

The Old Hickory

Bulletin

Old Hickory Church of Christ

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BEAR FRUIT IN KEEPING WITH REPENTANCE!

When the Pharisees and Sadducees went to the Jordan, where John the Baptist was preaching, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand," and baptizing many "as they confessed their sins," John specifically said to them, "Therefore bear fruit in keeping with repentance" (Matt. 3:1-8). ["Bring forth therefore fruit worthy of repentance:" - ASV] What is the meaning of John's statement?

What is repentance? First, what is repentance? W.E. Vine defined the original Greek word: "*afterthought, change of mind, repentance ... and is used of 'repentance' from sin or evil; ... 'to perceive afterwards' ... hence signifies 'to change one's mind or purpose,' always, in the NT, involving a change for the better, an amendment, and always, except in Luke 17:3,4, of 'repentance' from sin.*" (*An Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*, Old Tappan: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1966, Vol. III, pp. 279-281). "After thought" suggests the idea of thinking about some deed after you have done it. In a case of sin, it would be a retrospection of that sin, and also a subsequent feeling of remorse or sorrow for having committed the wrong action. But we would be incomplete in our understanding if we concluded that repentance is simply godly sorrow for sin.

Repentance is the result of godly sorrow. Sorrow for sin does not exactly describe repentance. We know this from the Apostle Paul's letter to Corinthian Christians: "I now rejoice, not that you were made sorrowful, but that

you were made sorrowful to *the point of* repentance; for you were made sorrowful according to *the will of* God, so that you might not suffer loss in anything through us. For the sorrow that is according to *the will of* God produces a repentance without regret, *leading to* salvation, ..." (2 Cor. 7:9-10a). Intense sorrow was developed in the hearts of the Corinthians, and Paul was touched by their distress. However, Paul was glad for them when he saw that *their godly sorrow produced* repentance. That godly sorrow involved putting an end to wrongful conduct and replacing it with righteous conduct. J.H. Thayer commented on the term "repentance" thusly: "*the change of mind of those who have begun to abhor their errors and misdeeds, and have determined to enter upon a better course of life, so that it embraces both a recognition of sin and sorrow for it and hearty amendment, the tokens and effects of which are good deeds*" (*Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, Edinburgh: T.&T. Clark, 1958, p. 406). This concept is superbly illustrated in the parable of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-32).

Is repentance then, a reformation of life? Every person who comes to remorse over his past conduct and genuinely repents reforms his life. But before we end our search for understanding, let us consider a return to the context which prompted our original question. John showed us that reformation of life is the *fruit* of repentance. The fruit which John commanded the Pharisees and Sadducees to bring forth was not solely the change of mind, nor was it solely remorse and grief over bad behavior. The fruit describes the actions of their lives which genuinely and indisputably demonstrate who and what they were. John represented men as fruit trees and their actions as the fruit that is brought forth. Luke indicates in his record of this event that the multitudes understood his illustration and asked for specific examples of the fruit when they asked, "Then what shall we do?" (Luke 3:10). To see his explicit answer, read Luke 3:11-14. These were actions that would proceed from a changed heart. This is the proof that John demanded from the Pharisees and Sadducees before he would baptize them.

Bring fruit worthy of repentance. J.H. Thayer defines the term "worthy" as originally meaning "*weighing, having weight; ... (weighing as much as) another thing, of like value, worth as much.*" He then defines the term as it is used in our context: "*befitting, congruous, corresponding ... to a thing.*" (Thayer, p. 52). One who gives himself to preaching the gospel is "worthy of his support" (Matt. 10:10; cf. 1 Tim. 5:17-18); that support is "*of like value, worth as much,*" and "*befitting*" to that labor. One who commits a capital crime of murder is

“worthy” of death (Acts 23:29; 25:11). Please think carefully here: If there are no actions that correspond or match up to the gravity or weight of the unrighteous behavior, there is no fruit worthy of repentance. Hence, there is no repentance.

