

Repentance

Repentance is a doctrine that describes the heart of one who is regenerated by the Holy Spirit. Repentance, because it deals with the nature of a man's heart, is related to Calvinism and the generic truths that are inter-dispensational in character. Repentance is a principle that is true in all dispensations. The nature of men's hearts does not change from one dispensation to another. Here is an appropriate quote from John Calvin:

“Christianity is a doctrine not of the tongue but of life. It is not apprehended by the understanding and memory alone, as other disciplines are, but it is received only when it possesses the whole soul, and finds a seat and resting place in the inmost affection of the heart.”

“For we will never have enough confidence in Him unless we become deeply distrustful of ourselves, we will never lift up our hearts enough in Him unless they be previously cast down in us, we will never have consolation enough in Him unless we have already experienced desolation, in ourselves.”

Calvin's comments are clearly related to the nature of man and the nature of true salvation of which repentance is a necessary part. When one is converted he is changed. The word "converted" implies a change of heart; the change of heart that accompanies true salvation is called repentance.

Repentance is part of the gospel message for today. The apostle Paul preached the necessity of repentance!

Acts 17:30 "And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men everywhere to repent."

Acts 28:20b "that they should repent and turn to God and do works meet for repentance"

Romans 2:4 "or despisest thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance"

Repentance is part of our gospel in the Pauline Age of Grace and repentance has always been part of the Gospel. In **Genesis 4:4b-5a** "And the Lord had respect unto Abel and to his offering! But unto Cain and unto his offering he had not respect. And Cain was very wrath, and his countenance fell."

Why did God not accept Cain's offering? Because the blood sacrifice was a confession of guilt. The sacrifice also acknowledged the need of mediation between God and man. Cain refused to bring the sacrifice. In verse 7 God instructs Cain on how to approach Him, "If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted? And if thou doest not well, sin lieth at the door. And unto thee shall be his desire, and thou shalt rule over him."

This is obscure in the English. Bullinger's notes are helpful here. "Lieth is masc. Sin offering is fem. So that the Hebrew reads "at the entrance [a male] is lying, a sin offering." ... **his**=[is] its (i.e. the lamb's) **and thou shalt rule ...him.** i.e., it (the lamb; it will not flee from fear).

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Here Cain is instructed on how to approach God and be accepted, yet Cain never obeyed God because God did not grant him repentance to acknowledge the necessity of the sacrifice of the sin offering. Instead he murdered his brother.

We know that Cain never repented because God did not choose him and enable him to obey by renewing his sinful heart and granting him repentance. Repentance is sovereignly granted by God in the application of the Gospel (Acts 5:31; 11:18). Repentance is sorrow for sin and an active turning from sin unto God. The sinner in repentance learns to loathe sin. Because God hates sin, the regenerated sinner with his new nature hates sin also, even in his own self. Therefore it follows that because of hatred of sin even within himself a believer's attitude will be one of self-loathing. This view of self can only be realized by regeneration. Therefore it follows also that repentance is the result of the work of regeneration. When one stands before the Holiness and Purity of God he is uncovered, he is undone, he is stripped naked. There is no place to hide from self-guilt except in the mercy and grace of God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Here are some scriptures that reflect the state of heart of some great men of faith:

Job 40:14 "Behold I am vile; what shall I answer thee?"

Job 42:5-6 "I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear: but now mine eye seeth thee. Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes,"

Isaiah 6:5 "Then said I, Woe is me! For I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts"

Daniel 10:8 "... For my comeliness was turned in me into corruption, and I retained no strength."

Isaiah 64:6 "But we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags and we all do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away."

Psalms 51:3, 5 "For I acknowledge my transgressions: and my sin is ever before me.... Behold, I was shaper in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me."

When God grants repentance to a man he faces up to the truth about himself and about God's righteousness. He understands that God's demands of holiness and righteousness are just and right.

Consider **Acts 17:30** "And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent." Also see Acts 3:9 and Mark 6:12. God's demanding of repentance from men is in accordance with His holiness.

Let us look at repentance more definitively. There are two Greek words translated "repent" in the New Testament.

1. **metanoew**

2. **metamelomai**

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Bullinger defines number 1 as, “(1) to perceive afterwards, hence to change one's mind and purpose This change is always for the better and denotes a change of moral thought and reflection; not merely to repent of, nor to forsake sin{ but to change one's mind and apprehensions regarding it. Hence to repent in a moral and religious sense, with the feeling of remorse and sorrow. Latin resipisco, to recover one's senses, come to a right understanding and resipiscentia, the growing wise to reform to have a genuine change of heart and life from worse to better.”

Examples:

Noun - Acts 5:31; 20:21; 26:20

Verb - Acts 26:20; 3:19; 8:22

2. **metamelomai**

“(2) to rue, regret, to have dissatisfaction with one's self for what one has done to change or alter one's purpose; have anxiety consequent in a past transaction to have pain of mind rather than change of mind; and change of purpose rather than change of heart.”

Examples:

Matthew 21:29; 27:3; 2 Cor 7:8

Here is a quote from J. N. Darby:

"Repentance is literally an after or changed thought, a judgment formed by the mind on reflection after it has had another or previous one; habitually in its use in Scripture the judgment I form in God's sight of my own previous conduct and sentiments consequent in the reception of God's testimony in contrast with my previous natural course of felling. Again we ask what is repentance? Repentance is a state of heart produced by the gospel. We repent because we believe. We repent of our sins. Acts 8:22, Repentance is not believing. Rev: 2:21; 2 Cor. 12:21. Repentance is not believing the gospel - yet you cannot have repentance apart from faith nor is it simply a change of mind. I admit that the mind must be changed to have it - but it is not simply a change of mind."

