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Doctrinal Outlines

HAVE YOU REALLY REPENTED?

I. Introduction

- A. The basketball coach was astounded! A player from his team had stolen the ball, but in his excitement he was headed toward the wrong basket! "You're going the wrong direction!" the coach shouted. "Stop! Turn around! Go the other way!" But to no avail. The player didn't listen. He scored a goal -- for the wrong team!
- B. Just as this player was told to stop and turn around, God has told humans to stop and turn around spiritually, in the Bible doctrine of repentance.
- C. But few understand what real repentance is. What a pity. Those who do not understand are doomed to continue in the wrong direction spiritually, and to ignore God's plain commands that we should repent (Mark 1:14-15, Acts 2:38, 3:19).
- D. Such ignorance need not plague those willing to learn, however.

II. The Basic Doctrine

- A. To repent means to change from living our way to living God's way.
- B. Repentance comes when we see our sins, are deeply remorseful of them, stop sinning, resolve to obey God and, with His help, actually do obey Him.

III. The Usual Teachings of This World

- A. Most people hold impressions about this subject that are far afield from the simple Bible truth. Some see no need for repentance because they feel they have not sinned.
- B. Others do not repent because they think all one must do is believe or accept the truth academically.

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- C. Others confuse real repentance with temporary sorrow, remorse or simple emotion unaccompanied by any permanent change.
- D. Clearly, such false beliefs cannot fulfill God's command.

IV. The Bible Teaching

- A. The English word repent is, of course, merely a translation from the original biblical languages of Hebrew and Greek. The words from which "repent" is translated means to turn -- to change direction.
- B. Such a change in direction requires one to first see that he is going the wrong direction, stop going the wrong way and finally to resolve to go God's way and obey God, with God's help.
- C. But a person cannot even see that he or she is going the wrong direction until God opens the person's mind to see it.
- D. This truth -- that one cannot truly repent until God grants repentance -- so strongly flies in the face of the teachings of this world that many simply cannot accept it.
- E. Nonetheless, the Bible clearly states that it is not our own will, but the "goodness of God" that "leads" us to repentance (Romans 2:4).
 - 1. The Bible further states that repentance is something God must grant, as He did when He "granted to the Gentiles repentance to [eternal] life" (Acts 11:18). See also II Timothy 2:25.
 - 2. God offers to grant one repentance when He calls a person to His truth, and we cannot be called to the truth unless God -- by His and not our own initiative -- decides to call us (John 6:44).
- F. If you are reading this, understanding it and being convicted by it, then God is calling you and leading you to repentance, if you will follow His lead.
 - 1. When God calls a person and begins to lead that person to repentance, He does so by showing the person that he or she has been living wrong -- that is, by showing the person his or her sins.
 - 2. And since "sin is the transgression of the law" (I John 3:4, Authorized Version), God shows the sins

by opening one's mind to understand God's law, which defines His way of truth.

3. One who really understands God's law sees that he has not been living in accord with it, that he has been sinning and needs to repent -- change.

G. We all need to repent.

1. Paul says in Romans 5:12, "All have sinned" (AV).
2. John declares plainly that "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us" (I John 1:8).
3. This presence of sin in us demands repentance, for God does not promise to forgive our sins unless we repent and are baptized, and the wages (result) of unforgiven sin is death (Romans 6:23)!
4. See also Luke 3:9. Clearly, repentance is not a matter to be taken lightly.

H. Nonetheless, many do not see the need to repent because, like the self-righteous Pharisees, they do not see their sins (Mark 2:16-17).

I. When one truly sees his sins in sharp focus, he will be deeply broken up about them.

1. Hence, repentance is accompanied by serious emotion and sorrow.
2. King David was deeply remorseful at his sin with Bathsheba, and his state of mind is reflected in his psalm and prayer of repentance (Psalm 51).
3. Other examples like that of Job (Job 42:5-6) could be cited.

J. Yet it must be stressed that although emotion usually accompanies repentance, bare emotion or sorrow unaccompanied by true change is not repentance!

