

THE COMMANDS OF JESUS - WEEK 1

Repent and Believe: Matthew 4:17

We are starting a new series on the commands of Christ. For the next 10 weeks, we will look at specific commands Christ gave his followers. At Mt. Sinai, God gave his people, the Israelites, the Ten Commandments so they would know what was expected of them in their relationship with God and with each other. The Ten Commandments were to be the guidelines for their lives. Likewise, in the Gospel accounts of the life of Jesus, we find 10 key commandments from Christ. These commands also instruct us in what it means to be a Christ-follower.

Of course, the first step in becoming a Christ-follower is *becoming a Christ-follower*. We live in an age where the meanings of words are fluid, changing with the whims of culture. Unfortunately, terms such as “Christian” or “Believer”, which used to hold clearly defined meanings are less concrete today. These terms can mean any number of things. Jesus, however, was very clear in defining what it meant to be one of his followers. In Matt. 4:17, Jesus commands us to “repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” As we will see, Jesus was calling us to **repent** and **believe**. But, what does that mean?

Repent:

Our word “repent” is translated from the Greek word *metanoeo*. In the Greek, in order for one to *metanoeo* there are 3 steps. The first step is new knowledge. The repentant person has to understand that he or she is in rebellion against God. That’s why the Apostle Paul declares in Rom. 3:23, “For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” Repentance requires us to understand the danger of our chosen course. The second step is regret for the previous course and displeasure with self. It is not enough to know that you’ve sinned against God, you must also regret that sin. Paul says in 2 Cor. 2:7, “For godly grief (regret) produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret, whereas worldly grief produces death.” The final step in genuine repentance is a change of action or course. If my wife points out that I am driving us in the wrong direction, our situation is not changed by me merely stopping the car. It is only when I actually turn the car around and head in the right direction that the error is corrected.

So, when Jesus calls us to repent, he is giving us the knowledge that we have sinned against God, asking us to be grieved over our sin, and asking us to change our course. This call and response are beautifully illustrated in Luke 7:36-50.

Believe:

You may be asking, what does “for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” have to do with believing? When Jesus says, “for the kingdom of heaven is at hand,” it is more than a declaratory statement. He is announcing God’s authority to rule the hearts of his people. He is calling us to acknowledge God’s rightful kingship over our lives. In the Greek, the word “believe” means to entrust one’s spiritual well-being to God. When we truly believe—as Jesus calls us to believe—we are acknowledging God’s rightful authority over our lives and placing our confidence in him. Thus, we find in Rom. 10:9 the twofold path to becoming a true Christ-follower—repent and believe.

Questions:

1. What’s the difference between godly grief and worldly grief?
2. We live in a time where there are “cultural Christians.” What’s the difference between a cultural Christian and a true Christ-follower?
3. The first step in repentance is knowledge of the need to repent. How does someone gain that knowledge? How can we help others gain that understanding?