The Lord said "repent and believe the gospel." They are not the same. Yet *they* go together. Should we preach repentance today? Paul preached repentance! Acts 17:30; 20:21. If Paul preached repentance then how can some say repentance is not for this dispensation? **2 Cor. 12:21** is a very important verse on repentance ..."I shall bewail many which sinned already, and have not repented of the uncleanness and fornication and lasciviousness which they have committed, The Greek word here is **metanoew**.

Repentance is not just a one time thing. Repentance is an attitude toward sin before God. As long as we sin we have a need for repentance. God hates sin. Do you hate sin? Do you lament in tears over your sins? God is serious about sin, and so should we be. Christ's precious blood was shed for our sins. Do not take sin lightly! God slew His only begotten Son because of sin. We should be holy because God is holy. Holiness is thinking like God

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thinks. God hates sin. A holy man will hate sin also. Holiness takes effort. **2 Cor 7:1**, "Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God." All believers at times are chastened by God during this life. **Heb 12:19**, "Furthermore we have had fathers of our flesh which corrected us, and we gave them reverence, shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits and live? For they verily for a few days chastened us after their own pleasure, but He for our profit, that we might be partakers of His holiness." Chastening by God brings repentance in the life of the believer - "or else you are bastards and not sons," Heb. 12:8.

Repent and believe the gospel. Is that only for non-believers? Is it a onetime thing and that is all? How often do we believe the gospel? If we are honest, oftentimes we are in unbelief - unbelief is sin. Where sin is there is need for repentance. So repentance is a lifelong process for each believer. I think most Christians today are too lenient over the sin question, because there is a lack of reverence for God the Almighty. Do most Christians see God as Almighty and Sovereign over all the heaven and earth? I think not. Most of professing Christianity has an impotent god; a god whose will can be thwarted and manipulated. God is almighty and thrice holy. He hates sin. I think one can say that the measure with which you hate sin is one way to gauge your faith. Repentance is the vital part of our message today for the Church the Body of Christ.

Those who do not think repentance is part of our message today do not see that repentance is the work of a Sovereign God. God is the source of repentance.

Acts 11:18 "When they heard these things, they held their peace and glorified God, saying Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life,"

Rom. 2:14 "... knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance?"

2 Tim. 2:25 "In meekness instructing those that oppose themselves. If God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth."

Is it any wonder why most competent Covenant Theologians question dispensationalism when dispensationalists deny that repentance is part of our gospel message today? A 5-point Calvinist of any merit hearing this Arminian gospel of these dispensationalists would have to associate Arminianism with dispensationalism, Arminian dispensationalists let their view of the gospel influence their dispensationalism. Therefore we can say any dispensationalist who is not also a 5-point Calvinist has a faulty dispensationalism. To be a good dispensationalist one must believe the 5 points. Covenant Theologians question these dispensationalists. So do I question these dispensationalists. Do they really understand the plan of salvation and the nature of God and man? Do they understand even the fundamentals? They claim to be fundamentalists yet they deny the fundamentals of the faith, - Are they Christians at all?

Here is a quote from J. N. Darby: *"the gospel is the means of leading to repentance; yet repentance is a state of heart produced by it, and not the belief itself. The gospel produces a subjective state which scripture call repentance. This is not a preliminary to faith, but its fruit."*

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Which comes first. faith or repentance? Repentance cannot precede faith or else repentance would not be of faith nor of God.

Again I quote Darby:

"I appeal to experience whether he who recalls what has passed in his own mind does not know that he was brought to a subjective state of hatred of sin - self-judgment, confession of sins with humiliation and self-loathing. In a word whether repentance was not produced in his soul if it were through the terms of the law, with fear and dread perhaps yet if real, always with some drawing to God as good, some love of holiness some sense of responsibility in grace whatever the terror, for mere terror of consequences is not repentance at all. Repentance is that state in which one is humbled, broken and subdued; where one repents toward God, where God's claim is owned, in which self, past self is judged. There is joy in heaven over a soul that repents. Luke 15:7,10. Where there is nothing to judge, repentance has no place. Where sin is, this judgment of one's own state is called for - So the Lord called sinners to repentance, Luke 5:32"

Perhaps those who teach that repentance is not for today's gospel have never experienced repentance themselves and are therefore not God's servants as they claim. This issue is serious. Paul in **2 Cor. 13:5** ... "Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves. Know ye not how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates?"

Again Darby is appropriate here:

"He looked, not merely that crimes and wickedness should be judged, but that a man should judge all his state in the light of God's own presence, and in reference to His divine character and authority over him, as in the thought of His goodness. This is true repentance; man is judged and judging himself in the presence of God to whom he belongs and to whose nature he has to defer with mercy before Him. Faith in our Lord Jesus Christ meets this, because there God has judged sin according to His own nature and authority."

Who can argue with this presentation of Salvation? It would behoove many of our professing dispensationalists to dig back into the roots of dispensationalism and discover the fundamentals of those such as Darby to see how far afield they have come from the basics of gospel preaching of their forefathers.