***The Doctrine of Repentance

RV32-01***

We are looking at Revelation 3:1-6 which is the letter of the Lord Jesus Christ to the congregation in the local church found in the city of Sardis in Asia Minor. This local church had the appearance and the reputation of being a powerful spiritual force in its time. However, the Lord Jesus Christ contradicts the popular view that people had of the church at Sardis. The program which this church conducted gave the impression of great spiritual activity; of great spiritual power; and, of great Christian fellowship. However, the Lord Jesus Christ looks at the same programs; the same relationship; and, the same congregation, and He says, "From my divine viewpoint, I see you as spiritually dead. And I see your works, which impress other people, as being totally unimpressive to me because they are not the product of God the Holy Spirit through believers who are in temporal fellowship serving the Lord."

So, the Sardis church is warned by Jesus Christ to wake up and to say what spiritual insights and qualities still remain among them. All was not lost. Some good things still remain, and they were cautioned to turn around and start with what they had – secure and preserve that, and try to recoup the lost ground.

**Remember**

What they were to do was to recall, first of all, the position that they had received when they believed in Christ as Savior – a position that placed them in Christ as members of His body, and those who were destined in the future to be His bride. This is a personal, intimate relationship reserved only for believers in the church age. They were furthermore to recall their Bible doctrine instruction which they had received, and to act upon those principles in their lives. This church had a sound doctrinal statement. It represented the historical period of the churches of the Reformation, which came up with splendid expressions of what the Bible taught, and splendid creedal declarations. But the problem was that while their creeds were orthodox, their lifestyle was carnal. Here in Sardis, they were to maintain their perspective of divine viewpoint truth, and to apply in practice without compromise that truth which they had. So, the Lord Jesus Christ says, "To correct this problem, remember who you are and what you are in Christ. Remember the principles of divine viewpoint guidance that you have learned; start acting upon them; and, do not compromise the sound doctrinal truths that you do possess."

What they were, in short, to do was to practice the sound doctrine that they were preaching. This passage indicates to us that the most serious loss to a human being is the loss of the doctrine that he knows – forgetting about the truth that he has learned. This is the reason that we have to feed daily upon the Word of God. Sometimes you're feeding upon something that is not brand new (that you already know), but it is bestirring your godly mind by way of remembrance. So, you have that clear and upfront to use as God the Holy Spirit must bring it up from your human spirit to apply it in the situation of life.

**Repent**

Well, the Sardis congregation must repent of its carnality and its consequent reversionism, and turn back to God's word in practice. That was the last word that we had given to this congregation. In verse 3, they were to try to stabilize their situation with what they had, and they were to repent. That's where we stopped last time – on this word "repent."

**The Doctrine of Repentance**

Now, we're going to take up the concept and the doctrine of repentance. We'll begin in the Old Testament. In the Old Testament, the word "repent" is the Hebrew word "nacham." This word "nacham" means "to regret." It means "to be grieved." It means "to change the mind or the purpose." This word is used in the Old Testament to express God's feeling of moral anguish over man's sinfulness, which then results in a new policy decision toward the sinner. You must understand that this word "nacham" expresses God's personal grief. It's a feeling of personal grief over man's sinfulness, and God's grief over man's sin results in a new policy decision toward the sinner.

**Anthropopathism**

The action by God is actually being described by what we call an anthropopathism. An anthropopathism is a human feeling which is ascribed to deity. God doesn't really have this feeling as such. This is a very difficult concept (an infinite concept) that we with finite minds are trying to grasp. In order to try to convey what God is doing, God the Holy Spirit takes certain concepts and certain words (and "nacham" is one of these), and He conveys what God is doing in terms of a human experience that we can relate to. The word "anthro" in anthropopathism comes from the Greek word "anthropos," which is the word for "mankind." The word "pathism" has to deal with feelings. An anthropopathism is a human feeling ascribed to God to convey something that God does.

**Anthropomorphism**

A similar word is "anthropomorphism," which means that God is given human form. We talk about the eyes of God or the ears of God. Well, God is a spirit. He is not in human form. The Mormons are wrong about that. God is not a physical flesh human type being. Yet, if we're going to talk about God hearing things, we have to talk the way we humans can understand. So, we have to talk about anthropomorphisms. We attribute that God has ears like we have, and that God has eyes like we have, and so on, so that we can convey what God does in human terms of understanding.

