

## Pure Repentance

'Repent and be baptised every one of you in the name of Jesus the Messiah, for the forgiveness of sins' (Acts 2:38).

'All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way, and the Lord has put on Him (Jesus) the guilt and iniquity of us all' (Isaiah 53:6).

'He personally bore our iniquities in His own body on the cross, so that we may die to sin and live in righteousness ... for we were going astray like sheep, but now we have come back to the Shepherd and the Guardian of our souls' (1 Peter 2:24 & 25).

'All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God' (Romans 3:23).

How does repentance affect people all over the world today? If we do not fully understand the word 'repent', then we cannot form the close and lasting relationship that God requires of us. Without repentance, there can be no forgiveness; without forgiveness, there can be no growth or cleansing. There is much misunderstanding about what repentance really is. Repentance is not a ritual of the church nor is it an emotion. Repentance means to completely turn around, to change our minds, to decide to turn away from all sin. It is a decision of the will that is registered in the mind. It is a choice to submit ourselves to what God requires us to do. We have all sinned and we were all going the wrong way, and to get back to God, we need to turn around and face His direction and walk towards Him. If we have not done that, we have not truly repented.

Walking towards God instead of away from Him is an awe-inspiring action. It is almost frightening, but with Jesus as our Shepherd and our Mediator, we can have boldness before the presence of God. 'Repent, that your sins may be erased so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord; and that He may send the Messiah, Who before was appointed for You – even Jesus Whom heaven must receive and retain until the time for the complete restoration of all that God spoke by the mouth of all His holy prophets for ages past' (Acts 3:19 to 21). Notice that Jesus will remain in heaven until the God-appointed time has come for His return. We all need to comprehend God's program for the close of this age, and the purposes which He is seeking to accomplish and how they relate to us. Most of us are associated with what is known as Pentecostalism or the Charismatic renewal within mainstream churches, which is a move of God that He is using to accomplish His purposes.

The words in Acts 3:19 were spoken by Peter, and his hearers were all Jews. He was in Jerusalem but these words have a very real application to us today. At that time, the only covenant people God had on all the earth were the Jewish people, and they related to Him in a special way. That separated them from all other nations on earth. Only since Paul began to preach to the Gentiles, has God had a second covenant people; and they are people who have accepted and received Jesus as their Saviour. Whatever church they attend and whatever the denomination they choose is not relevant to their relationship with Him. Much of what applied to Israel in those days, applies to all believers and has done since Paul took the Gospel to the Gentiles.

There has been a special period of time which has been spoken of by all God's prophets. That makes that specially mentioned time very important. From the beginning of the human race until the days that Peter was speaking about, all the prophets God has had on earth, have spoken about a certain period of time that was to come in the history of the human race. That makes that period of time of extreme interest and importance. Peter gives us certain successive phases that follow in God's divine program. By coincidence, in the English language each one of the four key words begins with the letters 'Re'. Repent, refreshing, restoration and return.

The first thing that God demanded was that the people repent and there would be seasons of refreshing. Then He said, out of the seasons of refreshing there would be times of restoration. Then, in this period of restoration there is one tremendous event that is scheduled to take place, and that is the return of the Messiah. No one but God the Father knows the hour and the day, but we need to look for the signs (Matthew 24:36) and we need to keep watch (Matthew 25:13). By implication, the children of the Light should be aware of the season preceding the return of Jesus. There is a time and season when His return can take place and it cannot take place before or after this appointed time. Heaven must receive and retain Jesus until the time of restoration of all things (regarding Israel), then He will return. So we have the clear outline of successive phases related to God's people that are to mark the close of the age.

John the Baptist heralded in Jesus' ministry by calling for repentance and preparing the way for the Lord. 'The beginning of the Gospel of the Messiah, the Son of God; just as it is written in the prophet Isaiah; Behold, I send My messenger before You, who will make ready Your Way: A voice of one crying in the wilderness, "Prepare the way of the Lord, make His paths straight." John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness, preaching a baptism of repentance in order to receive forgiveness of sins' (Isaiah 40:3; Malachi 3:1; Mark 1:1 to 4). John the Baptist said they had to repent and Jesus could not come and accomplish all that was required unless John prepared the way by preparing the hearts of the people, and that was done by calling for repentance. The sign that they had truly repented was their spiritual fruit, then they were baptised. John's baptism was the outward evidence of repentance. It was different to the baptism we receive now, which is identifying ourselves with the death and burial of Jesus, which could not happen until Jesus had died and rose again. If people had not repented, then John refused to baptise them. He insisted they repent first and they had to bring forth spiritual fruit before they could be baptised (Matthew 3:8), and the basic requirement for baptism was repentance.

Jesus was baptised by John, although he had no need of repentance, it was for our sakes, not His (Matthew 3:13 to 17). John said he had to decrease his ministry and Jesus had to increase His (John 3:30). Once John was imprisoned, then Jesus began His ministry and He also called for repentance (Matthew 4:17) and told people to believe the Gospel (Mark 1:14 & 15). There is a great mistake in modern preaching that says we need only believe. Jesus said we need to repent and believe. The only time Jesus said to only believe, was when he was about to raise Jairus' daughter from death (Luke 8:50). It is wrong to take that situation out of context and say that that is all God requires of the sinner. Saying that is to misrepresent God because before believing, God demands repentance. Without true repentance there can never really be true faith.

