

# CLARITY TRUMPET

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*For if the trumpet makes an uncertain sound, who will prepare himself for battle? So likewise you, unless you utter by the tongue words easy to understand, how will it be known what is spoken? For you will be speaking into the air.*  
-First Corinthians 14:8, 9-

## Understanding Repentance

There is one and only one condition for man to meet in order to obtain salvation:

*So they said, **Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved.** . . (Acts 16:31).*

*But to him who does not work but **believes on Him who justifies** [declares righteous] **the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness** (Romans 4:5).*

Over one hundred and sixty times in the New Testament God gives the *single* condition of believing in Christ for obtaining salvation or eternal life. The few verses that *appear* to present other conditions for being saved do not really do so when they are considered in their respective contexts. It is safe and very Biblical to declare that *salvation is by grace alone, through faith alone in Christ alone.*

The above statement being true, repentance is not, nor can it be, *another step or condition* for obtaining salvation. It is, however, something that *happens* with every unbeliever who becomes a believer in Christ. "How," you might ask, "can repentance be a *necessity* and yet not be a *step* one must take in order to obtain God's salvation?"

### The Biblical Meaning of Repentance

The answer to the above question is best answered by observing the Bible's definition of repentance in contrast to man's view of it.

The Greek word translated "repentance" is *metanoia* and always means a change of mind or attitude. For instance, the apostle Paul described the Gospel message he preached as "*repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ*" (Acts 20:21). I believe it is safe to say that every nonbeliever has some misconception concerning God and how to be in right relationship with Him through Christ. It is impossible, therefore, for an unbeliever to become a believer in Christ without having a change of mind or attitude concerning God and His offer of salvation. That's Biblical repentance.

## Why Biblical Repentance is Not a Work, But Man's Idea of Repentance is a Work

For salvation a person *must* change his mind from any misconception he has about God or His way of salvation. And God's way of salvation is always by grace through faith in Jesus Christ *without the addition of any human merit or works of any kind*. Therefore, if man must repent to be saved, repentance cannot be something unsaved people can point to as having some human worth or merit by which to commend themselves to God.

The way a man *thinks* about God is the real issue, not what sins he may or may not have committed. This is demonstrated so beautifully in Second Corinthians 4:3-6: *But even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, whose **minds** the god of this world [that's Satan] has blinded, who do not believe, lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine on them. . . . For it is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the **knowledge** of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.*

In contrast to God's Word, man defines repentance as turning from sin, being sorry for sin or quitting certain more obvious sins or bad habits. By this definition repentance, and therefore salvation, would be by man's works or efforts instead of by God's matchless and undeserving grace.

The issue is not turning from sin; it is changing one's mind toward Christ and trusting in Him for salvation. Turning from sin would involve *service*, which is only demanded of one who is already saved. Salvation, on the other hand, is always a gift, never the result of what *we* do concerning our sins. It is trusting in Christ and what *He* has done about our sins that saves.

### The Unbeliever's Dilemma

An unsaved person cannot really please God even if he does "good works." Romans 8:8 is

pretty clear on this point: *So then, those who are in the flesh* [the natural man] **cannot please God**. And Isaiah 64:6 removes any hope of man relying on his goodness when it declares that "*all our righousnesses [that's the best we can do] are as filthy rags. . .*"

It is only after one has come to Christ by faith that he, as a member of God's family, is commanded to change his life. Such changes undoubtedly involve turning from or leaving certain sinful habits. In fact, the Bible makes that very clear. For instance, Titus 2:11, 12: *For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying [renouncing, rejecting] ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age.* You might want to also look up Romans 12:1,2; 13:14; Ephesians 2:10; and 4:27-32.

### An Urgent Reminder

If you are to be effective in making God's saving Gospel clear to the unsaved world you must become convinced that *any teaching that demands a change of conduct on the part of the unbeliever before God will accept him and give him salvation, is adding works or human effort to faith and it contradicts all clear Scriptures on salvation. It is, in fact, an accursed message that cannot save.* See Galatians 1:8, 9 and Deuteronomy 27:18.

### Rediscovering the Correct Emphasis

It is due largely to the wrong emphasis on this matter of repentance that so many unsaved folks feel they can't be saved until they give up their beer, or cigarettes, or swearing or whatever. The confusion has come from the Christian professionals who have themselves been mistaught in Bible school or seminary. But, thank God, not all have just followed the theological crowd. Here, for instance, are some of my favorite quotes from spiritual giants of the past.

**Lewis Sperry Chafer**, D.D., Litt.D, ThD, founder of Dallas Theological Seminary, in his *Systematic Theology*, Volumn III on Soteriology, page 372, writes: "*The word *Metanoia* is in every instance translated *repentance*. The word means a *change of mind*. The common practice of reading into this word the thought of sorrow and heart-anguish is responsible for much confusion in the field of Soteriology."*

**Harry A. Ironside**, Litt.D, *Except Ye Repent*, pages 12-15: "But in order to clarify the subject, it may be well to observe carefully what repentance is *not*, and then to notice what it is.

First, then, repentance is not to be confounded with penitence. . . penitence is simply sorrow for sin. . . Nowhere is man exhorted to feel a certain amount of sorrow for his sins in order to come to Christ.

Second, penance is not repentance. Penance is an effort in some way to atone for the wrong done.

In the third place, let us remember that reformation is not repentance.

Need I add that repentance then is not to be considered synonymous with joining a church, or taking up one's religious duties, as people say. It is not *doing* anything.

The Greek word, *metanoia*, which is translated "repentance" in our English Bibles, literally means a change of mind."

**William L. Pettingill**, D.D., *Bible Questions Answered*, pages 215-216: "**What place has repentance in salvation? Should we tell people to repent of their sins to be saved?** The Gospel of John is the Holy Spirit's Gospel Tract, written that men might believe that Jesus is the Christ the Son of God; and that believing they might have life through His name (20:31). And it does not mention the word "repentance." But that is only because repentance is a necessary part of saving faith. Strictly speaking, the word repentance means a "change of mind." It is by no means the same as sorrow (II Corinthians 7:10). Since it is not possible for an unbeliever to become a believer without changing his mind, it is therefore unnecessary to say anything about it. The only thing for a man to do in order to be saved is to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ: and to believe on Him is the same thing as receiving Him (John 1:11-13).

### A Personal Plea

This article is not an attempt to split some theological hair; it is a sincere effort to help God's people who desire to reach the unbelieving world with the Gospel to share that Gospel in a clear, understandable and *Biblical* way.

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