So, this word is used in the Old Testament to try to convey to us a feeling that God has (an emotion) that does result in a very definitive action. So, we read in Genesis 6:6 one of the great expressions of divine repentance, where Moses records: "And it repented the Lord that He made man on the earth, and it grieved Him at his heart. There you have all the combination of the elements. He had repented, and here is the word that's used in the Hebrew (the "nacham"). "It repented (that is, it caused God a personal grief to look at His humanity that He had created, and to see how it had turned into a barnyard animal type of society, and how degenerated it had become), and God was very grieved." We would say, "Now how are we going to describe what God felt like?" Well, we have to describe it in human terms. So, we fall back to an anthropopathism, and we say that, "God was grieved," and that the result of that grief resulted in a change of policy on God's part. We would describe that again (in human terms) as a change of mind.

**Immutability**

Now, this is not a contradiction of the doctrine of the immutability of God. That will immediately come to the minds of many: If God is immutable and unchanging, how can you say that God repents (that God has a change of mind)? Well, this is an infinite concept which is being presented in human terms. The change you must observe is not in God. The change is in man. God has a policy. God has a policy in reference to Adam as the man who obeys Him. Then God has a policy in reference to Adam as the man who disobeys Him. While God has a change of mind (and that is the basic idea behind "nacham") which indeed is preceded by some personal feelings of grief and disappointment and sorrow, nevertheless, the issue is not the feeling. The issue is the change your mind. The reason that's there is because Adam changed. So, God, therefore, changes His policy, and in that sense, God repents. God looked upon humanity with all the potential it had. Please remember that we are talking about people who were way up there close to the point of creation, so the human structure genetically was at a maximum level of development. They had infinitely greater genetic qualities in terms of intelligence and abilities and capacities all around. For all of this to be prostituted, and for all of this to be degraded to the level of animals was something that really made God want to weep. It was a sadness that caused Him to look upon what man had done, and how God changed his mind; that is, out of that disappointment, He changed His policy toward dealing with mankind.

An example of this concept is in 1 Samuel 15:29, where we are told that, "The strength of Israel (that is, God) will not lie nor repent, for He is not a man that He should repent." God is immutable. He is not like man who is always changing. Human beings are never the same. Human beings change, and the Scripture is making it very clear that God is not being blown back and forth the way human beings are. God does have a point of stability. Notice in 1 Samuel 15:11 what God's attitude was toward Saul: "'And it repented Me that I have set up Saul to be king, for he has turned back from following Me, and has not performed My commandments.' And it grieved Samuel, and he cried unto the Lord all night." Here you have "nacham" used to describe that God had a change of policy toward Saul because Saul had not been obedient to the leadings of the Lord. And yet, in this same chapter, in verse 29, we were told that God is not like man that He should repent.

So, we have it made very clear here by the Holy Spirit that the immutability of God is indeed very true. God does not fluctuate radically back and forth as some emotional yo-yo. However, as the object of God deals with change, then God's policy toward them must change as well. But God Himself is absolutely consistent even in that act of change. That is the immutability of God. When you deal with God on the basis of confessing all known sins, then the channel of blessing is clear, and God the Holy Spirit is able to build your capacity and to deliver grace blessings. However, when confession of known sin is not made and fellowship is broken, then capacity is limited, and the channel of divine blessing is clogged, and they do not flow to you. Has God changed? No. God is still consistent. But His dealings with you are as per your changing back and forth. Yet, when you talk about this idea of policy, and about God doing things this way one time and this way another time, we have to talk about it in terms that human beings can understand. So, we talk about God doing it this way, and then changing His mind and doing it this way. That is simply to convey to us in human terms what God is doing in an infinitely justified way as deity.

Psalm 110:4 should be added to this: "The Lord has sworn. He will not repent. You are a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek." Here, to the Lord Jesus Christ, the Father says, "I will not change My mind about this. You will always be a priest after the superior order of Melchizedek" (superior to the Aaronic order). Of course, He could say that to Jesus Christ because nothing the Lord was going to do was going to change (make necessary a change) in God's policy toward Him.

