

The Possibility of Repentance

By T. Sean Sullivan

There is a word that is often used inside our buildings; during sermons and Bible classes. It is a word that all Christians must have come to understand at some point. It is a word that requires perpetual maintenance to stay alive. It is a word that is far easier to teach than to live—it is a challenge. That word is repentance.

The first voices of the New Testament carried out the message of repentance: John the Baptizer said, “Repent, for the kingdom of God is at hand” (Matt. 3:1-2). Jesus said, “Repent, for the kingdom of Heaven is at hand” (Matt. 4:17). The Apostle Peter, in the first gospel sermon, commanded repentance as part of the plan of salvation (Acts 2:38-39).

Not only is repentance a fundamental part of our becoming a Christian it is also a part of our necessary return to Christ when we sin. When Simon, a Christian, sinned, Peter instructed him to repent and pray for forgiveness (Acts 8:22). Repentance is a process of recognizing your sin, removing that sin from your life and returning to God.

A solid understanding of this subject and its challenges will help each of us. Let’s open our Bible to consider together the need of repentance; the focus of repentance; and the possibility of repentance.

The Need for Repentance

Repentance is change and to change, we must want to change. It is a human trait to desire change only when it is less painful to change than to stay the same. The discomfort, of staying the same, can come in many forms: an addict getting to the place of committing crimes to get their fix; a drinker who turns in rage on his family; or hurts someone in accident on the road; or maybe a young person is told that they have contracted a disease from their actions of promiscuity. There are also simply learning. Sometimes it is a change of understanding and realization that they are lost without God in their lives; that provokes a desire to change. God expects us to change—there is a need for repentance (Acts 17:30-31) in order to be prepared for judgment to come (Acts 24:25).

Why is repentance so difficult? Repentance requires us to say no to our self. The flesh of man is a powerful enemy to the soul, if it is allowed to be our focus. Galatians 5:19-21 tells us what the flesh will desire if we walk in its works. These actions of base pleasure are from the roots of temptation (1John 2:15-17). There is an almost endless list of corrupt things people pursue for pleasure or escape (1Cor. 6:9-10). All those things can meet repentance (1Cor. 6:11).

We can deny our flesh and walk by the direction of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22-25). The irony of sin is that most will suggest they are searching of a life of joy and peace on the pathway of sin; when that life is only available away from that path.

The Focus of Repentance

Repentance is absolutely necessary. God is aware that we need motivation to accomplish most things, especially difficult tasks. With this need known, God provides plenty of motivation to bring us to focus.

Repentance requires fierce intensity. On a material level—I have seen people embrace incredible fears or eat disgusting things on “reality T.V. for the right price—people will do anything to achieve the right prize. There is a prize, far greater than any

material thing, waiting for those who are willing to repent and serve God in full obedience. John 14:1-6 speaks of a “place” prepared for us in Heaven. Revelation 21:10, 22-27—pictures that place in words. Unless we are motivated to repent by our desire to achieve that place, we will never see its glory. Jesus also provides a different motivation in Luke 13:1-3—Repent or perish. Whatever you have as your motivation, fear or love, the commitment of repentance will take effort.

The Possibility of Repentance

We can be in control; we can maintain the pathway of right. The plans of God are always within our range of ability—His plan is good and perfect for all people every where (James 1:17). If you are willing, you can. God does not dangle the hope of heaven on an unreachable string. We can be among those who overcome (1John 5:3-5).

Every step in life is taken one at a time—repentance is a step in life. In order to succeed you must be patient. Patience with self, will keep you from frustration and the desire to quit trying. The worst possible thing that any Christian can do is walk away from Christ. When we become impatient and frustrated we may quickly assume we cannot succeed so we quit. Exercise patience in your life (Eph. 5:15-17)—carefully walk; watching while you walk (circumspectly). Let patience have its perfect work in your life (James 1:4).

Repentance must be an active part of our lives—if we desire salvation. Know that you can! We can remove sin from our lives like the brethren at Corinth (1Cor. 6:11). We can endure hardships with our faith intact like the brethren in Thessalonica (1Thes. 1:6). We can say what Paul said in Philippians 3:12-15.

If you are a Christian and you are in need of repenting—now is the time. If you are not yet a Christian you are in need of repentance too! In addition, you can be cleansed from your sins and become a Christian, through obedience to God’s plan, right now.

Thankfulness versus Discouragement

By Paul Ayres

Thankfulness leaves no room for discouragement. "I once read a legend of a man who found the barn where Satan kept his seeds ready to be sown in the human heart, and on finding the seeds of discouragement more numerous than others, he learned that those seeds could be grown almost anywhere. When Satan was questioned, he reluctantly admitted that there was one place in which he could never get them to thrive. 'In the heart of a grateful man.'" (V. Norskov Olsen, President, Loma Linda Univ.)

Fulton Oursler tells of his old nurse, who was born a slave on the eastern shore of Maryland and who attended the birth of his mother and his own birth. She taught him the greatest lesson in giving thanks and finding contentment. "I remember her as she sat at the kitchen table in our house; the hard, old, brown hands folded across her starched apron, the glistening eyes, and the husky old whispering voice, saying, 'Much obliged, Lord, for my vittles.'

'Anna,' I asked, 'what's a vittles?' She replied, 'It's what I've got to eat and drink; that's vittles.' I told her, 'But you'd get your vittles whether you thanked the Lord or not.' She answered, 'Sure, but being thankful makes everything taste better.'"