

GOD'S GRANT OF REPENTANCE

There is a passage in the book of Acts that reads this way, "So then, even to Gentiles **God has granted repentance** that leads to life." (Acts 11:18 NIV) What does it mean that "God has granted repentance that leads to life"?

Hello I'm Larry Murdock. I preach for the Gandy church of Christ. Good morning and welcome to this program.

In the first century it was a surprise to Jewish Christians that God would grant repentance to Gentiles. What this means is that God was giving Gentiles an opportunity to hear the Gospel of Christ and repent of their sins.

The Jewish custom was never to associate or to eat with Gentiles. Gentiles were people who were not Jews. However, God intended that what Jesus Christ **did** on the cross should be preached in every nation and to every person. So God chose Jesus' apostle Peter to be the first apostle to preach the gospel of Christ to Gentiles.

God also chose the Gentile family who would be the first to hear the Gospel of Christ. The head of this family was named Cornelius. After Peter preached the Gospel to Cornelius and his Gentile household. Peter concluded by saying, "Surely no one can stand in the way of their being baptized with water. They have received the Holy Spirit just as we have.' So he ordered that they be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they asked Peter to stay with them for a few days." (Acts 10:47-48 NIV)

You can read the entire circumstances surrounding the Gentiles' conversion in Acts, chapter 10.

Well, Peter was in trouble with his fellow Jewish Christians in Jerusalem when they learned about the Gentiles. The Jewish people wanted an explanation. So Peter came to Jerusalem and testified to what had transpired. In his conclusion Peter said this, "So if God gave them the same gift he gave us who believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I to think that I could stand in God's way?" When the [Jewish Christians] heard this, they had no further objections and praised God, saying, "So then, even to Gentiles **God has granted repentance** that leads to life." (Acts 11:17-18 NIV)

The Greek word translated "grant" in this passage can be translated in a wide range of meanings. That Greek word can only be accurately translated when the context is considered. However, in most cases this Greek word is translated by the English word "give." Something "given" is something "granted." If it is a gift that is given, then it is free. However, gifts can be refused! That's right!

Jesus' apostle Paul wrote that God "wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth. For there is one God and one mediator between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus, who **gave** himself as a ransom for all people." (1Timothy 2:4-6 NIV) Notice the word "gave". Jesus "gave himself as a ransom for all people." Of course, Paul is talking about Jesus' crucifixion. No one earned that ransom. Jesus gave it. It was freely given to the world. The ransom is for everyone. Furthermore, no one can duplicate that gift, for there is not one like it in all the world. (Acts 4:12)

But will everyone receive the benefit of Jesus' gift? No, not everyone **believes** that Jesus' death is a ransom. And even believers may not be willing to **DO** what is necessary to **receive** the benefits of that ransom. It is true, the ransom cannot be earned; however, the ransom can be rejected. That's right!

A person can reject Jesus' gift by NOT believing in it. That person dismisses the story about that ransom as a myth. In his mind, the story is wishful thinking. It is like a fairy tale! The unbeliever **does not accept** the gift because he does not believe in the gift.

Furthermore, a person can also reject Jesus' gift even after believing in it! That's right! There are people who believe the story about the ransom but they do NOT want to change their lives **as is required by the gift**. You see, there are conditions of acceptance which the Lord has made known whereby the gift can be accepted. Not only is one of the conditions Faith, but a second condition is **repentance** from sin. Once the conditions of Faith and Repentance are met a person can then be baptized into the forgiveness of his sins. (Acts 2:38) But some people refuse the gift because they wish to continue their sinful behavior.

