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MATTHEW 21:29

THE SCRIPTURE CONCERNED

He answered and said, I will not: but afterward HE REPENTED, and went. (Matthew 21:29 AV)

THE MEANING PEOPLE DRAW FROM THIS TRANSLATION

People think the word "repent" means something like "to be sorry" or "to have remorse".

But that is not correct!

THE MISTRANSLATION

In the Greek text of the New Testament there are TWO different words, both of which the translators have indiscriminately translated into English as "repent". But these two words have completely different meanings. Only one of those two words refers to a REAL GODLY REPENTANCE, while the other word means nothing more than A SHALLOW WORLDLY "REPENTANCE".

The Greek word "metanoeo" literally means "TO CHANGE THE MIND", i.e. "TO CHANGE THE WAY WE THINK". This is the word that refers to a real godly repentance, one that involves a total change in our outlook and in our way of thinking. This word describes what it is that God requires us to do if we want to establish a relationship with Him. God's instruction that we are to repent is addressed to OUR MINDS, and not to our actions or conduct. It is THE MIND that God requires to repent.

The Greek word "metamellomai", on the other hand, means "to care" or "to take care" or "to care about". The feeling of this word "metamellomai" is today expressed by the common expression "I am sorry". But being sorry is not what God means by the word "repent". Being sorry does not require a change in the way we think. Compared to what "metanoeo" means, the word "metamellomai" is VERY SHALLOW AND SUPERFICIAL! This word refers to a change in conduct but without changing the mind to a different way of thinking.

This word "metamellomai" is used six times in the New Testament, and in the KJV it is always incorrectly translated as "repent". Matthew 21:29 is the first of those six occurrences.

The consequence of this mistranslation of the word "metamellomai" is that people are confused about what God REALLY wants from us, when He instructs us to repent. This mistranslation has LOWERED the standards, reducing repentance to the mere level of "being sorry".

THE SOURCE OF THIS WRONG TRANSLATION

When Jerome translated the Greek New Testament into Latin for his Vulgate translation, he used the same Latin word for translating the Greek words "metanoeo" and "metamellomai". He rendered both these Greek words into Latin as "paenitentia", thus blurring any distinction between these two Greek words.

The translators of the early English translations had all "grown up on" the Latin Vulgate version, and they simply perpetuated this error, by also translating both these Greek words with only one English word, as if they mean the same thing.

So this error in translation is led back to Jerome and the Catholic Church.

THE CORRECT TRANSLATION

> He answered and said, I will not: but afterward HE WAS SORRY, and went. (Matthew 21:29 AV)

THE MEANING OF THIS CORRECT TRANSLATION

This Scripture is only talking about a shallow remorse, a type of worldly sorrow; but without any of the real attributes that God expects when He instructs us "to repent". This son being sorry for his earlier attitude had nothing to do with any "repentance". Most unrepentant people will experience this type of remorse at some time or other, and they will still be unrepentant in the eyes of God.

IN SUMMARY

This subject is explained in far greater detail in my article "EXACTLY WHAT IS REAL REPENTANCE?", available in the main article directory of this website.

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