

# Repentance

Dee Bowman

His name was Mr. Jackson. His wife was a faithful child of God, a saint for many years. Mr. Jackson was not antagonistic toward truth, or her devotion to it; rather, he himself partook of that truth, albeit from some distance away. He was at every service. He would even make an occasional remark in Bible class, although it was obvious that he considered himself an “outsider.” It was said that he would defend the truth around town and when he sat on the benches and whittled with his cronies on the town square. He was obviously convinced that the religious division he saw could be eradicated by a return to New Testament Christianity, the very thing being recommended by the church where he was attending. He was a good moral person, but for whatever reason, had never obeyed the gospel.

One day after the preacher had preached an especially hard sermon on the things necessary for salvation, one which was pointedly applicable to Mr. Jackson, I said to my Dad, “Dad, how do you suppose ole Mr. Jackson can sit in his seat after a lesson like that? Why doesn’t he obey the gospel? He certainly knows enough and it’s obvious that he has no disagreement with what is being taught.”

My Dad just smiled one of those smiles that has wisdom written all over it. “Son,” he said, “Ole Mr. Jackson just never has repented.”

Repentance is almost a forgotten part of what it takes to be saved. Most folks pay little attention to it. And yet it plays such a vital role in our salvation—both in the initial procuring of it, and afterward, the continual faithfulness it calls for.

The Scriptures emphasize that importance. In his famous message to the Hellenistic philosophers, in Acts 17, Paul said, “The times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commands all men everywhere to repent” (Acts 17:30). In Acts 2, Peter answered those who had been “pricked in their hearts” by his preaching, and who asked “men and brethren, what shall we do?” His answer? “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins...” Even a cursory look at the Scriptures will show the need for repentance.

What is repentance? Is it a change of life? Is it being sorry for your sins? Just what is it?

Repentance is not a change of one’s life, though it certainly has something to do with that change. In Acts 3:19, Peter said, “Repent and turn again that your sins may be blotted out.” The turning is not the repentance, but what leads to it. Nor is repentance being sorry for your sins. In II Corinthians 7:10, Paul says, “For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation...”

From these passages we can clearly see that repentance is something that takes place between godly sorrow and the reformation of life. It is dependent upon one, it results in the other.

When the word of God is preached and honest people are convicted by it, it produces sorrow of a godly sort, the kind of sorrow which results from the realization that you have been fighting against God—fighting against Him who loved you and has provided for your salvation. The knowledge of such produces godly sorrow, the kind that will often ask, “what should I do?”

Repentance is the change of a man’s will with regard to sin. Prompted by godly sorrow, a person decides in his heart that he will no longer serve sin, but will henceforth devote his life to the service of God. This mental action is what repentance is all about. It is the resolve to change (just as the prodigal son did when he, “came to himself” in Luke 15:17). In the parable of the rebellious son (Matthew 21:28-29), “A certain man had two sons; and he came to the first and said, Son, go work today in my vineyard. He answered and said, I will not; but afterward, he repented and went.” Repentance was reached when he changed his mind about the course he was on and decided to do right.

Repentance results in a reformed life. The son “repented,” then “went.” True repentance calls for some re-arranging, some re-evaluating, some alterations—first in the mind, then in the life. After the prodigal son “came to himself,” he went home. The decision to go home was necessary before his return to his father.

We need to retain and maintain sensitive hearts, hearts that are responsive to the calls of the word of God. We need to decide daily what is necessary to please God. And if after thinking it over, if we find, sorrowfully, that we’re going the wrong way, we need to repent, then straighten things out.

By the way, ole Mr. Jackson repented one day.