So, "nacham" expresses God's change of policy concerning judgments that He planned to execute until influenced otherwise by certain factors. Jeremiah 18:8 is a point to illustrate this. It expresses God's change of policy concerning judgments that He planned to execute until influenced otherwise by other factors: "If that nation against whom I have pronounced turn from their evil, I will 'nacham.' I will change my policy of the evil that I thought to do unto them." How will God change His policy? God will change His mind about what He was going to do. It's very important that you take hold of this word, because when we get to the New Testament, all these people like John the Baptist and Jesus and the apostles who talked about repentance (and called the people to repentance) were speaking in terms of their Old Testament background, and they knew what this word meant.

This is a word which is all fouled up today. It is a word that actually is one of those words that the devil has taken to keep people from going to heaven. Preachers and evangelists have caught hold of the concept of repentance, and they've given it a totally distorted meaning so that it confuses people and directs them away from what they must do to be saved. They're called upon to perform something that is not in this word, and that actually keeps them from being able to be born again. That's why this is an important word, and one that you must begin back here in the Old Testament to see just exactly what it means in terms of the way God used it.

So, here in Jeremiah, God is using it specifically in terms of His changing His mind about what He will do as a policy of change is brought about by the circumstances that have changed that God is dealing with. Verse 10: "If it does evil in My sight, that it obey not My voice, then I will repent of the good with which I said I would benefit them." Certainly, that is a word that was apropos to the nation of Israel, but it is a spiritual principle which is apropos to nations today. Historically, we have nations indeed that changed their mind and changed their mental attitude toward evil, and the result was that the change in them brought a change of mind from God. He changed His position. There was a "nacham" on the part of God.

You know that one of the most famous examples of that is in the book of Jonah, which very splendidly explains that very concept of repentance on the part of God. Jonah 3:9-10: "Who can tell if God will turn and repent, and turn away from his fierce anger, that we don't perish?" Here is what the leadership of Ninevah is saying. Verse 10: "And God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way, and God repented of the evil that He had said He would do unto them. And He did not do it." There you have a classic example of the Old Testament use of this word "repentance." The change on the part of the people that God was dealing with brought a change in the policy of God. A change in the mental outlook of these people brought a change of mind on the part of God.

So, God's change does not reflect upon His immutability. It reflects, indeed, upon His consistency.

**Intercession**

The Bible shows us that in the Old Testament that this change on the part of God was indeed brought about on occasion by intercession from human beings. The repentance of God is attributed to the intercession of a human being. In Exodus 32:12-14, you have an example of that. Here is Moses pleading with God not to wipe the Israelites off the face of the earth: "Wherefore should the Egyptians speak and say, 'For mischief, He (that is, God) brought them out to slay them in the mountains, and to consume them from the face of the earth.' Turn from your fierce wrath and repent of this evil against Your people." Moses is saying to God, "Repent. Change your mind about the destruction that you are intent upon doing to Israel: Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, Your servants to whom You did swear by Yourself, and said to them, 'I will multiply your seed as the stars of heaven, and all this land that I have spoken of will I give unto your seed, and they shall inherit it forever.'" And after listening to Moses, verse 14 says, "And the Lord repented of the evil which He thought to do unto these people.

So, here you have an example of going to bat. Here, Moses did it on the basis of divine promises. He reminded God of what He had promised, and on the basis of that, he was able to carry the day for Israel so that the nation was not destroyed. God obviously did what? He changed His mind about the evil that He was going to perform.

**Sorrow or Regret**

The idea of sorrow or regret is indeed behind this divine decision. That's what brought about the change. But when you look at this Hebrew word "nacham," the thing you must remember is that the emotion that's behind it that produces the change of mind is not what is stressed. The thing that is stressed is the mental change. That's what the word stresses when the writers use it. When it speaks about God, while He is grieved over the sin that He's dealing with, that is not the primary thing that this word stresses. The thing that it stresses is that God has changed His mind.