What is this fruit? If you have sinned against another person, go directly to that person in recognition of the sin, remorse for having done it. In the presence of God we are ashamed of thought, word and behavior that is loathsome, repulsive and unrepresentative of our holy God. The shame we feel results from our awareness that God knows what we did and we cannot be proud of it, but only humble; there is no attempt at self-justification. The pride that keeps one from genuine repentance will keep him from the salvation of his soul. Seek that person’s forgiveness. Seek forgiveness from God. God is “patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance.” (2 Pet. 3:9b). Such behavior as this is representative of a person who has repented.

We can learn from an example. Jesus said that the men of Nineveh “repented at the preaching of Jonah” (Matt. 12:41). We would do well to consider what God saw in them that satisfied His call to repentance, and as a result, prevented their destruction: “When God saw their deeds, that they turned from their wicked way, then God relented concerning the calamity which He had declared He would bring upon them. And He did not do *it*.” (Jonah 3:10). Their **deeds** showed their repentance. Questions about their repentance were not raised; it was their full intention to stop doing evil and it was shown by their actions. We also need to learn how to act when our repentance is genuine! Can it be said that we truly repented of sins committed against others because we offered a prayer in our secret prayer closets where we hid? Will “incognito repentance” work? Does genuine repentance go unnoticed? Maybe the “sackcloth and ashes” of Nineveh would help us understand. Paul was not disobedient to his heavenly instructions, declaring to men “that they should repent and turn to God, performing deeds appropriate to repentance.” (Acts 26:20). When you repent, there are “deeds appropriate to repentance.” There should be no question about it.

A word of caution is appropriate. Born of “secret repentance” are many illusions about repentance that prove false in the face of God’s Word. Stubborn human will and ungodly pride spoil our attempt to repent. Certainly, our

inability to see into the hearts of others will provoke us to brotherly love in these situations. There is also awareness that external appearances may indeed be hypocritical. So please do not misunderstand my purpose; I am not calling for demonstrations of repentance for the sake of demonstration. Many think that a generic confession at a church service without ever making things right in a personal way with the victims of their sin will meet God's requirement: was a transgression ever committed? Clearly John the Baptist's directive and also the preaching of Jesus and His Apostles kill that concept. There are a number of passages in the Old Testament that describe the principle of "making restitution" for wrong. (Ex. 22). Note also what Jesus said to Zaccheus when he offered restitution in Luke 19:8-9, "Today salvation has come to this house." What would the great prophets, preachers and teachers of the Bible enjoin upon men as evidence of repentance? A murderer could never restore life to his victim, but he could, in *some capacity*, help support a widow and/or children of his victim. If you stole money or an automobile from someone, could you genuinely repent of those sins while you continued to spend that money and drive that car?

Repent or perish! Jesus commanded, "I tell you, no, but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish." (Luke 13:3). With such serious consequences attached to a failure to repent, we dare not fail. We must know what the Lord meant by the command! Can one really repent of any sin that in his heart he denies committing, or continues to benefit from? Is one allowed to enjoy the proceeds of sinful behavior with immunity? Certainly the possibility of release or forgiveness of debt by the victim exists (Matt. 18:27), but the sinning offender does not make that determination. We walk on dangerous ground when we reason that because I cannot repair all of my sins that it is acceptable to God to make no attempt to repair *any* of them! Repentance stands between godly sorrow for sin and a changed life where that sin is forsaken and a righteous life is pursued. I must subdue my own stubborn will and submit to the will of God. This is the heart of "repentance toward God." (Acts 20:21).

May our repentance perfectly match God's requirement! Many elements go into the meaning of repentance, don't they? Without the full accompaniment of all the components that make repentance complete we will fail in our efforts to do *exactly* what God commands us to do. "Therefore having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is now declaring to men that all *people* everywhere should repent, because He has fixed

a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead." (Acts 17:30-31). Friend, do you need to repent?

-GFS

SUNDAY'S LESSONS: Sunday morning: "*Do You See God?*" (text: John 14:1-11); Sunday evening: bi-monthly singing.