

## **Repentance and John's Gospel**

### **Introduction**

Today most Evangelicals say that repentance is a condition of everlasting life. It is not unusual to read or hear someone say, "The person who repents and believes in Christ will be saved."

Regardless of whether repentance is, or is not, a condition of everlasting life, Bible-believers should grapple with the fact that repentance is not found in John's Gospel. That is what we will do in this workshop.

### **The Words Repent and Repentance Are Indeed Missing Entirely from John's Gospel**

The Greek words for repent and repentance are *metanoeo* and *metanoia*. Neither word appears at all in John's Gospel. As a result, it is not surprising that the English words *repent* and *repentance* are not found in the English translations of John's Gospel either. There is no dispute about this.

### **Five Explanations of Why It Is Missing from John's Gospel**

#### **Explanation #1: The concept (turning from sins) is there though the words are missing.**

At the *Grace to You* website John MacArthur has an article entitled, "Repentance in the Gospel of John." He points to verses like 3:19-21, 36; 6:48-66; 10:26-28; and 12:24-26. What he does is misses the meaning of various expressions and missing the contexts.

#### **Explanation #2: The concept (a change of mind) is there though the words are missing.**

Dr. Chafer (*Systematic Theology*, pp. 376-77).

Dr. Ryrie (*So Great Salvation*, pp. 97-98).

#### **Explanation #3: The concept (a change of mind, heart, and will) is there though the words are missing.**

Jody Dillow (*Final Destiny*, pp. 51-54).

Charlie Bing (*Grace, Salvation, and Discipleship*, pp. 51-52; *Lordship Salvation*, pp. 89, 95).

John MacArthur (*The Gospel According to Jesus*): "No message that eliminates repentance can properly be called the gospel, for sinners cannot come to Jesus Christ apart from a radical change of heart, mind, and will" (p. 182). While MacArthur elsewhere makes stronger statements about repentance, a quote like that should cause Free Grace people who hold view #3 to wonder whether their view might confuse people.

#### **Explanation #4: The concept of repentance (turning from sins) is found in John's Gospel, but repentance is not a condition of everlasting life.**

Repentance in the NT is always turning from sins (cf. Matt 12:41; 2 Cor 12:21; Rev 2:21-22; 9:20-21; 16:9, 11). Thus I agree with this view that repentance is turning from sins. And I agree that it is not a condition of everlasting life. But is the concept found in John's Gospel?

In John 5:14 the Lord said to the paralytic: “See, you have been made well. Sin no more, lest a worse thing come upon you.”

In John 8:11 He said to the woman caught in adultery, “Go and sin no more.”

Neither of those contexts deal with what one must do to have everlasting life.

But were those calls to repentance? We will discuss this under the fifth view.

**Explanation #5: Neither the words or concept of repentance are found in John's Gospel and repentance is not a condition of everlasting life.**

I hold this view, but I don't recall if I've put this in print.

Zane Hodges came to hold this view. In his book *Absolutely Free* he wrote,

The fourth evangelist explicitly claims to be doing evangelism (John 20:30-31). It is not the theology of the gospel of John that is deficient; it is the theology found in lordship salvation. Indeed, the desperate efforts of lordship teachers to read repentance into the fourth gospel show plainly that they have identified their own fundamental weakness. Clearly, the message of John's Gospel is complete and adequate without any reference to repentance whatsoever (Second Edition, p. 130).

Hodges concludes his discussion of repentance in John's Gospel in this way, “Only a resolute blindness can resist the obvious conclusion: *John did not regard repentance as a condition for eternal life*. If he had, he would have said so. After all, that's what his book is all about: obtaining eternal life (John 20:30-31) (*Absolutely Free*, Second Edition, p. 131).

In any case, these contexts are clearly not salvific in the sense of salvation from eternal condemnation. They concern salvation from temporal judgment.

**Explanation #5 Best Fits John and the Rest of Scripture**

First, repentance is turning from sins throughout the NT. If I am right in that, then that rules out view 2.

Second, the fact that the words of repentance are not found in John's Gospel argues strongly for views 4 or 5.

Third, if the concept of repentance is not in John's Gospel, and the evidence is strongly in favor of this, then view 5 is the only acceptable view.

**We Must Not Add an Additional Condition to Everlasting Life  
Beyond Faith in Christ**

May we stay true to the message of life even if the vast majority of people in Christendom add in turning from sins, commitment of life, obedience, good works, and perseverance.