

# Repentance

Note: A.M. Overton was the first Pastor of one of our Emmanuel Elders and his wife remember as children. Although he pastored a larger church in Fulton, Mississippi, he also pastored several small country churches in Northeast Mississippi part-time. People in the community would go to East Mt. Zion Baptist Church in Lee County for a 2:00 service and hear him preach. It was here that many adults and children, including this Elder's Mother and Great Uncle, heard the gospel preached clearly, and believed in Jesus Christ for their salvation. Many, many others came to know the Lord through his clear teachings. Brother Overton ran a school in Fulton for young preachers for many years, and made an issue of a Scriptural presentation of Salvation by Grace through Faith.

While the language is somewhat outdated today, the timeless truths are not.

## **REPENTANCE: WHAT IT IS, AND HOW IT IS PRODUCED** **By A. M. Overton**

### *FOREWORD To Revised Edition*

The author of this little booklet would like to say with all the emphasis that he can command that it is not in the least his desire to build up a reputation for himself, to get people to accept his interpretation, or to propagate anything save the pure truth of God's Word.

He has sought to approach this subject in the Word of God from the standpoint of four questions so necessary to the understanding of what God says:

1. Who says it?
2. To whom is He talking?
3. What is He talking about?
4. What did He say?

To overlook any of these points is often to completely miss the truth the Lord speaks. We only ask that the reader open-mindedly and with a teachable spirit before God, and not before this writer, consider the things we say in the light of, and only in the light of the Word of God. Our prayer, as we send this forth, is that the Lord may use it to honor Himself and to bless its readers.

A. M. Overton

Fulton, Miss. 1941

This booklet is reprinted by special permission of Mrs. Edna Overton Harrison widow of the late A. M. Overton author of this pamphlet.

Publisher's Note: A.M. Overton completed his service to God as a minister of the Gospel at 11 p.m., July 14, 1952. He served for 20 years as pastor of the First Baptist Church in Fulton, Mississippi and pastored several other churches.

## **PART I** **SOME TRADITIONAL IDEAS EXAMINED**

There has been so much mis-teaching concerning Repentance, and the minds of the masses of our people have been so discolored with erroneous ideas, that it is almost an impossibility to get many people to impartially consider the scriptures as they actually are. They insist on reading into the scriptures their preconceived opinions and holding on to their traditional ideas regardless of what the scriptures say.

In the first place, we want to consider some of the prevailing ideas about Repentance and see what the scriptures say about them.

1. “Repentance is sorrow for sin.”

If we accept the definition of this word as given in our modern dictionaries, then we will have to say that repentance is “a state, or act, of being sentiment, or having contrition for sin.” But we must remember that our dictionaries give the definitions of words as they are used in the present day, and not as they were used 2000 years ago, when the Lord completed His revelation of truth.

The scripture usually quoted to support this idea is II Cor. 7:10, “For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented.” We would call your attention, however, to the fact that this letter of II Corinthians was written “to the church which is at Corinth,” (1:2), and not to lost sinners. Then, it says that “godly sorrow worketh repentance.” If it works repentance, it is not repentance. If it were repentance, it would not have to work to produce repentance. This is self-evident.

But, notice the latter part of that same verse, “but the sorrow of the world worketh death.” The word translated “world” is the Greek word “kosmos”, which literally means “mankind”, or “world system”. It refers to people who are not saved, but are lost. Therefore, God says that the sorrow of a lost man, or of people of the world, works death, entirely the opposite of what so many preachers tell their congregations.

To scare, or to otherwise work a lost man’s emotions up into a fear or natural sorrow for his sins, which is not godly sorrow at all, will produce in him an emotional experience which a lost man cannot distinguish from a real spiritual experience. He may go on and join the church and live a normal life without ever realizing that he does not have eternal life. Multitudes of our church members, no doubt, have been so misled.

This scripture is not concerning a lost soul at all, but it is to the church at Corinth with reference to the letter previously written them concerning the gross immorality of one of their members. (See I Cor. 5:1-5) What this letter caused is shown in verses 8-11. To make this scripture apply to a lost soul is to violently misuse the Word of God.

