

What Is REAL Repentance?

Millions have heard the cry, "REPENT! Receive Christ!" But what does it mean? What is real repentance? Here's the BIBLE ANSWER!

by Garner Ted Armstrong

IN A WORLD fraught with tension and fear, increasing thousands are turning to *religion*. Somehow, many feel they need to "get right" with God — to join a Church — to become more "religious."

Vast evangelistic campaigns have netted thousands of "decisions for Christ." In a moment of remorse over their past lives, many have decided to "accept" Jesus as Saviour. But what is this "receiving" of Christ? Is it REAL?

Mass evangelism has been severely criticized recently by many who have shown the "decisions" made usually don't LAST very long. Were these decisions *real repentance*?

The Common Belief

A foremost religious leader once said: "First, let us understand what Christianity is NOT. It is NOT a way of life!"

But what does the newly converted Christian DO then, that MAKES him a Christian? Commonly, it is believed that the remorseful feeling of sorrow over past mistakes and misdeeds, plus the *acceptance* of Christ — the *worship* of Christ — is a saving experience. Hundreds of thousands of sincere, well-meaning, earnest people are content they are Christians — satisfied they are headed toward eternal life — *when they actually have never taken the first step toward becoming a true Christian, believe it or not!*

But listen to what the Bible actually says!

"From that time Jesus *began to preach* . . ." (Matt. 4:17). Jesus was a preacher! Jesus Christ came with a *message* from God the Father — and that message was what He preached! What was the *very first thing* HE told His audiences to do? ". . . REPENT: for the

kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matt. 4:17). Notice — the words of Jesus are: "REPENT!"

Later, the Apostles — Peter, James and John, the Apostle Paul and others — preached the same message Jesus brought from His Father. When Peter stood up to explain the amazing events of the Day of Pentecost in 31 A.D. he said, "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the *remission of sins*, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:38). Later, Peter said, "*Repent* ye therefore, and *be converted*, that your SINS may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord" (Acts 3:19). Jesus gave stern warning that "except ye REPENT, ye shall all likewise perish" (Luke 13:3, 5).

Then there *is* something required *in addition to* the acceptance of Jesus as personal Saviour! Jesus said so!

To repent and be converted is to CHANGE. That is the very *meaning* of the word "convert." Just what *is* that change, then?

Change What?

"I'm a changed man," said the reformed smoker. "I have finally quit the tobacco habit!" This man felt, because he had dropped a bad habit, he was a *changed* man! But was he really?

What is it Christ wants you to change? Merely your way of "thinking" about Him? Do you change your "outlook" on religion? Do you change your Church? Change your habits? Change WHAT?

The Apostle Paul explained that the ". . . carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be" (Rom. 8:7). That *carnal* mind is the NATURAL

human mind — the normal, sincere, natural, common "way of looking at things" that all of us were born with! It's the mind of every normal human being PRIOR to this *change* Christ was talking about! Paul went on to say, "Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, *he is none of his*" (Rom. 8:9). Did you notice it? If a man have not the *Spirit of Christ* — *he doesn't belong to Christ, and therefore IS NOT A CHRISTIAN!*

This change has something to do with the carnal mind, and the Spirit of Christ! Let's notice another important scripture. "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a *living sacrifice*, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. *And be not conformed to this world*, but be ye TRANSFORMED by the *renewing of your mind*, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God" (Rom. 12:1-2). Read that scripture again! *Study it!*

God says you must undergo a *renewing*, a *transforming*, a CHANGING — OF THE MIND!

This changing of the mind is a change of *human nature!*

The normal, natural way of human nature is the way of SELFISHNESS. The SELF is the entire motivating drive in human nature. It is the pleasing of the self, the satisfaction of the *self* — the way of *getting* for the *self* that is the basis of human nature. YOU are extremely selfish! All human beings are selfish.

And, behind the selfishness of every person lies the root cause of it all: *vanity!*

"Vanity of vanities, saith the preacher, vanity of vanities; ALL is vanity" (Eccl. 1:2). Every person is filled

with *vanity*, in one form or another. Notice that Paul tells us, "For the creature [correct meaning "creation"] was made subject to *vanity*, not willingly, but by reason of him who hath subjected the same in hope" (Rom. 8:20).

All is vanity! The desire of every person is to be "liked" by others — to be "well thought of," to be *accepted* by the society, looked up to, respected, admired, and loved by others — *all this is vanity!*

It is this *vanity* which leads a person to say, "What will my friends say?" or, "What will *people* think?"

