

A MOST DIFFICULT COMMAND

Acts 17:30-31

INTRODUCTION:

- A. It has been said that the most difficult command in the Bible is the command to *REPENT*.
- B. That is because in order to repent, we must see sin the way that God sees it and *ADMIT* that we are *GUILTY*.
- C. Repentance is a **BIBLICAL TOPIC**:
 - 1. **REPENT**:
 - 8 times** in the Old Testament.
 - 26 times** in the New Testament.
 - 2. **REPENTED**:
 - 2 times** in the Old Testament.
 - 5 times** in the New Testament.
 - 3. **REPENTANCE**:
 - 0 times** in the Old Testament.
 - 24 times** in the New Testament.
- D. Since this topic is discussed so much in the Bible, we need to give special attention to it.
- E. **ILLUSTRATION**: It is said that in ancient Greece a plague once swept through Athens. To pacify the pagan gods who were believed to be responsible, the people erected altars to every god known to them. Yet the scourge continued. Finally in desperation, another altar was built bearing these words: "TO THE UNKNOWN GOD." Soon afterward, the plague subsided. It was not until 600 years later, when Paul visited Athens on his second missionary journey, that he walked about the city and saw that inscription. Seizing the opportunity, he proclaimed to his listeners, "*Therefore the One whom you worship without knowing, Him I proclaim to you*" Acts 17:23.
- F. That one God, of whom they knew nothing about, Paul knew personally. Paul presented Him as the "*Lord of heaven and earth*" v.24. But the apostle did not stop there. He also called for repentance, for Jesus Christ would someday judge the world in righteousness – "*And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commands all men every where to repent.*" Acts 17:30.
- G. Let's see what Repentance is and see what the Bible has to say about it:

I. WHAT IS REPENTANCE IN THE BIBLE?

- A. Many people have *MISCONCEPTIONS* concerning repentance. What Repentance is NOT:
1. Repentance is *NOT JUST QUITTING THE SIN*. You could “change your life” – quit doing something, but that will not make you right with God unless you also repent.
 2. Repentance is *NOT COVERING THE SIN* and acting like it never happened — David.
 3. Repentance is *NOT MERELY BEING REMORSEFUL* alone without change.
 4. Repentance is not merely *ACKNOWLEDGING YOUR FAULTS*.
ILLUSTRATION: Peanuts comic strip...Lucy: "Recognizing your faults and actually changing your ways are two different things, Charlie Brown!" (See Below).
- B. The Greek word is “**metanoeo**” (**meta-change, noeo-thought or mind**). W. E. Vine defines "repentance" as:
1. A "change of mind" “change of mind or purpose”
 2. That which "involves both a turning from sin and a turning to God"
 3. The word as used in the original language “literally signifies to have a feeling or care, concern, or regret.”
 4. Mr. Webster says of the word, “to turn from sin and dedicate oneself to the amendment of one’s life; to feel regret or contrition; to change one’s mind”
- C. Years ago someone explained the turning and redirecting in this manner:
"REPENTANCE IS A CHANGE OF MIND, LEADING TO A CHANGE OF HEART, LEADING TO A CHANGE OF ACTION, LEADING TO A CHANGE OF LIFE."
- D. Jesus give a beautiful example of repentance in the parable of the two sons, *Mt 21:28-29*.
1. The first son refused to go work and later repented and went and worked.
 2. He had a feeling of regret and remorse that **CAUSED A CHANGE** of heart, mind and **ACTION**.
 3. This passage clearly shows that a change of life is brought about by repentance.
- E. Another example of repentance is in the parable of the Prodigal Son, *Luke 15:11-31*.
1. The younger son asked for his inheritance and wasted it in a far country.
 2. The son "*came to himself*" (v .17) and resolved to seek restitution with his Father.
This is a beautiful picture of repentance and godly sorrow.
- F. Charles Hodge says: "Heaven has only one sermon -- repentance. Sinners cannot return to God with their sins. The good news begins with bad news! Peter's first command on Pentecost was 'repent' (Acts 2:38)." (Gospel Advocate, October, 2002).

II. REPENTANCE HAS FOUR LEVELS

A. THE LEVEL OF ADMITTING:

1. Refuse to play the “blame game”.
2. It is not someone else’s fault.
3. *I did it.* I am accountable. I am responsible for my life.
4. It is not that I got caught. I did it! PERIOD. Case closed.

