

Christian Repentance

Repentance in the Life of a Christian

Selected Scriptures

1. Lack of Repentance as Evidence of Spiritual Separation

A. The Antediluvian World (Heb 11:7; 2 Pet 2:5)

The world had become so extremely wicked that God was grieved to have created man (Gen 6:6-7). Noah was righteous in a generation of wicked men, and God chose to save he and his family (Gen 6:9ff). Noah was a preacher of righteousness (2 Pet 2:5) and through his words and actions he proclaimed the impending doom of the world (Heb 11:7) that very quickly came upon those who did not respond with repentance to his message.

B. The Nation of Judah (Jer 5:1-4; 7:26-28; 8:4-7; cf. Gen 18:23ff)

Jeremiah was sent to walk through the streets of Jerusalem to find any who were faithful to God (cf. Gen 18:23ff). He found no one of faith or who were willing to respond to God's Word with repentance among the poor and ignorant (Jer 5:3-4) or among the mighty and knowledgeable (Jer 5:5). While they were no different than their fathers, God's patience had ended (Jer 7:25-28). It was rebellious, foolish and senseless for Israel not to repent (Jer 8:4-7).

C. The Nation of Israel during Christ's Time (Matt 11:20; 12:41; Luke 11:32)

Despite the fact that the Lord Himself was walking in the midst of the people, teaching and performing signs so that they knew that He was the Lord, rather than respond in repentance they continued in their comfortable and familiar false religion. A gentile noble woman responded to an earthly king and a nation of idolaters had responded to a mere prophet (Luke 11:29-32). And while the proverbial cities of wickedness would have responded to the incarnational ministry of Jesus (Matt 11:20-24), the devoutly religious Jews refused to repent (cf. Jer 5:5).

D. The Early Churches (Rev 2:5, 16)

Though they all began filled with people who loved and obeyed the Lord (Rev 2:4), many of the early churches had drifted far away and were in danger of no longer being a visible witness for the gospel of Christ because of their unfaithfulness (Rev 2:5, 16).

2. Repentance at the Beginning of Spiritual Life in the Old Testament:

A. God's Mercy to All Who Repent

While their repentance was short lived (cf. Judges 2:19), the one of the generations of the men of Nineveh so uniformly turned to God in repentance that

He delayed their destruction until a later time (Jonah 3-4; cf. 2 Kings 22:19-20).

B. God's Mercy to Israel if they Repent

While Israel had continually been unfaithful to God, He promised that if they would repent (Ezek 18:30-31), then He would respond to them by writing the law on their hearts (Jer 31:31-34).

C. God's Evangelistic Call in the Old Testament (Isa 55)

3. Repentance at the Beginning of Spiritual Life in the New Testament

A. Repentance as Preached by John the Baptist (Luke 3:3, 8; Acts 18:25)

B. Repentance as Preached by Jesus (Mark 1:15, 5:32)

C. Repentance as Preached by the Apostles (Mark 6:12; Acts 2:37)

4. Repentance During Faithful Spiritual Life

A. Repentance as a Response to God's Word (Job 42)

B. Repentance as a Response to God's People (Matt 18:15-17)

5. Ezekiel Provides Pictures of Two Types of Repentance (Ezekiel 18:20-24)

A. Genuine Repentance: Repentance that is Continual (v.21)

B. Counterfeit Repentance: Repentance that is Temporary (v.24)

6. Repentance and the Gospel of John: A Potential Problem?

Some object to teaching that repentance is this critical to the Christian life. One of their objections is this: The gospel of John does not include any mention of the word repentance while the purpose of this gospel is explicitly evangelistic (John 20:31). Therefore if repentance of sin were a necessary component of saving faith, John would have included it in one of his many discourses.

If the absence of the word repentance means that it has no significant or distinct place in the understanding of salvation, then neither does grace, because Jesus never mentions that word in His teaching either.

While the word repentance is not present in the gospel of John, the ideas are present both in the other gospels as well as in the very descriptions that John uses in his gospel (John 3:19-21, 36).