

REPENTANCE

I. A BASIC PRINCIPLE – justification before God has nothing to do with our works. Starting at Romans 3:20 and going through 3:31 how many times do you count phrases equivalent to “not by works” or “not by the law”? _____

What we do see is that we get justified before God (“in his sight” 3:20 and “before God” 4:2) through faith, for all those who believe, as a gift, by His grace.

How could Paul really have made his thesis any clearer: “But to the one who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is reckoned as righteousness” (4:5)?

II. WORD MEANING and PHRASE MEANING

What does the word “repent” mean to you? _____

The Greek word *metanoēō* ‘to repent’

1. Classical: have an afterthought, change one’s mind or opinion, repent
2. Septuagint: primarily used to translate *nicham* ‘be sorry, moved to pity, have compassion, suffer grief, repent (of one’s doings), comfort oneself’ (does not necessarily imply admission of guilt or error):
 - a. Notice what repentance was for the Ninevites in Jonah: 1:1; 3:5-10 – turned from their sinful ways in contrition, sat in sackcloth and ashes; the result was that God turned aside his temporal judgment on them.
 - b. Notice what repentance was for Job: he was pure and upright (1:1), he did not sin (1:22; 2:10), ... until ... Job opened his mouth (3:1), then for 40 chapters Job opens his mouth and sins. When Job recognized his wrongdoing he repented in dust and ashes (42:1-6).
3. New Testament:
 - a. Hebrews 12:17 – the one place in NT where “change the mind” fits. Esau could not get his father Isaac to change his mind about the blessing because it was TOO LATE, the blessing had already been given to Jacob!
 - b. Mark 1:15 – John’s ministry was to get the nation of Israel to clean up their act and believe the good news that the Messiah was coming (cf. Matt 3:2; 4:17) preparation for the kingdom.

In none of the following passages does “change the mind” adequately describe the action

- c. Luke 17:3-4 _____
- d. Matt 11:21-22 _____
- e. Rev 9:20-21 _____

Dictionary meaning of “repent” in English: **feel or express sincere regret or remorse about one's wrongdoing or sin – this is a very good description of the Greek *metanoēō*.**

III. CHRIST’S MANDATE TO THE APOSTLES

Luke 24: 33-49 (last words to disciples); see 46-47 Christ tell them to preach repentance

Did the disciples (and especially apostles) fulfill this commission?

1. Peter: Acts 2:38-39; 3:18-21; 5:30-32; 8:22-23
1. Paul: Acts 17:30-31 (in Athens); 20:20-21 (to the Ephesian elders at Miletus); 26:19-21 (to Jews and Gentiles)

So we see a strong message of repentance in the book of Acts -- but not to receive eternal life. What we do see in the book of Acts is a strong connection between “believing” and receiving eternal life: Acts 13:48 (30 occurrences of the Greek for “to believe”)

IV. BIBLICAL MESSAGE OF HOW TO RECEIVE ETERNAL LIFE

What is the purpose of the gospel of John? 20:30-31 _____

How much focus did John place on repentance in the gospel? NT 22 x’s; John’s gospel 0

Did John ever use the verb “to repent”? NT 34 x’s; John’s gospel 0; Rev – 12 x’s (so John was aware of the word and could use it when it fit his purpose; 5 of the 7 churches were told to repent).

What did John focus on? the verb “to believe” NT 241 x’s; Gospel of John 98 x’s
How about eternal life: NT 41 x’s; John’s gospel 17 x’s, John’s epistles 6 x’s; over 1/2 NT
Look at Luke’s presentation of the ministry of John the Baptist: Luke 3:3 ff – repentance!
Now notice the same ministry presented by John: John 1:23 ff. What is missing? repentance!
What about “forgiveness of sins”? Experiential – in this life we need “forgiveness of sins” and we
get it by repentance and/or confession; in Christ we have a Positional “forgiveness of sins” as Col.
2:13. Forgiveness of sins is what establishes a speaking relationship. It gets us back on speaking
terms.

Note Eph 1:7; 4:32; Col 1:14

What does “in Him” or “in Christ” mean? Paul—usually our position in Christ and all that we
have in the heavenly blessings (Eph 1:3), e.g. we are seen as righteous as God is!! – in Christ (2
Cor 5:21); John often uses the phrase to describe our Christian walk, to be in fellowship in this
life, e.g. to be “in the Vine” John 15.

So in the transitional book of Acts we see baptism and repentance required for “forgiveness of
sins” – NOT to “receive eternal life”. Because baptism and ceremonial/ritual washings were a very
important of Jewish culture, we see it as a requirement for Palestinian (Jew and Samaritan)
believers to get baptized to receive the Holy Spirit. We do not see this in the Gentile world (see
Cornelius Acts 10).

CONCLUSIONS:

- (1) Repentance is never a requirement to receive the gift of eternal life.
- (2) The only requirement is to believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God.
- (3) Repentance is NOT just a mental act of changing one’s mind.
- (4) The Greek word *metanoia* ‘repentance’ seems to have the meaning in the New Testament that we associate with the English repentance: contrition, remorse, change of course, turning from sinful activities to righteous activities.
- (5) John appears to have gone to extra measure to avoid the idea of “repent” in his gospel because he did not in any way want to include any of our works in the way we obtain eternal life. Only belief in Jesus as the Messiah was needed to obtain the gift (Rev 21:6; 22:17).
- (6) Repentance is part of the message, along with the resurrection, that Jesus has commanded his followers to go out and proclaim in the world. Unbelievers need to turn from sinful ways in remorse to avoid God’s temporal judgment. Believers need to turn away from sin to avoid discipline and get back in fellowship with God. Recognizing sin in one’s life should always lead us to repent and seek to get back on the narrow path that brings life – here an now!
- (7) Acts is a transitional book and the order of events: believe, repent, laying on of hands, receiving the Holy Spirit, baptism do not follow the same order for those raised in and near Judea in the first century and those of the Gentile world. By the time of the conversion of Cornelius (Acts 10) and then the Gentile mission of Paul (1 Cor 12:13) we see that those from a different cultural background were immediately Spirit baptized and placed into the Body of Christ before any kind of physical baptism or regardless of whether or not there was sin for which the believer needed to repent.