

## GOD COMMANDS ALL SINNERS TO REPENT AND BELIEVE

Is this the teaching of the Bible? Yes, for consider the following sampling of Scriptures:

- (1) **Acts 17:30** ~ *Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent . . . Who commands? God! Commands whom? All men everywhere! Do what? Repent!*
- (2) **Mark 1:14-15** ~ *Now after John was put in prison, Jesus came to Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel." Here we have Jesus our Lord preaching. What's His message? He commands his hearers to repent and to believe. He preached both (repentance and faith) at the same time, to the same people, in the same breath.*
- (3) **Acts 26:20** ~ *but declared first to those in Damascus and in Jerusalem, and throughout all the region of Judea, and then to the Gentiles, that they should repent, turn to God, and do works befitting repentance. This is the apostle Paul giving a summary of his preaching. What's his message? He calls his hearers to repent, to turn to God (faith) and demonstrate the reality of their conversion.*
- (4) **Luke 24:46-47** ~ *Then He said to them, "Thus it is written, and thus it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day, and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. Here the risen Christ commissions His apostles to preach the crucified and resurrected Saviour, as well as repentance. Preach to whom? To all nations!*

God commands everyone to repent and believe. Jesus preached repentance and faith to all His hearers, regardless of their spiritual state. The apostles were told to do the same, and we find Paul the apostle doing exactly that - preached repentance and faith to sinners. Note that there is no qualifying term before the word 'sinners'. It is not preach repentance and faith to *elect* sinners or *awakened* sinners or *sensible* sinners or *instructed* sinners; rather, it is just sinners!

God commands everyone to repent and believe, and that command can include *inviting them* (**Matthew 11:28-30**), *reasoning with them* (**Isaiah 1:18-20**), *pleading with them* (**2 Corinthians 5:20**) and *persuading them* (**Acts 28:23**).

**Is it an intelligent thing to do to command sinners dead in their sins to repent and believe?**

In **Mark 3:5**, Jesus commanded the man with a withered hand to stretch out his (withered) hand. That is exactly what he could not do, and that is precisely what Jesus commanded him to do! In **John 11:43**, Jesus commanded dead Lazarus to walk out from his grave. How could a dead man get up from where he was laid, and walk out of his grave? Yet that was precisely what Jesus commanded dead Lazarus to do!

Is it an intelligent thing for Jesus to do what He did in both instances? In gospel preaching, when we command spiritually dead sinners to turn from their sins and believe in Jesus, we are doing no more than what Jesus did in **Mark 3** and **John 11**! And we do it because He calls us to do it!!

**How can sinners be commanded to repent and believe when both repentance and faith are God's gift?**

First of all, note that God has a right to command because He is the Creator. Second, note that whenever God gives a command, it means we are obliged to obey. Hence, when God commands us to repent and believe, it is our duty, our responsibility, our obligation to obey. Failure to do so is sin!! I hasten to add that duty is different from ability. When God commands, it is our duty to obey, but it does not imply that we have the ability to obey. As said by a Bible teacher, "*God's commands are not designed to show us what we can do but what we ought to do.*" The fact remains that we cannot repent and believe on our own. Repentance is a gift from God (**Acts 11:18**). So also is faith (**Ephesians 2:8-9**). Unless God enables us, we can never repent and we will never believe.

Pause, and ask: *Can we show from the Bible that indeed God commands us to repent and believe?* The answer is a 'Yes'! *Can we demonstrate from Scripture that both repentance and faith are God's gift?* The answer is also a 'Yes'! What then?

Being a reformed logician is very attractive, but being a reformed theologian is what we must be. We are not called to be able to square all doctrines so that our logic be satisfied, but we are charged to be faithful to Scripture and so please God.

If the Bible calls us to preach repentance and faith to everyone, then do it in obedience to God. If the Bible tells us that repentance and faith are God's gift to His elect only, then accept it in submission to God. This we must do, no more, no less. So God help us!

**WEI En Yi**