

Repentance

Repentance. The word itself seems old fashioned and without regular usage, for today absolutes are rare with shades of grey having replaced right and wrong, but in truth the universe still works according to immutable laws which can no more be escaped than gravity, and the same Creator established the Ten Commandments for all mankind. Consequently, the world is suffering chaos, destruction and coming catastrophe – all of them the direct results of our breaking those unacknowledged eternal laws. We break them, they break us, and mankind is learning that the hard way, as our ancestors have done for the last, almost six thousand years.

That time is soon coming to an end, which is a period called in the Bible the ‘latter days’, ‘the last days’, or ‘the tribulation’. By the end of that seven year period of punishment for our evil choices, very few people will remain alive, Isaiah 24:6, *‘Therefore a curse devours the earth, and its inhabitants suffer for their guilt; therefore the inhabitants of the earth are scorched, and few men are left.’*

But that is not the end. After one thousand more years, all who have ever lived and died will be resurrected, hopefully having learned, of necessity the hard way, that choosing wrong does not pay. God has set aside the previous 1000 years in His Plan, during which Jesus Christ will rule the remnant of mankind still alive on this earth, from Jerusalem, who will, with God’s help, gradually restore the entire planet to its Eden like perfection, preparing it for that great resurrection to come, the Second Resurrection, Rev 20: 11-12, *‘Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. From his presence earth and sky fled away, and no place was found for them. And I saw **the dead, great and small**, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Then another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, according to what they had done.’*

Nothing could be more exciting for God’s people today to contemplate than that re-creation process during the 1000 year millennium, as those small populations left alive, grow, and learn to work with God’s laws, while enjoying the benefits which will result. You can be a part of that regenerative process, and not have to miss out on that most exciting and wonderful time, but there is a price and it is one that all we humans find hard to pay. You know how hard it is to say sorry, but to say sorry to our Creator and genuinely mean it, determined not to repeat those wrong choices, or sins as the Bible calls them, is one of the most difficult things to do, *1 John 3:4, ‘Whosoever commits sin transgresses also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law.’* All mankind, as we have seen, will have a chance to learn to live by God’s laws, but in the final analysis, those who then refuse will not receive the gift of eternal life. *John 12:25, ‘He that loves his [evil] life shall lose it; and he that hates his life in this world shall keep it unto life eternal.’* Romans 6:23, *‘For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.’*

Thankfully, Jesus Christ came to pay the penalty for all our sins. As the ‘hands on’ Creator for His Father, only *His* life could pay that price, but the Bible makes clear that in order to receive forgiveness, there are conditions, Acts 2:37-39, *‘Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, “Brothers, what shall we do?” And Peter said to them, “**Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself.**”*

Repent. The word means genuine deep remorse for the breaking of God’s laws. It is not a ‘once and for all time’ event either, but an attitude that we will need to maintain for the rest of our lives, because the Bible is full of illustrations that the most righteous of men and women, even those who have received God’s Holy Spirit and are mentioned in the faith chapter, Hebrews 11, like Abraham and David, continued to make errors as they were overcome by their human nature from time to time, and needed to cry out to God for forgiveness, before continuing their struggle to live by God’s Law. (See David’s prayer in Psalm 51)

Genuine repentance means that you place God's word above anything else: that you are prepared to put aside anything which goes against what you have come to understand God requires of you. It may be that you do not yet fully understand the whole of God's word, but you know in your heart that whatever He demands, you will do, for you recognise and despise your sinful nature, and your great need of God's mercy, eg. Luke 18:13, *'But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me, a sinner!'*

Overcoming our human nature then, is a life-long goal, demanded by Jesus (Read Revelation chapter 2). We read in Acts 2 that following repentance and baptism, we can receive the gift of God's Holy Spirit. Only this empowering gift can enable us to produce the fruits which witness to its presence, Galatians 5:22, *'But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, gentleness, goodness, faith.'* Also included is obedience to God's laws, 1 John 1:6, *'If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth.'* Acts 5:32, *'And we are witnesses to these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him.'* And Romans 2:13, *'For it is not the hearers of the law who are righteous before God, but the doers of the law who will be justified.'* 1 John 2:4, *'Whoever says "I know him" but does not keep his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him.'*

Of course, keeping the Commandments is not the most popular choice, as Jesus Christ made clear, Matthew 7:13-14, *'Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few.'* Most people brush this requirement aside, preferring to believe that the New Covenant has no such requirement, and that the Old Testament has no relevance for Christians, Hosea 8:12, *'I have written to him the great things of my law, but they were counted as a strange thing.'* They don't understand that Jesus Christ was the One who dealt with ancient Israel. He was the hands on Creator of the Earth, the active arm as it were, of the One who became His Father, Colossians 1:16, *'For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him.'*

They don't understand that the Holy Bible is *one* whole, and that it is impossible to fully understand the New Testament without the Old, which is why Christ said, *'Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil. For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled.'* Matthew 5:17-18.

