

Repent and Believe the Gospel

Is a depraved, vile, unwilling, unable sinner held accountable to repent and believe the gospel?

by F. Leon King

I. HUMAN ACCOUNTABILITY

Let me state that every mentally accountable human being on earth shall be held accountable for repentance toward God and faith toward Jesus Christ. This is true whether they have or have not heard the gospel. This accountability does not depend upon man's natural ability. Man is accountable because of the authoritative decree of God, that man should repent and believe, period. Gospel enlightenment amplifies that accountability, but depraved darkness does not void it in any sense. Because every natural man is a willing participant in this depraved darkness, he might well be justly condemned without further confrontation between him and God.

II. DEPRAVITY IS NOT INNOCENCE

It has been rightly stated through the centuries by true Bible evangelists that man, due to his depravity, cannot of his natural accord repent and believe though he is eternally responsible to do so. This is completely accurate. That man is responsible to repent and believe is obvious from many such Scriptures as Luke 13:3, John 3:18, and John 3:36. (We quote these passages here for ease of study):

He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. -John 3:18-19.

I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.

-- Luke 13:3.

He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. -- John 3:18.

He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him. -- John 3:36.

On the other hand, that he cannot naturally do so is equally obvious from many such Scriptures as Jeremiah 13:23, Matthew 13:9-11, John 6:43-44, John 10:6, John 10:26-27, Acts 11:18 and Acts 28:25-26. (Passages quoted below):

Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? <then> may ye also do good, that are accustomed to do evil. -- Jeremiah 13:23.

Who hath ears to hear, let him hear. And the disciples came, and said unto him, Why speakest thou unto them in parables? He answered and said unto them, Because it is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given. -- Matthew 13:9-11.

Jesus therefore answered and said unto them, Murmur not among yourselves. No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day. -- John 6:43-44.

This parable spake Jesus unto them: but they understood not what things they were which he spake unto them. -- John 10:6.

But ye believe not, because ye are not of my sheep, as I said unto you. My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: -- John 10:26-27.

When they heard these things, they held their peace, and glorified God, saying, Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life. -- Acts 11:18.

And when they agreed not among themselves, they departed, after that Paul had spoken one word, Well spake the Holy Ghost by Esaias the prophet unto our fathers, Saying, Go unto this people, and say, Hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and not perceive: -- Acts 28:25-26.

The great mistake of many has been to conclude that these truths were paradoxical and to make one of two errors. One school uses man's depravity and subsequent inability to his responsibility to proclaim him to be like an animal without free moral agency or volition. This is absolute error. The other error is to use his Bible-stated responsibility and free moral agency to deny man's depravity and to acclaim him a creature of free will who may, at his will repent, believe, reform, etc., etc., etc. This is equally wrong. Free moral agency does not equal free will nor deny human depravity. Human depravity does not equal innocence nor cancel responsibility. Responsibility does not equal ability nor is man rendered 'not responsible' in the eyes of God because he is unable.

If you would accuse the consistency of this, consider man's own law. Is a drunk responsible to drive safely, behave decently, etc.? Certainly! Is he able to do so? Certainly not! What then makes his ability less than his rightful responsibility? His drunkenness. What makes man's natural ability less than his responsibility? His sinful depravity. What ever else you do not understand about this, you should soon realize that no human plan or series of religious acts can change it. What is the answer to this impossible situation? Oh yes, it is impossible! "When his disciples heard it, they were exceedingly amazed, saying, Who then can be saved? But Jesus beheld them, and said unto them, With men this is impossible; but with God all things are possible." —Matthew 19:25-26. The answer is the New Birth.

III. THE NEW BIRTH

If there were some step-by-step plan of salvation, it would be given in God's Holy Word. We would not need to skip around to find it, getting one part of the divine plan here and another part there and another somewhere else. When the Lord was asked how to be saved, he never gave a "plan of Salvation" which suited men to the point that it has been written verbatim, nor did Paul, nor did Peter, nor did any other Bible writer. The truth is, that through the New Birth, God works in man, Faith and repentance, with which he receives Christ. It is only in the New Birth that man's depraved inability is overcome.

For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure. -- Philippians 2:13.

[Adapted from a sermon preached May 26, 1889, at the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington, England by Pastor Charles H. Spurgeon - LK]