

View

Did You “Repent In The Aisle”?

Many years ago while teaching a Bible class I asked a young lady the meaning of “repent” Her immediate answer was, “Oh, that's what people do in the aisle.” Then, seeing my puzzled expression, she continued: “You believe in the seat, repent in the aisle, confess at the front, and are baptized in the baptistry.”

Very neat, very neat indeed! And I suspect that there are a surprising number of adults who get little beyond this childish conception of the “plan of salvation.” We “repent in the aisle!” Abject sorrow for sin, that humbles — brings us trembling before our God — shakes our complacency and puts steel in our determination to sin no more, is virtually unknown.

If tears are shed this is a rarity and may often be traced to nervous embarrassment or a prolonged emotional appeal on the part of the preacher. Some speakers seem to fear any emotional appeal, while others seek to stimulate a synthetic down-pour by tactics of mass psychology. What has become of genuine, soul-searching conviction that changes a whole life? Well, the necessary ingredients are still with us, and but await recognition and proper use.

Sin is rampant, and if repentance is rare, it is not for lack of reason. But sin must be made apparent to the sinner. Platitudes and generalities soothe the flesh-- they do not strike the heart. When men “come to themselves,” are “pierced to the heart,” then they may repent. (Lu.15:17 Acts 2:37-38) Paul feared lest a penitent man be. “swallowed up with overmuch sorrow.” (2 Cor. 2:7) Does this fit our man “in the aisle”?

“Ye sorrowed to repentance: for ye were made sorry after a godly manner” — a portion of 2 Cor. 7:8-11. Read these verses carefully, for they distinguish between “sorry I got caught” and the humbling, self-abasing experience of one who realizes his unworthiness in the presence of God. Such a feeling fills with care, and our very being revolts against our former manner of life — the sin, of which we are now so ashamed.

“Unclean! Unclean!” we cry; and turn with joyous gratefulness to the Savior’s offer of forgiveness.

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Sunday Morning Assembly
9:30 AM

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7:30 PM

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Paul taught “repentance toward God” as well as “faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ.” (Acts 20:21) All sin is against God (Lk. 15:18), i.e., the creature wrongs the Creator when sin is committed; and since God alone can forgive, it is fitting that the creature present a contrite spirit to the Throne. The old-time mourner's bench was based on Calvinistic errors too space-consuming to be discussed here; but I sometimes wonder if we may not have “run past Jerusalem” in our casual attitude toward repentance.

Jesus said, “Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.” (Lk.13:3) Repent or perish — it is an ultimatum of Almighty God, an awesome thing. But the sin-burdened soul who truly repents sees more: “Repent, and be baptized-- for the remission of sins” (Acts 2:38). Christ lifts the burden of those who obey Him, and mourning turns to thanksgiving.

ROBERT F. TURNER, PLAIN TALK, DECEMBER, 1964

Repentance: The Forgotten Command

I admit that I don't care for the song that goes, “Did you repent, fully repent...?” But I have to admit that it asks a good question and an important one. We all want to be forgiven, but few repent, as brother Turner's article implies.

Repentance means to change one's mind, but that's a rather weak way of describing the process. Most of us change our minds as often as we change our clothes. The change of mind commanded by God in, for example, Acts 2:38, requires a radical conversion of the mind; a change from one mind-set to a completely different mind-set (see Col. 3:1ff), a metamorphosis, of sorts (see Romans 12:1-2, where Paul says we are “transformed”).

I worry that in the effort to get people baptized — and perhaps pad our numbers — we may forget to emphasize repentance. We may think the person we're talking to is a “good

guy” and, subconsciously, think he doesn't really have much to repent of.

That's symptomatic of forgetting that the standard for judging whether a person is “good” or not is not relative, but based upon the goodness of God. If I understand how good God is, I'll never describe myself as being “good.” Does that make sense? If no one is really “good,” except God, then none of us have anything to brag about and we all are in need of repentance.

Repentance requires confession (“acknowledgement”) of sin. If you have not been baptized, then repentance must be followed by baptism “for remission of sins” (Acts 2:38). If you are a Christian, then true confession brings complete forgiveness (I John 1:9).

There are times when “confession” is not enough, even for a Christian. There are times when he must *repent*, which may include restitution or some other “fruit worthy of repentance” (Mt. 3:8). Confession is our daily acknowledgement that we fall short of the glory of God (Rom. 3:23) as well as confessing specific sins. Repentance is the more appropriate word to use when we need to make a u-turn; when we've been making some wrong-headed decisions and are heading in the wrong direction.

The bottom line is that if we fail to repent when necessary, we will perish (Lk. 13:3). It is a prerequisite to forgiveness and God will not extend forgiveness without it. That makes it pretty important that we take a hard look at ourselves to make certain that our walk matches our talk.

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