

Notes for Those Called Out

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Refocus! Get Ready! God is at the Door!

by Dan Trygg

“In those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the wilderness of Judea, ² and saying, ‘Repent, because the kingdom of heaven has come near!’”

Matthew 3:1,2

“...as it is written in the book of the words of the prophet Isaiah: A voice of one crying out in the wilderness: ‘Prepare the way for the Lord; make His paths straight! ⁵ Every valley will be filled, and every mountain and hill will be made low; the crooked will become straight, the rough ways smooth, ⁶ and everyone will see the salvation of God.’”

Luke 3:4-6

“And going-out they preached in order that people might repent...”

Mark 6:12

“An extraordinary *mistranslation*”, “*unsuitable*”, “*totally inadequate*”, “*a theological and linguistic tragedy*”, “*the worst translation in the New Testament*” were the comments of a number of well-known and respected Greek scholars in the Wikipedia article on “Metanoia (theology)”. **What word are they talking about?** What term in our English translations has been so distorted that we miss the entire message it was meant to convey? **It is a word used *effectively* by John the Baptist, Jesus, the 12 apostles He trained, and the preachers of the early Christian movement. *In those early days, it was readily understood, but by the mid-second century it had become polluted with other notions.*** The sharpness of the term was dulled, and it became more and more misconstrued. What are we talking about? The Greek word, *metanoia*, which has been translated as “repent” in most of our English versions. That’s right, **our English word, “repent” is the tragic, unsuitable, totally inadequate, mistranslation we are talking about.** In the second century, the ideas of “feeling sorrow for sin” and “doing penance” (some act of voluntary self-punishment inflicted upon the person as a sign of contrition, or even as an attempt to *pay for sin*) began to be associated with this term, and *we have never been able to clear our traditions of these foreign nuances.* Part of the problem is that **there is no clearly equivalent word in the English language that adequately expresses the true sense of the underlying Greek word.**

What does *metanoia* mean? Most Greek lexicons will emphasize that it means a “change of mind”. The point of the scholars in the Wiki article was that **it was a *mind-shift, not an emotional response.*** In the original language, there was not necessarily any emotional response, at all. The emphasis was upon *seeing things differently.* In a sense, **even the definition, “a change of *mind*”, can be misleading.** It is *not* a change in one’s *thinking process*, or the *incorporation of new information* into one’s belief system. It is not about obtaining new *facts*, or coming to new *conclusions.* You see, **NT Greek has two different words for “mind”.** One word, *phrēn*, is the **capacity for rational thought.** It describes the thinking process, including gaining information, employing reason, and making conclusions. It is about your intellectual belief system. The other word, *nous*, is the **ability to perceive reality.** It reflects more of the *deeper, intuitive grasp of the world around you.* It is not strictly rational, or emotional, although both of these other capacities of inner consciousness can influence it. At other times, it can rightly discern reality, even when your mind cannot explain why, or your emotions are telling you something else. ***Nous* is your paradigm of reality,** your world view. The prefix, *meta*, refers to *radical change.* ***Metanoia*, then, means a radical change in how you see, grasp or perceive reality.**

When NT preaching was calling people to “change-your-mind”, it was not a call to employ your “feeler” (emotions) or your “thinker” (intellect). It was a call to use your “perceiver”. It was a challenge to *wake up, refocus* and *reevaluate.* **Often, there is an unknown or overlooked fact that is introduced by the speaker that is a “game changer”.** When you add this new piece of information, or this new perspective, ***everything* takes on a *new significance.*** John the Baptist, Jesus, and the apostles called people to “Radically-change-your-perception!” Why? “*Because the kingdom of God is at hand* (‘here’, or ‘on the verge of showing up’)!” In Acts 2:38 and 3:19, Peter called his listeners to “Radically-change-your-perception!” Why? *Because God had designated Jesus as the Messiah* prophesied about, who fulfilled God’s predetermined plan to suffer and die for sin, and to be raised from the dead in power. In Acts 17:30, Paul declared that God was calling all people everywhere to “radically-change-their-perception”. Why? *Because He has appointed a day when He will judge the world by a Man, Jesus,* whom He has designated, offering proof to all people by raising Him from the dead. In each scenario, there is a piece of information supplied that *changed everything*, if it were to be accepted. **The preacher presented the paradigm buster! His or her preaching was to bring about that paradigm shift.** He wasn’t just teaching *facts* to rationally convince the mind, or using rhetorical methods to stir *emotions.* **The preacher was purposefully trying to shake people out of their preconceived perceptions of the world, by introducing a truth that would *re-order everything.***

