

Part I: Repentance and Salvation

Introduction

The word "repentance" occurs once in the Old Testament and twenty-two times in the New. The Greek word used for all NT references is metanoia. Another Greek word with the same root, metanoeo, is used for all thirty-four New Testament occurrences of "repent," "repented," and "repents". These three English words appear a total of eleven times in the Old Testament. Metanoeo means to change one's mind or purpose; metanoia identifies the act of a change of mind or repentance, according to the Greek dictionary of the NASB Exhaustive Concordance.

This study will outline the two different ways people are to repent according to the Bible. Also presented will be the practical applications of the truth to real life for each.

The Scriptures

Psalm 7:12, 15-16 If a man does not repent, He will sharpen His sword; He has bent His bow and made it ready.
He has dug a pit and hollowed it out, And has fallen into the hole which he made.
His mischief will return upon his own head, And his violence will descend upon his own pate.

Ezekiel 18:30 "Therefore I will judge you, O house of Israel, each according to his conduct," declares the Lord GOD. "Repent and turn away from all your transgressions, so that iniquity may not become a stumbling block to you."

Ezekiel 18:32 "For I have no pleasure in the death of anyone who dies," declares the Lord GOD. "Therefore, repent and live."

Matthew 3:11 "As for me, I baptize you with water for repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, and I am not fit to remove His sandals; He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire."

Mark 1:4 John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.

Luke 3:8 "Therefore bear fruits in keeping with repentance, and do not begin to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham for our father,' for I say to you that from these stones God is able to raise up children to Abraham."

Luke 13:3 "I tell you, no, but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish."

Luke 15:10 "In the same way, I tell you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents."

Luke 15:18-20 "I will get up and go to my father, and will say to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in your sight; I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me as one of your hired men.'" "So he got up and came to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion for him, and ran and embraced him and kissed him."

Luke 19:5-9 When Jesus came to the place, He looked up and said to him, "Zaccheus, hurry and come down, for today I must stay at your house." And he hurried and came down and received Him gladly. When they saw it, they all began to grumble, saying, "He has gone to be the guest of a man who is a sinner." Zaccheus stopped and said to the Lord, "Behold, Lord, half of my possessions I will give to the poor, and if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I will give back four times as much." And Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, because he, too, is a son of Abraham."

Luke 24:47 ...and that repentance for forgiveness of sins would be proclaimed in His name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem.

Acts 2:38 Peter said to them, "Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."

Acts 11:18 When they heard this, they quieted down and glorified God, saying, "Well then, God has granted to the Gentiles also the repentance that leads to life."

Acts 20:21 ...solemnly testifying to both Jews and Greeks of repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.

Acts 26:20 ...but kept declaring both to those of Damascus first, and also at Jerusalem and then throughout all the region of Judea, and even to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, performing deeds appropriate to repentance.

2 Corinthians 7:9-10 I now rejoice, not that you were made sorrowful, but that you were made sorrowful to the point of repentance; for you were made sorrowful according to the will of God, so that you might not suffer loss in anything through us. For the sorrow that is according to the will of God produces a repentance without regret, leading to salvation, but the sorrow of the world produces death.

2 Timothy 2:25 ...with gentleness correcting those who are in opposition, if perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth...

Titus 3:3-5 For we also once were foolish ourselves, disobedient, deceived, enslaved to various lusts and pleasures, spending our life in malice and envy, hateful, hating one another. But when the kindness of God our Savior and His love for mankind appeared, He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit...

2 Peter 3:9 The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance.

Revelation 9:20-21 And the rest of mankind, who were not killed by these plagues, did not repent of the works of their hands, so as not to worship demons, and the idols of gold and of silver and of brass and of stone and of wood, which can neither see nor hear nor walk; and they did not repent of their murders nor of their sorceries nor of their immorality nor of their thefts.

Revelation 16:9 Men were scorched with fierce heat; and they blasphemed the name of God who has the power over these plagues, and they did not repent so as to give Him glory.