2. “Repentance is turning from sin.”

We once heard of a preacher who told his congregation that repentance was “coming to abhor, despise and detest sin, to get it out of your system, to turn from it completely with a determination never to go back to it again.” How any sane, rational man who knows one iota about scripture can say such a foolish thing is beyond this writer. But it is similar to that said by many preachers, and others.

That repentance is not turning in any direction is clearly shown in Acts 26:20, where the Lord says through Paul, “that they should repent and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance.” If one were to turn to God he would surely have to

turn from sin, or vice-versa. But here repentance and turning to God are said to be separate actions. See also Ezk. 14:6, 18:30.

Now, honestly, frankly, do you anyone anywhere who shows any proof of having for any length of time actually “turned from sin”? If we are still sinning we surely haven’t turned from sin.

No, if repentance is turning from sin, then we may rest assured that no human being has ever repented and none ever will. Such a statement is in the same catalogue as the statement, “You must live right if you go to heaven when you die.” No one, except Jesus Christ, has ever lived right, and if it be true that we must live right to be saved, then no one has ever been, or will ever be saved.

3. “Jesus said, Matt. 12:38-42, that the Ninevites repented at the preaching of Jonah, and they fasted, sat in sack-cloth and ashes, and cried mightily unto God.” Yes, the Lord did say that the Ninevites repented at the preaching of Jonah. They did fast, sit in sack-cloth and ashes, and cry mightily unto God. But we fear that those who use this scripture as a proof-text for what we commonly term “evangelical Repentance” have overlooked some very plain facts. Let us look at some of them.

First, the Lord also said that “This is an evil generation:” (Luke 11:29, a parallel passage to Matt. 12). He further said (v 32), “The men of Nineveh shall rise up in the judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: for they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and behold, a greater than Jonah is here.”

Of what judgment is He speaking here? Surely of the white throne judgment, which will follow the millennium (Rev. 20:11-15), not the judgment of believers in Christ, which will take place at His return, preceding the millennium. Only saved people will be in the judgment at His coming. All the lost dead will be in the white throne judgment.

Therefore, the men of Nineveh were not saved. They will rise up in the last judgment and condemn this evil and adulterous generation. (Matt. 12:39) Then, surely, we cannot use this instance as an example for the repentance which men have before they believe in Christ and are saved.

Another fact they overlook is, even granting that it is an example of evangelical repentance, they “believed God”, (Jonah 3:5) before they did any of those things mentioned. Now, if anything is certain at all, it is that in the New Testament, repentance always precedes believing in Christ, the greater element in which is believing what He says. (See Rom. 4:3, Gen. 15:6, John 3:36, II Tim. 1:12) If these Ninevites repented with an evangelical repentance they did it before they believed God, and before they did any of these things so commonly confused with repentance.

Again the message that Jonah carried to Nineveh was not one of personal salvation, but of national destruction. Upon hearing this message they did what Christ said they did; they repented, “had another mind” from the one they had previously, which gave them a feeling of self-security.

4. “If one does not repent of his sins, he cannot be saved.”

Not once in scripture does the expression “Repent of your sins” occur. Simon (Acts 8:22) was told to repent of his wickedness, but he was a believer (v 13). In Rev. 2:20, 21 is mentioned the woman Jezebel, the false prophetess, being given space to repent of her fornication. But this Jezebel is a type and not an individual. Even a casual reading of the scriptures will impress one with the conspicuous absence of this so often heard expression “Repent of your sin”. Brethren who claim to be preachers of the Word ought not to use such unscriptural language.

There are other ideas set forth as being repentance, but this discussion will not permit notice of them particularly. We will now proceed to the consideration of the positive side of the subject.

## **PART II WHAT IS REPENTANCE?**

To find out what New Testament repentance is, we must find out the meaning of the Greek word the Holy Spirit used in speaking the words which have been translated “repent”, “repentance”, etc. To accept a definition of the term without the original meaning is to miss the truth.