Ensnared in Society

Having been reared in a world that measures everything by *what people think*, you probably are *quite concerned* about the opinions of your friends, neighbors and relatives. You are wrapped up in this age, this society! Whatever is the standard, whatever is looked upon with approval *by* these people, whose acceptance you covet, *that* becomes the standard of your life! If you're like most people — you live in the way which is *most* likely to *gain* for you the acceptance and approbation you seek. You are a *part of this world*. Your life is regulated by this world and its customs, its holidays, its practices in business, in social life, in religious life, and all the many accepted standards of society which make up this "world."

Most people are *ensnared* by it — trapped into *CONFORMITY* with whatever is the way of the majority — following like blind *sheep* wherever society leads, never *questioning* WHETHER it is right, but simply *conforming* to the ways of others.

It is the *vanity* in human nature, the *selfishness*, which drives individuals on and on, seeking the respect and approbation of *other people!*

It is to *RELEASE* us from these shackles of tradition and society that Jesus calls us *out* of this world!

Jesus Calls You OUT of Society

Jesus said, "My kingdom is *NOT* of *this world*" (John 18:36). He was the Messenger from God the Father of a *better* kingdom — the world-ruling Kingdom of God! When Christ walked

this earth *as a man*. He spoke to His disciples of a soon-coming *WORLD GOVERNMENT* that would *supersede* and *PUT DOWN* *all opposing, man-made* governments, and *RULE THIS WORLD!* (Rev. 2:26-27.)

He prayed that His disciples would be *SEPARATE* from *this world*. "I pray for *them*: I pray *not* for the world, but for them which thou hast given me; for they are thine" (John 17:9).

Did you know Jesus Christ Himself said *IF YOU ARE A TRUE CHRISTIAN, YOUR FORMER FRIENDS, YOUR RELATIVES AND THIS SOCIETY WILL HATE YOU?*

Listen!

"If the world *hate* you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you. If ye were *of* the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are *not of the world*, but I have chosen you *out of* the world, therefore the world *hateth* you" (John 15:18-19).

Jesus said *your own family* would begin to look down on you, if you are really willing to *OBEY HIM!* "Think *not* that I am come to send peace on earth: I came *not* to send peace, but a sword. For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. And a man's foes shall be they of his own household" (Matt. 10:34-36).

If you are *really following Christ* — *LIVING* as He lived, *DOING* as He did — keeping God's *LAW* as He did — this society, even your closest former friends and your own relatives, will begin to *RESIST* and *PERSECUTE* you.

"Forasmuch then as Christ hath suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves likewise with the same mind... For the time past of our life may suffice us to have wrought the will of the Gentiles... Wherein *they think it strange* [the former associates, with whom you followed the courses of society] that ye run not with them to the same excess of riot, *speaking evil of you*" (I Peter 4:1-4).

Notice *HOW STRONGLY* God impresses on every Christian that they must discontinue their relationships with this sinning society! "Love *NOT* the world, neither the things that are in

the world. If any man love the world, *the love of the Father is not in him*. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that *doeth the will of God abideth forever*" (I John 2:15-17).

Count the Cost

In Luke 14 Jesus sternly warns every prospective Christian to *COUNT THE COST* of being a true follower of Him! How many people are being told to *COUNT THE COST* — or even told *WHAT THAT COST IS*, in today's great evangelistic efforts which invite people to "make a decision for Christ?"

Are they being *TOLD* what it really *means*? Are they being told *HOW* to give themselves to God — *HOW* to serve Christ — *WHAT* to do — *WHAT* it means? Are they being told to *COME OUT* of this society, and be *NOT* conformed to the world?

No! They *most decidedly are not!*

Many people are being led to "accept Jesus" or to "receive Him" today, in a moment of emotional remorse over past mistakes. But many thousands *DO NOT KNOW WHAT TO DO* to really become a Christian!

What IS the Cost?

Remember, Jesus *tells* you what you must *do* to become a Christian!

"Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that *DOETH* the *WILL OF MY FATHER* which is in heaven" (Matt. 7:21). "*REPENT*" said Christ. "*DO THE WILL* of God," said Jesus!

God's *will* is expressed in His Word. "Thy word is truth" (John 17:17). It is the *truth*, the *Word* of God that will set you free.

