

THE IMPORTANCE OF REPENTANCE

One reason that so many professing Christians struggle in their spiritual walk is because they had an **abnormal spiritual birth**. The root of many of their problems is that they never had a good start, which includes a complete turning in repentance from their sins. We could draw an analogy from the movement of a baby inside its mother's womb. Normally, the baby will **turn** so that its head is down between the 30 and 34th week of the mother's pregnancy. It is then in a good position for coming out. If the head has not turned by the 35th week, that is very concerning, as it would be a breach birth, with the bottom coming out first. I grew up on a dairy farm and had to help deliver calves a few times, but sometimes we had to call the vet when the head of the calf was not turned around properly.

As Christians, we should be good spiritual mid-wives, as we guide people through the process of being born again. Repentance is a gift of God through the Holy Spirit, so when we are sharing Christ with someone, we should be led of the Spirit and not rush ahead in the flesh. There must be a **turning of the mind** in repentance and a **willingness to change**.

When I was in my early 30's I was involved with street and jail ministry for a couple of years in Florida. We went to the streets, jails, bars, parking lots, a flea market and a shopping mall to share Christ and pass out tracts. One night I prayed with David M. to receive Christ at a bar in Sarasota. About six months later I was at the same bar and once again saw David still living in his old lifestyle. This was a wake up call for me. I realized that just getting someone to say a prayer does not mean that they are a Christian, for I had made a mistake that often occurs. **I had rushed the birth process in my eagerness to get a decision and had also neglected to follow up on David.**

Cut The Umbilical Cord

When a baby is born, it enters into a new world of light. The baby has its umbilical cord cut, which severs all ties to its former world of darkness. Can you see the parallel with the spiritual birth process? **Repentance is to leave a dark world of sin and cut the umbilical cord to the old life.** Those especially, who have been involved with the occult, dark spiritual forces and sexual perversion may need deliverance from demonic spirits. If they are not rooted out, they will hinder one from becoming fully alive in their walk with Christ. Former soul ties and ungodly relationships must cut off as well.

People often use Romans 10:9-10 when they get someone to become a Christian.

*That if you confess with your mouth **Jesus is Lord**, and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved. Everyone who trusts in Him will never be put to shame.*

This passage shows us that **the Lordship of Jesus is crucial to becoming a Christian**. Many have been taught to only receive Jesus as their Savior. The book of Acts reveals to us what the early church emphasized. The people repented to God, believed Jesus is Lord, were baptized in water and then received the Holy Spirit. These four experiences were meant to occur close to

each other whereas I was immersed in water and received the fullness of the Holy Spirit many years after my initial conversion. In the book of action (Acts) we see how many times (x) things were mentioned: Jesus as Savior 2x, Jesus as LORD 92x, Holy Spirit 52x, the Word and Scripture 66x, and Prayer 33x (mostly corporate prayer). If someone confesses Jesus is Lord, it is important to share with them another scripture which is foundational in the process of the new birth.

*....God's solid foundation stands firm, sealed with this inscription:
the Lord knows those who are His. Everyone who confesses the
name of the Lord must turn away from wickedness.
- 2 Timothy 2:19 NIV*

The way we learn what pleases and displeases God is from the reading the whole Bible - Romans 7:7, Acts 20:27. (Someone once said that 'whole Bible makes a whole Christian). We will be useful to our master Jesus Christ when we are set apart from unholy things - 2 Timothy 2: 20-22. Did you know that there are **two times more verses on repentance than on faith in the New Testament?** John the Baptist and Billy Graham were similar in their ministries as they did not focus on miracles and healing but often preached on the importance of repentance. There are several lists of sins in the New Testament that we should all read occasionally in order to remind us of things that we will keep us from entry into the kingdom of God if they are a regular practice in our life for which we are unrepentant (which we covered in a previous lesson).

Lessons From Farming

We are spiritual farmers and can learn from teaching of Jesus about the parable of the sower. There are different types of soils. The most time consuming process of getting a crop is the cultivation of the soil (eg. praying, caring, sharing testimony) which must be prepared to receive the seed. The farmer plows the hard ground, then disks and drags it until it is softened and loose. John the Baptist was a forerunner much like the prophet Jeremiah. Much of their work was to let God use them to break up the hard soil of people's hearts.

*Is not my word like a fire, declares the Lord, and like a hammer
that **breaks** a rock in pieces? - Jeremiah 23:29 NIV*

*...I have put words in your mouth, see today I appoint you over nations
and kingdoms to **uproot** and **tear down**, to **destroy** and **overthrow**, to
build and to plant. - Jeremiah 1:9-10*

*Sow for yourselves righteousness, reap the fruit of unfailing love, and
break up your unplowed ground, for it is time to seek the Lord, until he comes
and showers righteousness upon you. - Hosea 10:12*

Throughout the Bible, we see many people of God who wept over their sins and those of their nation: David in Psalms 51, Daniel in chapter 9, Nehemiah in chapter 1, Paul over the city of Ephesus - Acts 20:19-21. Ezra also humbled himself.

While Ezra was praying and confessing, weeping and throwing himself down before the house of God, a large crowd of Israelites - men, women and children gathered around him. They too wept bitterly. - Ezra 10:1

Around 760 B.C. - Jonah was a reluctant preacher of repentance to the very wicked city of Nineveh. God has a particular message for every city. For Nineveh it was a hard one:

Forty more days and Nineveh will be destroyed.

The whole city repented! (some prophecies are 'conditional' depending on the response of those who hear the message). They gave up their evil ways and violence. Jonah was mad, but God was glad. When God saw that the people were willing to turn away from their sin, he turned away his judgment, but eventually the people of Nineveh turned away from God. In 612 B.C. the Babylonians came in and totally destroyed the city.

God wants to pour out his refreshing rain of the Holy Spirit. However, God is waiting to see some showers coming from us....tears of sorrow over our sins and those of our nation.

1978 I received a beautiful hard cover edition of the classic book; Revivals of Religion by Charles Finney. It has a whole chapter on how to promote revival which covers sins of omission and sins of commission that hinder revival. Here are a few: neglect of the Bible and prayer, lack of love for the lost and also ingratitude.

A revival always includes conviction of sin on the part of the church. Back slidden professors cannot wake up and begin right away in the service of God without deep searchings of the heart. The fountains of sin need to be broken up. - Charles Finney

James was a pastor of the church at Jerusalem. He was the apostle known as 'camel knees' because he was praying so much on his knees they they became very calloused. He tells us to '**grieve, mourn and wail and to humble ourselves before the Lord**' - James 4:9-10. God wants to see our hearts broken before him in true sorrow over sin.

Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death. - 2 Corinthians 7:10

PRAYER: Holy Father God, we humble ourselves under your mighty hand and ask you to show us where we need to repent and we ask you to soften our hearts and make us to be more sensitive to sin and also to the leading of the Holy Spirit.

The broad way may seem to be the better road than the narrow path of Jesus, but it leads to destruction and death.

The way of Jesus is a 'new and living way' that leads to life eternal. -Hebrews 10:20