

## How do You See Things?

Wearing a suit with necktie and a hat to worship was almost bred into us who were children of the 1950s. And the tie had to be straight! All of us boys wore them. There was not one Sunday for the first 19 years I attended worship without a tie. Not once! To do so would have made me the oddball, yea eight ball, among my peers, not to mention the reaction of my parents by such a faux pas. That is how I would have been seen. That's how my parents and society generally saw things.

About 30 years ago grandpa wore a three piece suit to worship. On one Sunday, I asked a brother, if he did not know me and saw me in the street how would he see me. He said a lawyer or an executive of a company. So I put on my Greek fisherman's cap and asked, "Now what do I do for a living?" Immediately, I was a chauffeur. That cap changed how I would be viewed by society. How did he come to that conclusion? The only chauffeur, I have ever seen was in the movies. Note how dramatically the movies (media) condition how we perceive people and situations. So that's how we see things.

The most influential conditioning begins with our parents beginning at birth and throughout our childhood. Perhaps the strongest influence is that of the family's religion. Until the subtle influence of Secular Humanism (each person is his own god & makes his own religion) was foisted upon our society via the education system (and all media) for the last 50 years, breaking away from the family tradition was unthinkable. It's still that way in Buddhist, Hindu and Muslim societies, even warranting death for those who dare to stray. That's how they see things.

Of all the hindrances to becoming a Christian, Jesus cut right to the chase – the most difficult obstacle – "For I have come to 'set a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law'; and 'a man's enemies will be those of his own household.' He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me" (Matthew 10:35-38). To become a Christian and live faithfully would be apostasy to many, if not most families, throughout the world. The family is usually the most significant influence on how we see things.

Even after becoming a Christian, it took about three years to purge my Lutheran upbringing of the doctrine of inherited sin – we are born sinners! It was all based on a misunderstanding of Psalm 51:5 expressing David's remorse over committing adultery with Bathsheba (" Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me"–KJV). Three years to overcome a family influence!

Some 15 years ago, grandpa's mother asked about the eternal state of the babies which are aborted. Grandpa knew immediately what prompted that concern – inherited sin! Still, showing her from God's word people choose to sin rather than inheriting Adam's guilt, did not cause her to change her thinking. Seventy years of the family's influence and traditional religion. Because that's simply the way she sees it.

All of us from childhood are taught to see our condition, even our relationship to God, in a

certain way. No wonder, God's instruction about lifelong faithfulness to Him was (is) rooted in child rearing – "Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one! You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength. And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates" (Deuteronomy 6:4-9; cf Ephesians 6:4). That's how God wants us to see things.

Are you certain, you are right in your faith. Do you have the correct understanding of the Bible? Of how become a Christian? Of how to live faithfully – to glorify Jesus in your life? Most of us go through life, believing and doing because that is the way we were taught and have always done it. We do so because that's the way we see things.

How can you know you are right in what you believe and do? God has not left us in a lurch. He gave us the Bible to explain our condition and how to accept His loving salvation. Mostly folks view the scriptures from their rearing. That's how they see things. Do you see the scriptures correctly? But what if you were wrong?

As grandpa mused in this column recently about assuming the other fellow believes the way I do, i.e., because that's the way we all see things, then each of us Christians needs to consider how we see the Bible. For example, recently, grandpa asked several Christians, "What does it mean to repent?" How do you see that? Unanimously they said repent from sin. So I asked "What is sin?" lying, drinking alcohol, murder, rape and stealing were among the various answers. Take a moment to ponder what Jesus meant by His command to repent in this scene? "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" (Mark 1:14-15). What? I thought the "five" hallowed steps, hear, believe, repent, confess and be baptized were the proper order to become a Christian.

The Greek word translated repent simply means to turn. In Jesus day, it was used generally by the people for change. The ancient's meaning to repent included, to change plans, reconsider, change intentions and return to better feelings. The prophet Isaiah (46:8) used the word as "bring it to mind again" (ASV), "recall it to mind" (most versions). Young's Literal Translation renders it "turn back." Josephus, the Jewish priest and military general, used the word as a change of heart. The essence of the word is to change resulting from a reflection of something past. So what did Jesus mean when He commanded the people to repent and believe the gospel (Mk 1:15)?

In order to answer that we must consider the entire context. To whom was He speaking? Jews! He was preaching about the good news of the kingdom (v14). What did He mean by that? How did the Jews understand "kingdom?" The Jews were anticipating the rise of a king to free them of Roman rule. This is evident by the disciples question about Jesus' second coming just moments before He ascended into heaven – "Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" (Acts 1:6). After three years of walking with Jesus teach, perform miracles and seeing Him after His resurrection, they still had not grasped the meaning of His kingdom. They still anticipated a king of Davidic lineage. Why not expect such king? That was God's promise to

David – “...And your house and your kingdom shall be established forever before you. Your throne shall be established forever” (2 Samuel 7:12-17). Thus the Jews national expectation, and it was deeply ingrained into their thinking. This is an implication in Peter’s sermon on Pentecost. He focuses on David as the prophet who said Jesus would be the king on the throne in heaven (Acts 2:25-36). Again, what did Peter mean when he told the people to repent and be baptized for the remission of their sins?

As Jesus began His ministry preaching, “repent and believe the gospel,” likewise Peter made several points regarding the Jews repentance: (1) They must give up (turn from) 1500 years of following the Mosaic Covenant to enter the New Covenant. (2) They must give up the belief an earthly king would arise to restore the kingdom of Israel as in David’s day. (3) They must accept Jesus as their Savior and King reigning over His spiritual kingdom from His throne in heaven. Hours before Jesus was crucified, He told governor Pilate, “My kingdom is not of this world” (John 18:36). So under divine inspiration Peter, was clarifying what the kingdom is so the Jews would overcome 1500 years of how they saw things. A repentance indeed!

Repentance actually begins by changing from what or whom a person currently trusts, to trusting in Jesus – faith. Then the people and Saul asked “Lord what would you have me to do?” (Acts 2:37; 9:6;22:10). Grandpa says, it is important to consider if how you see things is right, especially when it comes to your eternity. Are you still relying on what you were taught in your childhood or, what God teaches in His word? How do you see things?