Here, then, is what it really *COSTS* to become a true Christian, and to become a begotten son of God!

IT COSTS YOUR LIFE!

LITERALLY!

Does that shock you? Perhaps it does unless you think I mean that statement as a kind of "spiritual phraseology" which is just another way of saying "set

your heart on the Lord" or some similar sentiment.

God's Word tells you that you must *literally* LAY DOWN YOUR LIFE for Christ.

"Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:38).

After you have been BROKEN UP, and *your own human will* has been totally SHATTERED, after you are DISGUSTED with yourself — FILLED with ABHORRENCE at your own actions, your own way of life — your own SELF, which is the VANITY within you — *then* you should be *baptized!* (Write for our free article, "Should You Be Baptized?")

What It Means

Immersion into a watery "grave" is a deep spiritual symbolism which signifies the actual, LITERAL BURYING of the *old self* — YOU — the way you HAVE BEEN, and the *resurrection* of a NEW YOU — now *conquered* by God, *surrendered* to God, meekly and humbly CHILD-like in your obedience and TRUST in Him as your living Saviour.

"Know ye not, that so many of us as were *baptized* into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore *we are buried* with him *by baptism into death*: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should WALK IN NEWNESS OF LIFE. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection. *Knowing this*, that our OLD MAN IS CRUCIFIED with him, that the *body of sin* [the former "you"] might be *destroyed*, that henceforth *we should not serve sin*" (Rom. 6:3-6).

Paul explained this principle further when he said, "For I was alive without the law once [without a knowledge of the law]: but when the commandment came [to his consciousness — so he became *aware of what sin was*] *sin revived* [he was able to see clearly that he was a *great sinner*] AND I *DIED!*" (Rom. 7:9.) Paul said, "For sin, taking occasion by the commandment [being brought to light for what it was by the

laws of God] deceived me, and *by it SLEW* me. Wherefore [because God's Law had *shown him* he was a sinner] the law is HOLY, and the commandment HOLY, and JUST, and *good!*" (Rom. 7:11-12.)

A Change of Mind

The Apostle Paul was a true Christian. He had the Spirit of God, which is promised to everyone who will *literally lay down his life*, and surrender the *self-will*, performing the ordinance of baptism, and coming to God's throne of grace as a meek child. Paul said, "I am *crucified* with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me" (Gal. 2:20).

After REPENTING, and *being baptized*, which symbolizes the BURYING of the old carnal self, which was formerly HOSTILE toward God — the Holy Spirit is then implanted *within* your mind, and CHANGES your mind. Jesus Christ begins to *motivate* your thoughts, guide and direct your every action — LIVE HIS LIFE over again, WITHIN YOU!

And He does it through the power of God's Holy Spirit!

This is a great mystery to most human beings — and yet, the Spirit of God MUST enter our CARNAL minds to *change* those minds, and make them yielding, humble, and *obedient* to God, where they had been hostile, antagonistic, resentful, and bitter toward our Creator!

The receiving of God's Spirit to *change* human nature is the receiving of an outside POWER — a *begettal* which makes us His sons!

A Changed Attitude

If you are a true Christian, *you will not be able* to blindly follow the customs and practices of this society any further. Instead, you will begin asking, "What is *God's* will, what does *God* say about it?" And you will begin to SEARCH THE BIBLE TO GET TO *KNOW* the will of God.

Your outlook and attitude will *gradually* become *Christ-like*. You will begin

saying, with Christ, "Nevertheless not *my* will, but *THY* will, be done!"

Where you formerly "went along with the crowd" in social activities, in customs of dress, in business practices, you will then begin to *question* the ways of the crowd. You will want to first ascertain *what God's will* is concerning these ways of life!

THAT IS THE DEFINITION OF A CHRISTIAN!

A Christian is a person who LIVES BY EVERY WORD OF GOD!

"Man shall not *live* by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God" (Matt. 4:4). So said your Saviour! But are most professing Christians really LIVING by every WORD of God?

Not so! *Most professing Christians do not even know a small portion of what the Word of God says!* It is because they don't STUDY the Bible, and begin to *drink in* of the Word of God that they gullibly swallow and accept whatever others say and believe!

