



What is Godly Repentance?

THERE are two kinds of repentance. One is of God and leads to eternal life. The other is of this world and leads only to death.

Many people have had what they would call "a religious experience." It is usually associated with "giving their heart to the Lord" or "making a decision for Christ." But does this represent genuine repentance in the Biblical sense?

A true, Godly repentance is not something worked up from within a person as the result of a moving church service. Neither the strains of "Almost Persuaded" — the old favorite hymn — nor the stained-glass voice of an emotional preacher can generate *Godly* repentance in an individual.

Real repentance — the kind God requires — is a *gift* of God. It is something that God must inspire in an individual. Both II Timothy 2:24-25 and Acts 11:18 make it clear that God must *grant* repentance.

True repentance is more than a mere emotional experience. To illustrate let's take the case of Joe Bloak (a fictional name).

Joe was a college football hero. He believed in God (so he said) and attended church pretty regularly. But he also liked to drink and have fun with the college co-eds. During the week he would work hard and discipline himself pretty well, but when Saturday night came he would "celebrate" by getting drunk, which sometimes led to fornication. He *knew* this was wrong because he knew the Bible condemned both drunkenness and fornication.

After he sobered up Sunday morning, with a terrible hangover, he would feel *very sorry* for what he had done. He would shed tears and swear to himself that he would never do it again! He would go to church that day and "repent." This made him feel better, and he would be "good" for another week. But almost every Saturday night old Joe would get drunk, and "slip" again, and commit fornication. And the following morning he would "deeply" repent again.

If you could have seen old Joe, you would have thought for sure he had really repented! He was so sincere and he shed so many tears! He asked God to forgive him every time, and he would go to church to confess and "make up" for his sins.

What was Joe's *real* problem? His repentance was only superficial. It was *not genuine!* He was only feeling sorry for *himself*. He was experiencing "worldly sorrow." He was upset because of what his sins had done to *him* — not for what he had done *against God* or anyone else. His was a *selfish* repentance. He experienced only a *temporary* feeling of remorse, sorrow and guilt. He continued to repeat the same sins over and over again!

If Joe had known that real repentance comes from God, he would have cried out in prayer with *all his heart* and asked God to *help him* repent. God would have *granted Godly* repentance if Joe had *really* wanted to stop sinning — *permanently*.

A person who is seeking *true* repentance shall find it, because God is will-

ing to give it! "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" (II Peter 3:9).

Paul described these two kinds of repentance. In the book of I Corinthians, he had written to the Christians at Corinth and corrected them very severely concerning a number of problems they had. In II Corinthians, Paul was encouraging them and commenting on their response to the correction. He wrote: "For even if I made you sorry with my letter, I do not regret it (though I did regret it), for I see that the letter grieved you, though only for a while. As it is, I rejoice, not because you were grieved, but *because you were grieved into repenting*; for you felt a godly grief, so that you suffered no loss through us. For *godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation* and brings no regret, but *worldly grief produces death*" (II Cor. 7:8-10, RSV).

God's Word says, "Repent ye therefore, and be converted [changed], that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord" (Acts 3:19). You must repent of your *sins* — the violation of any of God's laws (I John 3:4). Everyone has sinned and is guilty of breaking God's laws in some way (I John 1:8,10). If you have not broken the law in the letter, you surely have in the spirit! The *letter* of the law says, "Thou shalt not commit

adultery," but the *spirit* of that law is, "Whosoever *looketh on a woman to lust* after her *bath* committed adultery with her already in his heart" (Matt. 5:27-28).

God shows us in His Word that our hearts and attitudes are often evil and contrary to His way. Read Jeremiah 17:9 and Romans 8:7 in this regard.

When God has granted you true repentance, you will have the power to resist the way of the world. You will turn to God in sincere, heartrending sorrow because of your past life and submit yourself to His laws and His way of life. The old "you" is buried in baptism. A truly converted person has *changed* his life-style to conform with Christ's. The converted person now strives to overcome his carnal drives, the temptings of Satan the devil and the pulls of society. He submits to God.

This real Godly repentance must *precede* baptism (Acts 2:38). Then following baptism, the Holy Spirit is given.

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