

What Does God Require of Us?

There are many in this world who say that God commands everyone not to sin. However, the Scriptures make this fact very clear: it is not possible that anyone cannot sin. There are numerous places in Scripture that insure we understand that we are not righteous, and that we will not obtain righteousness by our works and our power. By the Scripture, we understand this applies across the board to everyone who has ever lived since Adam, and that ever will live, ((The righteousness Adam had was his own. However, in disobeying the single commandment he was given, he lost his righteousness, and thus would have to depend upon the righteousness of God for his justification.)) with the single exception of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is interesting that the following passage occurs three times in Scripture. Truly, the LORD God wants us to know: man cannot help but sin.

The LORD looked down from heaven upon the children of men, to see if there were any that did understand, *and* seek God. They are all gone aside, they are *all* together become filthy: *there is* none that doeth good, no, not one. (*Psalms 14:2-3; Psalm 53:1-3; Romans 3:10-12*)

Now, in light of the above references in Scripture, it is not sensible nor logical to propose that the LORD God is going to command man to not sin. This, of course, would bring many to the end of Ecclesiastes and the command given there as to what God requires of each and every one of us.

Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this *is* the whole *duty* of man. (*Ecclesiastes 12:13*)

If we notice, it states that the whole duty of man is to fear God and keep His commandments. However, it does not state what the commandments of God are. For that, we must go to other

parts of the Scripture, particularly to the passages of Scripture that address all men everywhere.

There are two places in Scripture where we can plainly see God's commandment to every individual. The first is the apostle Paul's address at Mars Hill in Athens:

And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent: (*Acts 17:30*)

Now this naturally would include Jews as well as the Gentiles. Though there are some who believe that Jews are treated differently than Gentiles when it comes to obeying of the commandments of God, the Scripture plainly indicates that this is not the case. In the first chapter of Mark, the Lord Jesus Christ preached the following to the Jews:

Now after that John was put in prison, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, And saying, The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel. (*Mark 1:14-15*)

So it is that this commandment to repent is given to all men, regardless of whether they are Jew or Gentile (which is everyone who is not a Jew), and it is tied to another commandment, which is 'believe, or obey the Gospel.' Moreover, if we study the matter, we find the two commandments appear in several places throughout the New Testament, and even refer back to the Old Testament.

The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance (*II Peter 3:9*)

But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Esaias saith, Lord, who hath believed our report? (*Romans 10:16*)

For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going

about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God. For Christ *is* the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth. (*Romans 10:3-4*)

And Jesus answering said unto them, Suppose ye that these Galilaeans were sinners above all the Galilaeans, because they suffered such things? I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish. Or those eighteen, upon whom the tower in Siloam fell, and slew them, think ye that they were sinners above all men that dwelt in Jerusalem? I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish. (*Luke 13:2-5*)

For unto us was the gospel preached, as well as unto them: but the word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard *it*. (*Hebrews 4:2*)

Therefore also now, saith the LORD, turn ye *even* to me with all your heart, and with fasting, and with weeping, and with mourning: And rend your heart, and not your garments, and turn unto the LORD your God: for he *is* gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repenteth him of the evil. (*Joel 2:12-13*)

In the above verses, there are a couple of things to note that either refer back to the Old Testament, or are citations of Old Testament Scripture. First, the reference in Romans 10:16 is to the fact that the children of Israel would not believe that Christ was to come, and thus were disobedient to the Gospel. This is supported by the passage from Hebrews 4:2, which speaks of the Gospel being preached to the children of Israel in the wilderness, and they would not receive it, as they would not hear what God had to say, and thus had no faith. Finally, the passage from the prophet Joel speaks plainly of true repentance of the heart, not the outward show men often give so that others may be impressed.

So we see that everyone has two intertwined commands that are not at all impossible to follow. We do also find that God has made them simple and attainable.

Now, there are those who argue that it is impossible for man to repent, as man is totally depraved in his nature. This is very true. However, though man, of himself has no inherent ability or desire to repent and thus cannot properly repent, the Lord made provision to overcome this difficulty as the Jews in the early church testified:

Forasmuch then as God gave them the like gift as *he did* unto us, who believed on the Lord Jesus Christ; what was I, that I could withstand God? 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 11:17-18)

This is confirmed by two other passages of Scripture that address the Lord's withdrawing someone's ability to repent. ((The withdrawing of repentance is not the same as withdrawing salvation. The command the Lord Jesus preached was "repent, and believe the gospel." This makes repentance only a part of salvation, and not equal to salvation, as believing must be coupled with it. Thus the Lord could withdraw repentance from someone who is born again, yet not affect their salvation at all.

