

# What Is REAL Repentance?

Millions have heard the cry, "REPENT! Receive Christ!" But what does it mean? What is real repentance? Here's the BIBLE ANSWER!

by Garner Ted Armstrong

**I**N A WORLD fraught with tension and fear, increasing thousands are turning to religion. Somehow, many feel they need to "get right" with God—to join a Church—to become more "religious."

Vast evangelistic campaigns have netted thousands of "decisions for Christ." In a moment of remorse over their past lives, many have decided to "accept" Jesus as Saviour. But what is this "receiving" of Christ? Is it REAL?

Mass evangelism has been severely criticized recently by many who have shown the "decisions" made usually don't LAST very long. Were these decisions real repentance?

### The Common Belief

A foremost religious leader once said: "First, let us understand what Christianity is NOT. It is NOT a way of life!"

But what does the newly converted Christian DO then, that MAKES him a Christian? Commonly it is believed that the remorseful feeling of sorrow over past mistakes and misdeeds, plus the acceptance of Christ—the worship of Christ—is a saving experience. Hundreds of thousands of sincere, well-meaning, earnest people are content they are Christians—satisfied they are headed toward eternal life—when they actually have never taken the first step toward becoming a true Christian, believe it or not!

But listen to what the Bible actually says!

"From that time Jesus began to preach..." (Matt. 4:17). Jesus was a preacher! Jesus Christ came with a message from God the Father—and that message was what He preached! What was the very first thing HE told His audiences to do? "... REPENT: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matt. 4:17). Notice—the words of Jesus are: "REPENT!"

Later, the Apostles—Peter, James and John, the Apostle Paul and others—preached the same message Jesus brought from His Father. When Peter stood up

to explain the amazing events of the Day of Pentecost in 31 A.D. he said, "REPENT, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:38). Later, Peter said, "Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your SINS may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord" (Acts 3:19). Jesus gave stern warning that "except ye REPENT, ye shall all likewise perish" (Luke 13:3, 5).

Then there is something required in addition to the acceptance of Jesus as personal Saviour! Jesus said so!

To repent and be converted is to CHANGE. That is the very meaning of the word "convert." Just what is that change, then?

### Change What?

"I'm a changed man," said the reformed smoker. "I have finally quit the tobacco habit!" This man felt, because he had dropped a bad habit, he was a changed man! But was he really?

What is it Christ wants you to change? Merely your way of "thinking" about Him? Do you change your "outlook" on religion? Do you change your Church? Change your habits? Change WHAT?

The Apostle Paul explained that the "... carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be" (Rom. 8:7). That carnal mind is the NATURAL human mind—the normal, sincere, natural, common way of looking at things—that all of us were born with! It's the mind of every normal human being PRIOR to this change Christ was talking about! Paul went on to say, "Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his" (Rom. 8:9). Did you notice it? If a man have not the Spirit of Christ—he doesn't belong to Christ, and therefore IS NOT A CHRISTIAN!

This change has something to do with the carnal mind, and the Spirit of Christ! Let's notice another important scripture.

"I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world, but be ye TRANSFORMED the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God" (Rom. 12:1-2). Read that scripture again! Study it!

God says you must undergo a renewing, a transforming, a CHANGING—OF THE MIND!

This changing of the mind is a change of human nature!

The normal, natural way of human nature is the way of SELFISHNESS. The SELF is the entire motivating drive in human nature. It is the pleasing of the self, the satisfaction of the self—the way of getting for the self that is the basis of human nature. YOU are extremely selfish! All human beings are selfish.

And, behind the selfishness of every person lies the root cause of it all: vanity!

"Vanity of vanities, saith the preacher, vanity of vanities; ALL is vanity" (Ecc. 1:2). Every person is filled with vanity, in one form or another. Notice that Paul tells us, "For the creature [correct meaning, "creation?"] was made subject to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of him who hath subjected the same in hope" (Rom. 8:20).

All is vanity! The desire of every person to be "liked" by others—to be "well thought of," to be accepted by the society, looked up to, respected, admired, and loved by others—all this is vanity!

It is this vanity which leads a person to say, "What will my friends say?" or, "What will people think?"

### Ensnared in Society

Having been reared in a world that measures everything by what people think, you probably are quite concerned about the opinions of your friends, neighbors and relatives. You are wrapped up in this age, this society!

Whatever is the standard, whatever is looked upon with approval by these people, whose acceptance you covet, that becomes the standard of your life! If you're like most people—you live in the way which is most likely to gain for you the acceptance and approbation you seek. You are a part of this world. Your life is regulated by this world and its customs, its holidays, its practices in business, in social life, in religious life, and all the many accepted standards of society which make up this "world."

