

Repentance

By David Phillips

In the New Testament God makes it very clear that all men need to repent. It was the first thing that was taught concerning the kingdom of God in the New Testament, “*Repent for the king of heaven is at hand*” (Matthew 3:2; 4:17; Mark 1:15). When the church was established in Acts 2 the first command given to those who were about to be added to that church was “*Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ...*” (Acts 2:38). This same theme is carried through to the end of the New Testament as it is written in Revelation 3:19, “*Be zealous therefore and repent.*”

Due to the great emphasis place on repentance it is a subject that all Christians ought to be well acquainted with. It is sad to say, however, that much doctrinal error has been taught in the Lord’s church because of a misunderstanding and misrepresentation of this subject. It is therefore the goal of this lesson to put forth scriptural teaching on repentance and to make the reader aware of the destructive error that is being taught on this matter so that we may flee from it.

What Is Repentance?

Simply put, the definition of repentance is to turn 180 degrees, to change one’s mind. Paul affirmed this definition as he says in Acts 26:20, “*...but declared first to those in Damascus...that they should repent, turn to God, and do works befitting repentance.*” Before a person repents they are turned toward the world (away from God). But notice again what Paul says one must do in repentance, “*turn to God.*” This is the 180 degree turn. In order for a person to repent that person must change his heart from seeking his own will to seeking God’s will.

Works Befitting Repentance

Because of the change that must take place in repentance it is necessary to also “*do works befitting repentance.*” Otherwise our repentance is in vain. Consider the instruction that John the Baptist gave those who sought instruction on this matter. “*So the people asked him, saying, ‘What shall we do then?’ He answered and said to them, ‘He who has two tunics, let him give to him who has none; and he who has food, let him do likewise.’ Then tax collectors also came to be baptized, and said to him, ‘Teacher, what shall we do?’ And he said to them, ‘Collect no more than what is appointed for you.’ Likewise the soldiers asked him, saying, ‘And what shall we do?’ So he said to them, ‘Do not intimidate anyone or accuse falsely, and be content with your wages’*” (Luke 3:10-14). When the selfish person repents he cannot continue to be selfish. He is to prove his change of heart by showing kindness, compassion, and generosity toward others. When the greedy tax collector repents he cannot continue to conduct his occupation with greed. He must be transformed into an honest and fair assessor receiving only those taxes which are due. In this same way any person who comes to God with a penitent heart must practice righteousness where they once practiced unrighteousness. Thus it is written in Romans 6:20, 22, “*For when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness...But now having been set free from sin, and having become slaves of God, you have your fruit to holiness, and the end, everlasting life.*”

This is a principle that all men must thoroughly understand if they are going to receive salvation. But we must beware. There are some who have twisted the scriptures in order to overthrow the faith of many. It is not hard for us to understand that when we repent we must stop practicing the sin that we have repented of. But some have come into the church teaching that when a person is baptized, they can continue to sin. The scriptures call this heresy! (2 Peter 2:1). Indeed, there are Christians who teach sinners they can remain in adultery after being baptized, and that God accepts them in their continued sin. Yet the very passage that they use to affirm this condemns them. *“But do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God...nor adulterers”* (1 Corinthians 6:9). Men who have been given to alcohol are reassured that they can continue to drink after they have come to Christ. Yet God refers to strong drink as a *“brawler”* in Proverbs 20:1. The one who is given to wine is the one who has woe, sorrow, contentions, complaints, wounds and redness of eyes according Proverbs 3:23-25. Many are made to believe that they can be *“washed, sanctified and justified”* while retaining their old ways. Those who teach and believe this lie are one and the same with those who honor God with their lips but their hearts are far from Him (Matthew 15:8). Let the reader understand that the very nature of repentance demands that the sinner stops practicing his sin in order to be washed, sanctified and justified (1 Corinthians 6:9-11). In 1 John 3:8 John wrote that *“For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil.”* The works of the devil is sin and the condemnation of man through sin! When we are baptized Christ washes us of our past sins. But whether a person is a Christian or a non-believer, sin is still the work of the devil and those who choose to continue in it are of the devil. *“He who sins is of the devil, for the devil has sinned from the beginning...”* (1 John 3:8). Christ died to destroy the work of the devil, not to legalize it! When a person truly repents (turns to God) he will cease committing his sin and begin serving God with all of his being. We must understand this, we must practice it and we must teach it!

“All Men Everywhere Repent”

“Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent” (Acts 17:30). Paul makes it very clear and very plain that God commands all men to repent. Though many teachers and preachers are lax on this subject let the reader note that the command to repent is just as serious and just as vital to our salvation as believing that Jesus Christ is Lord and Savior (John 8:24) and being baptized (Mark 16:16). Simon the sorcerer was one who deceived the people and, like so many of his trade, probably made his living off of his deception. This same man was converted by Philip in Acts 8:13 and continued with Philip listening to his teaching and being awed by the signs that he did. Yet when Simon saw that the Holy Spirit could be given by laying on of the apostles hands, his old habits kicked in. Simon offered money in exchange for the ability to give the Holy Spirit to whomever he laid his hands on (Acts 8:18-19). This was an attitude that is in every way contrary to the nature of God. Therefore when Peter responded to Simon’s request he did not delude him into thinking that he was ok. Rather, he said very firmly, *“Your money perish with you, because you thought that the gift of God could be purchased with money! You have neither part nor portion in this matter, for your heart is not right in the sight of God. Repent therefore of this your wickedness, and pray God if perhaps the thought of your heart may be forgiven you. For I see that you are poisoned by bitterness and bound by iniquity”* (Acts 8:20-23). Notice the phrase Peter used, *“For I see that you are poisoned by bitterness and bound by iniquity.”* This same phrase describes every person who does not cast off the old man of sin when they are converted. Jesus frees us from the bondage of sin, but if we refuse to repent then we are still *“bound by iniquity.”*

Men have two options: we can sin and have the devil as our father or we can be righteous and have God as our Father. One thing we can be certain of is that we cannot live in sin and still have God as our Father! It is for this reason that we cannot be the children of God unless we change our minds from practicing sin.

Why must all men repent? Because if we do not repent by choosing to serve the living God then we will be condemned to burn with Satan in the Lake of Fire (Matthew 25:41; 2 Thessalonians 1:8; Revelation 20:10; 21:8)! This may seem harsh to some, but we can be sure that it is truth. Let us therefore use it as motivation to change (Hebrews 10:30-31).

Conclusion

If you have not been living your life as God would have it, you need to repent today, for tomorrow may be too late. If you are a Christian and have not done everything possible to cast off your sin know that you have an advocate in Jesus and He will forgive us if we come to Him with humble and penitent hearts (1 John 2:1, 2).

If you are not a Christian you do not yet have Christ as your advocate. You will be lost in your sins unless you repent, confess Jesus Christ as Lord, and are baptized in the name of the Lord for the forgiveness of your sins (Acts 2:38; Galatians 3:26-27). If you wish be free from this burden and to have the hope of eternal salvation you can be saved today if you will obey.