

1009 Repentance and denying yourself
(Verses refer to those in NASB unless otherwise specified.)

There are four parts in this article. First, let us review the necessity of repentance. Secondly, we will take a look at what could have been the effect due to a wrong translation. Followed by a discussion about why one shouldn't look for a perfect church. Finally, we still need to pursue the truth even in this situation. In order to be conformed to the image of Jesus, we need to deny ourselves.

John the Baptist says in Matthew 3:1-3, "...Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." For this is the one referred to by Isaiah the prophet when he said, "The voice of one crying in the wilderness, 'Make ready the way of the Lord, Make His paths straight!'" Jesus himself says in Matthew 4:12-17 that repentance is necessary, "Now when Jesus heard that John had been taken into custody, He withdrew into Galilee; ...From that time Jesus began to preach and say, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.'" The disciples preach the same in Mark 6:12, "They went out and preached that men should repent." After Pentecost, they preached as was described in Acts 2:38, "Peter said to them, "Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." Repentance is absolutely necessary as indicated in 1 John 1:9, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

Repentance is only the first step. We really need a true repentance, since one can even cheat oneself without seeing the fact as says in Jeremiah 17:9, "The heart is more deceitful than all else And is desperately sick; Who can understand it?" We really need enlightenment by God. Merely studying the Bible is not enough. The purpose of studying the Bible is according to what Jesus says in John 5:39-40, "You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; it is these that testify about Me; and you are unwilling to come to Me so that you may have life." And the life can only be initialized from God as indicated in 1 Corinthians 3:6-7, "I planted, Apollos watered, but God was causing the growth. So then neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but God who causes the growth." What we can do is be willing to work with God.

Secondly, we can see a wrong translation can cause some problems. As an example, we are familiar with the verse in John 4:24, NASB, "God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth." According to Strong's Concordance, we have in John 4:24, NIV, "God is a Spirit: (G4151) and they that worship him must worship him in spirit (G4151) and in truth." There is no distinction between the Holy Spirit and our spirit in Greek. In the English translation the big letter "Spirit" is used to indicate the Holy Spirit, and the small letter "spirit" to describe our spirits. In this case, we cannot use the surrounding verses to decide which one we need to choose, and unfortunately all the possible combinations are chosen in different translations. Therefore, we have to decide how to translate correctly according to the whole Bible.

Let us just use these two versions for our discussion. In NASB, the small letter "spirit" is used. It has to be wrong since we cannot see a spirit, but in Exodus 33:23 Moses can see

God although not in face, "Then I will take My hand away and you shall see My back, but My face shall not be seen." Thus, we cannot say that "God is spirit" as in NASB. Since according to the whole Bible God is Holy Trinity, God is (Holy) Spirit. As in NIV, there is no "a" in Greek. Thus, the right translation should be "God is Spirit (G4151), and those who worship Him must worship in spirit (G4151) and truth."

Thirdly, let us not dream about a perfect church because Romans 3:23 says clearly, "for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." There was a pastor said something like this. If you ever see a perfect church, please let me know and I'll join it. She knows that it is impossible to have a perfect church. As long as I attend such a church, it isn't perfect anymore since I am imperfect. It is impossible to not make mistakes. Nevertheless, God is full of mercy and grace as seen in Revelation 3:8, "I know your deeds. Behold, I have put before you an open door which no one can shut, because you have a little power, and have kept My word, and have not denied My name." Just because the church in Philadelphia has a little power, He rewards them an open door.

Since we talked about sin, we may ask where it comes from? In Romans 5:12, "Therefore, just as through one man (Adam) sin entered into the world, ..." In Genesis 2:16-17, "The Lord God commanded the man, saying, "From any tree of the garden you may eat freely; but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat from it you will surely die." However, Adam disobeyed as stated in Genesis 3:6, "...she took from its fruit and ate; and she gave also to her husband with her, and he ate." So, sin comes from the disobedience of God. In Romans 5:19, "For as through the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, even so through the obedience of the One (Jesus) the many will be made righteous." He obeyed God to death. God says, don't kill people. If one kills, then the person doesn't obey and commits a sin.

God knows that we often are weak and commit sins and are unable to follow the words in 1 Thessalonians 5:19, "Do not quench the Spirit." He gives us the way of repentance in 1 John 1:9, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." What we need to do is to seek and open the door as stated in Luke 11:9-13, "So I say to you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks, receives; and he who seeks, finds; and to him who knocks, it will be opened. Now suppose one of you fathers is asked by his son for a fish; he will not give him a snake instead of a fish, will he? Or if he is asked for an egg, he will not give him a scorpion, will he? If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him?" The verses are referring to the Holy Spirit. The only condition is that the person has to be a Christian. Although it doesn't state when, there are no other conditions. We must pray to be filled with the Holy Spirit and pray in faith as stated in Hebrews 6:12, "so that you will not be sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises." Without the Holy Spirit, we cannot do anything. Jesus says clearly in John 15:5, "I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing."

Finally, let us talk about denying oneself in order to gain life. Words becomes flesh [1] in order to that we might have life abundantly [2]. To gain life is the way of following Jesus. It is a way of bearing our cross as Jesus says in Luke 9:23, "...If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow Me." It is the way of denying oneself! Paul in Romans 8:13 says, "for if you are living according to the flesh, you must die; but if by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live." In other words, we have to substitute the life of ours by that of Jesus: "I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me." (Galatians 2:20) "For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren." (Romans 8:29) To be conformed to the image of Jesus is our goal, how can we not deny ourselves?

Some related verses

[1] Philippians 2:5-7, "Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus,;who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men."

[2] John 3:17, "For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him." John 10:10, "The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly."