

THE DOCTRINE OF REPENTANCE

The *Doctrine of Repentance* is one of the main themes of the Bible – a core teaching of Scripture permeating both Old and New Testaments alike. It is the first step in the salvation process and the New Birth for fallen man. But there is more to it than that, and it is imperative that Christians properly understand what it means and implies. The call to repentance is not only directed to sinners, but to professing Christians as well. Christians are called upon to repent of their ways too, lest they forfeit their place in God's Eternal Kingdom. In the Old Testament the call to repentance was directed to national Israel as the Elect of God (CP 2Chr 7:14-15; Jer 4:1-4; Eze 14:1-11; 18:30-32). Under the New Covenant God calls sinners individually to repent (CP Mt 3:1-2, 5-11; 4:17; 9:13; Mk 1:15; 6:12; Lu 5:32; 13:2-5; 24:46-47; Ac 2:37-38; 3:19; 8:22; 17:30; 20:21; 26:20; Ro 2:4-6; 2Pe 3:9).

But New Testament Christians also have to repent in order to be saved. *Once-saved* does not mean *always saved*, as some in the contemporary Church would have us believe. Christians can fail God's grace and forfeit their salvation as Scriptures clearly and unmistakably teach (CP 1Cor 10:1-13 and 2Cor 13:5 with 2Cor 7:9-10; 2Ti 2:24-26; Rev 21:5; 2:12, 16; 2:18, 21-22; 3:1, 3; 3:14, 19). Unless the call to repentance is heeded by every human being – saint and sinner alike – they will be eternally damned. Repentance is indispensable to salvation; salvation is conditional upon repentance. No one can be assured of a place in God's Eternal Kingdom except they repent. The only person who ever lived and never sinned, and therefore had no cause for repentance was our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ (CP Isa 53:10; Mt 3:13-16; Jn 8:46; 2Cor 5:19-21; He 4:15; 7:26; 1Jn 3:5). Jesus had no need to be baptised by John the Baptist in Mt 3:13-16 for the forgiveness of sins – He did it to be identified with sinners and so fulfil Scripture "... *He was numbered with the transgressors*" (CP Isa 53:12). See also author's comments on Mt 3:1-3, 3:1-6, 3:12, 3:13-15, Ac 2:37-38, 1Cor 10:1-5, 10:9, 10:13, 2Cor 5:21 (A) and (B), 7:10, 13:5, 2Ti 2:26, He 4:14-16, 7:25, 2Pe 3:8-9, Rev 2:1-7, 2:12-17, 2:18-29, 3:1-6 and 3:14-22 in his book **A Question and Answer Study of the New Testament**, and all related cross reference studies referred to therein.

Repentance is not an abstract religious term or a matter of form or ceremony as some in the professing Church have made it, calling it "Penance", which are acts performed as an expression of sorrow for sinning. *Repentance* is a practical change from one way of life to another; a complete turnaround in lifestyle from an old sinful, Godless, self-centred existence, to a new Godly life in Christ. *Repentance* is a Divinely wrought conviction of sin in the heart that the Soul is guilty before God, and a resolute turning away from sin. It is at the time a renunciation of sin and an acceptance of God's empowering to live a Holy life. It involves both a change of mind about sin and a change of heart attitude toward sin. Repentant sinners identify themselves with the gracious act of God in redeeming them (CP Ac 2:37-38).

On the Day of Pentecost here when the Jews asked Peter what they must do to be saved, Peter responded

that they had to repent and be baptised. As an aside, but it should be noted in passing here, that this does not mean as claimed by many in the contemporary Church, that water baptism is also a pre-condition of salvation as is repentance. Baptism is contingent upon the availability of water and the physical state of the repentant sinner, whereas repentance involves a complete lifestyle change. It is not an external act, but an inward sorrow for sin, and a complete turning away from sin to God (CP Psa 34:18; 51:17; 119:59-60; Isa 57:15; 66:2; Mt 5:3-6; Lu 6:20-21). The declarations of Blessedness pronounced by Jesus in Mt 5 and Lu 6 here are called *Beatitudes*. There are nine all told. They are the principles of the Kingdom of God laid down by Jesus (CP Mt 5:1-12). Confessing one's Spiritual helplessness, sorrow for sin, meekness and a hunger and thirst for righteousness are all characteristics of the repentant sinner (see also author's comments on Mt 5:1-12 in his book **A Question and Answer Study of the New Testament**, and his studies *Psalm 119 – A Study on Salvation by the Word of God* and *The Beatitudes – the Principles of the Kingdom of God* in his book **Advanced Studies in the Christian Faith (Volume 1)**).

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(CP Lu 18:9-14). This is called the *Parable of the Pharisee and the Publican*. Publicans were tax collectors in Jesus' day. Here Jesus is teaching about the way of justification and getting right with God. The humility expressed by the publican, and his acknowledgment of the need for God's mercy and forgiveness for his sins, was true repentance, thus ensuring his place in the Eternal Kingdom. God's generosity and mercy reaches out to the lost but it can only be received by those, who like the publican, acknowledge their need for it. The Pharisee was self-righteous and not open to acknowledging his need to repent, and thus excluded himself from God's redeeming love. The repentant Publican got saved; the self-righteous Pharisee damned himself eternally (CP Lu 15:11-24). Here Jesus gives another outstanding illustration of repentance. This is called the *Parable of the Lost Son*, or *Prodigal Son*.

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All that is taught throughout Scripture, from Genesis to Revelation, is a running commentary on this parable – it proclaims the good news of the Gospel. The father's compassion toward his repentant son portrays the father heart of God and His infinite love and forgiveness toward every sinner who repents. As the father in the parable joyfully celebrated his son's return and restored him to a position of sonship in the family, so too God rejoices over every sinner who repents and restores them to sonship with Him (CP Lu 15:7, 10 with Jn 1:12; Ro 8:14-17; 2Cor 6:17-18; Ga 4:5-7; Php 2:11-15; 1Jn 3:1-2). See also author's comments on Lu 15: 1-7, 18:9-14 in his book **A Question and Answer Study of the New Testament**, and his studies *The Parable of the Lost Son* and *The Parable of the Pharisee and the Publican* in *The Parables of Jesus* in his book **Advanced Studies in the Christian Faith (Volume 1)**.

Repentance is not arbitrary, but necessary. It and faith are inextricably linked – by repentance one turns away from sin; by faith one turns to God, receiving Jesus Christ as Saviour.