Most people are ensnared by it—trapped into CONFORMITY with whatever is the way of the majority—following like blind sheep wherever society leads, never questioning WHETHER is right, but simply conforming to the ways of others.

It is the vanity in humannature, the selfishness, which drives individuals on and on, seeking the respect and approbation of other people!

It is to RELEASE us from these shackles of tradition and society that Jesus calls us out of this world!

#### Jesus Calls You OUT of Society

Jesus said, "My kingdom is NOT of this world" (John 18:36). He was the Messenger from God the Father of a better kingdom—the world-ruling Kingdom of God! When Christ walked this earth as a man, He spoke to His disciples of a soon-coming WORLD GOVERNMENT that would supersede and PUT DOWN all opposing, man-made governments, and RULE THIS WORLD! (Rev. 2:26-27).

He prayed that His disciples would be SEPARATE from this world. "I pray for them; I pray not for the world, but for them which thou hast given me; for they are thine" (John 17:9).

Did you know Jesus Christ Himself said—IF YOU ARE A TRUE CHRISTIAN, YOUR FORMER FRIENDS, YOUR RELATIVES, THIS SOCIETY WILL HATE YOU?

Listen!

"If the world hates you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you. If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, therefore the world hateth you" (John 15:18-19).

Jesus said your own family would be-

gin to look down on you, if you are really willing to OBEY HIM! "Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword. For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. And a man's foes shall be they of his own household" (Matt. 10:34-36).

If you are really following Christ—LIVING as He lived, DOING as He did—keeping God's LAW as He did—this society, even your closest former friends and your own relatives, will begin to RESIST and PERSECUTE you.

"Forasmuch then as Christ hath suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves likewise with the same mind: . . . For the time past of our life may suffice us to have wrought the will of the Gentiles . . . Wherein they think it strange [the former associates, with whom you followed the courses of society] that ye run not with them to the same excess of riot, speaking evil of you" (1 Pet. 4:1-4).

Notice HOW STRONG God impresses on every Christian that they must discontinue their relationships with this sinning society! "Love NOT the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth forever" (1 John 2:15-17).

#### Count the Cost

In Luke 14 Jesus sternly warns every prospective Christian to COUNT THE COST of being a true follower of Him! How many people are being told to COUNT THE COST—even told WHAT THAT COST IS, in today's great evangelistic efforts which invite people to "make a decision for Christ?"

Are they being TOLD what it really means? Are they being told HOW to GIVE themselves to God—HOW to serve Christ—WHAT to do—WHAT it means—are they being told to COME OUT of this society, and be NOT conformed to the world?

NO! They most decidedly are not!

Many people are being led to "accept

Jesus" or to "receive Him" today, in a moment of emotional remorse over past mistakes. But many thousands DO NOT KNOW WHAT TO DO to really become a Christian!

#### What IS the Cost?

Remember Jesus tells you what you must do to become a Christian!

"Not every one that saith unto me, 'Lord, Lord' shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that DOETH the WILL OF MY FATHER which is in heaven" (Matt. 7:21). "REPENT" said Christ! "DO THE WILL of God," said Jesus!

God's will is expressed in His word. "Thy word is truth" (John 17:17). It is the truth, the word of God that will set you free.

Here, then, is what it really COSTS to become a true Christian, and to become a begotten son of God!

IT COSTS YOUR LIFE!

LITERALLY!

Does that shock you? Perhaps it does, unless you think I mean that statement as a kind of "spiritual phraseology" which is just another way of saying "set your heart on the Lord" or some similar sentiment.

God's word tells you that you must literally LAY DOWN YOUR LIFE for Christ.

"Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:38).

After you have been BROKEN UP, and your own human will has been totally SHATTERED, after you are DISGUSTED with yourself—FILLED with ABHORRENCE at your own actions, your own way of life—your own SELF, which is the VANITY within you—then you should be baptized!

#### What It Means

Immersion into a watery "grave" is a deep spiritual symbolism which signifies the actual, LITERAL BURYING of the old self—you—the way you HAVE BEEN, and the resurrection of a NEW YOU—now conquered by God, surrendered to God, meekly and humbly CHILD-like in your obedience and TRUST in Him as your Living Saviour.

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baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so WE should WALK IN NEWNESS OF LIFE. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection. Knowing this, that our OLD MAN IS CRUCIFIED with him, that the body of sin [the former "you"] might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin" (Rom. 6:3-6).

