

The Wednesday Word, December 11, 2019: Repentance or Reformation?

Opinions are like noses...everyone has one. That's why, when it comes to doctrine, we so often hear "I think this," or "I think that," and "Mr. So-and-So thinks the other." There are many varied and colourful opinions out there but to establish the veracity of a matter we need to ask what God thinks? What are His thoughts?

In Matthew 22:29 the Lord rebuked the Sadducees saying, "You do err, not knowing the Scriptures." That's a somber reprimand for many of us.

God has spoken and His word endures for ever (1 Peter 1:25). What then does His Word say, for example, about repentance? Is it the same as reformation? Let's then, for just a moment, look at this important truth.

In Acts 17:30-31 we discover that, "God now commands all men everywhere to repent: Because he has appointed a day, in which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he has ordained; whereof he has given assurance unto all men, in that he has raised him from the dead." Let's unpack this;

Who commands repentance? God!

When does He command it? Now!

Whom does He command to repent? All men!

Where does He command this? Everywhere!

Why does He command repentance? To escape the coming judgment.

What assurance have we that there is a coming judgment? Christ has been raised from the dead!

Through the years, many have considered their responsibility to repent, and yet they still lack salvation.

Why?

Because they confuse reformation with repentance. They realise, to a point, their sinful condition, and unfitness for God's holy presence, so they turn over a new leaf. They give up their obvious and visible sinful habits and try to lead a good and religious life. By doing so, they hope to make amends for their 'high crimes and misdemeanors'. Oh, and yes, they believe that Christ died on the cross, but they seem to have no idea that they are to trust Him for their salvation. They do not see Him as their sin-bearer and substitute. However, by their upright behavior and sincerely trying to be good they believe they will reach heaven someday.

But is this repentance? Far from it! Repentance is seeing ourselves as poor, helpless, vile, lost sinner whose only hope is Jesus. What we are looking at with the "new leaf adherents" is the evidence of the deeply rooted self-righteousness of a deceived mind. These folks have gone through reformation not repentance. But God commands repentance, not reformation. Reformation will probably be appreciated by their neighbours but repentance towards God and repentance unto life are other things altogether.

If a person trusts in their reformation to gain eternal life, they are trusting in what they have done. But we are not saved by works. We are not called upon to trust what we have done (see Ephesians 2:8-9). A saved person does not justify themselves, but they look to Christ alone for their right standing before God. What a vast difference there is between reformation and repentance! Repentance is a change of mind about sin, our lostness and about Jesus. Real salvation is by grace. By the work of the Spirit we see that we are guilty and lost (see Luke 19:10). We comprehend that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners (see 1 Timothy 1:15). We understand that Jesus, the appointed Judge, is also the Saviour.

Those hoping in their reformation must realise the following: God is "just and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus" (Romans 3:26). They must, 'Believe on (trust on) the Lord Jesus Christ, and they shall be saved,' (Acts 16:31).

We are not called to believe about Him as merely an historical fact, but to trust the Person and finished work of the risen One. We cannot do a single thing to please God before we believe, for "in all your doings your sins do appear" (Ezekiel. 21:24). Reforming our ways is not the ground of salvation. We must believe and trust on Him first, and then follow Him."

And that's the Gospel Truth!