
Words of Truth

Repentance Needs To Be Seen

By: Brian A. Yeager

On more occasions than I can account for I have been part of discussions wherein it is clear that people confuse confessing sin with repenting of sin. It is absolutely necessary that a person who has sinned must confess those sins to God to have forgiveness (Psalms 32:5 and I John 1:9). At times, sins will also have to be confessed to brethren (James 5:16). A person saying, "I have sinned" does not mean that person has stopped sinning. That statement means that they have confessed that they have sinned.

Let's say, for the sake of illustration, that a brother or sister in Christ decides to travel for vacation. This person KNOWS that he or she needs to worship God in spirit and in truth (John 4:23-24) on the first day of the week (Acts 20:7). This brother or sister in Christ knows it is wrong to have fellowship with the erring (Psalms 26:4-5, Psalms 101:3, Psalms 119:115, Proverbs 9:6, Proverbs 29:27, Jeremiah 15:17, Matthew 12:46-50, Romans 16:17-18, II Corinthians 6:14-18, Ephesians 5:11, II Thessalonians 3:6, I Timothy 5:22, I Timothy 6:3-5, II John 1:9-11, and Revelation 2:14-16). Therefore, this brother or sister in Christ KNOWS they must find faithful saints to worship with.

This brother or sister in Christ enjoyed the trip. It was a nice, restful vacation. When he or she returns home you hear of the journey, sights, foods they've tried, etc. This individual seems physically refreshed and recharged. A faithful Christian asks this individual this question: "Seeing as how few faithful there are, how did you find faithful Christians to worship with on your trip?" Then, this individual drops his or her head and confesses that they worshipped where the truth was not taught and practiced. This person confesses that the sermon was watered down, the songs and prayers were wrong, and that the focus of the congregation was not right. This person expresses remorse and tells of how future trips will have to be different. This person even begins to bash the errors they've seen.

This individual we are discussing, at this point, has confessed that he or she did something wrong. However, repentance has not taken place. Nothing has changed yet. The fact is, it may be some time before anyone, including the individual that sinned, knows if he or she has changed at all. This person is home now. No temptation to worship in error is in place. You or this individual will not know if change has really occurred until the opportunity arises again for them to prove what they will do given the same temptation. Repentance is NOT words. Repentance is action.

The Action Of Turning Away From Sin

Notice, through the following Scriptures, how repentance is shown through right actions: *"If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and **turn from their wicked ways**; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin,*

and will heal their land... **Depart from evil, and do good; and dwell for evermore...** He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso **confesseth and forsaketh** them shall have mercy... Therefore say unto the house of Israel, Thus saith the Lord God; **Repent, and turn yourselves from your idols; and turn away your faces from all your abominations...** Again, when I say unto the wicked, Thou shalt surely die; if he **turn from his sin, and do that which is lawful and right;** If the wicked restore the pledge, give again that he had robbed, walk in the statutes of life, without committing iniquity; he shall surely live, he shall not die. None of his sins that he hath committed shall be mentioned unto him: he hath done that which is lawful and right; he shall surely live... Bring forth therefore **fruits meet for repentance...** To open their eyes, and to turn them **from darkness to light,** and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me. Whereupon, O king Agrippa, I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision: But shewed first unto them of Damascus, and at Jerusalem, and throughout all the coasts of Judaea, and then to the Gentiles, that they should **repent and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance...** Nevertheless the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are his. And, Let every one that nameth the name of Christ **depart from iniquity...** **Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works;** or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent" (II Chronicles 7:14, Psalms 37:27, Proverbs 28:13, Ezekiel 14:6, Ezekiel 33:14-16, Matthew 3:8, Acts 26:18-20, II Timothy 2:19, and Revelation 2:5).

What about the above Scriptures are not clear? Even a dishonest person could not argue with the clarity of God in showing us that repentance means changing from sin to righteousness with evidence of such displayed in good works. Godly sorrow is good in that being sorry leads to repentance, but sorrow does not equal repentance (II Corinthians 7:8-10). Even the world gets that. The world has statements such as: "Are you sorry for what you did or are you sorry you got caught doing it?" A judge in a criminal court still sentences a criminal to a punishment even though the criminal may acknowledge the crime and state remorse for it. Can we, who are to be like God (Ephesians 5:1), not see spiritual truths better than the world? Even people of the world know that you cannot see if a person changed or not if they are not given the same opportunity to do something wrong again.

What Is Done In Time Of Temptation?

The illustration we used is that a brother or sister in Christ travels, disregards the need to worship faithfully, and then confesses the fault when called on what that person did. Now, how will you really know if this person changed? The truth is, without a time of temptation (Luke 8:13), you'll not really know. What will this person do on his or her next vacation? What they say is not what matters. We've proven that biblically. It may be a year or years later before you know if this person has really changed.

Conclusion

We must be mindful of the fact that words are nearly meaningless. Proof of change exists in action rather than statements. As with all things, until something or someone is really proven, you don't know what or who is right (Matthew 7:15-20 and I Thessalonians 5:21). If you've sinned, prove you've changed. If you're examining others, look for evidence of change!