

THE IMPLICATIONS OF THE MEANING OF REPENTANCE

2 Peter 3:9 is an outstanding example of the promise Jesus made to His apostles that when the Holy Spirit came, He would bring to their remembrance all things the Christ had said to them when He was with them (John 14:26). Peter wrote: *"The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance."* One import of the verse is that all who do not repent will perish. That is exactly what Jesus said when He was on earth with Peter and his fellow apostles. *"I tell you, nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish"* (Luke 13:3,5).

Repentance in the New Testament is translated from the Greek word, *metanoia*, which means to change one's mind or purpose. In the New Testament, when repentance is used in a spiritual context, it always refers to a change of mind that purposes to leave sin behind and do that which is righteous. This correct meaning of repentance implies the following truths.

Repentance is not reporting one's sin. The principal gave the third grade boy a note to take home to his parents. The note read: "Johnny said his teacher would remind him of a mule if only the mule had longer ears." The boy's father asked him, "Did you say that, Johnny?" Johnny replied that indeed he had. That doesn't mean the youngster repented of his untoward description of the teacher; he only reported the fact that he said it. We often hear people say something like, "John came forward and repented of sin after the sermon Sunday morning." No, John came forward, because he had already repented. He had already made up his mind that he had sinned, and that he wasn't going to do it anymore. When John came forward, he confessed his sin.

Repentance implies a certain kind of sorrow. Paul wrote: *"For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of: but the sorrow of the world worketh death"* (2 Cor. 7:10). The third grade boy may be sorry that his unflattering description of the teacher was found out, but he may only be sorry because he got in trouble with the principal, and expected even worse when he arrived home. A thief may be sorry that he was caught stealing because it landed him in jail, but all the while, he sits in his cell planning his next caper when he is released. One who repents of sin is indeed sorry that he sinned, but that sorrow is for the act, not being caught in it, and that sorrow leads him to true repentance.

Repentance implies a change of course. If Johnny repents of his description of the teacher, he will not portray her so unflatteringly again. If the thief repents, he will commit himself to stop stealing. True repentance results in a change of life. John wrote: *"Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God."* The original word rendered commit is in a form that means to keep on committing sin. It refers to the continual practice of sin. All of us commit isolated acts of sin. John acknowledged that in 1 John 1:8-10. But one who repents, leaves the practice of sin. The thief leaves the sin of stealing, the liar leaves off his lying, the person in an adulterous marriage leaves it. A failure to make the necessary change exposes repentance that is disingenuous.

Repentance is a necessary step in one's initial obedience to the gospel (Acts 2:38). It is also essential to maintaining the precious reward of eternal life (Acts 8:20-23). Is there sin in your life? Repent of it today.

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