

This is a somewhat “harder” article than I usually like writing, but I think there's a need for it. Please bear with me...

RECENTLY, a friend of mine told me that he had the chance to interview the new pastoral candidate for his church. In the pastoral questionnaire which accompanies the pastoral selection process, the candidate had been asked, “How do you believe a person become saved?”

Interestingly, this young, aspiring pastor gave an answer that was devoid of any concept of, reference to or mention of repentance. So, at my prompting, my friend asked him personally but publicly (at a church meet and greet with the pastoral candidate) about the role of repentance in conversion.

The young man answered that he believed repentance was a fruit of salvation, not a prerequisite for salvation. Since I'd applied for that same job and not been considered for it, my friend thought I'd be interested in this new, young (just graduated seminary two months prior to this interchange) candidate's views, and shared all of this with me.

I responded rather fervently, and with numerous scripture references. My response follows, and is worth looking at for everyone who is in Christendom, or has any interest in Christianity itself by way of spreading the Gospel and the Kingdom of God. I recommend looking up the Scriptures in your own copy, so that you get a feel for where they are, in the event that you have opportunity to turn to them and share them with Christians and non-Christians alike.

- John Baptist's message was repent. Matt 3:1,2.
- Jesus' message was repent, Matt 4:17, Mk 1:14, 15.
- Jesus sent out His men to heal, deliver and preach. The message they were to preach was repent, Mk 6:7-12.
- Jesus told the story of a deceased rich man who was experiencing the torment of an afterlife without God, and a beggar named Lazarus who was in the comfort of an afterlife with God's own. The rich man wanted Lazarus to go back to earth to preach to his five brothers in order to keep them from that place of torment. What message did this dead, judged, rich man want preached to his brothers in order to keep the them all out of torment and bring them in to the presence of God? Repent. Luke 16:24-31.
- After the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus, when the church began, what was the message that Jesus' followers preached? Repent. Acts 2:32-38.
- Later, when Peter got a chance to preach in the Temple, what was his message? Repent. Acts 3:11-19.

- When the Gospel went to the Gentile world, what was the message? Repent. Acts 17:22-31.
- In Apostle Paul's theological "*magnum opus*", the letter to the Romans, what was his central message? Repent. Romans 2:1-4.
- As Paul continued to reach out to the rest of the Gentile world, he spoke of what it is to admit to being a sinner oneself. His message was still, repent. 2Cor 7:8-10.
- The writer to the Hebrews speaks of the "*elementary*" principles of the faith, and conspicuous in the list (and first, by the way) is repentance. Heb 6:1,2.
- Apostle Paul sums up Christianity to "*Jews and Greeks*" (in other words, to every human) and he states categorically that it begins with that indispensable component, repentance. Acts 20:21.

How is it that today, when it comes to defining the Gospel, i.e. "How do you believe a person becomes saved?", we have dispensed with the indispensable?

I am saddened... for this is not a matter of opinion. This is Historical, Biblical Christianity... which is not quite as common or popular in church (lowercase "c" as opposed to uppercase "C" church) as we might suspect and assume.

I have several Russian friends (largely because the location where I teach a class is in the Russian Ukrainian Evangelical Baptist Union in Ashford, CT).

One of them is a missionary to Russia, Ukraine and Belarus; another is a professor in the only seminary in Belarus (White Russia), in the capitol of Minsk. It is interesting to hear them tell of evangelism in their countries, Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, etc.

People don't refer to when they "*accepted Jesus as their personal savior*". Instead they refer to "*when I made my repentance*".

They say that it is not unusual for someone to stand up in an evangelistic service and shout, "*I am repenting!*".

This is obviously not "*their gospel*", for there is but one. And as you can see from all the scripture references above, it is/was the message of all NT writers and players, since Jesus, and before!

What we have now is something that is not *completely* divorced from that, but off just a little bit.

We have those who think that repentance has nothing to do with salvation, but comes afterward. That may be a very popular message, but it is not a biblical one.

In addition to that, we have those who assume that if one admits that he or she is a sinner, that admission is tantamount to repentance. Well, sometimes it is, and sometimes it isn't.

Additionally still are those who say they repent and one might not necessarily see any fruit of that repentance in their lives. Perhaps, but I've done plenty of things for which I'd previously

repented... you?

Not last and not least, there are those who present the gospel and actually understand the nature of repentance, but are hesitant to ask for one's repentance when it comes to the point of the *"sinner's prayer"*. Perhaps their thinking that they'll not get the conversion if, right off the bat they "push too hard" in the area of behavior. "We know that repentance happens in the heart, and is then to be followed/demonstrated by behavior."

Who knows who's saved, and what their state is before God? Who knows who has really repented? Yes, we know that we can't know, but to leave repentance out of the Gospel is not the most Biblical presentation.

What we do know is this... there is no salvation without repentance. It is not ours to judge its reality, neither is it ours to *"shield"* from the concept of repentance, those with whom we share the Gospel, *"For godly sorrow produces repentance, leading to salvation, without regret; but worldly sorrow produces death."* 2Cor 7:10

Pastor