

TOWARDS REPENTANCE

2 Corinthians 7:9-10

9) Now I rejoice, not that ye were made sorry, but that ye sorrowed to repentance: for ye were made sorry after a godly manner, that ye might receive damage by us in nothing.

10) For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of: but the sorrow of the world worketh death.

In Genesis four, Cain was offered a refuge of mercy from God's immediate judgment contingent upon his response to the edict handed down by Jehovah. What we walk away with in this scriptural setting is the emphasis God places upon becoming thoroughly clean from our transgressions. Much like Esau later would experience, Cain never found that "place" called repentance. God was judiciously clear; nothing short of full repentance would be acceptable. Cain's subsequent actions would ultimately mark him as rejected by God. Consequently, Cain's spiritual status with God theoretically went from unacceptable to rejected, not because of his initial sin but rather his refusal to become thoroughly clean.

Genesis 4:7

7) If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted? and if thou doest not well, sin lieth at the door. And unto thee *shall be* his desire, and thou shalt rule over him.

A Cake Half-Baked

It is generally understood that there is a distinction between reacting and responding. Reacting is traditionally defined as an instinctive, emotional response to a situation. It's often impulsive and can be influenced by our past experiences or fears. On the other hand, responding is a thoughtful and deliberate action. It involves considering the situation, weighing the options, and making a conscious decision.

It can be said, then, regarding repentance, that the term "reacting" is simply an emotionally charged action that temporarily and superficially deals with the immediate consequences induced by past sinful failures or critical sinful events. We historically refer to this type of behavior in terms of "jailhouse repentance." One is not truly sorrowful over their actions necessarily, but rather sorry they were caught and even more sorrowful that their sin was ever revealed. So, an emotional reaction on some level, whether lesser or greater, is commonly manifested by the transgressor as to minimize their sin and to quickly appear justified before men.

However, any alleged seemingly righteous behavior posturing as "change" that falls short of full repentance will never be approved by God. Jailhouse repentance should also be forthrightly and consistently condemned and conscientiously and narrowly viewed as suspect by men.

The term “response,” as opposed to “reaction,” however, involves a more carefully constructed strategy that assumes full ownership of sins, along with the proper futuristic behavior needed and required towards any long-term or complete reconciliation between both God and man.

Godly sorrow is not repentance, yet it “worketh” or produces a pathway towards repentance - “that ye sorrowed **to** repentance” (2 Cor. 7:9).

Paul mentions two completely opposite sorrows: a worldly sorrow producing death and, once again, a godly sorrow that produces repentance unto life or authentic change. A worldly sorrow is reflected in a lifestyle of residual sinning and repenting wherein one is never truly delivered from the bondage of sin. One may often experience temporary relief from the immediate consequences of their error, but without the necessary change in their nature, they are forever guilty and self-condemned as a result. Any outward appearance of turning around from sin is temporary in nature and is simply an emotional reaction to the glaring fact that they have been discovered in their sin. By day's end, they are right back in their pit of despair.

Fruit that meets the requirements of repentance is the overt sign that authentic godly sorrow is blazing a trail forward toward reconciliation with God (see Matthew 3:8).

Reactionary impulses that appear externally as repentance, at best, deal primarily with the mistakes of our past. There is very little, if any, plan highlighting a godly future towards righteousness. Yet godly sorrow is the forsaking of past sins through the forging ahead towards genuine repentance, all the while confronting the needs of our future restoration in righteousness.

Reaction vs. Response

Most of our acclaimed “responses” during the preaching aspect of our services, and primarily during altar services, i.e., post-preaching, are not as much the fact we are responding to the preached word as much as it is; we are merely reacting. Again, reacting is an emotional action that addresses our past with an immediate impulse that only satisfies the moment. Our most reliable posture that reflects true and lasting change is not found in our immediate emotional reaction to preaching, however. Rather, it is what we do with the preaching once we exit the building. How we incorporate the preached word moving forward will be the best-qualified gauge and determining factors towards either legitimate or illegitimate “change.”

