

Winning the Hard Ones

The Necessity of Repentance

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Famous Quote

“There are many who speak only of the forgiveness of sin, but who say little or nothing about repentance. If there is nevertheless no forgiveness of sins without repentance, so also forgiveness of sins cannot be understood without repentance. Therefore, if forgiveness of sins is preached without repentance, it follows that the people imagine they have already received the forgiveness of sins, and thereby they become cocksure and fearless, which is then greater error and sin than all the error that preceded our time.”

MELANCHTHON

“What should I say to someone who acknowledges his sins, but says, ‘I just hope God is forgiving’?”

This person could be referred to as “awakened, but not alarmed.” Explain that God is forgiving—but only to those who repent of their sins. Ask him, “If you died right now, where would you go?” If he says, “Hell,” ask if that concerns him. If it does concern him, ask, “What are you going to do?” Then tell him that God commands him to repent and trust the Savior. If it doesn’t concern him, speak of the value of his life, the threat of eternal damnation, and the biblical description of hell. Caution him that he doesn’t have the promise of tomorrow, and plead with him to come to his senses.

Some people insist “repentance” is an old-fashioned word that the world cannot understand. “Sin” is another word that falls into that category.

However, we must carefully check our motives for avoiding their use. Do we want to substitute different words to help the world understand, or do we simply want to shake off the reproach that comes with their use?

If the world cannot comprehend spiritual words, then we should explain their meanings.

2 Timothy 4:2 preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching. (ESV)

Sin is transgression of the Law (**1 John 3:4**), and repentance means to turn from sin. It is more than contrition (sorrow for sin); to repent means to confess sin and forsake it—to agree with God that it is wrong and to turn and go in the opposite direction. An old soldier once summed up repentance this way: “God said, ‘Attention! About face! Quick time march!’”

It is true that numerous Bible verses speak of the promise of salvation with no mention of repentance. These verses merely tell us to “believe” on Jesus Christ and we shall be saved (**Acts 16:31; Romans 10:9**).

However, the Bible makes it clear that God is holy and man is sinful, and that sin makes a separation between the two (**Isaiah 59:1, 2**). Without repentance from sin, wicked men cannot have fellowship with a holy God. We are dead in our trespasses and sins (**Ephesians 2:1**) and until we forsake them through repentance, we cannot be made alive in Christ.

The Scriptures speak of “repentance unto life” (**Acts 11:18**). We must turn from sin to the Savior. This is why Paul preached “repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ” (**Acts 20:21**).

Jesus said that He came to call “sinners to repentance” (**Matthew 9:13**).

The first public word He preached was “repent” (**Matthew 4:17**). John the Baptist began his ministry the same way (**Matthew 3:2**).

Jesus told His hearers twice that without repentance, they would perish (**Luke 13:3, 5**).

If belief is all that is necessary for salvation, then the logical conclusion is that one need never repent.

However, the Bible tells us that a false convert “believes” and yet is not saved (**Luke 8:13** *And the ones on the rock are those who, when they hear the word, receive it with joy. But these have no root; they believe for a while, and in time of testing fall away.*); he remains a “worker of iniquity.”

In his book *One Thing You Can't Do in Heaven*, Mark Cahill notes that, when witnessing to the lost, “if there is no desire to walk away from sin, the person is not really making a true heart commitment to the Savior.

In **John 6:44** Jesus says, ‘No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him.’ If God is drawing someone to Him, He would also be drawing the person away from his sin.”

Look at the warning of Scripture: “If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth” (**1 John 1:6**).

The Scriptures also say, “He that covers his sins shall not prosper, but whoso confesses and forsakes them [repents] shall have mercy” (**Proverbs 28:13**).

Jesus said that there was joy in heaven over one sinner who “repents” (**Luke 15:10**). If there is no repentance, there is no joy because there is no salvation.

As Peter preached on the Day of Pentecost, he commanded his hearers to repent “for the remission of sins” (**Acts 2:38**). Without repentance, there is no remission of sins; we are still under God’s wrath. Peter further said, “Repent...and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out” (**Acts 3:19**). We cannot be converted, or have our sins blotted out, unless we repent.

