

Marxsen holds that, unlike both John the Baptist and the author of the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus calls his hearers, first, to faith, and only then to repentance. But this contention cannot be easily made to square with the wording in Mark's summary formulation in 1:15, even if one allows for the indicative statement preceding the imperative, "Repent, and believe the gospel!" If Marxsen were right, one would expect Mark to have said instead, "Believe the gospel, and repent!"

One solution to the apparent problem is to distinguish between two senses or levels of repentance. One could then say that the repentance that Jesus calls for, and calls for first, is the "turning around" that consists in giving up all attempts to secure one's existence so as to believe the gospel, that one's existence has always already been secured by God's unconditional love. Then one could go on and say that, given this "turning around" and faith in the gospel, one repents in the further sense of no longer doing the things or leaving the things undone that one does or leaves undone insofar as one is caught up in the attempt to secure one's existence by what one thinks, says, or does. Since it is repentance in this further sense that John the Baptist and the author of Matthew, in their different ways, both call for, not second, but first, they are indeed different from Jesus in the way that Marxsen argues they are,

Of course, it is just such a distinction between different senses or levels of repentance (or in Mr. Wesley's terms, "inward" and "outward" holiness respectively) that Bultmann makes in interpreting what Paul means and does not mean in Romans 7.

10 September 1999