Moreover, the Lord will never withdraw His salvation from someone, as salvation is completely predicated upon the new birth in Christ Jesus. Repentance, on the other hand, is only a requirement for salvation to occur, not a condition for keeping it. Just as faith is a condition for salvation to occur, the keeping of our salvation is not dependent upon our faith. Rather, the keeping of our salvation is entirely dependent upon Christ, not us. If it were dependent upon us, we would be in the exact same position as Adam, except with innumerable more chances to fail – which we invariably would

exercise. In short, heaven would never receive a single man as we would all fail – just like Adam. We must remember that only God is intrinsically righteous, and only God is intrinsically able to maintain His righteousness.

However, withdrawing repentance from someone who is not saved would mean that they could never be saved.))

Lest there *be* any fornicator, or profane person, as Esau, who for one morsel of meat sold his birthright. For ye know how that afterward, when he would have inherited the blessing, he was rejected: for he found no place of repentance, though he sought it carefully with tears. (*Hebrews 12:16-17*)

For *it is* impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, And have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come, If they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put *him* to an open shame. (*Hebrews 6:4-6*)

Thus, it is God that grants us the ability to repent properly before Him, in a manner acceptable to Him. This is very much like the situation all of us face when we hear the Gospel. We have a requirement placed upon us by the Lord: We must know who is doing the offering of salvation, what the salvation consists of, (or is) and why we need that salvation. Since none of these things are readily apparent physically, we are at a considerable disadvantage. We must know and understand these things spiritually, which is impossible for us to do. This was the situation the woman at the well in Samaria faced.

Jesus answered and said unto her, If thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is that saith to thee, Give me to drink; thou wouldest have asked of him, and he would have given thee living water. (*John 4:10*)

By the Lord's statement to the woman, we know that the Lord will not accept blind belief. We cannot just believe because we believe, and have the Lord accept it. Rather, we must know with certainty who is doing the offering, what He is offering, and why we need it. This is why the statement is made in Hebrews:

But without faith *it is* impossible to please *him*: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and *that* he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him. (*Hebrews 11:6*)

However, again the Lord has not left us without recourse. It is stated plainly in Romans 10:17: "...so then faith *cometh* by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." Now then, we can establish what this faith is, as it is now established how that we, who are all sinners, receive this faith. In Hebrews 11, which is the definitive discourse on faith and its power, the following statements are made:

Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. For by it the elders obtained a good report. Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear. (*Hebrews 11:1-3*)

First, we see that faith is both a 'substance' and an 'evidence;' moreover, in verse two faith is declared to be an 'it.' By these adjectives we can understand that the 'faith' that saves is a noun, much like we would describe an instrument of some sort. However, as verse three describes, this instrument is quite special and unique among instruments. This instrument allows those possessing and using it to understand that God created the universe *ex nihilo*, or literally 'out of nothing.' The rest of the chapter goes on to describe how that faith enabled the people of God to do things that would have been impossible otherwise. The how of this is that God grants an instrument to the one that hears the Gospel, which enables that person to 'see' who God is, what He

offers to the sinner through the shed blood of Jesus Christ, and why that person needs salvation. This is a direct contrast to how the Apostle Paul described the Athenians at Mars Hill:

Then Paul stood in the midst of Mars' hill, and said, Ye men of Athens, I perceive that in all things ye are too superstitious. For as I passed by, and beheld your devotions, I found an altar with this inscription, TO THE UNKNOWN GOD. Whom therefore ye ignorantly worship, him declare I unto you. (Acts 17:22-23)

By this statement it is made clear, the Lord considers blind belief to be no better than superstition, as one cannot fulfill the requirement of knowing who God, and specifically the Lord Jesus Christ, really is. However, through this instrument of faith, which the Lord grants upon hearing the Gospel, one is entirely able to fulfill the requirements necessary to properly exercise the repentance God grants and thus obey the Gospel unto salvation in Christ.

Now it is established that God does command all men everywhere to repent and obey the Gospel, it is essential to understand why God chose to have these two commandments as His requirements for us all, rather than the command to 'not sin.' What does not seem to be understood by most is what is implicit in the command to repent and obey the Gospel. In posing the following questions, what is implicit within the command should be come clear.

What are we repenting of?

Why do we need to repent anyway?

Why do we need to believe, or obey the Gospel?

The answer is clear: WE ARE SINNERS! And, we sin because we are sinners. Moreover, we know that we are sinners because God put the knowledge of His law in every one of us, as it is

written:

(For not the hearers of the law are just before God, but the doers of the law shall be justified. For when the Gentiles, which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these, having not the law, are a law unto themselves: Which shew the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and *their* thoughts the mean while accusing or else excusing one another;) (*Romans 2:13-15*)

The Scripture also reveals that we know the wrath of God is against us for our sin.

