

Spiritual Transformation Requires Repentance

By Tom Hill

Bible Text: 2 Chronicles 7:14

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A dispute exists among believers today on the idea of revival. On the one hand, a cry for revival has risen from many Christians. They see the Church of Jesus Christ in great need of an outpouring of the Holy Spirit on individual believers as well as the Church as a whole.

Others are indifferent or even resistant to this call for revival. Things are not so bad, they think. Those who call for revival are often labeled “alarmists,” “hypocrites,” or “super-spiritual in need of spiritual changes themselves.

However, the fundamental requirement for revival is a recognition of sin in one’s heart and an aggressive pursuit of personal holiness. Those who sincerely desire revival do exhibit these characteristics.

Sadly, the believers who resist the call to revival in the Church conclude that they do not need nor desire a spiritual transformation in their lives. They consider their spiritual condition satisfactory and sufficient. Only minor adjustments are needed, nothing radical.

When we come to the Scriptures, however, we find that the Bible identifies certain qualities of those who satisfy God's requirements and enjoy His blessings. So, if these are missing in a person’s life or in the life of the Church, a spiritual transformation is needed.

I could point to many of these references, but I call your attention to a well known verse on revival, 2 Chronicles 7.14.

It describes the promise of God to Solomon’s prayer. Solomon sought assurance from God that He would turn the condition of His people if they turned to sin and then sought Him again. It outlines God’s requirements before He will turn once again to His people in blessing. Specifically, I point to the last of God's demands in this verse, “...turn from their wicked ways...” This obligation specifies repentance, a lost practice in the Church today.

From this passage, I want to examine with you some particular absolute truths about repentance. We must believe and obey them and apply them in our lives before we will once again experience spiritual reformation, revival, and transformation. I pray that the Holy Spirit will use them in your life to evaluate your true condition before God. I pray

that the Holy Spirit will apply them in your life today that you might begin to enjoy God's glorious presence in your life.

Fallacies of repentance

As one might expect, numerous false ideas about repentance abound. First, many find it totally unnecessary. You might expect such a view in nonChristians, but it also expresses the view of many believers. According to these persons, it is old fashioned and outdated. Perhaps it had a place in the Old Testament, but certainly not in our enlightened age. But such a view results from self-satisfaction with current conditions, rebellion against God's commands, or ignorance.

It is no wonder that many in the Church of Jesus Christ emphasize salvation without repentance. In addition, this fallacy advocates forgiveness without repentance. In essence, it proposes that spiritual transformation can occur without repentance. But, it is a false view of repentance.

Second, some people mistake sorrow for sin for repentance. If one experiences sadness, grief, or even terror over sin(s), (s)he believes that repentance has taken place. But such sorrow can often times result from the effects of sin. In addition, it can arise from a fear of impending judgment against that sin.

In truth, sorrow is part of repentance, but it does not necessarily bring about a change in behavior by itself. It is only part of repentance. No one will question the great sorrow that Judas experienced after he had betrayed Jesus. Yet, Judas did not repent of his grave sin. Sorrow fools many into thinking that they have repented. Unfortunately, they have mistaken a part for the whole.

Third, some substitute a resolution against sin(s) for repentance. In this instance, some vow to remove certain practices from their behavior and think they have repented. Again, a part has taken the place of the whole. Like sorrow for sin, a resolution against sin(s) can result from an extremity of circumstances. One fears future evil or judgment and vows to "never do it again."

Again, this fallacy substitutes a part for the whole. Repentance does include the desire to leave behind sinful practices. But it includes much more. The Bible details the number of vows that King Saul made to stop his pursuit and desire to murder David. Yet, the Scriptures do not describe the King as repentant for his sinful behavior.

Finally, many believe that separation from certain sin(s) qualifies as repentance. This has led to the "Don't" lists that some have. It can proceed from convenience, good judgment, or designs for personal benefit. Often such plans only substitute one set of sins for others. It sometimes comes from a fear of harm, a desire for health, or an aspiration for money.

This delusion also substitutes a part for the whole. Repentance does demand a separation from sin. But it is the end result of repentance.

For example, King Ahab, one of the vilest of Israel's kings, had a moment of partial repentance for his gross sin, but it did not bring full repentance. He died in his sin.

These false concepts of repentance affect only part of the man. True repentance changes the whole man: mind, heart, soul, spirit, and behavior.

Facts of repentance

Against these false views of repentance stands the sure, certain truth of Scripture: God requires repentance for spiritual transformation to occur. Without it, nothing happens. The Bible boldly unites repentance with salvation and sanctification.

For example, our Lord Himself spoke of its requirement as part of salvation. At the outset of His earthly ministry, Jesus declared its demand. We find His words recorded in Mark 1:15:

"The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel."

Note the Lord's inclusion and demand for repentance. He made it an indispensable part of salvation. I have heard many sermons, and sadly preached some myself before I came to the truth, that make no mention of repentance. Salvation is presented as a salve for the hurts of mankind and a solution to life's problems. In essence, the Church too often presents a salvation without repentance.

Jesus made no such offer. Salvation requires a complete change of lifestyle. He made no allowances for one of any other stripe or color. Such decisions do not fulfill the demands of Christ. Salvation is not primarily a cure-all for human hurts.

