

Understanding Repentance

Luke 15:4-7

Introduction: We are going to talk about a work that is often overlooked in the scheme of redemption. That work is repentance. Christians understand repentance, but we don't always emphasize its importance. We are going to review scriptures for a complete definition and understanding of repentance.

I. Repentance is extremely important.

A. We all are commanded to obtain repentance (Acts 17:30).

B. Jesus calls all who are sinful (sick) to repent (Matt. 9:12-13). Notice Jesus connects His mercy with our repentance.

C. In fact, God says His goodness leads us to repentance when we recognize everything He has done for us (Rom. 2:4).

D. The removal of our sins is conditional upon our repentance and conversion (Acts 3:19). We observe that conversion comes after our repentance.

II. What is repentance?

A. 2 Cor. 7:9-10, addresses sorrow in relationship to repentance. It says Godly sorrow leads to repentance and repentance leads to salvation. Therefore:

1. Godly sorrow alone is not repentance.
2. Godly sorrow is necessary for repentance.
3. By implication, there may be sorrow for sin without repentance.

We know this is true when we consider the case of Judas. Judas was intently sorry for his transgression against Christ; however, it did not lead to his repentance (Matt. 27:3-4).

B. Another relationship is made to repentance in Matt. 3:8. This passage suggests there must be fruit to demonstrate repentance. However, this fruit is not repentance itself. We also saw this in Acts 3:19 in the phrase "repent therefore and be converted." Conversion means to "turn about" [Vines]. It implies the resisting of something that must be given up. Specifically, it means turning from the sins of the past. Therefore:

1. The turning is the fruit of repentance.
2. We could say that we have repented when we have turned (been converted) from our sinful past.
3. Another element of repentance beside Godly sorrow is the fruit or the conversion after repentance.

C. The only result of Godly sorrow for sin which leads to conversion is a change of will or purpose in reference to sin. The "change of will or purpose" [Vines] is repentance. Repentance is resolving not to sin again.

D. Repentance is a change of will, produced by Godly sorrow that leads to conversion.

1. If there is no Godly sorrow that would produce a change in will then there is no repentance (Example, Esau, Heb. 12:16-17).

2. If the change in will, though produced by sorrow doesn't lead to conversion (a turning from sin) then there is no repentance (Example, Judas).

III. Understanding Luke 17:3-4.

This passage gives us difficulty when we equate repentance with changing our conduct. How could a person repent without time to demonstrate his change in conduct? Simply, repentance is not the change in conduct but the change in will. The change in conduct (conversion) is demonstrated with our asking for forgiveness or being baptized. In this passage, the offender is demonstrating his conversion by asking forgiveness. However, repentance is his change in will.

IV. Looking back to Acts 3:19.

A. Repent expresses a change of mind where conversion expresses a change in conduct.

B. There are three reasons given for our need to repent and to be converted (Acts 3:19-20):

1. "that our sins may be blotted out."
2. "that times of refreshing may come..."
3. "that He may send Jesus ..."

C. Conversion (turning) implies action. The asking for forgiveness and the act of baptism are such acts of conversion (Acts 26:20).

Conclusion: If we are not willing to repent of our sins, then life has no meaning. Solomon, in Ecclesiastes, said living life our way is vanity. Jesus tells us there is more joy in heaven over one lost sinner that repents than over anyone else (Luke 15:4-7). Do you want the Lord to rejoice over you? If you need to repent, please demonstrate your converted heart this day. Turn from your wicked ways either in baptism or by asking for forgiveness.