God Himself “commands *all men everywhere* [leaving no exceptions] to repent” (**Acts 17:30**).

Peter said a similar thing at Pentecost: “Repent, and be baptized *every one* of you” (**Acts 2:38**). Scripture says that the Lord is “not willing that any should perish, but that *all* should come to repentance” (**2 Peter 3:9**). Clearly, those who do not repent will perish.

If repentance wasn't necessary for salvation, why then did Jesus command that *repentance* be preached to all nations (**Luke 24:47**)? When He sent out His disciples two by two, they “preached that men should repent” (**Mark 6:12**).

The necessity of repentance underscores the importance of going through the Law with a sinner. If a man doesn't know what sin is, how can he repent?

Any “repentance” would be merely “horizontal repentance.” He’s responding to the Savior because he’s lied to men, he’s stolen from men, etc. But when David sinned with Bathsheba, he didn’t say, “I’ve sinned against man.” He said to God, “Against you, and you only, have I sinned, and done this evil in your sight” (**Psalm 51:4**).

When Joseph was tempted sexually, he said, “How can I do this thing and sin against God?” (**Genesis 39:9**).

The prodigal son said, “I’ve sinned against heaven” (**Luke 15:21**).

That’s why Paul preached “repentance toward God” (**Acts 20:21**).

When a man doesn’t understand that his sin is primarily vertical, he’ll merely exercise superficial, experimental, horizontal repentance, and fall away when tribulation, temptation, and persecution come.

“What gives you the right to judge me?”

To pronounce another religious group to be false can seem a pompous undertaking, especially in a culture that preaches tolerance for everything from homosexuality to a mother’s “right” to kill her unborn child.

Tolerance is the banner that unites much of our culture, and anyone who points a judging finger at someone or something is often ridiculed.

But Christians are told in the Bible to separate themselves from the sinful practices of man and to expose error. God's Word tells us to examine all things and hold fast to that which is true (**1 Thessalonians 5:21**). So we do.

What does it mean to examine if we do not judge what is right and wrong? Jesus judged the Pharisees as hypocrites. Peter judged Ananias and Sapphira as liars (**Acts 5:3, 4**). Paul judged the Galatians as fools (**Galatians 3:1**).

Something can be said to be right or wrong because the Bible has laid out before us a moral and doctrinal standard that is clear. It is wrong to lie, so we are able to say to someone who lies, “What you are doing is wrong.” That is making a judgment.

Likewise, with the cults, as Christians we are commanded to be able to give answers to everyone (**1 Peter 3:15**) and to contend for the faith that was delivered to the saints (**Jude 3**). If we do not fight for the faith, the faith will be lost. If we do not expose the errors of the cults, then the cults will move unchecked in the world and lead even more people into eternal destruction.

To make a judgment means we must recognize that there are absolutes. In a world that worships relativism, absolutes are not welcome and the cults that espouse their demonic doctrines beg tolerance.

The true Church stands for the truth of God's Word, not a compromising collection of beliefs that changes as people's whims change. The cults are cults because they deny the true God, add works to salvation, and corrupt a multitude of biblical truths. Their end and the end of all who follow them is damnation. To do anything other than warn people about them would be unloving.

Who is Jesus?

In Mormonism, Jesus is the brother of the devil begotten through sexual intercourse with a god who came from another planet.

In Jehovah's Witnesses, he is Michael the Archangel who became a man.

In the New Age Movement, he is a man in tune with the divine consciousness. Which is true?

The only true Jesus is the one of the Bible, the one who is prayed to (**1 Corinthians 1:1, 2; Acts 7:55–60**); worshiped (**Matthew 2:2–11; 14:33, John 9:35–38; Hebrews 1:8**), and called God (**John 20:28; Colossians 2:9**).

The Jesus of the cults is not prayed to, worshiped, or called God. And since the Jesus of the Bible is the only one who reveals the Father (**Luke 10:22**) so that you may have eternal life (**John 17:3**), you must have the true Jesus who alone is the way, the truth, and the life (**John 14:6**).