

National Repentance

by Anton Bosch

True repentance is a personal decision that requires a change of mind and direction, and we should pray specifically for individuals to come to faith in Jesus Christ.

Scripture: 2 Chronicles 7:14, Isaiah 55:7, Matthew 3:8, Acts 26:20, Romans 11:26, Hebrews 11:13

Topics: "Personal Repentance", "Individual Salvation"

Description

Anton Bosch challenges the concept of 'national repentance' by emphasizing that repentance is an action that requires a change in behavior, not just words. He highlights that repentance is personal and cannot be done on behalf of others, including nations, as each individual must take responsibility for their own sins. Bosch clarifies that God deals with individuals, not nations, and that Jesus died for each person personally, not for specific countries. He stresses the importance of praying for individuals to come to repentance and belief in Jesus, rather than using vague prayers for nations.

Transcript

It has become customary to speak of prayers of "national repentance".

On May Day, this year - 2010, a large number of people met at the Lincoln Memorial in Washington DC to pray various prayers of repentance "on behalf of the American people". I remember a number of times, when growing up in South Africa, that the Government called national days of prayer and repentance in the hope that God would send rain at times of drought. Shortly after the fall of Apartheid many churches, groups and individuals prayed prayers of repentance on behalf of the nation for the sins of the past. Many have prayed prayers of repentance because of the holocaust under Hitler. And the list goes on.

But is this a Biblical idea?

The short answer is no - there are a bunch of problems with this notion. The first is that repentance is something that needs to be done, rather than prayed. Every day millions of prayers ascend to God in which people pray prayers of repentance. The vast majority of these are a waste of time since the prayer has no intention of changing their actions, lifestyles or habits. Repentance is about doing not talking. The word itself means a change of mind and of direction. You can be heading down the road and say a million times that you are going in the wrong direction, but until you actually make that U-turn and stop going in the wrong direction and start going in the right direction, nothing will happen. It's as simple as that.

John the Baptist said that the Pharisees who had come to see him baptize must: "Bear fruits worthy of repentance" (Matthew 3:8). Paul, speaking of the mission to the Gentiles said: "That they should repent, turn to God, and do works befitting repentance" (Acts 26:20). Isaiah said: "Let the wicked forsake his way, And the unrighteous man his thoughts; Let him return to the Lord, And He will have mercy on him; And to our God, For He will abundantly pardon" (Isaiah 55:7). So, no prayer of repentance is worth anything unless it is accompanied by actions. In spite of the many prayers of repentance prayed on behalf of the nations, all nations are becoming more sinful and thus those prayers clearly do not work.

Secondly, there is no such thing as repentance "by proxy". This means you cannot repent on behalf of other people, whether living or dead. No-one except Hitler himself can repent of the things he did - and he cannot because he is dead and it is too late for him. You can repent on behalf of your family as much as you like, but until they individually and personally repent, nothing is going to happen. We cannot repent on behalf of our family, a church, and least of all, a nation.

Sin is personal. When we sin, each who has sinned is guilty of that sin and each one has to personally repent. One could argue that Israel sinned as a nation when they refused to cross the Jordan (Numbers 14), yet the two individuals that did not agree with the majority were saved and entered the Land. So, was God dealing with them as a nation or individually? Clearly individually; since Joshua and Caleb would have had to perish with the rest of the nation if God was dealing with them as a group. When God destroyed the world in the Flood, righteous Noah and his family is saved. The same happened in Sodom. Thus, even in the Old Testament, God's dealings are on an individual basis.

Thirdly, God does not deal with nations, He only deals with individuals. Jesus did not die for America or England - He died for each of us personally. The only nation God ever had a relationship with as a nation was Israel (See the first article in this series). Yet, Jesus did not even die for Israel. All the verses that are quoted as examples of God's promises or dealings with a nation are directed at Israel and they cannot be claimed for any other country. When Israel eventually returns to God (Romans 11:26), each individual Jew will still have to make a personal decision. Israel will not be saved because of a decision of the government, but because of the cumulative effect of each Jew coming to personal repentance. We need to be clear the Jews in the end are saved, not because they are Jews, but because each of them has personally believed on the Lord Jesus Christ.

One of the favorite verses used by those who promote the idea of National Repentance is 2Chronicles 7:14: "if My people who are called by My name will humble themselves, and pray and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land". This promise is very specific - it is to "my people who are called by my name". Is South Africa, or Germany, or America, God's people? Obviously not. Which country is called by God's name? None - except Israel. So this verse has nothing to do with any nation other than Israel. The only people who can claim both those conditions are Christians. They are the people of God (Romans 9:25, 1John 3:1-3, 1Peter 2:10). And they are called by His name (Acts 11:26, 1Corinthians 12:12).

But then you cannot apply this verse to Christians since their Land does not need to be healed. The Christian's land is the New Jerusalem and that is perfect. Here we are but strangers and pilgrims. (Hebrews 11:13, 16). The often-recited verse in 2Chronicles 7:14 only applies to one nation, and that is to Israel, and even then the promise has expired since Israel rejected the offer one time too many.

Should we not pray for nations? Yes, we can pray but there is only one valid prayer and that is that people, individually, will come to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and repent. Because we are often too lazy to name individuals before the Throne of Grace, we resort to those catch-all phrases: "Lord save the Chinese", "Lord help the poor", or "Lord be with those in prison". What does that mean? I don't want to be insensitive, but it means absolutely nothing.

As Christians we can make a difference, but it begins where you are. Pray for each of your unsaved family members; pray for others you know by name - your colleagues, neighbors and others you have dealings with. First pray that the Lord will help you to show them what it means to be a real Christian. Next pray that the Lord will soften their hearts to the Gospel and bring them to repentance. Finally pray that the Lord will open an opportunity for you to share your Hope with them and that He will give you the courage and wisdom to do it right. Do this until Jesus comes. Yes, that is a lot harder than "Lord save the lost", but that is our duty; everything else is a copout.

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