

It Is Written

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WHY IS REPENTANCE SO HARD?

By Kyle Campbell

The command to repent is one of the hardest, if not the hardest, to persuade people to obey. Not only do non-members have a very real problem with this, but many members of the church do as well. Why is repentance so hard? There are at least four concepts that repentance involves that make it difficult.

Repentance involves a recognition of God. It involves recognizing what God requires (Luke 13:3; 24:47). God is the one who requires us to repent. Since He does so, the command is not an option. It involves a consideration of God's "goodness" and "longsuffering" (Romans 2:4; 2 Peter 3:9). God could easily bring judgment on us at any time, but He is gracious and gives us time to repent. How sad it is to see people misusing their opportunities.

Repentance involves godly sorrow. Godly sorrow is not repentance, but it leads to repentance (2 Corinthians 7:10). "Godly sorrow" is not sorrow because one has been caught in his sin. It is not sorrow for what sin has done to him. For example, a young man told of his experiences in trying to help his uncle who was an alcoholic. When he and others visited and encouraged him to repent, his uncle would shed many tears, but he would never change. That is not true repentance.

Repentance involves a change of mind coupled with a change of action for good. In Matthew 21:28-32, one of the sons "repented and went." In Matthew 3:7-10, John the Baptist severely rebuked the Pharisees and Sadducees for not producing the fruits which demonstrate repentance. The phrase "worthy for repentance" really means, "answerable to amendment of life." King Manasseh humbled himself and repented, tearing down the altars and idols he made for the people to worship (2 Chronicles 33:10-13). Don't be like Judas who changed his mind, but didn't follow with good action (Matthew 27:3-5). One might say he has repented, but if he continues in his evil ways, he hasn't repented at all.

Repentance involves God's blessings. In the parables of Luke 15, the lost sheep, coin, and son all teach the same lesson. There is rejoicing in heaven when a sinner repents (Luke 15:10). Sins are blotted out and refreshing comes from the Lord when one repents (Acts 3:19; cp. Isaiah 55:6-7; Ezekiel 18:30-31). Why does this make repentance difficult? Because blessings also imply judgment (Acts 17:30-31). I believe everyone wants to be blessed, but we've got to remember that we'll be judged too. An eternal condemnation is in play every day of life and in every decision you make.

Are you ready to humbly repent of your sins and no longer commit them? We may indeed come boldly to the throne of grace (Hebrews 4:16), but only if we are ready to turn from sin. Are you ready to make a change?

Why "Liberal" and "Conservative" Churches of Christ?

By Robert Harkrider

During the past three decades many have asked this question. Some sincere brethren who have been caught up in one stream or another never fully understood, and many who were too young before have now grown to adulthood wondering why. It is therefore a good question worthy of repeated investigation. Labels of "liberal" and "institutional" versus "anti" and "conservative" have been used by

some as a prejudicial tool to halt further investigation. Labels used as prejudicial clubs are to be condemned; yet the terms "liberal" and "conservative" are proper when used as adjectives to describe a difference in attitude toward Bible authority, and consequently, a difference in practices. As the years go by, the attitude underlying the division becomes more apparent. We are not separated because one group believes in benevolence and the other does not, nor because of jealousy and envy. We have divided over a basic attitude toward the Bible. A liberal attitude justifies any activity that seems to be a "good work" under the concept, "We do a lot of things for which we have no Bible authority." A conservative attitude makes a plea to have Bible authority (either generic or specific) for all we do - therefore refraining from involving the church in activities alien to that of the church in the New Testament. Briefly, the walls of innovations which have divided us are built in three areas:

WHO? Who is to do the work of the church? The church? Or a human institution? The church has a God-given work to do, and the Lord made the church sufficient to do its own work. Within the framework of elders and deacons, a local church is the only organization necessary to fulfill its mission of evangelism, edification, and benevolence (Eph. 3:10-11; 4:11-16; 1 Tim. 3:15). However, a wedge was driven when some began to reason that the church may build and maintain a separate institution - a different WHO to do the work of the church. This separate institution is human in origin and control. It is not a church nor governed by the church - yet it receives financial maintenance from the church. Human institutions so arranged (such as benevolent homes, hospitals, colleges or missionary societies) may be doing a good work. But when they become leeches on the church, they deny its independence and all-sufficiency and make a "fund-raising house" of God's church.

HOW? How is the work of the church to be overseen? On a local basis with separate, autonomous congregations? Or may several local churches work as a unit through a sponsoring eldership? The organization of the New Testament church was local in nature, with elders limited to oversight of the work of the flock among them (Acts 14:23; 1 Pet. 5:2; Acts 20:28). We are divided by those who promote "brotherhood works" through a plan of inter-congregational effort with centralized oversight - an unscriptural HOW.

WHAT? What is the mission of the church? Spiritual, or also social? It is in this area that the loose attitude toward the Scriptures is becoming more apparent. Though wholesome activities are needed for all, the Lord died for a higher and holier mission than food, fun, and frolic. Let the church be free to spend its energy and resources in spiritual purposes (1 Pet. 2:5; Rom. 14:17) and let the home be busy in providing social needs (1 Cor. 11:22,34).

Is This Our Attitude?

By Kyle Campbell

I don't think it's a far stretch to say that most of our lives boils down to attitude. Attitude or heart is going to determine how we act. Jesus made the connection in Matthew 15:19 when He said, "For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies ..." (Matthew 15:19).

A good example of this principle is found in John 5. The lame man listened to what Christ said and was healed (vss. 2-9). The Jews disbelieved and did not care to learn (vss. 15-18). They automatically took the position that the miracle was untrue. God wants us to "search the scriptures" (vs. 39), but the Lord said "ye will not come to me, that ye might have life" (vs. 40).

People close their hearts and their attitude toward the truth is extremely poor. Everyone has decisions to make. What will be your decision toward truth? Will you hear it and accept or will you reject it? If you wish to accept, let us help you find the truth that God has revealed through His scriptures.