K. Paul addresses this issue squarely in II Corinthians 7:8-11, where he shows the difference between godly sorrow and worldly sorrow.

1. He explains that worldly sorrow "produces death" because it is only the temporary sorrow of being caught, a type of self-pity, a fear of punishment or embarrassment.

2. But the sorrow of God "produces repentance to salvation" because it causes a permanent change in behavior, and leads to a person's becoming totally "clear" from the reoccurrence of sin.
- L. In fact, the change of behavior that accompanies repentance is the best proof of one's repentance.
1. John the Baptist refused to baptize those who had not shown by their changed behavior that they had brought forth the true "fruits" of repentance (Matthew 3:7-8).
 2. Christ dogmatically stated that mere lip service -- misnamed "belief" by some -- is not sufficient for salvation: "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven" (Matthew 7:21).
- M. Repentance is not merely emotional sorrow, and neither is it penance.
1. Penance is an act or acts designed to try to pay the penalty of sin for oneself, such as by doing some good work of charity.
 2. Although good works are necessary in a Christian's life, they do not forgive past sins or pay their penalty, for our sins are forgiven by grace and not works.
 3. The Bible simply does not teach the doctrine of penance, and penance is in no way even similar to repentance, which God's Word teaches and indeed commands.
- N. Salvation requires obedience, and it therefore requires one to stop his old ways and begin obeying God -- it requires repentance!
- O. Such repentance is toward God the Father, who is the author of His law and against whom our sins are directed (Acts 20:21).
- P. Such repentance goes far beyond a mere outward verbal expression of belief, and even far beyond a few mechanical changes in behavior.
1. It pierces deep into the heart and mind of the person, and embodies an unconditional surrender from living one's own way to truly living God's way of life.

2. It requires putting Christ above all else in one's life (Luke 14:26-33), and hence in a symbolic sense sacrificing your own life (Romans 12:1-2).

Q. Further, true repentance is not a once-and-for-all event, nor is it synonymous with perfection.

1. The repentance required before baptism is indeed a focused turn-around from our way to God's way -- a massive spiritual reversal.

2. Yet, even at baptism God does not reveal all of our sins to us at once, nor do we immediately overcome all our sins.

3. We continue to see and battle them over time while we "grow" in God's grace and knowledge of His ways (II Peter 3:18).

R. As He reveals His law to us, and hence our sins (as we see how we fall short of that law), we must daily repent.

S. We must see our sins, stop them, resolve to do right and follow through with God's help -- continually. Indeed, we must grow spiritually for the rest of our lives.

T. But our obedience to God's law comes with help from Him.

1. No one can obey God's law in its fullest spiritual sense, in heart and mind, without His help (Jeremiah 10:23).

2. This is because the minds of humans are susceptible to the pulls and deceptions of Satan.

3. Yet, the spirit of God, which is given to those who have been properly baptized after true repentance, is more powerful than Satan and can and will give us the strength to obey!

V. Key Verses

Here is a brief summary of the key scriptures about this subject.

A. Mark 1:14-15, Act 2:38 -- we are commanded to repent, which means to change from our way to God's way.

B. Romans 2:4, Acts 11:18 -- repentance must be granted by God, who calls according to His will.

- C. Romans 6:23 -- the wages of sin is death.
- D. II Corinthians 7:8-11 -- sorrow that produces true repentance is far different than mere worldly sorrow.
- E. Matthew 7:21 -- salvation requires obedience to God.
- F. Jeremiah 10:23 -- we cannot obey God without His help.
- G. II Peter 3:9, 18 -- spiritual growth is a process and doesn't happen all at once.
- H. Psalms 51 -- repentance is often accompanied by deep emotion. *But not always.*

VI. Conclusion

The importance of repentance cannot be overemphasized. It is a first step toward salvation.

Have you repented? If not, then the words shouted by the basketball coach to the confused player are for you:

"You're going the wrong direction! Stop! Turn around! Go the other way!"