The Greek language was that used by our Lord and all those who wrote the New Testament, just as the Hebrew language was used by the Old Testament writers. Our Bible is a translation of the Hebrew and Greek manuscripts.

The word translated “repentance” is “metanoia”. The prefix “meta” implies a change. An illustration of this may be noted in the English word “metamorphosis”, which means “a change of form”. The word “noia” is the word for “mind.” Therefore, literally in everyday language, the word repentance as used in the New Testament means “a change of mind”, “a new mind”, or “another mind”. The verb “repent” is from the word “metanoeo”, which means “to have another mind”, or “to change the mind”.

Now, this is not a new-fangled definition of this word. It is just what it has been all these 2,000 years. Any departure is just that much from the plain Word of our Lord.

The Lord Jesus said that the Ninevites had a change of mind at the preaching of Jonah. He also told some (Luke 13:3), “Except ye change your mind, or have

another mind, ye shall all likewise parish". John the Baptist told his hearers, "Have another mind for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."

If there be any who raise the cry that we are changing the Word of God, we simply challenge them to investigate for themselves, instead of blindly following the old traditional interpretations, which have hidden what the Lord actually said. If repentance is a change of mind, FROM what and TO what is it changed? Let us examine the scriptures.

The only place we know where anything is said about the "from which", is in Heb. 6:1, where it says "not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works." We are further said (Heb. 9:14) to be purged from these same works by the blood of Christ.

Repentance is from DEAD WORKS.

Dead works are works done by a dead person, or by a person who is lost, described as being dead in trespasses and sins (Eph. 2:1). All works, any works are dead works, so far as giving life is concerned. So long as any man depends in any part upon works of any kind for his salvation, he has not had a change of mind from them, and consequently has not repented according to the New Testament pattern, which is the only kind acceptable to God.

Urging and begging people to be sorry for their sins, to mourn, to pray, or do anything else of the kind, has never and never will lead any soul to repentance. It only encourages him in his already self-satisfied dependence upon dead works.

The direction of repentance forward is shown in Acts 20:21, "repentance toward God". The change of mind is away from dead works toward God. There is a looking away from what we have done, are doing, or can do, to what God has to offer or what He has to say.

God has a message of "good news" (the literal meaning of the word "gospel" for all lost men. But they will never pay any attention to this message so long as they think they can help themselves by something they can do.

*From what source does repentance come?*

If we were to take human testimony here we would get a wide variety of answers, but none of them would be truth unless they were the testimony given by the Lord in His Word.

In Acts 5:31 we read that Christ was exalted to be a Prince and Saviour, "for to give repentance to Israel." Also in Acts 11:18, following Peter's account of his preaching to those in Cornelius' house, we hear the apostles and brethren saying, "Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life." This same idea of God giving or granting repentance is expressed in II Tim. 2:25, "Peradventure God will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth."

Therefore, repentance is a gift, or grant from God, not something the individual works up himself, or something somebody works up for him.

### *How does God give this repentance?*

In Rom. 2:4 we read, “the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance.” God’s goodness leads men to repentance. What is the greatest, widest, deepest, highest and most wonderful expression of the goodness of God known to mankind? It is the gift of His Son, Jesus Christ, to be our substitute, to be made sin for us, to die under our sins, to do all that a righteous God demands for the salvation of sinners. In other words, the gospel of Christ, “How that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; and that He was buried, and that He rose the third day according to the scriptures”. (I Cor. 15:3, 4) is the expression of God’s marvelous goodness to man. And nothing in the wide, wide world will lead lost men to repentance except the gospel of Christ. If men are not led to have another mind about how they are saved through the declaration of the gospel message then they will never have that “new mind”.

Like wisdom, righteousness, sanctification and redemption (I Cor. 1:30), repentance is in Jesus Christ. In Luke 24:47 the Lord said, “that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name among all nations, beginning in Jerusalem” Remission of sins is in Christ. Read Acts 10:43. Likewise repentance is in Christ. If Christ is preached, repentance is preached. It is to be preached in His name. Many people misinterpret this expression (Luke 24:47) to simply mean that we are to go around telling people to repent, and do it in the name of Jesus, that is, tell the folks we are preaching in the name of Jesus. If we truly preach Christ we will truly preach repentance and remissions of sins. If we fail to truly preach Him, we may stamp, yell and beat the air all we please, but this will never produce repentance from dead works toward God.

