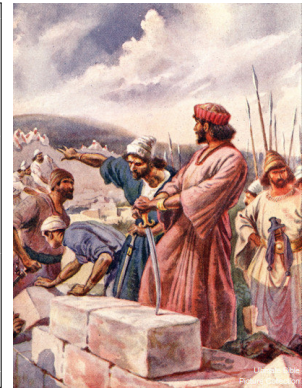


The Sword and The Trowel

They which builded on the wall, and they that bare burdens, with those that laded, every one with one of his hands wrought in the work, and with the other hand held a weapon. For the builders, every one had his sword girded by his side, and so builded (Nehemiah 4:17-18)

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Unless You Repent

We are reminded of the mission of Jesus when we read the words of Mark 2:17, *“Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance.”* There we have it—Jesus came for the spiritual health of mankind. He did not come as a social reformer or as one who would make life easier. He came as a Savior and as that Savior He would call upon sinners to repent. Isn't it interesting that the very first message from Jesus as He started His three years of preaching was one of repentance (Matt. 4:17)?

We also see repentance in the three part answer Jesus gave to an accusation from the Pharisees. They thought it a terrible matter for Jesus to mingle with sinners (Lk. 15:2). Each part of His answer dealt with repentance and the joy that corresponds. Repentance has to do with sinners. It would be hard to call upon sinners to repent and yet to have no dealings with them whatsoever. This is not to say that Jesus condoned or ignored their sin. If, as the Pharisees claimed, these ones were indeed sinners, then Jesus would call on them to repent. That is not condoning or ignoring sin. When Jesus gave His answer on this occasion, He spoke of a woman who lost a coin (Lk. 15:8-10). She originally had ten coins that most commentators say would have been strung together and worn as a bracelet or headdress. These things break and the coins fall to the floor. Each coin was, in the original language, a drachma. This was equivalent to the Roman denarius. As such it amounted to a day's wages. Thus, she had ten day's wages in these coins. The loss of one was a serious matter. This is not like dropping a dime on the floor! The lighting of the lamp shows the

earnestness of the search. Her sweeping is not for cleanliness. The floor was dirt and her sweeping would be useful to uncover the coin. The words about being careful in the search are understated. The carefulness of the search would be paramount. We see how much the finding of this coin meant as she called her friends and neighbors. Jesus likens such an event to repentance when He says, *“Likewise, I say to you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents”* (Lk. 15:10). The one (coin) that was lost is found (comes to repentance). Once again the aim is to show how sinners need to repent and this time how heaven rejoices when they do.

I need to point out that repentance is not something that is optional. If all have sinned, as explained in Romans 3:23, then likewise all need to repent. Jesus well stated this need when He said, *“I tell you, no; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish”* (Lk. 13:3). I do not know what words it would take to make this need any more urgent than these words. The apostles, on Pentecost, made it clear that repentance, like baptism, was required in order to obtain the forgiveness of sins, *“Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins...”* (Acts 2:38). Friends and brethren, do not be deceived, you cannot be saved without repentance!

It is good to point out what Jesus had to say about repentance. I am sure a number of us understand what He and his apostles taught. I think a greater problem is that while we understand what is said, we do not understand what constitutes repentance. More of us may fail to understand this on a fundamental level than what we care to admit. As a matter of fact, this might happen and we do not even realize it.

I am more convinced now than ever that a great many brethren do not know what repentance is. This becomes evident when a Christian responds to the invitation. We are familiar with the procedure. The song is being sung and some brother or sister comes down to front of the building. Words are whispered to the preacher. At the conclusion of the song it is mentioned that _____ has responded to the invitation and has confessed the sin of _____ and would like the prayers of the church. All then are lead in a prayer in which there is supplication and rejoicing. Afterward, someone will say how good it was that _____ repented today.

What is usually referred to as repentance in such cases is not repentance, but a confessing of sins. We are prone to assume that the same individual has repented of sins. However, they may **not** have repented of sins, but are **merely** reporting sins. The very sins which are confessed may freely be continued in, perhaps after they are confessed that very day!

Folks, plainly speaking, repentance is not whispering a few words to the preacher! The word most commonly translated as “repent” in the New Testament means “to change one's mind or purpose, always in the NT, involving a change for the better” (Vine, p. 962). Mr. Thayer adds this to the definition, “A change of mind, as it appears to one who repents, of a purpose he has formed or of something he has done” (p. 405). It is significant that in both definitions there is the notion of change. This is a change of **mind and action**. A case of a change of mind is illustrated by the teaching of Jesus in Matthew 21:28-32. The son who repented is the one who “...answered and said, ‘I will not,’ but afterward he regretted it and went” (v. 29). The change of action is illustrated

by looking at what Jesus said in Matthew 12:41, "The men of Nineveh will rise up in the judgment with this generation and condemn it, because they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and indeed a greater than Jonah is here." What did Nineveh do that constituted repentance? Jonah 3:10 tells us that they "turned from their evil way." These two instances show us the change of mind and change of actions that constitute repentance.

