

Reaping The Benefit Of True Repentance

Discerning The True Gospel

If we are going to find true revival **we must first embrace the true Gospel**. This issue in itself can take divine intervention. To find true biblical Christianity amid the deceptive counterfeit presented by most ministers in this nation is a miracle for sure. In the message commonly heard from most pulpits today there are many elements of true Christianity that have been tossed aside in favor of a more user-friendly message. How can we distinguish the true from the false?

I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel: 7 Which is not another; but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ. Galatians 1:6-7

Rarely do you hear a minister (or a TV or radio

preacher) preach on the reality of a literal fiery eternal Hell; or the call to a holy and sanctified life-style. The topic of modern preaching most usually centers around the prosperity and preservation of self. The goodness of God, but never His severity. *A false balance is abomination to the Lord (Proverbs 11:1)*. And even more rarely is the standard lifted which demands that a person turn from their sins in genuine repentance to receive the gift of God's grace.

New Wine In New Wineskins

It is important to realize that once we are filled with God's grace and the power of the Spirit we now have not only a means, but also a mandate, to **stay free from defilement**. Many people who have desired to follow Jesus are truly perplexed over the fact they once felt the touch of God upon their lives, but somehow it has dwindled and faded to little more than a condemning memory.

And no man putteth new wine into old bottles;

else the new wine will burst the bottles, and be spilled, and the bottles shall perish. 38 But new wine must be put into new bottles; and both are preserved. Luke 5:37-38

In the days Jesus walked the earth as a man the bottles they used were made of animal skins. As these skins would age they would get less supple and develop weak spots. New wine has a tendency to be quite active, and would expand an old wine skin beyond it's limits, causing damage to the wine-skin, and a loss of its contents.

New wine had to be put into fresh skins. The Lord was not just trying to scratch up a message here to pass the time of day. This teaching was vital to those who would be the foundation of the Christian Church. Jesus was using this allegory to impress upon them (and us) the importance of repentance in entering a life of faith in Him. Sin in the life of a believer is like a crack in the wine-skin; leaving the vessel empty, and unfit to be refilled.

Why Preach A Powerless Gospel?

A gospel that does not proclaim the absolute necessity of turning from your sins is not the Gospel of the Bible; and will not produce lasting fruit. Countless church goers have been deceived into thinking they can embrace a life of faith and still retain their former life-style. This is what many people are hearing from the 'modern' pulpit. Most of today's ministers are more worried about increasing their attendance numbers than they are about preaching a life changing message.

They are so concerned about preaching in a manner that will cause the maximum number of people to return (with their checkbooks) that they preach next to nothing that will confront sinful mankind with the standards of a holy God. They usually make a few token stabs at sin but then negate any standard they have presented with words of pacification. As Vance Havner once put it: "Half of what they say cancels out the other half; and **they end up having**

said nothing at all.” Amen Brother Havner!

I personally have witnessed drunkards, perverts, and drug addicts being told “God loves you, and He accepts you just the way you are.” This is not the truth! Does God love us just the way we are? Yes, He sure does; and we are quite thankful that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us.

Thank you Jesus! But to leave a sinner with the impression they are acceptable to God without turning from their sin to obey the will of God is a perversion of the Gospel; and a sin against God and man.

Following the example of Jesus

From that time Jesus began to preach, and to say, Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. Matthew 4:17

Here we have a record of the start of Jesus’ preaching and teaching ministry. Jesus went forth and began to preach what? Repentance! He knew

that if this foundation was not laid the house would not stand. He knew you could not skip this step and have a successful outcome. He also warned of Hell twice as many times as he promised salvation. How many today are following his pattern of ministry?

Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock: 25 And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not: for it was founded upon a rock. 26 And every one that heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand: 27 And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell: and great was the fall of it.

Matthew 7:24-27

Some mistakenly say this parable is about having Jesus as your foundation (as he is the rock) but if you read carefully you will see it is obedience to his teachings that is the solid foundation that will carry you through the storm. Seeing the absolute necessity of repentance and obedience in entering a life of faith: let's look at what true repentance is, and what it is not.