There is a mistaken idea with some that to preach repentance, one must always be yelling “Repent, repent, repent, repent”. Our observation has been that the ones who do the most talking about repentance miss the truth of repentance almost, if not altogether.

We are sure that we can safely take the Word of the Lord as a safe pattern in the matter of dealing with lost people. The Book of John is the one Book of all the Books of the Bible, written particularly to show lost men how to be saved. “Many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this Book: but these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through His name.” (John 20:30, 31)

Reader, how many times do you suppose the word “Repent”, or the word “Repentance” occur in this Book that God gave to show lost men the Way of life in Christ?

Perhaps you will say, “Oh, I don’t know how many times, but I am sure they occur there many times.”

You may be surprised to learn that neither word occurs a single time in the entire book.

Does that mean that no repentance is preached in the Book of John? Indeed not, the book is full of it, for it magnifies Christ throughout, and wherever Christ is



preached, repentance is preached. If Christ is not preached, no repentance is preached.

### **PART III**

#### **THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST IS THE ONLY REMEDY**

The world is teeming with its lost millions. They are dead. They are blind. They are in darkness. They are in the power of Satan. They are without forgiveness of sin. They have no hope. They are unrepentant. What can we do? What shall we do?

It is better that we should do nothing at all than that we should mislead a lost soul. But let us see if God does not tell us of a Remedy for all these troubles. Let us see if He does not show us what to give lost men, which will take care of their salvation from start to finish.

In Acts 26:17, 18, we hear the apostle Paul recounting his experience in meeting Christ on the road to Damascus. He is telling what Christ said to him, “Delivering thee from the people, and from the Gentiles unto whom I now send thee, to open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in Me.” Now turn to I Cor. 1:17, and we hear this same Paul say, “Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel.”

Here we have it all in a nutshell. The gospel of Christ, which is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth (Rom. 1:16), is all that we need to give men for them to have their eyes opened, for them to have all the turning that is required, for them to have forgiveness, or remission of sins and for them to have a guarantee of an inheritance in glory.

Reader, can you not see that there is One Person, Christ Jesus, to be magnified and One Message, the Gospel of Christ, to be preached?

If we will faithfully do this we need have no fear but that some will repent from dead works toward God and believe the gospel. It is not our business to make men repent or to believe. We cannot do either. It is our responsibility to faithfully preach His Word. He will see to all the rest.

We have seen that the gospel of Christ leads men to repentance. We hear the Lord say through Paul, “Faith cometh by hearing and hearing by the Word of God.” (Rom. 10:17)

Therefore, if we preach the Word we have discharged our responsibility and doing so, have done the most possible toward the salvation of the lost about us. There is great sin in substitution.

Suppose you have a loved one, or a friend, who is blind. He cannot see at all. Would you go to him and beg him to look? Would you insist on his trying to look?

Would there be any sense in your asking him if he were willing to see? How hard would he have to try, in order to be able to see?

But, suppose there is a doctor who has perfected a remedy, which will completely restore sight to the blind when administered according to directions. You have a bottle of it. But instead of giving this remedy, you lay it aside because it does not appear to you to be the right color, or otherwise, and you substitute a preparation you have thought out your self.

Would your love for this person dictate that you should follow instructions with the known remedy, or would it dictate such a substitution? This does not require an answer. You know what it would be.

Now, the multitude of lost, blind people about us cannot see, and no amount of denunciation, begging, pleading, or anything else will enable them to see the truth. The great Physician has provided a Remedy that is sufficient for any and every case. That remedy is the Gospel of Christ. We have it revealed in the Word of God. Will we follow orders and give it according to instruction, or will we dare substitute some remedy of our own making?

May God help us to realize the eternal seriousness of this matter.

“Preach the Word.” II Tim. 4:1

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