Observations

Repentance connected to salvation is the one-time event of a person turning from a life direction of sin to a life direction of obeying God. Perhaps this ultimate expression of faith is most clearly seen in Zaccheus. In Luke 19 this tax-gatherer, known to be unfair, welcomed the opportunity to host a dinner with Jesus as his guest with a statement of repentance: "Half of my possessions I will give to the poor, and if I have defrauded anyone anything, I will give back four times as much." This serious commitment marked an extreme change for a man who had gained riches by defrauding citizens. Jesus, knowing the hearts of men, knew this change in purpose was evidence of his saving faith. He replied, "Today, salvation has come to this house."

Repentance is not a source of salvation apart from the Gospel but rather is part of the response of faith in one receiving the Gospel. No one is saved by works, including the work of repentance. True believers are saved by grace through faith. Yet true saving faith is described as having died to sin and now being alive to God (Romans 6:3-14). Further, believers present themselves as instruments of righteousness; they are no longer slaves to sin (Romans 6:3-14). Unfortunately some in our era preach the Gospel as receiving forgiveness but not turning from sin; such teaching ignores the Romans 6 truth of Jesus and His followers dying to sin and living to God. Clearly, repentance is part of the saving faith that results in forgiveness of sins.

That repentance is essential in salvation is clear from other New Testament truths as well. Jesus, in John 15:8-11, taught that keeping His commandments results in abiding in His love. This is a statement of the general direction of the life of believers after repentance and the exhibiting of saving faith in the Gospel. If one could be saved by faith without repenting these statements of Jesus could not be correct. The Lordship of Christ, as taught in Galatians 1:10 and 2:20 for example, implies repentance is part of saving faith. Also, the book of 1 John has this truth as its theme.

In Scripture the connection of repentance to salvation is a recurring theme. The Old Testament selections on the previous pages demonstrate it. It was the theme of the preaching of John the Baptist (Mark 1:4, Luke 3:8). Jesus made it clear that repentance is an essential part of salvation (Luke 5:32, 15:10). After Jesus' death and resurrection, the Gospel again included repentance (Acts 2:38, 26:20, 2 Peter 3:9).

Repentance is a vital component in salvation.

Application

Remember the biblical teaching on repentance in regard to your own salvation, if you are a Christian. Recall the manifestations of your former pursuit of sin. Remember the change in direction when you believed in the Gospel. Call to mind your new life and new goal of obedience. Return to that purpose today. Energetically seek to bear fruit in keeping with repentance in all the specific opportunities before you today.

If you never turned away from sin as a primary direction of life, today is the day to do so. Choose to believe God sent His Son to pay the price for your sin on the cross. Choose to believe He offers forgiveness to those who receive it by faith. Choose also to believe that Jesus was Holy and that He died to defeat sin. Choose to repent: to turn away from a life of sin and to pursue a life of obedience. God will give you eternal life with Him and will enable you to be effective in bearing fruit in keeping with repentance.

Do you include the topics of sin and repentance when you preach the Gospel? To do so is an important application of studying repentance. Review the following verses (printed at the beginning of the study). Notice that repentance was part of the saving faith called for by John the Baptist (Matthew 3:11, Luke 3:8), by Jesus Himself (Matthew 4:17, 11:20), and by those who preached the Gospel after His death and resurrection (Luke 24:4-7, Acts 20:21, 2 Timothy 2:25). To omit sin and repentance from the Gospel is to give only a partial description of the truths of salvation.

If you understand the biblical teachings on repentance you also have a more accurate perspective of one's response to the Gospel. When a person bears fruit in keeping with repentance, there is assurance of salvation (John 15:8-11, 2 Peter 1:8-11, 1 John 5:15). You can encourage true brothers and sisters whose lives have changed with these passages. The Word of God is silent regarding one who proclaims faith in Christ but as far as can be seen does not exhibit a life marked by repentance. Is he a weak Christian or a tare among wheat? God knows the heart; we do not.