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And said unto them, Thus it is written, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day: And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. And ye are witnesses of these things. — Luke 24:46-48

Biblical doctrine is the foundation of evangelism as it is the foundation of Christian experience, Christian worship, Christian behavior, and Christian service.

There are three areas of biblical truth found in Luke 24:46-48, and what we believe about these three areas of truth will have a profound effect upon the message and the methods for evangelism.

We have considered the goal as we find it in Matthew 28:16-20, and the scope and results as we find them in Mark 16:15, 16. Now we will look at the doctrinal content of the message of evangelism as we consider the heavenly mandate in Luke 24:46-48.

In verse 48, Jesus said, “And ye are witnesses of these things.” What things does He speak of? We must back up to answer that question. In verses 46 and 47, we learn what things we are witnesses of, and thus we have the doctrinal content of our Lord’s mandate.

In verses 46 and 47, we have three basic areas of Christian truth that contain the vital and essential content of the message of evangelism.

First, (v. 46) “it behoved Christ to suffer”: the cross. The message includes all the truths that hinge on the suffering of Christ on the cross. What actually took place at the cross? — the atonement in its design, its accomplishments, and its application.

Second, (v. 46) “and to rise again from the dead”: the resurrection. The message includes all the truths that hinge on the resurrection of our Lord. He ascended and is exalted to a throne — He is now the enthroned Christ. This will immediately bring us to proclaim His lordship. The resurrection establishes His lordship now.

Third, (v. 47) “And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name among all nations”: repentance and remission. Repentance — what is repentance? Whatever it is (we shall take it up later), it is part of the message of evangelism, and it involves the nature of saving faith.

It is the content of the message that needs to be carefully examined in our day. Therefore, I am going to spend more time on the doctrinal content of the message of evangelism. Let us take a serious look at these three areas of truth as we have them in Luke 24:46-48.

TRUTHS THAT HINGE ON THE DEATH OF CHRIST

The first area of truth is in verse 46: “it behoved Christ to suffer” — the death of Christ on the cross, or the atonement.

Demands of the Law

The law is the first message of the cross. There are three truths of the Bible that stand or fall together. They are the law of God summarized in the Ten Commandments, the cross, and the righteous judgment of almighty God. Why do I say that these three truths stand or fall together? Because you cannot touch one without touching the others.

1. If you do away with the Ten Commandments, there is no such thing as sin (â€œ. . . sin is the transgression of the Lawâ€— I John 3:4). If there is no sin, the cross is not necessary.
2. If you do away with the cross, you have no answer to the sin question, and there is no hope for sinners.
3. If you do away with the righteous judgment of almighty God, who cares about sin, the cross, or Christ? The law is the first message of the cross.

Probably the verse in the Bible that best describes the work of Christ is Isaiah 42:21: â€œ. . . he will magnify the law and make it honorable.â€ Christ magnified the law in His life by keeping it perfectly, and in His death by suffering its penalty for His people. The very base of the cross is Christ satisfying divine justice (the righteous demands of a Holy God) for sinners. At the cross, God the Father sheathed the sword of divine justice in the bosom of His Son in order that sinners might have an honorable pardon: not just sin overlooked, but sin paid for; not only expiation, but also propitiation.

This leads to a question in respect to the present-day evangelistic messages. Where is the preaching of the law? Paul said, â€œ. . . by the law is the knowledge of sinâ€ (Rom. 3:20). And in his testimony he acknowledged the law as the means that brought home the knowledge of sin. â€œ. . . I had not known sin, but by the law . . .â€ (Rom. 7:7). Where is the evangelistic preaching of the law?