Neither are we equating being sorry about being involved in sin is the same things as repenting of sin. There is a difference between the two. 2 Corinthians 7:10 tells us that "...godly sorrow produces repentance leading to salvation..." If sorrow equals repentance, then this verse becomes impossible to explain. It would have repentance producing repentance. This impossibility is only solved when we understand that sorrow *does not equal* repentance. So while sorrow is commendable and necessary, it is one of several steps in the process that leads to repentance. Be careful not to equate sorrow with repentance. One might sorrow over sin and never repent, but think they are OK. **That** is a dangerous condition for it leaves sin without repentance.

While confessing is a good thing and a scriptural thing (1 Jn. 1:9), we must recognize that it is neither repentance nor a substitute for it. It is entirely possible that one may confess (or report) their sins while not changing their mind about them and not ceasing to commit them! I am saying this based on many years of practical experience. When a man "comes forward" every three weeks for a period of three years and confesses to adultery, do you think he has repented? I saw a forty year old bulletin that announced a member had recently confessed of being unfaithful. This same individual has, on numerous occasions over the last forty years, made the same confession. Many think there was repentance. Really? You inquire if there was ever a time, in the last forty years, that this individual has ever been faithful. You are told that there has not been any sign of faithfulness. Well, there has been a lot of reporting, but where is the repentance?

John the Baptist told the Pharisees they needed to bring forth fruit worthy of repentance (Matt. 3:8). In other

words, repentance is going to be manifested in some way. I realize that we cannot tell if the mind has changed, but we can usually tell if the life has changed. When someone repeatedly "comes forward" and it is the same sin over and over and over, one has to wonder where is the repentance? Remember Jesus said, "*I tell you, no; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish*" (Lk. 13:3).

You do not have to be Solomon to figure this out. Neither are you being judgmental when you reach the conclusion that some have reported sin, but not repented of it. Like Peter's speech gave him away (Matt. 26:73), the lack of a change of life gives many away. There has been no repentance when no change is manifested. No matter how much we might wishfully call confessing repentance they are not the same. If someone has merely reported their sin, but not repented, there is still a need to call for repentance. Those who think that some of this article has been too harsh need to remember one thing. If there has been no repentance, the very worse thing that anyone can do is to pretend that there has been. This will only exacerbate the situation by leaving the impression that all one has to do to repent is to announce that they have sinned. Such an announcement might be a good and necessary thing to do, but it will not be able to stand alone with the corresponding repentance. Jesus said, "*I tell you, no; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish*" (Lk. 13:3).

All of this is written out of love and concern for souls. I do not want anyone to fail to find the forgiveness of sins. Neither do I want anyone to be led into thinking they have repented when they have not. I think we need to understand what repentance is and do what God says is necessary in order to repent. I take the words of Jesus very seriously, "*I tell you, no; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish*" (Lk. 13:3). I hope everyone does.

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I Know What Is Right

I am not bragging in this article. I may be wrong on any given subject. I am certainly not infallible. However, I

know when I see wrong behavior and by knowing what is wrong, I am supposed to know what is right.

That brethren sometimes differ on things is well-known. That some brethren sometimes leave a group of brethren because of differences of opinions or procedure is again a well-known occurrence. Sometimes such action may be the best for both parties. It may be that those who leave will find acceptance in a new surrounding and those who are left may likewise find peace. I rejoice when things can be worked out in such a way that all are satisfied.

However, sometimes brethren who leave a group take with them a certain malevolent intent to destroy those left behind. I know of such a case occurring near to where we were at in West Virginia. A church near to us split over personalities (I never did hear of any scriptural violations). One man spent his time visiting Gospel Meetings up and down the Mid-Ohio River Valley casting accusations against the group he had left. Let me be clear—what this brother did was wrong. Even if his allegations were true, his traveling about and making the accusations was wrong. I know what is right. What is right is this—settle the matter among those who are involved (Matt. 18:15-18). It is wrong to attempt to settle it by appealing to the brotherhood gossip mill! Church problems are seldom, if ever, solved by a "show of hands" among those who are unconnected to the issue. ***It is right to get everyone connected with the split together and let them settle it while others who are uninvolved keep their noses out.*** The brother who went about allegedly "telling it like it is" clearly revealed himself as one who did not care to settle anything—all he accomplished was the furtherance of the fuss! What a demonstration of carnality. Yes, I know what is right and this brother's actions I have described here are never right.

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