But there is a third way by which someone may finally refuse the ransom that Jesus offers. Even after **believing** in the ransom and **repenting** of sins and **reenacting** the good news by baptism, a person can eventually reject Christ's ransom! Jesus' apostle Paul mentions such a person. Paul once made the

statement that "all who live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution." (2 Timothy 3:12) Some Christians may not wish to suffer persecution and so they ultimately backslide and refuse the ransom. This may have been Demas' problem. Demas was a man who had accepted Jesus' ransom, and he was serving the apostle Paul while Paul was imprisoned in the city of Rome and nearing his execution. Paul wrote that "Demas has forsaken me, having loved this present world..." (2 Timothy 4:10 MKJV) On an earlier occasion the apostle Paul wrote a letter to the churches of Christ in Galatia. There were some Christians there who thought they could avoid persecution if they accepted Jewish circumcision. Paul wrote, "Those who want to impress people by means of the flesh are trying to compel you to be circumcised. The only reason they do this is to avoid being persecuted for the cross of Christ." (Galatians 6:12 NIV) Paul told these Christians "Mark my words! I, Paul, tell you that if you let yourselves be circumcised, Christ will be of no value to you at all." (Galatians 5:2 NIV) If those Christians were circumcised Christ's ransom on their behalf would be forfeited! That is a powerful message! That is a strong consequence! Paul expressed that consequence this way, "You who are trying to be justified by the law have been alienated from Christ; you have fallen away from grace." (Galatians 5:4 NIV) They had fallen from the gift of God's grace, the ransom God had given for their souls. Yes, to avoid persecution and because of love for this present world even people who become Christians may reject the ransom Christ gave to the world.

But not only has God granted repentance to the world, which means that God is giving you time and opportunity to repent, our heavenly Father has also given people many good gifts. Jesus' half-brother James wrote that all of God's gifts were aimed at producing children for God. "Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows. He chose to give us birth through the word of truth that we might be a kind of first-fruits of all he created." (James 1:17-18 NIV) Our heavenly Father has given to the world the "word of truth." This is the "seed" that begets a child of God. That's right!

The apostle Peter put it this way, "Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth for a sincere brotherly love, love one another earnestly from a pure heart, since you have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God; for "All flesh is like grass and all its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers, and the flower

falls, but the word of the Lord remains forever." And this word is the good news that was preached to you." (1Peter 1:22-25 ESV) Our heavenly Father is able to conceive children in every generation because of the living and abiding seed of God, which is His Word. I will die, but the Word of God I preach will live on. My flesh is as grass. The grass withers, the flower falls, but the Word of God I bring to you today is God's seed that will remain in the world for every generation until the end. God is granting you repentance! You are hearing His Word!

The apostle Peter also shows us what to think concerning the years in which Jesus Christ is delaying His return. Peter says to "Count the patience of our Lord as salvation." (2Peter 3:15 ESV) In fact Peter assures us of something that we should not overlook. That one fact is "that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance." (2Peter 3:8-9 ESV) Friends, by delaying Jesus' coming God is granting you time to Repent!

Not only is our heavenly Father giving His creation a grant of time to repent, He also gives us good reasons to repent. The apostle Paul was talking with Jewish Christians when he wrote, "Therefore you have no excuse, O man, every one of you who judges. For in passing judgment on another you condemn yourself, because you, the judge, practice the very same things. We know that the judgment of God rightly falls on those who practice such things. Do you suppose, O man—you who judge those who practice such things and yet do them yourself—that you will escape the judgment of God? Or do you presume on the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance? But because of your hard and impenitent heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath when God's righteous judgment will be revealed. He will render to each one according to his works: to those who by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, he will give eternal life; but for those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, there will be wrath and fury." (Rom 2:1-8 ESV)

Paul says it is presumption on our part when we take hold of God's kindness, His forbearance, and His patience, but we do not come to repentance. How tragic to take advantage of God's goodness but never change our behavior! Examine your

own life, my friend, and you will find God's goodness in your life. Count your many blessings, name them one by one, and it will surprise you what the Lord has done. "There will be tribulation and distress for every human being who does evil, the Jew first and also the Greek, but glory and honor and peace for everyone who does good, the Jew first and also the Greek. For God shows no partiality."
(Romans 2:9-11 ESV)

Visit a church of Christ near you and get started living for God while He is granting you time and reasons to repent.