Luther said: â€œThe Law must be laid upon those that are to be justified, that they may be shut up in the prison thereof, until the righteousness of faith come— that, when they are cast down and humbled by the Law, they should fly to Christ. The Lord humbles them, not to their destruction, but to their salvation. For God woundeth, that He may heal again. He killeth that He may quicken again.â€

Augustine said: â€œThe conscience is not to be healed, if it be not wounded. Thou preachest and pressest the Law, the judgment to come, with much earnestness and importunity. He which hears, if he be not terrified, if he be not troubled, is not to be comforted.â€

Beza said: â€œMen are ever to be prepared for the gospel by the preaching of the Law.â€

John Calvin on the moral law:

The true knowledge of God constrains us to worship Him, and that the true knowledge of self leads to genuine humility and self-abasement. The law is the instrument which the Lord uses to bring about both these results: by asserting therein His right to command, He calls us to pay Him the reverence due to His majesty; and by setting before us the standard of His righteousness, He shows us our unrighteousness and impotence. Moreover, the things which are taught in the tables of the law are also taught by that inward law which is written on the tables of every man's heart; for our conscience does not allow us to sleep an unbroken sleep, but inwardly testifies to us of the claims of God and of the difference between right and wrong. But since this inward law is insufficient, through our ignorance, pride, and self-love, God has given us also the plainer and surer testimony of the written law. From the law we learn that God, being our Creator, justly claims all that is due to a Father and a Master, namely, honor, reverence, love and fear: that we are not our own masters, at liberty to follow the desires of our own mind without regard to His good pleasure: finally, that He loveth righteousness and hateth iniquity, and that we therefore must follow after righteousness in the whole course of our life unless we would be guilty of impious ingratitude to our Maker. Nor can we rightly excuse ourselves by alleging our inability to keep His law, seeing that the glory of God must not be measured by the extent of our powers, and that the sin which causes our inability lies within our own heart and is righteously imputed to us alone.

Therefore, we cannot exclude the first message of the cross, God's holy law, when we consider â€œthese things which we are witnesses of.â€

We have considered just one aspect of the cross, that is, the base of the cross which is Christ satisfying the demands of the law, thus satisfying divine justice that sinners might have an honorable pardon: â€œ. . . he shall magnify the Law and make it honorableâ€ (Isa. 42:21).

Atonement

The next aspect of the cross that forms part of the doctrinal content of the divinely inspired message is the atonement. For whom did Christ die? The Bible is very clear on this answer, though many preachers are not.

The atonement that we are considering is a planned atonement— the cross was not an accident. God planned it. He was not sleeping or caught off guard at the cross. He had an unchangeable, immutable plan, and it was being carried out. The apostle Peter preached this as part of his first message: “Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain” (Acts 2:23).

The apostles not only preached it; they prayed it. Hear their prayer in Acts 4:27-29: “For of a truth against thy holy child Jesus, whom thou hast anointed, both Herod, and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, were gathered together, for to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done.” God was the master of ceremonies at the cross.

Jesus also taught that God the Father had an unchangeable, immutable plan:

For I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of Him that sent me. And this is the Father’s will which hath sent me, that of all which he hath given me, I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day (John 6:38, 39).

I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep (John 10:11). I know my sheep (John 10:14-15).

Jesus makes clear why some do not believe on Him. Have you ever wondered why some do not believe? Well, Jesus answers that question here:

But ye believe not, because ye are not of my sheep, as I said unto you (John 10:26).

He describes two characteristics of His sheep:

My sheep hear my voice, and they follow me (John 10:27).

This truth, that the atonement was for the sheep, is underscored by our Lord’s prayer found in John 17. Hear His prayer: “As thou hast given him power over all flesh, that he should give eternal life to as many as thou hast given him” (John 17:2). “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). “Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me: for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world” (John 17:24).

This view of the extent of the atonement makes the cross a place of victory, because what the Father planned, the Son purchased, and these He prays for. This is consistent with that great declaration in that messianic prophesy of His coming: “He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied: by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many; for he shall bear their iniquities” (Isa. 53:11).