It is true that it brings joyous effects into the lives of those who repent and believe. But mankind needs salvation through Jesus Christ because of our horrible sin. He provides the only way to peace with God. His requirement is repentance and faith in Jesus Christ, His provision for sinners like you and me.

In addition, sanctification, Christian growth and maturity in holiness and righteousness, requires repentance, too. In fact, like salvation, sanctification cannot take place without it. I can refer to no better reference than the text for this article, 2 Chronicles 7:14:

"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."

In this promise from God to Solomon, repentance is stated two times. First, the phrase "...shall humble themselves..." describes one who comes to God in repentance for sin.

Further, the verse demands one to "...turn from their wicked ways..." before God will hear and answer.

In the writings of the Holy Spirit through Paul, one cannot ignore the call to repentance. Every letter calls for a change in behavior from sin unto holiness and righteousness. Time and time again, the Apostle lays down the challenge of repentance. It is the inescapable truth of Scripture: God demands repentance of His people as part of the ongoing spiritual transformation and reformation of a believer from salvation unto sanctification.

In order to clarify this truth further, I will take the remaining portion of this article to describe repentance. In this fashion, the Holy Spirit can evaluate your life with you to help you determine your conformity to this grand Biblical truth.

Form of repentance

Repentance begins with a comprehension of sin. In this first step, one becomes aware of sin. The Holy Spirit gives a knowledge of sin and the awareness of sinful behavior. This knowledge leads one down the path of true repentance. For example, it was not until the prodigal son came to himself and realized his condition that he could begin the road to reformation (Luke 15.17).

Second, the knowledge of sin produces sorrow for that sin. This sorrow comes not because of being caught or because of the effects of the sin. The sorrow that leads to repentance is a mourning for offending a holy God. It produces a broken heart. No greater example of this aspect of repentance can be found than in the life of David. The great Psalm 51 records the realization of his sin with Bathsheba and against Uriah, her husband. It details the Godly sorrow that he felt for his sin against God. David sums it up in Psalms 51:17:

"The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise."

Godly sorrow does work repentance (2 Corinthians 7.10).

Third, repentance requires confession of sin. In many ways, it seems that confession means nothing more than mere admission of commission of sin. Too often people admit to errors, mistakes, and misunderstandings. But they come short of true confession of sin. True confession of sin means to call it what God calls it. It recognizes its offense against a holy God and its deserved judgment. It makes no excuses nor exceptions. It was at this point that the prodigal son made his stirring declaration in Luke 15.18:

"I have sinned against heaven, and before thee."

At this point, many search for a forgiveness without confession and repentance. But the promise of forgiveness and cleansing comes after true confession of sin(s) (1 John 1.9).

Fourth, a thorough confession of sin(s) brings one to feel shame for the sin(s) confessed. A complete realization of one's sin and the viewing of it as God sees it brings shame. This shame includes guilt, humiliation, and embarrassment. Again, the prodigal son illustrates this truth clearly. After the realization of his sin and its confession, he calls himself unworthy of being a son. He thought that he had lost that right because of his offensive behavior (Luke 15.21). True repentance includes shame for sin.

Finally, shame for sin brings a hatred for the sin(s) that leads one to turn from it. It brings a change of heart, attitude, and desires. It results in a change of behavior. In fact, this change illustrates the literal meaning of our text from 2 Chronicles 7.14, "...turn from their wicked ways..." To turn means to cease from, to quit, and to turn back. Further, it describes one who leaves off an evil way.

Thus we have viewed the completeness of repentance. I pray that the Holy Spirit has opened your eyes to see these Biblical truths. They give us a full account of what God demands of us.

They outline for us the duty demanded of us by God. God intends for them to mold our judgment to the truth. They are not only instructions to believe but commands to obey. They will bring rest to the conscience and comfort for doubt.

Where has the Holy Spirit identified your failure to apply these truths in your life? To reject them diminishes the truth of God's demands and rejects the work of the Spirit in our lives. It leads to a lack of personal holiness and hinders growth in righteousness.

What conclusions about your conduct has He revealed to you today? Has He found you obedient or disobedient? Innocent or guilty?

Your sin has grieved the Holy Spirit and brings disapproval and reproof from God. As a believer in Jesus Christ, you can find relief from your sin by full and complete repentance. You will find Jesus a complete Advocate for you before the Father.

Perhaps the Holy Spirit has revealed to you that these truths have no personal application in your life. You are lost, ruined, and deserving of God's eternal judgment.

You recognize your sinful, helpless condition, unable to save yourself or to in any way accomplish your salvation. You realize your need of a Savior.

Today, God has revealed to you His provision in Jesus Christ for sinners. He died to pay the penalty of sin for sinners like you and me. You now know that He is your only hope of salvation.

I remind you of the command of Jesus in Mark 1.15:

"Repent and believe the gospel."

Further, I remind you of His promise in John 6:37:

"All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out."

I pray that the Holy Spirit will apply these truths in your life today and bring you to saving faith in Jesus Christ.

I pray that the Holy Spirit will apply these truths in your life today and begin a spiritual transformation in you that will revolutionize your life.

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