An Old Testament example of repentance on the part of man, which again conveys the idea of changing the mind, is David. You have this recorded in 2 Samuel 12:13. David has permitted his own spiritual maturity structure to deteriorate. David, for one reason or another, has fallen into sloppy godliness and into a sloppy spiritual maturity attitude. The result was that he was now open to an immorality in the sin of adultery. In 2 Samuel 12:13, he is faced with this issue, and he has to make a decision: "And David said unto Nathan, 'I have sinned against the Lord.' And Nathan said unto David, 'The Lord also has put away your sin. You shall not die.'"

Now, under the Old Testament order, under the theocracy of Israel, when the sin of adultery was committed and was brought into the open and confirmed, those who were guilty were executed. It was a capital crime. That is what is behind the situation here. God says that, in His sovereignty, He is making an exception with David. David was as guilty as anybody else of this particular crime. But in God's judgment, His plan for David brought an exception of the death penalty. Of course, David went on for another 25 years in which He performed some of the greatest feats of his life; in which he accomplished some of the greatest spiritual opportunities and accomplishments that came to him; in which he wrote great portions of the Word of God; and, which proved to be his finest hour. All of that was in the plan of God. All of that could have been terminated by the executing of the penalty of death for the adultery.

The thing that changed it was that David turned to "nacham" – a genuine mental attitude change toward this evil. He did not do that immediately. He rode along for a while trying to justify it in one way or another. But the time came, as is so splendidly illustrated in the whole 51st Psalm. We won't read all of it, but that psalm is David's expression of when he came back to God with repentance. We'll read verse 3, which says, "For I acknowledge my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me." Then he goes on and talks in verse 4 about how he has sinned: "The sin is against God. It's evil in His sight," and so on. He admits that what he did was wrong. He admits that it violated God's moral standard. He admits that it was against an absolute standard of God. And he admits that there is no justification. That is confession of sin. This is 1 John 1:9 in operation in the Old Testament context. When he does that, he has repented.

The fact that there was sorrow, and the fact that there was regret and all that is not the thing that is emphasized here. The thing that is stressed here is that David changed his mind. Verse 4, particularly, makes that clear when he says, "Against You only have I sinned and done this evil in Your sight." Obviously, there were other people involved who were hurt and injured down the line with all this. But the point that he made was that he understood that his attitude was toward God. That's where the trouble was. His attitude toward God was what was out of line. Now he was changing that attitude toward God. He was coming about, and he was saying that, "Yes, God is right. When God says, 'This is wrong,' this is wrong. When God says, 'You shall not do this,' that indeed you shall not do." You change your mind, and you come back to God.

One of the things to remember about repentance, of course, is that there is a great deal of this that is involved in the life of the believer. David was a believer. Believers have really one whole life that's nothing but a constant repentance. It's a constant series of repentance. That repentance, generally, is admitting changing your mind about something that God has said that you shouldn't do. And the sin nature says, "But I want to do it."

We always get interesting insights from parents in Berean Christian Academy because a lot of them go to cutesy-poo churches, and they hear sermons on challenge, and sermons on inspiration, and they get little "sermonettes" from "Christianettes" and from "pastorettes." None of it really amounts to very much, and it really shows when they try to talk about the Bible. You kind of feel a little embarrassed about them. You obviously know they've never sat in the presence of a Hebrew word in their life, let alone a Greek word. They just don't know that there is such a thing as a real hardcore, downright authority of the Word of God. So they don't really get the implications of what the Scripture is saying.

So, we had this one parent in the academy this year who criticized one of our classes. This parent really criticized the school as a whole, because what was true in that class was true of our school. This parent said that we are so negative. We're just so negative because we tell kids they can't spit on one another. And if they do, we have ways of handling that. If that doesn't work, we let the victim give return in kind. That isn't too groovy, but it certainly discourages the spitting routine. That's very negative, isn't it? We don't allow them to pick up rocks and throw them around. We say, "Thou shalt not throw rocks on campus." So, if you're busting people's noses, and cutting their lips, and making them bleed, and messing up our campus with their blood, you can't do that. And in the classroom, you can't just pop out of your seat. You have to ask permission. You can't just open your mouth and start babbling. You have to raise your hand and ask permission. It is just terrible to walk through those halls of the academy, and you see all these kids step out of line, and some teacher snatches them right back: "Thou shalt not."