Jesus teaches the same thing in John 6:37: “All that the Father giveth me shall come to me. . . .” Not, maybe they will come, or, it would be nice if they came, or, if they decide they will come, but rather, “shall come.” This, then, is an important element of the message of the cross, the message of evangelism. This means that Christ’s death was not in vain, but rather, everyone for whom He savingly died, will come. It is interesting to note that when the angel announced His birth to Joseph, the angel was straight on this point: “And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name Jesus: for he shall save his people from their sins” (Matt. 1:21).

Please note the text says, “save his people,” not every single individual, but His people— the sheep.

God used the fact that He had some people, some sheep, to encourage the evangelizing of that wicked city of Corinth. The great apostle was afraid to go to Corinth, and God encouraged him by saying, “. . . be not afraid . . . for I am with thee, and no man shall set on thee to hurt thee: for I have much people in this city” (Acts 18:9, 10).

1. His coming was for His people (Matt. 1:21): “And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name Jesus: for he shall save his people from their sins.”

2. His purchase on the Cross was for the sheep— His people (John 10:11, 14, 15): “I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep.”

ood shepherd giveth his life for the sheep. ... I am the good shepherd, and know my sheep, and am known of mine. As the Father knoweth me, even so know I the Father: and I lay down my life for the sheep.”

3. His prayer was for all that the Father gave Him (John 17:2, 9): “As thou hast given him power over all flesh, that he should give eternal life to as many as thou hast given him . . . I pray for them: I pray not for the world, but for them which thou hast given me; for they are thine.”

Is this the message of the cross that you have heard— Christ whose death is not in vain and will not fail to accomplish all that was intended? Or, have you heard the message of a poor, impotent, pathetic, and sometimes, effeminate Jesus who died just to make salvation possible and who is standing idly and impotently by, waiting to see what these mighty, powerful sinners are going to do with Him?

This is not just a different emphasis. It is a different content of the message of evangelism. The biblical gospel is God-centered, God-honoring, and it will bring glory to God and good to sinners.

TRUTHS THAT HINGE ON THE RESURRECTION OF CHRIST

This brings us to the second doctrine in Luke 24:46-48: “. . . and to rise again from the dead . . .”— the doctrine of the resurrection. This sets forth Christ’s exaltation and lordship, and all I will do at this point is show how the apostles had this key truth as part of the doctrinal content of their evangelistic message.

The first post-resurrection sermon is recorded in Acts 2. Peter is the preacher. He begins the sermon in verse 14: “But Peter, standing up with the eleven, lifted up his voice, and said unto them....” Let us follow his sermon to underscore how faithful he was to our Lord’s mandate in respect to the doctrinal content as we find it in Luke 24. Peter brings in the cross and the crucifixion: “Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain.” He emphasizes the resurrection: “Whom God hath raised up having loosed the pains of death. . . . This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we all are witnesses.” He also emphasizes the implications of the resurrection, that is, Christ’s exaltation to a throne and His lordship: “. . . He would raise up Christ to sit on his throne. . . . being by the right hand of God exalted. . . . Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ.” You will note that Peter preached that Christ is presently Lord, and not by man’s making or consent, but by almighty God’s decree: “God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ.” Please note carefully that men do not make Christ Lord. God almighty has already done it. Therefore, Christ must be preached as Lord at the outset in the evangelistic message.

Now, it is just at this point that we will see how different the present message of evangelism really is. Lordship was in the initial message— at the outset— not some second act of consecration. There was bowing at the beginning. This is very clearly seen in Luke, where our Lord gives the doctrinal content for the message of God-centered evangelism (Luke 24:46, 47). God-centered evangelism must have the God-given doctrinal content in the message.

The lordship of Christ is a vital part of the message of evangelism. There are those who call this the “lordship gospel,” and those who preach the lordship of Christ— lordship preachers. I would to God there were no other kind! Our churches would not be filled with so many who give no biblical evidence of conversion. No one will be saved who has not bowed to the lordship of Christ, any more than one could be saved without repentance. “I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish” (Luke 13:3).

