Repentance in Apostolic Preaching
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Even the most cursory study of the preaching in Acts shows that the gospel according to the apostles was a clarion call to repentance. At Pentecost, Peter concluded his sermon--a clear lordship message--with this: "Therefore let all the house of Israel know for certain that God has made Him both Lord and Christ--this Jesus whom you crucified" (Acts 2:36). The message penetrated his listeners' hearts, and they asked Peter what response was expected of them. Peter said plainly, "Repent, and let each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins" (v. 38).

Note that he made no mention of faith. That was implied in the call to repentance. Peter was not making baptism a condition of their salvation; he simply outlined the first step of obedience that should follow their repentance (cf. 10:43-48). Peter's audience, familiar with the ministry of John the Baptist--understood baptism as an external corroboration of sincere repentance (cf. Matt. 3:5-8). Peter was not asking them to perform a meritorious act, and the whole of biblical teaching makes that clear.

But the message he gave them that day was a straightforward command to repent. As the context of Acts 2 shows, the people who heard Peter understood that he was demanding unconditional surrender to the Lord Jesus Christ.

In Acts 3 we encounter a similar scene. Peter and John had been used of the Lord to heal a lame man at the Temple gate (vv. 1-9). When a crowd gathered, Peter began to preach to them, rehearsing how the Jewish nation had killed their own Messiah. His conclusion was precisely the same as it had been at Pentecost: "*Repent therefore and return*, that your sins may be wiped away, in order that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord; and that He may send Jesus, the Christ appointed for you, whom heaven must receive until the period of restoration of all things about which God spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets from ancient time" (vv. 19-21 , emphasis added). The King James Version says, "Repent... and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out." Again, Peter's meaning was unmistakable. He was calling for a radical, 180-degree turning from sin. That is repentance.

In Acts 4 , the day after Peter and John had been instrumental in the healing the lame man, they were brought before the Sanhedrin, the ruling body of Israel. Boldly, Peter said, "Let it be known to all of you, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead--by this name this man stands here before you in good health. He is the stone which was rejected by you, the builders, but which became the very corner stone. And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men, by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:10-12). While there is no mention of the word *repentance* there, it was Peter's obvious message to these rulers. They had rejected and killed their rightful Messiah. Now they needed to do an about-face: turn from the heinous sin they had committed, and turn to the One whom they had sinned against. He alone could grant them salvation.

When Peter was called of God to proclaim the gospel to Cornelius and his household, the message had a different emphasis: "that through His name everyone who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins" (Acts 10:43).

But did Peter overlook the issue of repentance in his ministry to Cornelius? Not at all. It is evident that Cornelius was repentant. When Peter later recounted the incident to the church at Jerusalem, the church leaders responded, "Well then, God has granted to the Gentiles also *the repentancethat leads to life*. " (Acts 11:18 , emphasis added). Obviously the entire Jerusalem church understood repentance as tantamount to a saving response.

No-lordship advocates usually gravitate to Acts 16:30-31 to find support for their view that repentance is not essential in the call to saving faith. There the apostle Paul answered the Philippian jailer's famous question, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" What did Paul tell him? Simply, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you shall be saved, you and your household." Evidently Paul did not call the jailer to repentance.

But wait. Is that a fair conclusion to draw from this passage? No, it is not. The jailer knew very well the cost of being a Christian (vv. 23-24). He was also obviously prepared to repent. He was about to take his own life when Paul stopped him (vv. 25-27). He had clearly come to the end of himself. Moreover, Paul gave him a more extensive gospel presentation than is recorded for us in Acts 16:31. Verse 32 says "they spoke the word of the Lord to him together with all who were in his house." Ultimately the jailer did repent. He proved his repentance by his deeds (vv. 33-34). This passage cannot be used to prove that Paul preached the gospel without calling sinners to repentance.

Repentance was always at the heart of Paul's evangelistic preaching. He confronted the pagan philosophers of Athens and proclaimed, "Having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is now declaring to men that all everywhere should repent" (Acts 17:30). In his farewell message to the elders of Ephesus, Paul reminded them, "I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and teaching you publicly and from house to house, solemnly testifying to both Jews and

Greeks *of repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ* " (Acts 20:20-21 , emphasis added). Later, when he was hauled before King Agrippa, Paul defended his ministry with these words: "I did not prove disobedient to the heavenly vision, but kept declaring ... even to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, performing deeds appropriate to repentance" (Acts 26:19-20).

Clearly, from the beginning of the Book of Acts to the end, repentance was the central appeal of the apostolic message. The repentance they preached was not merely a change of mind about who Jesus was. It was a turning from sin (3:26; 8:22) and a turning toward the Lord Jesus Christ (20:21). It was the kind of repentance that results in behavioral change (26:20). The apostolic message was nothing like the no-lordship gospel that has gained popularity in our day.

I am deeply concerned as I watch what is happening in the church today. Biblical Christianity has lost its voice. The church is preaching a gospel designed to soothe rather than confront sinful individuals. Churches have turned to amusement and show business to try to win the world. Those methods may seem to draw crowds for a season. But they're not *God's* methods, and therefore they are destined to fail. In the meantime, the church is being infiltrated and corrupted by professing believers who have never repented, never turned from sin, and therefore, never really embraced Christ as Lord or Savior.

We must return to the message God has called us to preach. We need to confront sin and call sinners to repentance--to a radical break from the love of sin and a seeking of the Lord's mercy. We must hold up Christ as Savior *and* Lord, the one who frees His people from the penalty *and* power of sin. That is, after all, the gospel He has called us to proclaim.

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