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness; Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath shewed *it* unto them. For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, *even* his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse: (*Romans 1:18-20*)

Thus, without God commanding us to not sin, He reveals that we are sinners and in need of redemption. Moreover, by commanding each and every one to repent and obey the Gospel, the Lord is implicitly stating that we are contrary to His express will and in sin, and thus condemned.

We must understand that inherent in the command to repent and believe the Gospel is a condemnation if we fail to follow this positive command of the Lord. Just as failure to obey a negative command such as "Thou shalt not steal." incurs the condemnation of God, likewise the failure to follow the positive command to repent and obey the Gospel. It is essential that we fully understand all that is required to condemn us to Hell for all eternity is a single sin, regardless of how 'minute' it may be, or what it even is.

Failure to do, is just as much sin as failure to not do!

Additionally inherent in the command to repent and believe the Gospel is the fact that if we fail to comply, we condemn ourselves and reveal that we are indeed sinners. Thus, the simple act of giving this express command reveals that, *whether anyone complies or not, they are guilty just because the command is given.* The issuance of the command carries the presumption (which is entirely true) that everyone is a sinner and guilty before God, else He would have never issued the command. If it were possible that someone throughout man's history could stand against their nature and not rebel against God, then God would have commanded that we not sin. After all, what is the point of sacrificing oneself for a creature that could be righteous, if only he would try? Why suffer to make man righteous when he could be righteous by his own merit and effort?

Therefore, God's righteousness is manifest in the structure and issuance of just such a command as repent and believe (or obey) the Gospel. Hence it is unnecessary for God to command the lost (in fact everyone) to not sin as it has been encompassed and superseded by the command to 'Repent and believe the Gospel.'

Now, there are those who will point to the Old Testament and to the Lord's commands to Israel and show where He told them to not sin, and to abide by the covenant He had with them. If we are careful to note, we find that the context of this command to not sin is strictly within the covenant God had with Israel and was not applicable generally. In other words, it applied to the outward requirements Israel was to fulfill in the covenant. If we study, we find that a majority of Israel were never saved, but when they were obedient to the covenant and honored the Lord, He blessed them. Thus, the issue is not one of sin in the sense of justification before God; rather, it is sin in the sense of failing to uphold a covenant they had with the Lord.

Thus it is plain in Scripture: It would not be reasonable to assert that God demands of everyone on the earth that we not sin. Since we are born with a nature to rebel against God, and we follow that nature and openly rebel as soon as we have cognizance of God's commands, God would be asking of us the impossible. Rather, God commands everyone to 'repent and believe the gospel,' which is an entirely attainable command for everyone.

A Final Thought

There are those who teach and believe that God has created some individuals in this world only for destruction, and that they have no opportunity for salvation. In fact, they teach that those unnamed persons can never be saved even if they wanted to – that they were chosen in eternity past to be set for destruction and nothing can or will change that. That God, in His sovereignty, decided in eternity past to deliberately set some individuals in a position in which they cannot choose salvation, while setting others to be saved, all without the individual really having a choice. In other words, some individuals will be irresistibly drawn to Christ, while others will be ever rejected, never to be drawn to Christ at all.

The following is given for you to consider concerning the nature and character of any person in a position of authority:

What does it state about the character of a person who gives a command to those under him, knowing full well that it is entirely impossible for those under him to accomplish the command – and then destroying them for failure to keep the command? Would this not be entirely cruel?

Of a certainty, it would be. It would be a monstrously cruel joke that would not be funny at all to those creatures subject to it. It certainly would be worse than muzzling the ox that is used to tread out the corn. We would think it entirely cruel of an owner to muzzle his beast of burden while it is

being used to grind the grain he eats, and thus tempt the animal every moment, but make it impossible for the animal to taste even one single grain. Rather, we find an illustration of part of the character and nature of the Lord in the command the Lord gave to the children of Israel concerning their beasts of burden:

Thou shalt not muzzle the ox when he treadeth out *the corn*.
(*Deuteronomy 25:4*)

Now, this command is tied in the New Testament to rewarding the laborer for his labor. However, the same kind of character that commands that the laborer enjoy the fruits of his labor, is the same kind of character that would *not* delight in giving an impossible command and then condemning those who cannot fulfill it. The character of the LORD God is such that He would never demand of us something we could not do. Indeed we do find in the Scripture the following statement by the LORD:

Say unto them, As I live, saith the Lord GOD, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live: turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die, O house of Israel? (*Ezekiel 33:11*)

Why then would the Lord command all men to repent and believe the Gospel, and deny any number of them the ability to fulfill that command (except for egregious cause, such as blaspheming the Holy Ghost) when the Lord cares far more for man than for an ox and is grieved when the wicked destroy themselves?

REPENT YE AND BELIEVE THE GOSPEL

In Christ,

Paul W. Davis