B. THE LEVEL OF GUILT: Guilt is grasping the hurt I caused in you or God.

1. David was exceptional in this, “Against Thee, and Thee only have I sinned.”
2. David had sinned against Uriah the Hittite, Bathsheba, society. But guilt involved , God!

C. THE LEVEL OF CONFESSION:

1. Confession, too, has been deserted in our time.
2. You do not confess simply because *THE EVIDENCE IS PUBLIC!*
3. You do not confess like in “plea bargaining”. To confess is even more than admission.
4. Confession is the “*rumbling of a crumbling heart*”.
5. Confession eliminates negotiation.

D. THE LEVEL OF PROMISE:

1. I am genuinely sorry.
2. My sin breaks my heart, too.
3. I never intend to do that again.

(Much of these thoughts came from Charles Hodge)

III. PROPER MOTIVATIONS FOR REPENTANCE

A. THE GOODNESS OF GOD: To the Romans Paul asked the question, "*Do you despise the riches of his goodness and forbearance and long suffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance?*" **Romans 2:4.**

1. God is so good to us in both the material and spiritual realms.
2. That should lead us to obey Him and repent when necessary.
3. It is sobering to think how good God has been to us when we had no goodness requiring His mercy.

B. THE TERROR OF THE LORD as Paul said in **2 Corinthians 5:11.**

1. "*Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men...*"
2. The fear of Divine wrath is one reason that will motive men to turn their hearts to God before it is too late (Heb. 10:31).
3. “It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.” *Hebrews 10:31.*

4. "Because he [God] hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man [Jesus] whom he has ordained; whereof he has given assurance unto all men, in that he has raised him from the dead. " *Acts 17:31*.

C. **GODLY SORROW:** Paul said in **2 Corinthians 7:10** "*For godly sorrow produces repentance leading to salvation, not to be regretted; but the sorrow of the world produces death.*"

1. Worldly sorrow is a selfish kind of sorrow.
Sorrow you got caught.
Sorrow that you look bad.
2. Godly sorrow is sorrow for what you did and who you hurt.
It is directed toward God.
Like David felt after his sin, Psalm 51:4.
3. Repentance is not just sorrow – it is produced by sorrow.

IV. REWARDS OF REPENTANCE

- A. *PEACE OF MIND, Philippians 4:6-7*
- B. Renews *RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD*.
- C. Gives the angels in heaven a reason to rejoice, *Luke 15:7,9,10*.
- D. Renews *RELATIONSHIPS WITH OTHERS* — John Mark, *Acts 15:36-37; 2 Tm 4:11*
- E. MOST IMPORTANT OF ALL: LEAD TO THE SALVATION of one's soul.

CONCLUSION:

- A. **ILLUSTRATION:** The students of an old and beloved teacher asked him when they should repent of their sins. He answered, "You should repent of all your sins the day before you die!" "But we do not know when we will die," said the students. To which the old teacher replied, "Then repent today!" Paul said in 2 Corinthians 6:2, "behold, now is the day of salvation." Repent today so your sins can be forgiven and you can spend eternity with all the redeemed in heaven.
- B. Do YOU need to repent? Do so TODAY.

Ricky Phillips
Martin Church of Christ
Martin, TN

www.martinchurchofchrist.org

ILLUSTRATION: Several years ago the Peanuts comic strip had Lucy and Charlie Brown practicing football. Lucy would hold the ball for Charlie's placekicking and then Charlie would kick the ball. But every time Lucy had ever held the ball for Charlie, he would approach the ball and kick with all his might. At the precise moment of the point of no return, Lucy would pick up the ball and Charlie would kick and his momentum unchecked by the ball, which was not there to kick, would cause him to fall flat on his back. This strip opened with Lucy holding the ball, but Charlie Brown would not kick the ball. Lucy begged him to kick the ball. But Charlie Brown said, "Every time I try to kick the ball you remove it and I fall on my back." They went back and forth for the longest time and finally Lucy broke down in tears and admitted, "Charlie Brown I have been so terrible to you over the years, picking up the football like I have. I have played so many cruel tricks on you, but I've seen the error of my ways! I've seen the hurt look in your eyes when I've deceived you. I've been wrong, so wrong. Won't you give a poor penitent girl another chance?" Charlie Brown was moved by her display of grief and responded to her, "Of course, I'll give you another chance." He stepped back as she held the ball, and he ran. At the last moment, Lucy picked up the ball and Charlie Brown fell flat on his back. Lucy's last words were, "Recognizing your faults and actually changing your ways are two different things, Charlie Brown!"