Paul explained this principle further when he said, "For I was alive without the law once [without a knowledge of the law]: but when the commandment came [to his consciousness—so he became aware of what sin was] sin revived [he was able to see clearly that he was a great sinner] AND I DIED!" (Rom. 7:9). Paul said, "For sin, taking occasion by the commandment [being brought to light for what it was by the laws of God] deceived me, and by it SLEW me. Wherefore [because God's law had shown him he was a sinner] the law is HOLY, and the commandment HOLY, and JUST, and good!" (Rom. 7:11-12).

#### A Change of Mind

The Apostle Paul was a true Christian. He had the Spirit of God, which is promised to every one who will literally lay down his life, and surrender the self will, performing the ordinance of baptism, and coming to God's throne of grace as a meek child. Paul said, "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me" (Gal. 2:20).

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And He does it through the power of God's Holy Spirit!

This is a great mystery to most human beings—and yet, the Spirit of God MUST enter our CARNAL minds to change

those minds, and make them yielding, humble, and obedient to God, where they had been hostile, antagonistic, resentful, and bitter toward our Creator! The receiving of God's Spirit to change humannature is the receiving of an outside POWER—a begetting which makes us His sons!

#### A Changed Attitude

If you are a true Christian, you will not be able to blindly follow the customs and practices of this society any further. Instead, you will begin asking, "What is God's will, what does God say about it?" And you will begin to SEARCH THE BIBLE TO GET TO KNOW the will of God.

Your outlook and attitude will gradually become Christ-like. You will begin saying, with Christ, "Nevertheless not my will, but THY will, be done!"

Where you formerly "went along with the crowd" in social activities, in customs of dress, in business practices, you will begin to question the ways of the crowd. You will want to first ascertain what God's will is concerning these ways of life!

THAT IS THE DEFINITION OF A CHRISTIAN!

A Christian is a person who LIVES BY EVERY WORD OF GOD!

"Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God" (Matt. 4:4). So said your Saviour! But are most professing Christians really LIVING by every WORD of God?

Not so! Most professing Christians do not even know a small portion of what the Word of God says! It is because they don't STUDY the Bible, and begin to drink in of the Word of God that they gullibly swallow and accept whatever others say and believe!

#### What It Means to You

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own. The Christian then takes the ordinance of baptism which shows God he really means it.

He expects God to stand back of His promise to give him the Holy Spirit, as a result of the REPENTANCE and the baptism which God demands.

THEN — AND NEVER UNTIL THEN—WILL YOU BECOME A TRUE CHRISTIAN.

Finally, you will begin to practice as a HABIT, the very life of Christ. "He that saith, 'I know him,' and keepeth not his commandments, a liar, and the truth is not in him" (1 John 2:4). "He that saith he abideth in him [as a Christian] ought himself also so to walk [LIVE], even as HE [Christ] walked" (1 John 2:6).

The true Christian, who has REALLY repented, will LIVE as Christ lived! He will keep the LAWS of God, being obedient to God in every way, and becoming a recipient of the great HAPPINESS and tremendous BLESSINGS that come with that obedience!

"For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps" (1 Pet. 2:21).

CHECKUP on yourself!

Study these scriptures in your own Bible. Many of you THINK you are already "saved" and that you are already good Christians! But "Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall!" (1 Cor. 10:12).

Remember to "examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is IN you, except ye be reprobates?" (III Cor. 13:5).

Serve Christ—OBEY Christ—LIVE as Christ lived, FOLLOW Christ, IMITATE CHRIST!

THAT IS WHAT IT MEANS to give yourself to Him!

#### Baptizing Tours

If YOU are one who really feels you have come to know what real repentance is—and you want to repent, you really WANT TO OBEY God—the here is GOOD NEWS!

Each summer, Mr. Armstrong sends teams of ministers, or advanced students of Ambassador College who are thorr-

oughly trained, consecrated and dedicated men, to visit those wishing to be baptized.

These men are Mr. Armstrong's personal representatives, who drive many thousands of miles to visit and counsel with those whose hearts have been made

willing, and who want to be baptized. They are true servants of Jesus Christ, and they speak and act in His name, and are seeking to serve Him.

If you would wish one of these teams to call on you, in your own home, to talk to you about water baptism—then

write to Mr. Armstrong immediately.

The tours are being planned NOW, so write soon, if you want to be baptized. And, if you have not read the booklet "All About Water Baptism," better ask for it, too.

But remember if you're not sure, then read this article again.

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