

The Debate on Biblical Repentance

Repentance is no more a work of merit than its counterpart, faith. It is an inward response. True repentance pleads with God to forgive and deliver from the burden of sin.

The inner most being of man knows that judgment will come. Therefore, genuine repentance (The working of God in man's very being, which results in an outward transformation.) pleads with God to deliver from the judgment of hell. It is the same attitude of the publican that Jesus tells us about in the gospel of Luke. "Two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, and the other a publican. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican. I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess." Now, note carefully the shift in the narrative. "And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner." Jesus immediately states, "I tell you, this man [the publican] went down to his house justified rather than the other [the Pharisee]: for every one that exalteth himself shall be abased [brought low, or humbled]; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted [brought high, or justified]" (Luke 18:10-14).

Repentance is not merely behavior reform. But because true repentance involves a change of heart and purpose, it inevitably results in a change of behavior.

Like faith, repentance has intellectual, emotional, and volitional ramifications. In his book on Systematic Theology, Berkhof describes all three of these elements of repentance. He states that the intellectual element of repentance is "a change of view, a recognition of sin as involving personal guilt, defilement, and helplessness." The emotional element is "a change of feeling, manifesting itself in sorrow for sin committed against a holy God." The volitional element is "a change of purpose, an inward turning away from sin, and a disposition to seek pardon and cleansing."

I think we need to understand, that repentance is a response of the total person, and each of the three elements mentioned are deficient apart from the other. However, this view is incompatible with the message that we hear from many, especially those of the no-lordship theology.

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