So, here's this parent saying, "You're so negative," because her kid was told not to do something, and he wanted to do it, and he got in trouble. And she goes to a lovely Bible church. Right away I know what her trouble is. She doesn't understand that here at Berean Academy, we take our cues from God. We operate in the tradition of the Ten Commandments: "Thou shalt not; thou shalt not; and, thou shalt not," right down the line. I never saw anybody more negative than God, did you? Perhaps He doesn't have enough doctrinal instruction, and when He gets a little more enlightenment, He won't be so negative all the time.

That's what repentance is. Repentance is basically, "I'm changing my mind about the fact that you told me not to do something, God, and I muscled my way in and said, 'Yeah, I am going to do it. I'm going to have my way. I've done it sometimes deliberately; willfully; and, openly, and sometimes subtly such that I don't even realize that this is my attitude, and I'm pushing in this way.'" Basically, "nacham" means that you change your mind where God has drawn the line, and you've stepped across it. You back off like David, and you say, "That was wrong, and I admit it, and I change my mind about it." That's the Old Testament.

When you come into the New Testament, of course, the word "repent" is very prominent in the New Testament. The New Testament word is the one that we have here in the Sardis letter where they are told to repent. It is the Greek word "metanoeo." "Metanoeo" is the Greek word for "repent." You can cut this word in half. The first part, "meta," is a preposition which means "after." The second part, "noeo" is a verb that means "to think" or "to perceive." Thus, what you have when you put these two parts of the word together, is "to think" or "perceive afterwards." That means that, when you've thought it over, you changed your mind. When you thought it over, you changed your outlook. That's what is at the heart of "metanoeo."

This is exactly in the same tradition of "nacham." It's tied right down from the Hebrew. They moved right into the Greek, and the same concept was carried over into the Greek – "to change your mind." Now, when a preacher calls upon you to show sorrow of repentance, he's calling upon you to do something that has nothing to do with the Hebrew or the Greek word. It's not the primary factor in these words. To repent does not mean to cry. To repent does not mean to feel sorry for what you've done. To repent does not mean to have any emotional reaction at all.

Now, there indeed may be a feeling behind your repentance. You may be disgusted with yourself. You may loathe yourself for what you have done. You may see yourself finally in the perspective that God sees you, and you are revolted by that. You do have that feeling, but that quality of repentance consists not in that feeling, even if you really regret what you have done in violating God's character in dealing with you. The quality of repentance expressed by this word lies in your changing your mind about that evil (whatever feeling you may have about it). The idea is after thinking; after you thought it over; and, after you perceived what you actually had been involved in, you came to a different conception.

In the New Testament, this word is used chiefly, of course, in terms of turning from sin and turning to God's righteousness. This is expressed, for example, in Acts 3:3: "Jesus answered and said unto them, 'Verily, verily, I say unto you, except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.'" Here is a change that you must make. You turn from evil. You turn to God's righteousness. You are born again. In the New Testament, chiefly, this word is used in terms of sin – in terms of changing your mind about evil.

Now, there is, in the New Testament, a word for repentance that does connote an emotion. I should tell you that one so that you are acquainted with that, and somebody won't spring this on you. It's "metamelomai." "Metamelomai" means "to regret;" "to be sorry;" or, "to have remorse." It refers to a repentance which is the emotional sorrow. It is sorrow for something that you have done which you wish was undone. And for a while, probably David had a "metamelomai" type of repentance. He did not change his mind about the evil of adultery, but he did have an emotional sorrow over the consequences, and he just wished the act could be undone. And there is in Scripture the use of this word that is an emotional reaction. The Bible never promises forgiveness upon this kind of repentance. It never promises forgiveness for sins for a "metamelomai" attitude. It promises repentance only for "metanoeo" – only for a change of mind attitude does one find salvation.