...except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.

Jesus Christ

Mention the word 'repentance' and many people cringe. They associate the word with either the fruitless and never-ending labors of religious penance; or the overbearing preaching of some pulpit-bully who constantly beats his congregation with threats of damnation without ever showing them how to find peace with God, and the power to live right.

Understanding What Repentance Is Not

Penance and condemnation: neither of these concepts come anywhere near to being an accurate representation of what true repentance is; nor will produce the wonderful benefit it brings to those who find it. Let's identify true biblical repentance so we can enjoy the reward God intends it to bring our way.

Many people today confuse 'repentance' with 'penance': the self-righteous act of punishing yourself for your sins. Some religions even get out there so far that they get into flagellation: a vicious practice of self-abuse that involves beating, whipping, or cutting oneself in a perverse attempt at self-discipline and/or pleasing God, but accomplishes neither.

Stop Beating Yourself Up

I know a number of persons who practice what I call 'mental flagellation'. They assault themselves

with a continual flow of self-abasement with words like, “Oh, you filthy dog!” or “I’m such a filthy sinner!” They constantly whip and cut themselves with thoughts and phrases of a degrading nature, thinking this is seen by God as a form of humility or repentance; but these actions never truly produce anything but condemnation.

If this describes you: **please stop it!** You are not helping yourself or pleasing God. If all you are doing is beating yourself with ‘thou shalt nots’ then you are actually strengthening the power of sin over you. Yes, that's right, strengthening your sin's grip on you! ...*the strength of sin is the law.* (1Corinthians 15:56) The law will not set you free!

Stop beating yourself with the law, and try placing your faith in what took place on the Cross instead. Your sin has already been paid for. Do you think you can out do what Jesus did or embellish upon it with your self-abuse? In God’s estimation your self-degrading efforts are a very poor substitute for

repentance. Penance is not repentance.

Repentance Versus Condemnation

Neither is condemnation. To listen to some preachers you would think repentance is when you are walking around scared you are not a righteous person because you are not engaging in enough works of religious duty. Afraid you will end up in Hell forever because your are not religious enough! And they manipulate the flock through that fear, "Work harder - give more - and don't miss a service, or you will not be pleasing to God!"

We should fear God, but not like that. You are never going to be 'good enough' to be seen as righteous in God's eyes. Give it up! The Bible says that: "*all have sinned and come short of the glory of God.*" (Romans 3:23) And also it is written: "*there is none righteous, no not one!*" (Romans 3:10) If you could become righteous through your own efforts there would have been no need for Jesus to go to that Cross.

Righteousness Triumphs Over Condemnation

Jesus paid the penalty for your sin and rebellion. Only a faith in that truth can bring righteousness upon you: the righteousness of Jesus Christ freely given to those who would turn from their sins and believe from their heart the wonderful truths of the Gospel. Only through the gift of Christ's righteousness can we become acceptable to God. We need to be able to find rest in the knowledge this is a free gift.

Your heavenly Father desires that you would have a confidence in your right-standing with Him, and an assurance by the witness of His Spirit in your heart that you are a child of God. It's quite difficult to stand fast in that confidence and assurance when your conscience is all clouded up with religious condemnation. Condemnation is not repentance! Let's stay clear on that.

Repentance Is Not Just A Change Of Mind

I heard a preacher once say, “You know, repentance is not that big of a deal. It’s merely a change of mind: I once thought that something was okay but now I think it’s wrong.” Sorry, not even close! Changing your mind about something being good or bad falls quite short of true repentance.

A person could smoke for 20 years, and then decide they are bad for your health and quit. Another could drink heavily for years and then, tired of consequences to family and finance, decide to quit drinking. In both cases many would declare this to be repentance, but this is not necessarily so. Although both decisions would be wise, and highly beneficial, neither addresses the matter of true repentance.