What It Means to You

A Christian, then, is CONQUERED by God. His carnal will is *broken!* He realizes he has SINNED! Sin is any action that is contrary to the LAW of God (I John 3:4). He then CRIES OUT to God and asks for *forgiveness* for those sins, and a *lifting* of the death penalty, which every sin brings (Rom. 6:23). He accepts God's promise of forgiveness, *on faith*, by accepting the sacrifice of *Christ*, accepting Jesus' death *in place* of his own. The Christian then takes the ordinance of *baptism* which shows God *he really means it*.

He expects God to stand back of His promise to give him the Holy Spirit, as a result of the REPENTANCE and the baptism which God demands.

THEN — AND NEVER UNTIL THEN — WILL YOU BECOME A TRUE CHRISTIAN.

Finally, you will begin to *practice* as a HABIT, the very life of Christ. "He that saith, 'I know him,' and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him" (I John 2:4). "He that saith he abideth in him [*is a Christian*] *ought himself also so to*

walk [LIVE], even as HE [Christ] walked" (I John 2:6).

The true Christian, who has REALLY repented, will LIVE as Christ lived! He will keep the LAWS of God, being obedient to God in every way, and becoming a recipient of the great HAPPINESS and tremendous BLESSINGS that come with that obedience!

"For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, *leaving us an example*, that ye should *follow his steps*" (I Peter 2:21).

CHECK UP on yourself!

Study these scriptures *in your own Bible*. Many of you THINK you are already "saved" and that you are already good Christians! *But* "Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall" (I Cor. 10:12).

Remember, to "*examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates?*" (II Cor. 13:5.)

Serve Christ — OBEY Christ — LIVE as Christ lived, FOLLOW Christ, IMITATE CHRIST!

THAT IS WHAT IT MEANS to give yourself to Him!

Self-Sacrifice

All the practical side of religion is summed up in the exhortation of Paul, that we present our bodies a living sacrifice to God. Anciently, a man brought a lamb and presented it to God, laid it on the altar to be consumed by God's fire. In like manner we are to present our bodies. The first thing is not to be a worker, a preacher, a savior of souls; the very first thing in a Christian life is to present one's self to God, to lay one's self on the altar. We need to understand this. It is easier to talk and work

for Christ than to give ourselves to Him. It is easier to offer God a few activities than to surrender our lives to Him.

But the heart must be first, else even the largest gifts and services are not acceptable.

"'Tis not thy work the Master needs, but thee,

The obedient spirit, the believing heart."

"A living sacrifice." A sacrifice is something really *given* to God, to be His altogether and forever. We cannot take it back. One could not lay a lamb on God's altar, and a minute or two afterward run up and take it off. We cannot be God's today, and our own tomorrow. If we become His at all, in a sacrifice which He accepts, we are His always.

Baptizing Counsel

If YOU are one who really feels you *have* come to know what real repentance is — and *you want to repent*, you really WANT TO OBEY GOD — then here is GOOD NEWS!

One way we are prepared to serve YOU that many of you may not realize is this: As a part of the ADULT EDUCATION PROGRAM, we now have TRAINED MEN — graduates of AMBASSADOR COLLEGE — available in all parts of the United States and many parts of the world, ready to counsel with you PERSONALLY — to answer questions — to help you with any spiritual problems — even to baptize any who are ready for it.

I think that because we say in literature, and you hear on radio, "there is no follow-up — no one will call on you" — many may have MISUNDERSTOOD. What we mean to say to the public is that there will be

no follow-up trying to sell them something — we have NOTHING TO SELL. And that giving us their name and address for requested literature, or a subscription (free — already paid) to *The PLAIN TRUTH* does not mean someone will come knocking uninvited on their door.

We DON'T send anyone to see you, UNWANTED. Not unless you REQUEST IT! *BUT*, if you would like one of our trained men, graduates of AMBASSADOR COLLEGE, to call and counsel with you about any problems, answer any questions — even explain anything in the Bible, there is such a man NEAR YOU! So PLEASE feel free to invite such a visit. That's what they are there for. And of course you know they have nothing to sell. They won't ask you for money. They won't plead with you — or even urge you to "be converted" or baptized, nor to join anything. Of course, if you WANT *and request* help in finding God and letting Christ REALLY come into your life, they are fully qualified to HELP. But they will not try to shove anything on you. They are qualified to EXPLAIN the Bible if you ask, but never will they argue. Actually most of them are consecrated and ordained ministers. They, and we here at Headquarters of this great Work, want only to HELP — to SERVE. We count it a PRIVILEGE to do so.

But remember — if you're *not sure*, then *read this article again*. □

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