I will appeal to the sacred manual of evangelism, that is, the Book of Acts, to support this truth. In Acts, chapter one, our Lord goes back to heaven (Acts 1:10). Immediately, the apostles became authorized custodians of our Lord’s message and His mission. This is at the very pure source of the stream before the present, man-made corruptions clouded the message and contaminated the pure stream of biblical evangelism.

It seems that every Bible-believing person would agree that if we want to examine the message of evangelism, we should study and consider what the apostles preached; therefore, my appeal will be to the Book of Acts. I will direct your attention to three salient points concerning the lordship of Christ.

First, when our Lord was introduced and announced into the world as to who He is, it was a clear announcement of His lordship:

For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, which is Christ the Lord (Luke 2:11).

That Savior is the Lord, and the Lord is the Savior. And saviorhood and lordship are inseparably joined. There is only one mediator, and Christ is that mediator. As our mediator, He has three offices: Prophet, Priest and King. But we are not saved by one of His offices— we are saved by Him. “He that hath the Son hath life,” not, “He that hath one of His offices hath life.” If we are in Him, we have the blessing and benefit of all His offices.

Second, when the New Testament preachers preached, they preached the lordship of Christ:

For we preach not ourselves but Christ Jesus the Lord . . . (II Cor. 4:5).

And there is not one place in the whole New Testament where Christ is offered as we hear Him offered today— “trust Christ as your personal Savior.” There is no such language used by the apostles; not even is there such an idea conveyed.

Third, when believers came to Christ in the New Testament, they came to Him as Lord:

As you have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in Him (Col. 2:6).

Lordship was not a second step of consecration, or a second work of grace. Nor did sinners make Him Lord. He is Lord by God almighty’s decree, irrespective of anything sinners did, said, or believed. Acts 2:36 should settle this question as to who makes Jesus Lord: “Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ.”

Again, I would like to appeal to the Book of Acts where we have the purest examples of evangelism, as to message, methods and motives. It will shock some of today’s evangelists and their man-invented, unbiblical, Hollywood methods to find that the word “Savior” appears only two times in the Acts of the Apostles, and in neither case (Acts 5:31; 13:23) is it connected with sinners’ “accepting Jesus as your personal Savior.”

How in God’s name did we come to huckstering off Jesus as some kind of hell-insurance policy, when the Bible announced Him as Lord and exalted Him to a throne? The New Testament preachers preached His lordship, and sinners received Him as Lord. There is not one New Testament example of Christ being offered any other way. This is a vital point, and not just some “preachers’ hobby.” Oh! the lordship of Christ is the lost doctrine of the Bible in evangelism.

One of the greatest soul winners that ever lived, Charles Haddon Spurgeon, warned young preachers in his school about this perversion that we see in much evangelism today. He said,

If the professed convert distinctly and deliberately declares that he knows the Lord’s will, but does not mean to attend to it, you are not to pamper his presumptions, but it is your duty to assure him that he is not saved. Do not suppose that the Gospel is magnified or God-glorified by going to the worldlings and telling them that they may be saved at this moment by simply “accepting Christ” as their Savior, while they are wedded to their idols, and their hearts are still in love with sin. If I do so, I tell them a lie, pervert the Gospel, insult Christ, and turn the grace of God into lasciviousness. It is interesting to notice that the Apostles preached the Lordship of Christ. The word “Savior” occurs only twice in the Acts of the Apostles (Acts 5:31, 13:23). On the other hand it is amazing to notice the title “Lord” is mentioned 92 times; “Lord Jesus” 13 times; and “The Lord Jesus Christ” 6 times in the same book. The Gospel is: “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.”

The following New Testament statistics should settle the question. Jesus is referred to as Lord 822 times; Lord Jesus, 22 times; and Lord Jesus Christ, 81 times.

The word Savior is only used 24 times (8 of which refer to God the Father as our Savior).