Repentance is not an issue of the changing of our mind, but of the heart! And it is not a question of our actions being detrimental to self or family; but

whether or not they are a grief to God. True repentance requires an acknowledging that our wrongdoings are an offense to God. King David cried out to God: *“Against thee, thee only, have I sinned.”* (Psalms 51:4)

True Repentance Brings Victory Over Sin

But we must go a lot farther than just hanging our head in shame before God. If we stop there we are still just stuck in a religious condemnation. Right where the religions of man would like to keep you. With your head hanging in condemnation, and your hand reaching for your wallet to ease the pain! But if we have truly repented the sin is gone and we can now lift our heads.

Are you still in bondage to a sin and carrying the guilt of your actions? Don't lie before God and call yourself repentant. He would rather have you be honest and call yourself a rebel against His will than to lie to Him. Better yet why not seek to put

away that sin? God will meet you there with the strength you need to overcome.

Don't stray off into doing penance for your sin; the price has already been paid. And all condemnation will do is have your chin dragging the floor because you are bowed down so far; it can never set you free or bring you peace. True repentance is evidenced by a putting away of sin, and will bring a freedom from the guilt that sin caused. This will bring a sense of joy and liberty to your life. Repentance is not a dirty word!

I love the word repentance! Some folks might view that as a strange statement, (or maybe even indicative of me being somewhat of a religious nut) but I love the word because I know its true meaning, and have personally known the reward it brings. Preaching false concepts of repentance only brings religious bondage upon a person; but in reality God intends for preaching along these lines to bring liberty and joy to a person; a heart full of peace and a life free of condemnation! Is that

something we should turn a deaf ear to?

Defining Repentance

In the midst of all the garbage that is being preached by so many on this matter how can we find the meaning of true repentance? Sometimes the best way to understand the meaning of a word is to actually take a look at the word itself.

To get a better understanding of repentance let's break down the word 'repent': Re + pent.

Re = do over or return.

Pent = high or lofty.

Repent = return to the high or lofty place.

I like to use as an example another word that uses the root 'pent'; namely the word 'penthouse'. The penthouse is the uppermost floor of a tall building, and is a symbol of prestige. We would say a person living up there was living large; high above that which would be considered lowly or common.

Lofty Living!

Think about the walk that Adam and Eve had with God in Eden, before they fell victim to the wiles of the Devil. The Scriptures teach that they were created in the image and likeness of God. The Bible tells us that God is clothed with righteousness and majesty, and also that He wears light as a garment! If Adam and Eve were created in the image of God, then they too were clothed with righteousness, majesty, and light.

Walking each day with God in all the glory with which He had created them. Now I would call that a pretty good example of penthouse-living! But, sadly, Adam and Eve fell; **they un-pented**. Through sin they fell from that lofty position they had enjoyed, and passed on that sinful state to all of mankind.

Now man needs to re-pent; to return to that higher living, and exalted state of being, that comes with a

right relationship with the Lord. When you think of the word repentance, think re-penthouse! Think 'return to the penthouse.' It will keep your mind from straying over into all of that religious bondage.

True Repentance Brings Revival!

Another thing I love about repentance is that it brings revival! To humbly acknowledge your wrongdoings as offensive to God, and to turn from them to draw close to Him in faith, will set your heart ablaze with spiritual renewal, and a zeal for the things of God! Is your heart burning with a love and zeal for Jesus? Or have you let things creep into your life that defile your conscience, and separate you from that lofty and sanctified walk with the Lord you should know.

It doesn't have to be something as serious as adultery, theft, or murder. It is possible to let things that are socially acceptable (like the mind-numbing hypnotism of the television) steal away the zeal

and spiritual fulfillment that we would find in seeking daily communion with God. Don't let the things of this world keep you from having an unhindered fellowship with the Lord.

A great number have mistakenly preached repentance as condemnation or as religious penance; and today so very many refuse to even preach it at all for fear of man's displeasure. But the Lord Jesus Christ said, "Repent and believe the Gospel!" Let's make sure we get the foundation taken care of before we try to build the house. That way we can build **a house that will stand strong** against the storms of life.