Here's an example of where "metamelomai" is used. When you know the difference, right away, it illuminates this passage. In Matthew 27:3, Judas has betrayed Jesus Christ. He has discovered the consequences of his act: "Then Judas, who had betrayed Him when he saw that he was condemned, repented ('metamelomai')." Note that this is not "metanoeo." The Greek does not use this word. The Greek uses the emotional repentance word: "And brought again the 30 pieces of silver to the chief priest and the elders," and so on. Judas wanted nothing more to do with it. He gave them back the money. They wouldn't take it back. They wouldn't change their minds on the deal. But what did Judas have? He repented. Somebody says, "Did he go to heaven?" No, Jesus made it very clear that he was an unbeliever. Jesus made it very clear that, of His disciples, they were all clean, save one. That was Judas. Jesus made it very clear that Judas was a son of perdition – that he was doomed to hell for all eternity. So, there was no question about where Judas was going. It says that Judas repented. What did he repent? He had an emotional sorrow for what he had done. He didn't want to really see Jesus be condemned in this way. He didn't want to see Jesus suffering. He didn't want to see Jesus get into the circumstance that his betrayal put him in. But the action on the part of Judas was an emotional reaction, and it had nothing to do with this change of mind for the claims of Jesus Christ or the issue of salvation.

**Change Your Mind**

Another use of "metamelomai" is in Matthew 21:29. In the Judas passage, somebody may bring that verse up to you and say, "Here he repented. How come he wasn't saved?" Now you'll know why. He did not repent in the repentance which is a mental attitude change that brings about justification. In Matthew 21:29, you have the parable of the two sons: "What do you think? A certain man had two sons, and he came to the first and said, 'Son, go work today in my vineyard.' He answered and said, 'I will not.' But afterward, he repented and went." He did the "metamelomai," and he went. What did he do? After he thought about what he said to his father, "No, I won't do this," he had an emotional attitude about this. So finally, what did he do? He said, "Well, I'll go." The very word tells us what happened to this son – he felt so crummy emotionally, and the sorrow over telling his father, that he went and helped him in the vineyard. This didn't mean that he had a change of mental attitude such that his father was justified in asking him, and that it was the right thing for his father to tell him to go in the vineyard – that his father had the right to approach him on this subject. It doesn't indicate that at all. It just indicates that he had an emotional feeling (that he felt so condemned) that he went out and helped after all. "Metamelomai" means to be troubled in mind for an act of evil, but not of such a nature as to change your mind about doing that evil. That is a very great difference that's involved here.

One of the things that always comes up is: What is the relationship between "repent" and "believe?" And evangelists like to get all wound up about calling people to repent, and that repent generally means to have a sorrow over the fact of your sins. So all these sins are listed. So, generally, in an evangelistic meeting, the preaching generally devolves upon sins: this sin; that sin; this sin; and, that sin. And the evangelist usually has a supply of very good stories about this drunk; about this adulterer; and, about this thief. It just makes fascinating listening as they get up and talk this whole evening about these various sins. These sins are what you are to repent of. Therefore, the first step of being saved is to repent. This is presented as something that you are to do.

Now, to repent, we have already seen from the Hebrew and from the Greek, means one thing: "to change your mind." Now, here is a person who is lost. He is guilty of all these various sins of one kind and another. He may have a "metamelomai" sorrow for what he was doing because it got him in trouble. He stole something and he got caught and went to jail. He hates that. He's sorry about that. But his attitude toward stealing the next time – that has not been changed. But now, for him to be saved, he must have a mental attitude change. How can that change be brought about?

**Believe**

It can only be brought about in one way, and that is that he believes in Jesus Christ. He believes in Jesus Christ. The word "believe" is a word that requires an object. That object gives the word its value. Believing in Jesus Christ produces eternal life. The only time a person believes in Jesus Christ is when he has changed his mind about the sins that he is engaged in. He has changed his mind as to the acceptability of those sins. He has changed his mind to the point where he condemns those sins as being the evil that God says they are – that they are wrong, and that his lifestyle is a style of evil. And the only way he will say that is when he believes in Jesus Christ as Savior.

So, *you cannot repent without believing*. That's why the primary emphasis in Scripture is not on repent, but on believing. It is, "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved." It is, "With the heart, man believes unto righteousness." The stress is always upon believe. It is, "For God so loved the world that whosoever believes in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." Indeed, repentance is necessary in the process of salvation, but that repentance is a change of mind which is the result of believing in Jesus Christ as Savior. When you turn from your dead works, you turn to an about-face position, and the only place you can go from your dead words of the sin nature is to the living God and eternal life. *Believing is repenting.* Believing is an about-face from your evil to God's righteousness.