It is important to look closely at who John the Baptist, Jesus and the apostles were preaching to. We tend to think of “repentance” as being primarily for the lost. When we look at the scriptures, however, it becomes clear that this is too narrow an understanding. John the Baptist, for example, first appeared at the fords of the Jordan, in the wilderness of Judea. **Who was John preaching to? He was preaching to the crowds of religious pilgrims travelling from Galilee to go up to Jerusalem to the feasts.** These were observant Jews, people who believed enough in God to leave their homes to travel 80 miles on foot to obey the requirements of the Law. **Who was Jesus preaching to? Again, to the Jewish people in the towns and countryside of Galilee and Judea. The early apostolic preaching tours were also directed to these same people. Most of them were orthodox in doctrine.** They knew their scriptures better than most Christians of today know their Bibles. It is not until Acts 11:18, when Peter defends his actions by recounting how and why he preached to Cornelius and his friends (Acts 10), the first Gentile converts, that the listeners conclude, “Well, then, God has granted to the Gentiles the mind-shift that leads to life.” **In fact, there is only a handful of times in the entire NT where this idea of “mind-shift” or “repentance” is actually used of leading total unbelievers to faith in God** (Acts 17:30; 20:21; 26:20; II Tim. 2:25; Heb. 6:1,6; II Pet. 3:9). **The vast majority of the occurrences of the forms of this word (50x) are descriptive of calling people of faith to a clearer, deeper grasp of spiritual reality. Why is this so important? Because we need to recognize that we may need such a mind-shift from above** – “Those whom I love, I reprove and I discipline; be zealous therefore and radically-change-your-perception” (Rev. 3:19). The alternative is to stay stuck in our complacency and spiritual blindness. In Revelation 2:20-22, Jesus confronts a woman from Thyatira who is a false prophetess, leading others astray into error and immorality. The Lord indicates that He had given her time to radically-change-her-perception, but she did not wish to mentally-shift-away-from justifying her immoral practices. She and her followers were not willing to change. Unless they did so, He would bring sickness and great affliction upon them. This personal revelation from the Lord is meant to be the “game changer”, the “paradigm buster” that would wake her up and cause her to mentally shift gears!

In Romans 12:2, Paul writes that **we are transformed by the renewal of our minds (nous)**, toward us to test-out-to-discover the will of God. While the word, *metanoia*, is not used here, the idea is very much evident. Hebrews 5:14 indicates that, while spiritual babies can only handle spiritual milk, **those who are mature are those who have exercised and trained their faculties-of-perception to discern good from evil.** Again, the word, *metanoia*, is not used by this writer here, but it is clear that spiritually mature people have trained themselves to be more spiritually perceptive. **We all need spiritual paradigm-shifts in order to advance in our walk with the Lord. Both of these passages emphasize how important it is to put our faith into action.** We must invest in expanding our awareness of reality by studying the scriptures, and putting them into practice in our lives. *Those who will take risks of obedience* will put themselves out on the growth edge, and *are more likely to expose their erroneous misconceptions, as well as to discover new understanding.* Those who are passive remain stunted and immature. Many are like the woman of Revelation 2, they are simply *unwilling* to change.

One of the key themes that comes to the surface repeatedly in the passages about metanoia is the challenge to “bring forth fruit worthy of a-radical-shift-in-perception” (Matt. 3:8-10; Lk. 3:7-11; Acts 26:20). From this, we learn that *the purpose of a dramatic-mind-shift is to produce a change in direction in one’s life.* These paradigm-shifts are not just “talking points” or “exciting experiences” or “emotional highs”. They are serious business, and are to bring about distinct and dramatic change. **If change does not happen, then the so-called “change-in-perception” is only an intellectual or emotional experience, not a true, deep inner transformation** of one’s inner compass, or view of life. **Those who had a genuine change of perception often ask the question, “What shall we do?”** The shift in their perception *demands* a corresponding shift in how they live. We see also from the biblical examples that **the preachers gave practical, down-to-earth instructions regarding what to do next.** John’s baptism was a way of demonstrating the mental-shift into an outward act of consecration to God. “If the kingdom of God has come, then I am dedicating myself afresh to serve this King.” **It translated down to practical matters** such as sharing food and clothing with people in need, **or choosing a different attitude, or putting aside former abuses of power. The point is: Nothing is different if nothing is different. There is no change if there is no change.** God is calling us to a radical-shift-of-mind to bring about a radical-shift-of-direction. This means *nothing*, if there is no *action*. As James pointed out, **unless we are doers of the word, we deceive ourselves** (Jas. 1:22).

Finally, **what radical-change-of-perspective is God wanting you to come to terms with?** Do you need to see that Christ is *in* you, and *you* are in *Him*? Do you need a fresh and deep revelation of His love for people? Do you need to really grasp how world events are racing toward the conclusion of this age? Do you need a rebuke from the Lord to wake *you* up? **What about the message of John the Baptist, Jesus and the apostles: God’s kingdom has come near! It is here, right now! Make the mental adjustment, come to grips with it, and bear fruit in keeping with that new perception of reality.**