Matthew Henry, that memorable household commentator, said in the introduction to his commentary on the New Testament, “All the grace contained in this book is owing to Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior; and, unless we consent to Him as our Lord, we cannot expect any benefit by Him as our Saviour.”

Yes, He is Savior, and our personal Savior, but His saviorhood is within His lordship and not apart from it. This is one of the weak links in the present-day message of evangelism. Yet, it is the principal doctrine that hinges on the resurrection— Jesus’ exaltation, His lordship.

If you don't agree with this point now, you will! "Wherefore God also hath highly exalted Him, and given Him a name which is above every name: That at the name of Jesus, every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Phil. 2:9-11). Some will acknowledge His lordship in restitution now, but all will acknowledge it in recognition later.

God-centered evangelism proclaims the biblical message of the lordship of Christ at the outset, not as a second work of grace, or an act of optional consecration later.

REPENTANCE AND REMISSION

Let us now consider the third element of the doctrinal content as we have it in Luke 24:47: "And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem."

Repentance is one of the vital elements of the gospel message that is strangely absent from most of the present-day evangelism, both personal evangelism and mass or public evangelism. This essential ingredient of gospel preaching has slowly, but surely, faded from our present-day pulpits. As a result of this missing element, our church rolls are filled with many members who have missed repentance and will perish unless they repent. Jesus said to the religious crowd of His day, "I tell you, no, but, unless you repent, you will all likewise perish" (Luke 13:3, NASB). This is just as true today as when Jesus said it.

Consider the place repentance had in New Testament preaching.

Our Lord's Example

Repentance was our Lord's first and last subject. Early in His ministry He called for repentance:

From that time Jesus began to preach, and to say, Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand (Matt. 4:17). . . . Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, and saying, The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel (Mark 1:14, 15).

His last instruction to His successors was for them to preach repentance:

And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem (Luke 24:47).

Does this fact not show how important repentance is? How can a minister claim to be preaching the gospel if he leaves out one-half the ingredients? Our Lord made it His keynote address (Matt. 4:17; Mark 1:15), and His disciples followed His example and His clear instructions.

The Apostolic Example

The apostles took seriously our Lord's instructions. We see it from the very first sermon after His ascension (Acts 2:14-41). The apostle Peter was the preacher. The Holy Spirit had come in convicting power; the audience was smitten in conscience (Acts 2:27) and inquired what they must do to be saved. Now, most evangelists in our day would have said, "Accept Jesus as your personal Savior," a form of words not found once in the New Testament and which excludes this imperative to repent. Peter was more interested in obeying the Lord's instruction than in results or statistics. Therefore, Peter answered their question by saying, "repent." He was taught biblical evangelism by our Lord as we can clearly learn from Mark 6:12, "And they went out, and preached that men should repent."

The apostles never changed their message regardless of their audience. To the intellectual Stoics and Epicureans at Athens, the great apostle Paul said, "God . . . now commandeth all men everywhere to repent." This was not optional, but essential. Jesus taught the apostles, "Except you repent you will perish" (Luke 13:3). He taught men to preach repentance. He set the example by preaching repentance Himself. How have we lost the message of repentance in our evangelism?

In Peter's second sermon (Acts 3) we see he had not forgotten or changed the message. See it in Acts 3:19. "Repent

ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out. . . .” Again, it is clear that repentance is part of true conversion and connected with forgiveness of sins. May I encourage every serious person to turn to the Book of Acts to confirm what I am saying. Surely, no one would disagree with me when I say the Book of Acts in the inspired manual for God-centered evangelism.

Let me give you another example from the sacred manual of evangelism— Acts 20:20, 21. The context of these verses describes our Lord’s chief apostle leaving the church at Ephesus where he had evangelized for three years, and he is recounting his ministry and message to the elders as part of his parting words. He gives them the content of his evangelistic message in these words, “... have taught you publicly, and from house to house, testifying both to the Jews, and also to the Greeks, repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ.”