Moving forward in righteousness towards spiritual change beyond the immediate context of one being revealed in error is the defining attribute of our godly sorrow unto repentance. Repentance is two-fold. It is a forsaking of sin, but more importantly, it involves a pursuit of God and a desire to be right with God and man.

It is more than a reactionary impulse that satisfies the moment. We address the future through a righteous response toward lasting change. The seven immediate signs of repentance found in 2 Cor. 7 are the fruit of true repentance. They expressly speak to us of a forward plan towards the future of godly living.

With this principle in mind, we recognize the chasm of difference between reaction and response regarding the issue of repentance. The contrast between the two is as wide as the dichotomy between being healed and being made whole.

In Luke 17, we have a vitally important kingdom requisite introduced to us by an example fleshed out in the cleansing of 10 leprous men. The requisite for complete New Covenant spiritual restoration, as taught by Christ, is faith. (v.19) As we know, repentance is the first tangible sign of faith. Nine men accepted their healing by settling for the immediate results of their outward appearance. Jesus is obviously glancing back towards Old Covenant ceremonial precepts, which dealt exclusively with the nature and influence of the Law upon the external man. While the disease of leprosy/sin was seemingly outwardly resolved, scripture clearly indicates that inwardly they were still lepers (vv. 20-21).

The disease of sin had been externally dealt with, but yet the inner-man consequences remained. Whatever damage the disease had outwardly caused while remedied externally in the immediate context, or at least enough to pass the Levitical protocols of cleansing, could potentially still be a future concern for them, seeing that leprosy is an interior issue of the blood. A twisted diseased limb, for example, would simply become a disease-free twisted limb. Healed but not made whole.

There was one leper, however, who turned back or “returned to give glory” (v.18) and discovered complete healing toward full recovery and wholeness. This heartfelt response or forward look by faith beyond the immediate context of merely an external change, along with a desire for more, created a pursuit in his spirit for the future of righteous living by returning to Christ to humbly give thanks. While the nine simply satisfied man’s basic requirements, this one man was reconciled to both God and man through faith. The results were astounding. The twisted, diseased limb was no longer twisted and no longer diseased, but he was completely renewed unto wholeness. His body, soul, and spirit were thoroughly cleansed and completely restored brand new. He was made whole.

Christ taught that an outward observation of “reactionary repentance” is a poor and unqualified substitute and witness for a legitimate “response repentance” towards inward and lasting change (v.21).

For a full restoration or as scripture indicates, “thy faith hath made thee whole” type restoration, one must look beyond the immediate external relief of alleged “change” and invest into the long-term heart of the issue called godly sorrow unto repentance, with the future of a righteous and godly lifestyle in view.

REVIVED and RESTORED

No Bible scholar would argue that Psalms 51 is emphatically our most pristine example of a godly sorrow towards authentic repentance. More than a mere reaction towards “change” after being exposed as a sinner by somehow downplaying his deeds as if he wasn’t nearly as egregiously wrong as some were saying he was, David completely humbled himself. David openly and unequivocally addressed not only the past of his transgression, but he also humbly and painfully reached toward the future, towards his full and complete spiritual recovery.

The longing to be “thoroughly” purged (v.2), washed, renewed, cleansed, and restored led him to openly confess his sinful nature. Not simply what he did, but who he now was came into sharp focus. Once he unashamedly addressed his past sins, along with his current and shameful status with God, he then reached forward in faith unto righteousness and towards a plan for the future to be reconciled with both God and man. “*Then* will I teach transgressors thy ways; and sinners shall be converted unto thee (v.13). David’s repentance produced in his spirit a righteous and godly plan for the future that would reconcile him back to both God and man. The magnitude of a response versus a reaction cannot be overstated.

In summary, we often hear about how one has been rehabilitated and now is miraculously “changed.” Be sure, however, that “reactionary repentance” at best deals primarily with our past unrighteousness through a shallow and ultimately temporary pretense of external change to avoid any immediate wrath. While “response repentance” openly addresses our very nature by dealing with both our personal past sins along with a plan for the future regarding our righteous behavior towards both God and man. Our “inward parts” (Ps.51:6) or the whole man is reconciled and restored to both God and man through our “response repentance.”

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