

## Repentance – What Is It?

One of the basic doctrines in the bible is repentance. In Hebrews 6:1, we are told that "...the foundation of repentance from dead works..." is one of the elementary principles of Christ. In the book of Acts, Peter preached, "...Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." (Acts 2:38 NKJV) So repentance is a necessary step we must take before we should even consider baptism or receiving the Holy Spirit. Since this is such an important doctrine, we need to first understand what it is.

John the Baptist was a prophet who preached a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins just prior to the beginning of Jesus' ministry. (Mark 1:4) His purpose was to prepare the people of his day so that they would be ready to receive Jesus and what He was offering, which was salvation. But why did they need to be prepared? They needed to be prepared because they were sinners, as we all are. (Romans 3:23) What that means is that we have all, in one way or another, violated or broken the laws of God. In John 3:4, we learn that "Whoever commits sin also commits lawlessness and sin is lawlessness". Lawlessness means that we are living without law. What law are we living without?

In the book of Romans it states:

*Owe no one anything except to love one another, for he who loves another has fulfilled the law. For the commandments, "You shall not commit adultery," "You shall not murder," "You shall not steal," "You shall not bear false witness," "You shall not covet," and if there is any other commandment, are all summed up in this saying, namely, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." Love does no harm to a neighbor: therefore love is the fulfillment of the law. (Romans 13:8-10 NKJV)*

What this is saying is that God's law of love is synonymous or the same thing as His commandments. God will never tell us to do anything that is harmful to someone else. Whenever we do anything that harms another human being, we sin. We are not practicing love. As stated before, we have all sinned. (Romans 3:23)

In the book of James we learn:

*If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself, you do well; but if you show partiality, you commit sin, and are convicted by the law as transgressors. For whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one point, he is guilty of all. For He who said, “Do not commit adultery,” also said, “Do not murder.” Now if you do not commit adultery, but you do murder, you have become a transgressor of the law. (James 2:8-11)*

God is love. (I John 4:8) He defines what love is in His commandments and in His Word. When we fail to obey His Word, we sin. Then what should we do? (See Acts 2:37) We repent!

Repentance means that we will change. It means that we will stop doing what we are doing, if God says that it is wrong, and we will do what God says to do. When John the Baptist preached to the multitudes, he told them to “...bear fruits worthy of repentance...” (Luke 3:7-9) The people wanted to know what they should do. 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 NKJV)*

Basically, he was telling them to love their neighbors – to follow what would be Christ’s teachings as recorded in Matthew 7:12. It says, “*Therefore, whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets.*”

To fulfill God’s law of love, we need a change of heart. In Jeremiah 31:33 it says, “*But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put my law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.*” This is God’s doing. He brings us to repentance by His goodness. In Romans 2:4 it states, “*Or do you despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance?*” God knows that we are weak and He knows that we are flesh. In Psalm 78:38-39 it says, “*But He, being full of compassion, forgave their iniquity, and did not destroy them. Yes, many a time He*

*turned His anger away, and did not stir up all His wrath; For He remembered that they were but flesh, a breath that passes away and does not come again.*” When we realize that we have done something wrong, something that God would not approve of, we can change because God is merciful. In Lamentations 3:22-23 it states, *“Through the LORD’s mercies we are not consumed, because His compassions fail not. They are new every morning; Great is Your faithfulness.”* To the woman taken in adultery, Jesus said, *“...go and sin no more.”* He is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. (II Peter 3:9)

Repentance is understanding in our hearts that we have violated God’s Word in some way but wanting to change. Repentance is changing from doing things our way to doing things God’s way. It is recognizing that God can change our hearts, and therefore our behavior, when we acknowledge and confess our sins. (James 5:16; Psalm 51)

Finally, one of the best explanations of what repentance entails is found in Ezekiel 18: 21 – 32. It says:

*“But if the wicked man turns from all his sins which he has committed, keeps all My statutes, and does what is lawful and right, he shall surely live; he shall not die. None of the transgressions which he has committed shall be remembered against him; because of the righteousness which he has done, he shall live. Do I have any pleasure at all that the wicked should die?” says the LORD God, “and not that he should turn from his ways and live?...Cast away from you all the transgressions which you have committed, and get yourselves a new heart and a new spirit. For why should you die, O house of Israel? For I have no pleasure in the death of one who dies,” says the LORD God. “Therefore **turn and live!**”*

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January 24, 2015