Only with that understanding can we understand why Jesus Christ came with this message, Matthew 3:2, *'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.'* True repentance separates the genuine Christian from *'the sorrow of the world,'* 2 Corinthians 7:10. *'For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret, whereas worldly grief produces death.'* ESV. At this point, many who read this will switch off, for they have been conditioned to believe that the law is done away, and thereby will lose their opportunity to experience the millennium.

You though, know what Jesus Christ was prepared to do for you. He gave His life for you, in the most painful way, Isaiah 53:5, *'But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed.'* ESV. He paid the penalty for our sins, the curse of which is death, Galatians 3:13, *'Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangs on a tree.'* As we read, only the life of the Creator could pay that penalty for **all** His creation, Hebrews 2:9, *'But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour; that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man'.*

As a result, the truly penitent will give up their lives to Christ in the sense of devoting themselves to His righteous service, for He has bought us, 1 Corinthians 6:20, *'for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body'*, by turning from your sinful ways and determining to live by God's laws. He became our 'sacrificial lamb' which was pictured by the Passover lamb of the Ancient Israelites, 1 Corinthians 5:7, *'Cleanse out the old leaven that you may be a new lump, as you really are unleavened. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed,'* - the Feast day mentioned in Exodus 12:14 and 1 Corinthians 11:24.

But repentance is not just for self. God calls us to become His servants. After baptism we are commissioned to carry forth the same gospel Christ brought, Mark 1:14-15. *'Now after John had been taken into custody, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of God, and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.'* Luke 24:47, *'and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem.'* Acts 1:8, *'But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.'*

To be His witnesses we need to get to know our God and this means contact with Him through studying His word and prayer. We need to have faith in His words just like the faithful listed in the faith chapter, Hebrews 11:6, *'And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.'* God it is who gives us faith, Romans 12:3, *'For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but think of yourself with sober judgment, according to the measure of faith God has given you.'*

If then, and only if, we remain faithful until the end of our lives, will we take part in the First Resurrection and **become the Bride of Christ**, Revelation 17:14, *'They will make war on the Lamb, and the Lamb will conquer them, for he is Lord of lords and King of kings, and those with him are called and chosen and faithful.'* Hebrews 11:35, *'Women received their dead raised to life again: and others were tortured, not accepting deliverance; that they might obtain a better resurrection.'*

The great impediment to that faith is that most who are called, are diverted from following God's word to following a man who claims to speak for God, though most who follow a man or men would not like to admit that an idol has replaced their God.

So, in summary, what must a newly repentant Christian do?

- Believe Jesus Christ's words, pattern and example, 1 Timothy 1:16, *'But I received mercy for this reason, that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience as an example to those who were to believe in him for eternal life.'* 1 Peter 2:21, *'For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps.'*
- Count the cost. Luke 14:25-33, (*'For which of you, desiring to build a tower, does not first sit down and count the cost, whether he has enough to complete it?'*, verse 28). Luke 9:62, *'Jesus said to him, "No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God.'* John 11:16, *'Then said Thomas, which is called Didymus, unto his fellowdisciples, Let us also go, that we may die with him.'*
- Faith is action, Matthew 10:32-38, *'So everyone who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven, but whoever denies me before men, I also will deny before my Father who is in heaven. "Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. And a person's enemies will be those of his own household. Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. And whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me.'* Matthew 5 14-16, *'"You are **the light** of the world. A city set on a hill **cannot be hidden**. Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.'*
- Have you turned from your evil ways, as Christ advised the woman caught in adultery? John 8:11, *'She said, "No one, Lord." And Jesus said, "Neither do I condemn you; go, and from now on sin no more.'*

- Realise that you may not be able to follow Him successfully until you are baptised and receive the gift of the Holy Spirit, Acts 2:38, ‘And Peter said to them, *“Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.”*

Even then we must realise that *with* baptism and the begetting of the Holy Spirit we are still a babe in Christ, not a spiritual giant. As a consequence, we cannot expect to be *instantly* able to automatically overcome our problem sins – we must expect to persevere until, with the help of God’s Holy Spirit, we can put them behind us. Ephesians 1:13-14, *‘In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation-- having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the **Holy Spirit of promise**, which is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory.’*

Well, now that you understand what is involved in repentance, take courage. Christ said the way was narrow but the rewards are almost beyond our comprehension. Study the next step, baptism, a step that can change your life for eternity and help you to become a member of the very family of God after the First Resurrection.

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