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WHAT IS REPENTANCE – Part 3

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Repentance takes place when godly sorrow produces a resolve to forsake sin. As stated before, repentance is literally a change of mind, but even this seems to fall short of the way the word is used in the Bible. When living in sin, man is “conformed to this world,” walking “according to the course of this world” and “fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind,” being “by nature [a child] of wrath” (*Romans 12:2; Ephesians 2:2-3*). Repentance is the Biblical answer to this – when man undergoes a complete transformation, “renewed in the spirit of [his] mind” (*Ephesians 4:23*; see also *Romans 12:2*). Repentance produces a mind living by a different standard – God’s standard; whereas it was once given to disobedience, it is now focused on obedience. Christ illustrated the power of repentance in a parable: “A certain man had two sons; and he came to the first, and said, Son, go work to day in my vineyard. He answered and said, I will not: but afterward he **repented**, and went” (*Matthew 21:28-29*, KJV). The son that repented completely changed his will to match his father’s will (v. 31).

Repentance is nothing unless it produces reformation of life. When Jonah was sent to the city of Nineveh, he was told to preach a message of impending doom (v. 1-4). When the people of Nineveh heard this message, they “believed God” and “proclaimed a fast” – their change of mind produced action (v. 5). Their destruction was averted not simply because they changed their mind, but because “God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way” (v. 10). Repentance will always do what it did in Christ’s parable and what it did for the Ninevites – it will cause one to reform his life. Repentance will prompt the non-Christian to gladly declare, “I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God” and respond to God’s commandments beginning with baptism (*Acts 8:37-38*; see also 2:38). The Christian that arises out of the waters of baptism will “put to death” his “members which are upon the earth” and set his “mind on things above” (*Colossians 3:2, 5*).

True reformation of life includes restitution. While the blood of Christ completely cleanses one from the guilt of sin, it does not undo all of the consequences of sin. The Bible says of a man named Zacchaeus that he “was a chief tax collector, and he was rich” (*Luke 19:2*). This is almost a double indictment against Zacchaeus: he was the chief publican, or tax collector – a profession known for its graft and corruption – and was rich – and riches came in tax collecting in that day only through dishonesty. When Zacchaeus was confronted with his sin (v. 7) he apparently had a change of mind concerning his former life, and manifested this by saying, “Look, Lord, I give half of my goods to the poor; and if I have taken anything from anyone by false accusation, I restore fourfold” (v. 8). Zacchaeus knew that he could not keep what he had stolen and have true repentance, and purposed to make restitution. Such is required of anyone wishing to keep God’s command to repent.

CONCLUSION

One cannot understate the importance of baptism – it is the only way to have a cleansed and reborn spirit (*John 3:3-8*), the only way one can get into Christ (*Galatians 3:27*), and the only way to become a new creation (*2 Corinthians 5:17*). However, baptism does not and cannot change our lives as Christians; the command that God designed to achieve change in our lives was and is repentance. True repentance – changing one’s mind to conform to the will of God – will bring forth appropriate fruit, or action (*Matthew 3:8*). It comes as no surprise then that Christ said twice for emphasis, “I tell you, no; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish” (*Luke 13:3, 5*).

Have you repented? Have you changed your mind and has this mind produced the appropriate works of reformation and restitution? Christ commanded, “If he trespass against thee seven times in a day, and seven times in a day turn again to thee, saying, I repent; thou shalt forgive him” (*Luke 17:4*). What He commanded of His disciples, God will perform – He will forgive you for what is past and help you to create a new future.