

1 *Works Worthy Of Repentance*

Are Works Worthy Of Repentance to Effectuate God's Forgiveness?

In the prior chapter, we learned that the lesson of the *Be Reconciled Before Sacrifice* emphasizes a **successful** reconciliation with an offended person before you can ask God to accept an atoning sacrifice (*i.e.*, which today means the atonement of Jesus). This running off first to be reconciled is, in effect, mandating a *work* worthy of repentance.

Jesus told us one prophet greater than all the prophets ever which preceded Him was John the Baptist. John ranks above Isaiah, Ezekiel, and even Daniel. Thus, John the Baptist's words are the inspired words of Yahweh Almighty. Who says so? Jesus your Lord. Jesus was John's contemporary, and must have heard the very gospel of John heralding the New Covenant. Jesus must have been endorsing 100% everything John said as the true inspired words of God Almighty. Thus, one can say John the Baptist's Gospel was contemporaneously adopted by Jesus.

To make sure we do not forget that John the Baptist was himself a prophet, we should make it a new habit to refer to John the Baptist as *The Prophet John-the-Baptist*, just like we might say *The Prophet Isaiah*. Having Jesus tell us that John was the greatest prophet gives us the absolute assurance that the title the *Prophet John-the-Baptist* is a correct title.

Does the Prophet John-the-Baptist ever make works worthy of repentance a clear condition of salvation? Does the Prophet John-the-Baptist ever teach you must have a work worthy of repentance that corresponds to the sin you have committed or you will be sent to the fires of hell? The Prophet John-the-Baptist once clearly said directly:

(8) Bring forth therefore ***fruits worthy of repentance***, and begin not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father: for I say unto you, that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham.

(9) And even now the axe also lieth at the root of the trees: ***every tree therefore that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire***. (Luke 3:8-9)(ASV). (See same at Matt. 3:7-10.)

Here we see a passage that the Modern Gospel completely ignores. You will pause, no doubt, and pick up your Bible to check to verify that this is truly in the Bible.¹

The Prophet John-the-Baptist's meaning could not be plainer. John in verse nine ***made works essential*** or otherwise you would be thrown in the fire. In this context, the works were mentioned in the prior verse: *works worthy of repentance*. Thus, this repentance by works-worthy-of-repentance were *absolutely* essential or otherwise you would be "cast in the fire." John did not say here that works were merely evidence of a saving faith. The Prophet John-the-Baptist said a saving faith, if barren of good works to match that expression of faith in Jesus, was not unto salvation.

Jesus' Message Of Payback According to Your Practices

This was identical to Jesus' principle of leaving your sacrifice at the altar and 'be reconciled' with your neighbor, which was discussed in the last chapter. In Matthew 5:23-24, Jesus said the way to receive the benefits of atonement (i.e., imputation of righteousness) was to do whatever it took to

1. We previously discussed this passage in the chapter entitled "Every Tree Without Good Fruit" on page 1 *et seq.*

appease your offended neighbor. You were going to have to do a work worthy of repentance to achieve reconciliation with the one you offended. Before doing that, Jesus did not want you trying to bring any kind of sacrifice to God. Prophet John makes the same point in Luke chapter three when he talks explicitly of the absolute necessity of works worthy of repentance to avoid being thrown in the fire.

This then explains Jesus' statement in Matthew 16:

For the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels; and then he shall **give reward every man according to his— the practice works** of each. (Matthew 16:27)

The ordinary translation is lacking in two respects. The word translated commonly as *reward* is “give” or “pay.” In Greek, it is *apodidomi*. Also, the word rendered as *works* is not the word for *works* used in the New Testament. Everywhere else, the word *works* in the New Testament is *erga* in Greek. Here, instead, the word is *praxis*. It means *practice*. On Judgment Day, Jesus will give to each according to “the practice of each.” ***Jesus promises to judge by your practice, not according solely to your faith.***

Hence, Jesus constantly tried to create *insecurity* about evil practices by threatening to use that as the criterion for judgment of *everyone*. Jesus repeats this in John's Gospel: “And shall come forth, they that have done good deeds, unto the resurrection of life.” (John 5:29.)

This emphasis on repentance onto good works for salvation is why obviously the apostles went out preaching repentance. “And they went out and preached that men should repent.” (Mark 6:12.) Perhaps this is why among Jesus' last messages while on earth was:

And He said to them, “Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and rise again from the dead the third day; and that **repentance for forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in His name** to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem. (Lk. 24:46-47.)

Simply put, Jesus told the apostles to preach all must repent *from sin* (not merely a change in their mind about Jesus' identity) to obtain forgiveness. The way Jesus expresses this injunction is that it is already a given that as a matter of fact He suffered and rose. Those facts are beyond question, and believing they are true is not the *key point* about how to obtain *forgiveness of sins*. It is assumed the nations will know those simple facts about Jesus' suffering and resurrection. The key, instead, is to preach thereafter "repentance [from sin] for the forgiveness of sins."

The Bible's Doctrine on Works Worthy of Repentance

So what were these "works worthy of repentance" that Jesus and the Prophet John-the-Baptist implored on the pain of losing salvation (*i.e.*, being cast into the fire) if you did not do it?

The Bible required that if you stole, you could not just verbally say you were sorry. You had to pay back what you stole with interest. (Exodus 22:1-15; Leviticus 6:1-5; Numbers 5:5-8; 2 Samuel 12:6.) As Ezekiel says, eternal life² is by repentance onto works worthy of repentance:

[I]f the wicked restore the pledge, **give again that which he had taken by robbery**, walk in the statutes of life, committing no iniquity; **he shall surely live, he shall not die**. (Eze 33:15 ASV.)

When men marry women who God prohibited to marry, God commanded them to divorce. (Ezra 10:3, 11, 1, 19, 44.) To the extent possible, you must take action to undo the wrong God prohibited.

2. On how this passage uses *life* to mean *eternal life*, and *death* to mean *damnation*, see page 5.

When Zaccheus repented of sin, and gave what he stole back to those from whom he stole, Jesus said “salvation” had come to Zaccheus’ house that day. (Luke 19:8.) Zaccheus undid the wrong he did to the extent possible. He then went even farther beyond that. Jesus promised him salvation as a result.

This point was elucidated over a century ago in an article appearing in Benjamin Lyon Smith, *The Millennial Harbinger Abridged* (1902) at 447-50.³ This article written by Alexander Campbell (the Irish reformer transplanted to the United States) explains the error of the teaching today that mere sorrow is enough:

The preachers of repentance — of the necessity of repentance in order to remission, ought to set this matter fairly and fully before sinners. Do they represent repentance as sorrow for the past, and a determination to reform? How then will the sinner know that he is sorry for his sins against men, or how will the community know that he has repented of such sins, **unless full restitution be made**? It is impossible that either the sinner himself, or the community who know his sins against men, can have **any certain evidence** that he is penitent, unless by making all possible restitution. *Id.*, at 448.

Alexander Campbell goes on to explain that making amends is what is meant by the phrase *works worthy of repentance*, and is indispensable in salvation.

3. This article was Alexander Campbell’s “Repentance,” *The Millennial Harbinger Extra* 4 (August 1833): 345-348, reprinted at <http://www.mun.ca/rels/restmov/texts/blsmith/mha/MHA10805.HTM> (last accessed 5/6/2007). Alexander Campbell taught faith and repentance for salvation, leading to the fruit of baptism and confession. (Alexander Campbell, *The Christian System* (2d ed., 1839) at 64, reprinted at <http://www.mun.ca/rels/restmov/texts/acampbell/tcs2/TCS219.HTM> (accessed 5/7/2007).

‘Works worthy of repentance’ is a phrase which can be understood in no other sense than those **works which make amends for the harm done to men**, and the dishonor done to God, as far as both are possible. Can any man think that he is sorry for that sin or wrong which he has done, when **he makes no effort to make amends to him who was injured** in person, character, or property, by it? Works worthy of his professed repentance are wanting, so long as any being whom he has injured in person, property, or reputation, is unredressed to the utmost extent of his ability. *Id.*, at 450.

Let’s discuss the texts that illustrate God’s principle of *works worthy of repentance*. This way we will know Jesus’ requirement to apply His atonement is not mere sorrow about sin.

Example from Leviticus

Leviticus 6: 1-7 explains:

And the Lord spake to Moses, saying, If a soul sin, and commit a trespass against the Lord, and lie to his neighbor in that which was delivered him to keep, or in fellowship, (i. e., dealing,) or in a thing taken away by violence, or has deceived his neighbor; or have found that which was lost and lies concerning it, and swears falsely; in any of these that a man does, sinning therein: then it shall be because he has sinned, and is guilty, that **he shall restore that which he took violently away, or the thing which he has deceitfully gotten, or that which was delivered him to keep, or the lost thing which he has found, or all that about which he has sworn falsely: he shall even restore it in the principal**, and shall add the fifth part more thereto, and give it to him to whom it appertaineth, in the day of his trespass

offering. And he shall bring his trespass offering to the Lord, a ram without blemish out of the flock, with thy estimation, for a trespass offering to the priest. And the priest shall make an atonement for him before the Lord; and it shall be forgiven him, for any thing of all that he has done, in trespassing therein.

This passage mandates restitution for the harm done.

Further, the Law made provision for the case in which the sinner could not find the person against whom he had sinned. In such a case, the repenting sinner was to seek out the kindred of the injured party, and if he could find any kinsman, he was to recompense this kinsman. However, if he could not find a kinsman, he must recompense it to the Lord, besides offering his trespass offering. It was to go into the Lord's treasury. (Num. 5: 7, 8.)

The principle, in all cases of sin against another person, was that the sinner "shall make amends for the harm he hath done, . . . and shall add the fifth part thereto." (Lev. 5: 16.)

Adam Clarke, the famous commentator, understands Jesus' principle.

No man should expect mercy at the hand of God, who having wronged his neighbor, ***refuses***, when he has it in his power to make ***restitution***. Were he to weep tears of blood, both the justice and mercy of God would shut out his prayer, ***if he make not his neighbor amends for the injury he has done him***. He is a dishonest man, who illegally holds the property of another in his hands. (Comment on Gen. 40: 2.)

Conclusion

Prophet John told the religious rulers to “Bring forth therefore fruits worthy of repentance” (Matt. 3:8.) He told them not to trust in their election as sons of Abraham. That is not the criteria for salvation that God will employ on judgment day. Instead, bring forth fruit worth of repentance. For every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown in the fire.” (Matt. 3:10). Jesus repeats this phrase.

When we deciphered “works worthy of repentance,” we found that the Bible has many passages to explain them. These were works of restitution to make right as much as possible your wrongs. A simple ‘I’m sorry’ does not do the job. Mere repentance from sin (sorrow) is insufficient.

This helps us now to understand what Jesus meant when He said we are not to bring our sacrifice to the sacrifice place (altar) until we are reconciled with the one whom we offended by sin. (Matthew 5:23-24.) Jesus is talking identical to Prophet John-the-Baptist. The word of reconciling to the point one satisfies the one you offended is identical to works worthy of repentance. Both passages are primarily directing us to restitution or making offers satisfactory to resolve the offense we committed against another.