This passage alone should forever establish the fact that repentance is:

1. An inseparable part of the message of evangelism.
2. Not just for the Jew but also for the Gentile.
3. A sacred duty.
4. Inseparable from faith.

Another apostolic example in the life of the great apostle is Acts 26:18-20. The apostle is giving his personal testimony before King Agrippa, and he tells the king what Jesus told him to do, that is, the purpose for which our Lord had appeared to him; Jesus said, “... I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister and a witness . . .” (v. 16). In verses 18-20, our Lord tells Paul what his ministry was meant to be: “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. . . .” (v. 18). In verse 20, Paul tells King Agrippa the content of the message, “... that they should repent and turn to God...”, not just trust, but turn and trust.

Now, this message of repentance almost got Paul killed. “For these causes the Jews caught me in the temple, and went about to kill me” (v. 21). And one of the reasons preachers avoid preaching repentance is this very point. It will cause some waves and some antagonism from this generation of poor, lost, self-deceived church members who are products of an evangelism that has left repentance out of its message. Therefore, the supposed converts have missed Bible repentance, and their life and their dedication to Christ and His church testify that they do not perform deeds appropriate to repentance.

I am making a plea for every sincere Christian to examine all personal evangelism and public evangelistic preaching by the clear, New Testament, God-centered evangelistic message. Many of our serious church leaders and members know that there is something wrong with most of the so-called “converts,” but they do not seem to trace the problem to the message of evangelism. This is why they are forever rushing on the contemporary scene with some new method while the real problem is in the message.

The harvest of poor, lost church members that we have reaped is a result of the seeds that have been sown— seeds that did not include what our Lord clearly commanded to be part of the Great Commission (Luke 24:46, 47). Our Christian forefathers would unequivocally agree with the truth of what I am seeking to set forth. The following is a quote from an old Southern Baptist Declaration of Faith:

We believe that Repentance and Faith are sacred duties, and also inseparable graces, wrought in our souls by the regenerating Spirit of God; whereby being deeply convicted of our (1) guilt, (2) danger, and (3) helplessness, and of (4) the Way of Salvation by Christ, we turn to God with unfeigned (1) contrition, (2) confession; and supplication for Mercy; at the same time heartily receiving the Lord Jesus Christ as our Prophet, Priest, and King, and relying on Him alone as the only, and all sufficient Savior.

This is a far cry from that anemic, unbiblical expression, “accept Jesus as your personal Savior.”

Since repentance is one of the missing links in much modern evangelism, and some teachers and preachers pervert the meaning, I want to present what the president of the first Southern Baptist Seminary, Dr. James P. Boyce, taught about it. But, first, let me underscore my premise that not only is it a missing link, but the message which replaces it is badly perverted. The following quote will prove it.

Any teaching that demands a change of conduct toward either God or man for salvation is to add works or human effort to

o faith, and this contradicts all Scripture and is an accursed message.

The above quote is from a book entitled Handbook of Personal Evangelism by Dr. A. Ray Stanford (onetime president of Florida Bible College), Dr. Richard A. Seymour (President, Soul Winning Seminars) and Miss Carol Ann Streib. The book was the textbook on evangelism for the Florida Bible College, and it is a fair representation of much shallow, man-centered evangelism.

You will note Dr. Boyce says that the doctrine of repentance must be learned two ways. First from the Greek word itself, and second, from its application to a matter which is written within the sphere of morals. The following is from a chapter of Abstract of Systematic Theology by Dr. James P. Boyce.¹

