

How to Become New

(Compiled by Paul R. Blake)

Introduction:

A. Isa. 42:5-10

B. A new year will be beginning soon. It is an arbitrary and artificially generated line of demarcation. Time is duration and existence

1. We are the only beings that measure its passage. God is not bound by it, and animals are only cognizant of seasonal changes
2. However, it is important to periodically stop and measure ourselves against its passage; yearly self-examination reminds us to do better
3. Unfortunately, mental health researchers have discovered that the most depressing day of the year is January 11th, as it is at this point that most people have broken their New Year's resolutions
4. It is not enough to acknowledge and celebrate transitions; we must work to maintain the permanence of the change
5. It is not helpful, however, to dwell overlong on the past or sit about daydreaming of the future
6. Paul understood this - Phil. 3:12-14

C. We cannot undo the past, but we can change our own future

1. The New Year can become a season of renewal
2. In the physical realm, holidays and memorials can only serve as reminders. In the spiritual realm, actions can actually make things new

I. A NEW CREATURE

A. Rom. 6:3-5

1. Baptism is the mark when we end our slavery to sin and begin a new life - Rom. 6:8-11
2. It is a sign of our covenant with the Lord - Col. 2:11-13
3. All past sins are washed away - Acts 22:16

B. But that mark of transition doesn't have meaning if we don't let go of the past

1. Rom. 6:12-13
2. Paul introduced this matter by asking about the change - Rom. 6:1-2
3. Peter introduced the world to the Gospel with the word for change -- "repent" - Acts 2:38
4. Repentance is turning away from the past; it is a reversal of moral purpose. Baptism doesn't motivate or propagate our change
5. We change our hearts and minds first. We begin that change with repentance; we mark that change with baptism, at which point our sins are washed away.

II. A NEW HEART AND MIND

A. Acts 26:20 - The word "repent" comes from metanoeo.

1. A compound word of meta (change) and noeo (to use the mind)

2. It originally was used for hindsight, to reflect back on what one has done, to change one's mind about past choices, to reconsider past thoughts, words, or actions with regret
- B. "Turn" comes from epistrepho, a compound of epi (on) and strepho (turn), meaning "to turn around, do an about face, to be converted"
1. The emphasis is on a change in behavior, a return to one's original state
 - a. Acts 15:36 - "Let us go again"
 - b. Conversion implies that one was once righteous and with God, but had left and is now returning - Rom. 7:9-11
 - c. We don't begin life sinful, but righteous. We then lose our way - Ecc. 7:29
 - d. God calls us back - Acts 3:19
 - e. Return to the shepherd - 1Peter 2:25
- C. Why two different words?
1. Because sin begins in our thoughts and comes out in our words and deeds - Mark 7:21-23
 2. Therefore, change must also start in our minds and come out in our words and actions
 3. Repentance is saying "No" to sin. Conversion is saying "Yes" to righteousness.

III. A NEW SPIRIT

- A. Ez. 18:30-31 - Repentance opens the way for a new spirit
1. The Gospel reached the hearts of the Jews; they asked what to do and were told to begin with repentance - Acts 2:37-38
 2. They gladly received this word and immediately performed it - Acts 2:41
 3. Their former spirit toward Christ was animosity - Acts 2:22-23, 36
 4. Sorrow over the past isn't just about changing our hearts, minds, and actions; it is about changing who we are and where we are relative to all matters of life
 5. Our spirit is completely different; we do not look the same way at the Lord, the world, and our place in it
 - a. When we hear the commands of God, rather than grumbling over the restrictions, we are excited to do righteousness
 - b. When confronted by old temptations, rather than getting excited about indulging, we are repulsed by the prospect
 - c. When thinking about losses we experience in this world, rather than becoming angry or sad, we praise God that we are that much closer to seeing His face in the world to come. A new spirit!
- B. Godly sorrow is a blessing designed to change how we think and feel about sin, transforming our spirit - 2Cor. 7:9-11
1. It is the transformed spirit that enables a permanent change in behavior
- C. Often in our rush to baptize people, we under-emphasize the importance of repenting before baptism

1. Baptism is for people who have begun the process of change, who want to become new
 2. If the person seeking to be baptized isn't doing it because he or she is seeking and working to become a new person, they need to stay out of the water until they do
 3. Someone who has no plans to change his current behavior should not be baptized until he eagerly abandons his practice of sin
- D. Baptism does not stop us from sinning; repentance does
1. Therefore, the penitent condition is an ongoing state; we spend the rest of our lives in a lifelong commitment to the process of change
 2. Baptism simply gives a clean slate from which to work on our new life.
 3. Warning: repentance doesn't get easier over time. The longer you wait, the harder it becomes.