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FOR THE SOWER ISA. 55: 1 0 FOR THE EATER
BRIEF BIBLICAL MESSAGES FROM

THE WORD OF TRUTH MINISTRY

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WHAT ABOUT REPENTANCE?

The Problem Stated

Those who do not know the complex problem related to the word *repentance* will not be interested in the solution. If one's Bible study has been so superficial that it has created no questions, he will seek no answers. However, the careful student will want to know, when he comes to Matthew 3:2, what it was that John the Baptist was demanding of the people of Israel when he said: "**Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.**" Furthermore, he will feel a pressing need to know, when he comes to Luke 13:3, what the Lord Jesus meant when He said: "**Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.**" Then when he reads in Matt. 11 :20, 21 that the Lord reproached the two cities where most of His mighty works were done "**because they repented not,**" he is bound to ask, if he is a seeker of truth, what it was the Lord expected of these cities, and which they failed to produce. But when he seeks the answer to these questions, he will find that he faces one of the great major problems of New Testament interpretation.

The nature of this problem can best be stated through the words of Dr. Archibald T. Robertson, an outstanding Baptist scholar who was professor of N.T. Greek at the Southern Baptist Seminary from 1883 to 1934. His book on the grammar of New Testament Greek is the greatest of its kind. He often quoted his father-in-law, Dr. John A. Broadus, a scholar of equal rank, as having said: "The translation of *metanoeo* by 'repent' is the worst translation in the entire New Testament. "

These words are sufficient to demonstrate the reality of the problem; and it becomes more persistent when we realize that in the Greek N.T., we find the word *metanoeo* (pronounced, meta-nahEH-o), which is the verb, thirty-four times; and the noun *metanoia* (pronounced, met-AN-oy-ah) , which is derived from the verb, occurring twenty-four times. In each of these fifty-eight occurrences, they are translated by a word concerning which two outstanding Greek scholars have said: "is the worst

translation in the entire New Testament." Furthermore, the KJV translators have compounded this error by taking the six occurrences of *metamelomai*, treating this word as if it were the same as *metanoia*, then translating it by some form of the word "repent" in all six occurrences. Thus in sixty-four passages of the New Testament we have sixty-four deliberate and willful misrepresentations of God's truth, resulting in an erroneous concept of what the Lord demanded when He used the word *metanoeo* in His call for vital and imperative action.

The history of flagrant mistranslations of these two Greek words began about 150 A.D. when the New Testament was first translated into Latin. *Poenitentiam agere* was the way the words of John and Jesus were first translated. These words meant "do penance" and this translation committed the Latin fathers to the idea that *metanoeo* was related to the penalty man was supposed to pay for his sins, the sorrows he must show and the tears he must shed for them. No such ideas were in the Greek words, but they were incipient in the church the Latin fathers were building, and to use a term that expressed these to translate *metanoeo* was one way to insinuate them into the Word of God.

When Jerome (A.D. 347-419) produced the Vulgate, he perpetuated this erroneous translation, so that in time the Roman Church from top to bottom began to think of acts of penance in order to cancel acts of sin. Thus, it was that for fourteen centuries, the emphasis was all on doing penance, on something that man did about his sins. What God had done was all but forgotten. When the sufferings of Christ for sin were brought forth, men were told they must "do penance" to reap the benefits from it.

When the English versions of the Scripture began to appear, the translators followed the Latin. Wycliffe, whom history tells us had no proficiency in Greek, rendered Matt. 3:2: "Do ye penance: for the kingdom of heavens shall come nigh." He translated directly from the Latin Vulgate. One would expect something better from William Tyndale since he was capable in the Greek and worked directly from it. But he scarcely improved on Wycliffe, rendering the Lord's words as meaning: "**Repent ye, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.**"

When the *King James Version* was brought forth, "the learned men" who did the translating well know that *metanoeo* did not mean "do your penance over again"; yet, they translated every occurrence by a word that says and means exactly that. Thus, a major doctrine of Roman Catholicism was forced upon all Protestants by fifty-eight mistranslated passages in the New Testament.

Following the publication of the KJV, there was a vast amount of discussion and debate as to what the word "repent" signified. The Roman Catholics always insisted it meant doing penance, that is, punishing yourself to make satisfaction for your sins; and the Protestants mostly insisted it meant sorrow for sins committed.

