

church of Christ at Greenwood

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Return to the Lord

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Built in to the message of the prophets was the appeal to repent. These men were sent by God to expose sin and urge the guilty to repent. Often the appeal was framed as a challenge to return to the Lord (Isaiah 6:10; Jeremiah 3:1; Malachi 3:7). For instance, Joel's appeal to Judah was for the people to repent of their sins. "So rend your heart," and "return to the Lord your God" (Joel 2:13). Through the distribution of His judgments (locusts, drought, desolation), God intended to admonish His people to come out of their sin and back to Him. It was His loving purpose to prompt a change in their direction. The essential definition of repentance has not changed through the dispensations. We can, therefore, use Joel's statement as the basis for our understanding of returning to the Lord. And this study can find application for those who have been baptized but have left their God.

Repentance is a change in direction. The simple word "turn" shows that to be so. Those guilty of sin (before or after baptism) need to turn; a change of direction is needed. If you've been letting the world influence your thinking, your speech, your conduct, your dress or attitude, you need to change your direction. If you've abandoned the assembly, harbored ill-will in your heart, accepted false teaching, helped false teaching advance, participated in party strife or refused to grow, God seeks a change in your direction. Repentance is a change in your direction, turning from your sin to the Lord (1 Thessalonians 1:9-10).

Repentance occurs in the heart. Observe in verse 12 of Joel 2, "with all your heart." Everything we do before God ought to be done with a whole heart. Repentance, to be complete and genuine, must come from a whole heart: a heart of reverence for God, love for God; a heart influenced by the cross of Christ. Repentance should be the product of a heart of mature responsibility toward everything that is holy and right. The conviction of sin from the Word should be let in, so that repentance finds its' true and good expression.

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Repentance is not just a ritual. “So rend your heart, and not your garments...” It was customary among the Jews to express their emotions in very public, visible ways. To this day in middle eastern cultures, when a family member dies, there may be public weeping and wailing; throwing dust in the air; beating the breast and the rending of garments. The problem to be noted here is, the emotion must not be ritualized and confused with true repentance. The fact that someone may cry in public or come down an aisle doesn’t assure wholehearted repentance. Repentance is a personal decision to leave sin behind and come to God. It is a decision of heart, productive of good fruit. It may be accompanied by some open expression, but the essence of the matter lies in the heart and the results in life.

Repentance is made possible by a gracious God. “Return to the Lord your God, for He is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love...” If you are alive to hear the Word, be convicted and repent, thank God that you have such a blessed opportunity. Thank Him for the precious blood of Christ. “The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.” If you are alive today, you can repent. Thank God for the time He has given you to return to Him, but don’t presume upon His grace and providence. “He relents from doing harm,” but the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night. Repent while there is time.

If you are reading this as one convicted of your sin, now is the time to repent. If you just plan to repent someday, that isn’t good enough. Ask God to relent, turn from your sin and enjoy peace with Him through the Lord Jesus Christ.