We need to repent while we are on earth. Once we are dead it is too late so praying for the dead is pointless. Leaving it until the last minute is toying with our eternity, because there may not be time to repent. Some people who have a prolonged illness may have time to repent, but if someone suffers a sudden death and they have not repented, then they are lost for eternity. It is only while we are on earth, while we have the opportunity, is the only time that our repentance is accepted. Jesus made this clear when some Galileans had been murdered by Pilate, and eighteen died suddenly when a tower in Siloam fell on them, and Jesus said they had all been lost eternally (Luke 13:1 to 5). Jesus said in verses 3 and 5, unless you repent, you shall all likewise perish. The only alternative to perishing is repentance. It is significant that all the sacrifices that the Galileans were offering when they were killed, apparently did not save their souls because Jesus said they perished. That word indicated a lost soul so we could be in the middle of some religious ordinance, going to church or even praying, and if God requires our soul and we have not repented, then we will perish. Repentance is serious business with our Father.

When Jesus died and had risen again, He commissioned all the disciples to go into all the world and teach people to repent, then be baptised and filled with the Holy Spirit. It was necessary for the Messiah to die and be the first to rise from the dead, then in His name, repentance and remission of sin should be preached amongst all nations beginning at Jerusalem (Luke 24:46 & 47). So the first offer in the Gospel is not forgiveness, but repentance. There is repentance then forgiveness of sin.

When Peter preached the message of repentance, the people came under conviction and realised they were not right with God. They knew God would require an account of their lives for what they had done, and especially their ill-treatment of the Messiah. They asked what they could do and Peter gave them the only clear answer. 'Repent, be baptised everyone of you in the name of Jesus for the forgiveness of sin and you shall receive the Holy Spirit' (Acts 2:38). That is God's answer to the question of what we should do to be reconciled to God. It is sad that some church leaders have split up the answer, but there are three steps to take; repent, be baptised, receive the Holy Spirit. God's program has not changed. There is no softening of these requirements in the New Testament. Every person who repented was immediately baptised in water. Anybody who claims forgiveness without baptism is in error. We need those three steps so we can lead an effective Christian life, but the first requirement is always repentance. Before Jesus came, God ignored the ignorance of sinful people but from the time of Jesus, God requires all people everywhere to repent (Acts 17:30). There are no exceptions. All people everywhere doesn't leave out anyone, anywhere. Paul urged both Jews and Gentiles to turn in repentance to God and to have faith in Jesus (Acts 20:21).

Repentance is part of the foundation of faith, along with baptism, laying on of hands, resurrection and eternal judgement. We need to move on from there, grow in God and listen to more advanced teaching. 'Let us go on and get past the elementary stage in the teachings and doctrine of the Messiah, advancing steadily toward the perfection that belongs to spiritual maturity. Let us not again be laying the foundation of repentance of dead works and of the faith in God; with teachings about purifying, the laying on of hands, the resurrection from the dead and eternal judgement. If indeed God permits, we will proceed to more advanced teaching' (Hebrews 6:1 to 3).

In the above three verses are the six basic truths on which the Christian Gospel is founded. Dead works are all work that is not done in faith and obedience to God. Even some religious works may not be what God requires. Those works will be burned up. 'The work of each one will become known; for the day (of judgement) will disclose it because it will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the work each person has done. If the work has been built on this Foundation, he will get his reward; but if the work is burned up, the person will suffer loss though he himself will be saved, but only through fire' (1 Corinthians 3:13 to 15).

Many Christians do not have a strong foundation of faith and so are spiritually, very wobbly. Usually, the 'stone' that has been omitted is repentance. In the closing book of the Bible, we have messages sent from the Lord Himself to seven Christian churches. With the churches of Smyrna and Philadelphia God had no fault with them, but the other five churches had to repent. Jesus said, 'I have somewhat against you' and He proceeded to tell them what their fault was. He also said in every case; 'I know your works'. In all the five churches that had faults, the first requirement was to repent (Revelation chapters 2 & 3).

God is getting everything ready for Jesus' second coming, just as He did the first time. The hour and the day are fixed and are known by God the Father, and Jesus said it is not for us to know exactly when (Acts 1:7). It is not possible for Jesus to come until there is repentance and the way has been prepared. Just as repentance was the major requirement for His first coming, so it is for His second. It makes no difference what church we attend, if it is not teaching God's way, then it is the wrong way and God's way is the way of repentance. Some church leaders are more concerned about money and their church programs than what is written in the Word of God. Without pure, genuine repentance, no one can understand the will and purposes of God. We need to repent of things like pride, self-will, stubbornness, self-righteousness and other wrong things that can keep us from developing a close relationship with God. All people have to turn and repent; saved and unsaved alike, and this is not optional; it is a command of God. We all need to be willing to admit our sins. Jesus said to confess our sin to Him and He is faithful and true to forgive us (1 John 1:9) but we must first admit we are sinners then tell God what we have done. He won't be shocked because He already knows, but we need to take responsibility for our own sin and deal with it. We can't live by our own standards, we need to live by God's very high standards. God is moving and if we don't move with Him, we will be left out. Jesus is cleansing the church by blood and water (Ephesians 5:25 to 27; 1 John 1:7).

We must make ourselves ready for the second coming of the Lord (Revelation 19:7). Our salvation and our being ready for the coming of the Lord is dependant equally on reading and obeying the Bible, as it is on our putting our faith in the blood of Jesus. We can't have one without the other. We need the water of the Word and the blood of Jesus, and it is the Spirit Who bears witness to both the water (the Word) and the blood. Jesus shed His blood and He is the Word of God (Revelation 19:13). That makes us complete in Him as He saves us completely; that is we are not half saved, but completely, totally, absolutely saved by choosing to repent.

Amen and God bless you.

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