John Calvin thundered out many times against the prevalent idea that repentance meant sorrow for sin, saying: "In the definition they have given of repentance, it clearly shows that they never understood what it was; for they catch at some passage in the writing of the fathers, which by no means expresses the nature of repentance; as 'that to repent is to weep for sins previously committed, and not to commit sins to be wept for.' Again: 'that it is to lament evils that are past, and not to commit new ones to be lamented.' Again: 'that it is a kind of mournful vengeance, punishing in ourselves what we bewail having committed.' Again: 'that it is a sorrow of heart and bitterness of soul on account of the evils which a man has committed, or to which he has consented.'" *Institutes of Religion*.

In spite of Calvin's vigorous protests, erroneous thinking has always characterized Protestant views on repentance, making it to be sorrow for sin. The mourners' bench and the penitents' form have ever been prominent in some denominations. That repentance is sorrow for sin is clearly refuted by the words of Paul when he said: "**For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation**" (2 Cor. 7: 10). Even godly sorrow cannot be what it produces.

The problem of the meaning of *metanoeo* was widely discussed in England and on the continent for a century before 1900. It was a time of great theological discussion and debate. The great thinkers and writers took up the matter and discussed it apart from all religious presuppositions. Men such as Thomas De Quincey, Samuel Coleridge, and Matthew Arnold expressed their keen dissatisfaction with "repent" as a translation of *metanoeo*. Arnold said: "We translate it 'repentance,' a mourning and lamenting over our sins; and we translate it wrong."

During the later part of the nineteenth century, the hope was often expressed that the revisers of the *King James Version* would purge from its pages this fallacious portion of pure Roman Catholic philosophy and bring forth something that would more clearly represent the truth the Spirit of God was declaring. But this hope was in vain, for the revisers did not touch the matter, not even in a marginal note. This perpetuated the error that God required men to weep over their sins as the initial step in the Christian life.

The American counterparts of the English revisers did the same. The idea held by most people that one's tears were effective in washing away guilt was so deeply rooted that the translators hardly dared to touch the erroneous translations which permitted the use of the Bible in support of this Christ dishonoring fallacy.

Later translators such as Rotherham, Weymouth, Moffatt, and Goodspeed did no better. They resolutely put their feet in the print of those who had gone before them. They continued to proclaim in their versions the same old Roman Catholic doctrine of "do penance."

The latest translation of the Bible at this date is the *New International Version* (NIV) which professes to be: "A completely new translation of the Holy Bible made by over a hundred scholars." These scholars claim to have: "held to certain goals for the NIV: that it would be an accurate translation," and that their first concern has been: "the accuracy of the translation and its fidelity to the thought of the biblical writers." Nevertheless, in spite of these claims, they saw fit to repeat the egregious errors of previous translators in every passage where the words *metanoeo* and *metanoia* are found. These self-proclaimed paragons of accuracy and fidelity never even offered a footnote to alert the reader that a more accurate rendering was possible.

In many religious circles great anguish of soul is demanded before faith in Jesus Christ can be exercised. One is expected to experience a great paroxysm of sorrow for past sins before he can lay hold of the Savior of sinners. Some are able to produce such an emotion at will.

. The demand for anguish is easy for them. Others must be worked on and prodded until such a feeling arises within them. In such circles the validity of one's salvation is measured by the anguish that preceded it. Great sorrow of heart is supposed to be a meritorious and cleansing work.

It is an almost universal thought that a man must punish himself for the sins he has committed. Soren Kierkegaard, the Danish philosopher and theologian, held and declared that it was his duty before God to spend the days of his life mourning over the sins of his youth. Thus, his past sins became the primary concern of his life.

Ideas and teachings such as these are usually supported by Bible texts in which the words "repent" and "repentance" are found. False meanings are read into these passages, and these false meanings are well supported by the mistranslations that characterize all versions.

Many Bible interpreters have recognized that something should be done about honestly translating the Greek words *metanoeo* and *metanoia*. However, they have usually moved from one error to another by saying the verb means "change your mind," and that the noun indicates a state of "changed-mindedness." This has satisfied many since it relieves them of the "do your penance" aspect and the "sorrow for sin" aspect usually associated with these words. However, the idea of "changing one's mind" is insipid and inadequate.

Thus, we now have the problem before us. Is there a satisfactory solution? I believe there is, but this will have to be presented in a subsequent study.

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