The Scripture doctrine of repentance is to be learned in part from the meaning of the original Greek word used to express it, and in part from its application to a matter which is within the sphere of morals. I. There are two forms of words used in the New Testament which are translated repent and repentance. Only one of these is used of the repentance associated with salvation from sin. This is the verb *metanoëo*, and the corresponding noun *metanoia*. The other verb is *metamelomai*, the noun of which does not appear in the New Testament, but occurs in the Septuagint in Hosea 11:8. The verb is used in the Septuagint in Psa. 110:4; and Jer. 20:16. It is also the word used in the New Testament in Matt. 21:29, which says of the son who had refused to obey his father's command to work in the vineyard, "afterward he repented himself and went." It likewise is found in Matt. 21:32 and 27:3, this latter being the case of Judas. Paul uses it in Rom. 11:29; and II Cor. 7:8-10. It is also the word used in Heb. 7:21. In all other places translated repent and repentance in the New Testament, the original is *metanoëo* or *metanoia*. This word means to reconsider to perceive afterwards, and hence to change one's view, and mind, or purpose, or even judgment, implying disapproval and abandonment of past opinions and purposes, and the adoption of others which are different. In all cases of inward change, there is not necessarily a change of outward conduct, nor is such change accompanied by regret. These results of the inward change would flow from the nature of that about which that change has arisen.

We arrive therefore, at the meaning of Christian repentance partly through the meaning of these Greek words, but also partly because it is exercised about a question of morals. It is seen that it involves a change in the outward life because such change is a result of the change of inward opinions. It also includes sorrow for sin because a change of view as to the nature of sin and of holiness must be accompanied by regret and sorrow as to the past acts of sin.

The word *metamelomai* means to change one's care, to regret; the idea of sorrow always accompanying it.

The two words are nearly synonymous in their secondary meaning, and each is used in this secondary meaning in the New Testament. *Metanoëo*, however, traces the feeling of sorrow and the change of life back to an inward change of opinion and judgment as to the nature of sin and holiness, and of the relations of man and God. It is perhaps on this account that it is exclusively used for true repentance in the New Testament. This is not simply sorrow, or remorse, which may pass away, or lead in despair to other sins, or fill the soul with anxiety; but a heartfelt change in the inward soul towards God and holiness, which is lasting and effective, and which may be associated with peace and joy in believing.

II. To set forth more explicitly what Christian Repentance is, it may be stated that it includes:

1. An intellectual and spiritual perception of the opposition between holiness in God and sin in man. It does not look at sin as the cause of punishment, but, abhors it, because it is vile in the sight of God and involves in heinous guilt all who are sinners.
2. It consequently includes sorrow and self-loathing, and earnest desire to escape the evil of sin. The penitent soul does not so much feel the greatness of its danger as the greatness of its sinfulness.
3. It also includes an earnest turning to God for help and deliverance from sin, seeking pardon for guilt and aid to escape its presence.
4. It is also accompanied by deep regret because of the sins committed in the past, and by determination with God's help to avoid sin and live in holiness hereafter. The heart heretofore against God and for sin is now against sin and for God.

From these facts, it will be seen that:

1. The seat of true repentance is in the soul. It is not of itself the mere intellectual knowledge of sin, nor the sorrow that accompanies it, nor the changed life that flows from it; but it is the soul's apprehension of its heinous character, which begets the horror and self-loathing which accompany it, and the determination to forsake sin which flows from it.

2. That true repentance is inconsistent with the continuance in sin because of abounding grace.

3. That true repentance consists of mental and spiritual emotion, and not of outward self-imposed chastisements. Even the pious life and devotion to God which follow are described not as repentance, but as fruits meet for repentance.

III. The Scriptures teach that the author of true repentance is God operating by truth upon the renewed heart.

Acts 5:31 — Christ is said to have been exalted — “to give repentance to Israel, and remission of sins.”

Acts 11:18 — “Then to the Gentiles also hath God granted repentance unto life.”

The means used is the preaching and other exhibition of the truth. Repentance like faith comes through the hearing of the Word. By this men are exhorted to that duty, and gain the knowledge of the truths taught by God, through spiritual apprehension of which men are led to the truth.