**Rationalism and Empiricism**

There is no credit to you in this. This is non-meritorious. If it were rationalism that was the means to salvation, rationalism means man's reasoning ability. That's a credit to you. Those of you with higher IQs are able to do better reasoning. That is more credit to you than those with less. The other possibility is empiricism. Empiricism is experience. If experience is your approach to God, then again, your ability to respond to your experience is a credit to you. Rationalism and empiricism are means of gaining knowledge and of gaining results, but they are a credit to you. But when you come to faith, which is the Bible-way of being saved, that is no credit to you. You can be the lowest IQ on the face of the earth, or you can be the highest IQ. Faith is no credit to you either way. You simply believe God, and in that belief, have performed the repentance. It's a non-meritorious act. Faith (believing) is the only non-meritorious way of approaching God. Every other way gives credit to the human being.

So, here you have the gospel message, and you have responded to it with a positive response. Believing in Jesus Christ has taken place. He is the object of your belief. Therefore, your belief has value. You have changed your mind about Jesus Christ. There was a time when you doubted that He was deity. There was a time when you doubted that He was really God. Maybe there was a time you doubted that He even ever lived. There was a time you doubted His claims to being the Son of God. Then suddenly, because of the conviction of God the Holy Spirit and the illumination to your understanding, you see that it is true. You see that He becomes the object of your faith. So you believe.

Repent and believe are not two consecutive acts. They are simultaneous. They're a little different, but they are simultaneous. When you put your trust (and that's what belief is) in Jesus Christ, you have changed your mind about Jesus; about evil; and, about God's standard of righteousness that you've rejected, and you turn from doing evil to godly living. You once rejected Christ; you've changed your mind about Him; you believe His claims; and, in that way, you have repented. The word "repent" is used, therefore, in some places in the New Testament, with salvation. That is the case in Mark 1:15, Matthew 12:41, Luke 13:3-5, and Luke 15:7-10. But in all these places, when repent is used with salvation, the means of repenting has to be understood as believing the gospel message. If you do not believe the gospel, you cannot repent. When you try to say, "First, you must repent to be saved," then you are conveying to people that, first of all, they have to feel sorry for their sins. They have to shed tears or they have to do certain penance, and that is completely false. How you feel about your sins emotionally has absolutely nothing to do with being born again. Being born again has to do only with believing in Christ as Savior. You will never believe in Him as Savior until you have changed your mind about your evil lifestyle.

Repent, of course, is used in the Christian life after salvation as well. It is the repentance that leads us on to spiritual maturity. It is repentance that leads us on day-by-day in maintaining our temporal fellowship. The whole Christian life is one change of mind after another. With every human viewpoint that is challenged in your thinking by a divine viewpoint point, there comes a need for repentance. The Christian who does not repent when he is confronted with a divine viewpoint that contradicts his human viewpoints is a Christian who goes into carnality. The main issue is believing for salvation. The main issue in the Christian life is believing doctrine unto progress toward spiritual maturity, and the emotional factor is completely out of it.

A prime example in the New Testament of repentance, of course, is the prodigal son. As you read that parable in Luke 15:17-21, you have a very classical example of how a person changes his mind toward his own evil, and he believes what his father has told him. The result is that there is a great change in the life.

We're going to stop here now. There are a few more things to say about repentance, because we ought to look a little bit at what Jesus Christ and the disciples did with John the Baptizer. When John came on the scene, the big word with him was "repent." But I hope we have at least clarified for you that, on the basis of the Old Testament word "nacham," and on the basis of the New Testament word "metanoeo," repent (in terms of Scripture, meaning what God the Holy Spirit gives to these words as their meaning) means to change the mind. The emotional factor is not the issue. It is a mental attitude change. When you understand that, you realize that the only way you change your mental attitude is when you believe what God has said. You do that when you believe the gospel. You do that when you believe every point of doctrine.

So, you begin with repentance (a changing of your mind). That's how you begin the Christian life. And at any point in time when you stop repenting (when you stop changing your mind) about the human viewpoint that you believe in, and the divine viewpoint that God brings, that's when your Christian life slows down. It's one grand repentance from beginning to end.

Dr. John E. Danish, 1977

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