

Doctrinal Summary of Repentance: Preceded by Humility

In 2 Chronicles 7:14, God identifies that if Israel would humble themselves and repent, He would restore them.

“And My people, who are called by My name humble themselves and pray and seek My face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, will forgive their sin and will heal their land.”

The word “humble” is translated from the Biblical Hebrew word יִכַּנְעוּ (“yic-cahn-u”) which more literally means, “they will be acted upon in an action which begins and continues to subject themselves to the control of another.” It identifies that a person places himself under the control of another person by his own doing rather than by capture. In God’s statement, He is identifying that if the people of Israel will subject themselves to His control, then He will restore them out of the judgment He has imposed for their rebellion (cf. 2 Chron. 7:12-14). The people of Israel are to act upon themselves to subject themselves to God and continue to be controlled by Him through the Law and the prophets. If they don’t subject themselves back to His control, then His judgment and discipline upon them will continue in order to bring them to the place wherein they once more function as His people. Once under God’s control again, Israel must also “turn from their wicked ways.”

The word “turn” is translated from the Biblical Hebrew word יָשׁוּבוּ (“yah-shu-bu”) which more literally means, “they will perform the completed action to turn from one’s current direction of travel in order to return to the place of departure.” It identifies that a person stops moving in the current direction they are travelling in and reverses course in order to travel back the direction they came with the ultimate goal of returning back to the place they left. Israel is to turn around and head back to righteous works in a completed action; that is, they are to completely accomplish the action of turning from wicked ways and head back to righteous ways. In order to get back to righteous ways, they must first subject themselves to God’s control. He will make their wicked ways become righteous ways as they obey Him, hear their prayers, forgive their sin, and heal their land.

While this passage is specifically referring to what God will do for His chosen people (those belonging to the line of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob), there is a principle observed within it that humility precedes repentance and repentance precedes restoration. James identifies this principle as well in James 4:10.

“Humble yourselves in the presence of the Lord, and He will exalt you.”

The word “humble” is translated from the Koine Greek word ταπεινώθητε (“tah-pei-noh-thae-teh”) which more literally means, “you all are commanded to be acted upon to become lower in position or priority than another.” James commands his audience of believers to be acted upon by themselves to make themselves lower in their position or priority in regards to their position in front of God. The result of doing so is that God Himself will exalt them by raising them up out of their position in sin (cf. James 4:7-9). While walking in sin and out of fellowship with God, the believer has exalted himself to a higher position and priority than God. While in his arrogance and pride the believer does not subject himself to the control of God. Consequently, as he stays in arrogance and pride he will not turn from his sinfulness, changing his mind about its acceptability in his life. It is only after the believer lowers himself to a position and priority below God that he will accept what God says and change his mind to match God’s.