Why do some verses just say repent (Mark 6:12; Acts 2:38; 3:19), others say believe and nothing about repentance (John 3:16, 18; Acts 8:37; 16:31;), and still others say repent and believe (Mark 1:15; Acts 20:21)?

The best way to answer this question is by quoting an Article of Faith from the Baptist Confession of 1833, called “The New Hampshire Confession.” The following article was added to this confession in 1853:

Article VIII: Of Repentance and Faith

We believe that Repentance and Faith are sacred duties, and also inseparable graces, wrought in our souls by the regenerating Spirit of God; whereby, being deeply convinced of our guilt, danger and helplessness, and of the way of salvation by Christ, we turn to God with unfeigned contrition, confession and supplication for mercy; at the same time heartily receiving the Lord Jesus Christ as our Prophet, Priest and King, and relying on Him alone as the only and all sufficient Savior.

You will note that repentance and faith are inseparable graces. Herein lies the answer to our question. This is just saying that the nature of saving faith includes repentance. Therefore, where there is no repentance, there is no saving faith. It is here that many, many poor lost church members are self-deceived. They have missed repentance and are as lost as lost can be. Many do not even know what repentance is; therefore, how could they possibly know if they have repented?

Let me further emphasize this “inseparableness” of faith and repentance from an old catechism question (Westminster Shorter Catechism):

Question 87.

What is repentance unto life?

Answer.

Repentance unto life is a saving grace, whereby a sinner, out of a true sense of his sin, and apprehension of the mercy of God in Christ, doth, with grief and hatred of his sin, turn from it unto God, with full purpose of and endeavor after, new obedience.

You will notice the phrase, “. . . and the apprehension of the mercy of God in Christ. . . .” One might think it strange to find the necessity of grasping “the mercy of God in Christ” in a definition of repentance. Ah, but it only underscores the point that where “saving faith” is found, there evangelical repentance will be found also, and where evangelical repentance is found, there true saving faith will be found. They are Siamese twins — inseparable.

The word “repent” does not need to appear for us to see the principle of repentance as part of the message of God entered evangelism. Let me illustrate it from our Lord’s evangelism. In His personal evangelism to the rich young ruler (Mark 10:17-22), the rich young ruler wanted to know what to do to have eternal life (Mark 10:17). The Master Evangelist addresses Himself to the rich young ruler’s question, but He did not use the words believe or repent. However He got to the heart of true repentance and saving faith by showing the rich young ruler that he could not have two Gods, and therefore, he must turn from his “green god.” “Then Jesus beholding him loved him, and said unto him, one thing thou lackest: go thy way, sell whatsoever thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, take up the cross, and follow me.” This is preaching repentance, and it was necessary for the young man to turn from — as well as to — in order to have eternal life. Men must repent or perish).

Charles Haddon Spurgeon had a great sermon entitled "Turn or Burn" from the text Psalm 7:12: "If he turn not, he will whet his sword; he hath bent his bow, and made it ready." His outline for the sermon was:

1. The nature of the turning here meant.
2. The necessity there is for men's turning, otherwise God will punish them.
3. The means whereby men can be turned from the error of their ways.

Sometime ago, I read of a godly old minister who was nicknamed by his colleagues "Mr. Faith and Repentance." The reason for this nickname was that he dwelt much on these two inseparable graces. He used to say, "If I die in the pulpit, I hope I am preaching faith and repentance, and if I die out of the pulpit, I hope I die practicing faith and repentance."

Repentance is a missing link in much present-day evangelism; yet it is part of the doctrinal content of our message. It is not new methods that we need. It is the very message of evangelism that needs to be restored; not just a "tune-up," but a complete "overhaul."

Conversion must reach the whole man, and therefore, faith and repentance must also reach the whole man.

1. His mind — that is, what he thinks.
2. His affections — that is, what he feels.
3. His will — that is, what he decides.

Notes

1. Abstract of Systematic Theology, Dr. James P. Boyce Chap. XXXIII, "Repentance."

Author

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