

Seven Myths of Repentance (Myth #3, #4, & #5)

by Robert Wurtz II

True repentance involves a change of heart, a born again experience, and taking responsibility for our own sin, not making excuses or justifying ourselves.

Scripture: 2 Samuel 12:12, Luke 12:3, John 21:23, 2 Corinthians 5:17, 2 Corinthians 10:12, 1 Timothy 5:20

Topics: "True Repentance", "Heart Transformation"

Description

Robert Wurtz II addresses the myths surrounding repentance, debunking the misconceptions that penance equals repentance and that reformation alone signifies true repentance. He emphasizes the importance of genuine repentance leading to a transformation of the heart and a new nature in Christ, rather than mere external improvements or self-imposed discipline. Wurtz also highlights the incompatibility of repentance with self-defense, stressing that true repentance involves acknowledging sin without making excuses, comparisons, or explanations.

Transcript

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(Part III)

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C) MYTH #3 PENANCE IS REPENTANCE

1) Penance

Penance is voluntary self-punishment to show repentance. Penance is not something generally found in Protestant circles in the west. Some may 'afflict' themselves for a time hoping to gain God's approval through some type of 'work', but this is not a biblical practice. If people 'afflict' themselves with fasting or some other thing it can only be a means to changing their mind- but penance in itself is not repentance.

2) Church Discipline

John MacArthur once stated that one of the greatest problems in Churches today is that they do not exercise church discipline. In fact, he stated that he believes the exercising of church discipline in his church is a primary key to its continued growth over many years. New Testament church discipline is not

like the concept of 'penance' that we find later in the Universal Church, but is a biblical practice designed, NOT to ease a persons conscience by having them punished for their sin and when the punishment was over they felt better; but New Testament church discipline was to provoke fear in those who would be tempted to sin and to cause the one who had sinned to turn with godly sorrow and repent. I Timothy 5:20-21 reads... Those who sin are to be rebuked publicly, so that the others may take warning. I charge you, in the sight of God and Christ Jesus and the elect angels, to keep these instructions without partiality, and to do nothing out of favoritism. (NIV) Timothy was (as are we) instructed to rebuke publicly anyone without fear or favor who had committed a sin worthy of such a rebuke.

Throughout Church history there have been a number of different ways in which the Churches would handle persons who had been caught in sin. The Jewish Synagogues would hand out punishments to offenders of God's laws depending on the severity of the crimes. Some were as severe as lashes, and in more severe cases, expulsion from the Synagogue for a certain period of time was the penalty. The only real carry over of these practices into the New Testament was expulsion (excommunication). It must be understood that the New Testament pattern was to bring a person to repentance and NOT punishment. McClintock and Strong comment on this saying, "The act of excommunication was at first an exclusion of the offender from the Lord's Supper and from the agapae. The term itself implies separation from the communion. The practice was derived from the injunction of the apostle (I Corinthians 5:11): "With such a one no not to eat." From the context, and from I Corinthians 10:16-18; 11:20-34, it clearly appears that the apostle refers, not to common meals and the ordinary intercourse of life, but to these religious festivals." A more severe approach was to "deliver such an one unto Satan" as was the Case with Alexander (I Timothy 1:20), Hymaneaus, Philetus (II Timothy 2:18), and the fornicator of I Corinthians 5. This was the highest censure in the New Testament Church imposed by God through man (the Apostles).

D) MYTH #4 REFORMATION IS REPENTANCE

1) Pagan Repentance

Personal Reformation is not repentance. Simply deciding you are going to "do better next time" is not repentance. Richard Owens Roberts writes, "Anyone can turn over a new leaf. It does not require the help of God to sin less or to sin differently. All of us are worse than we need to be, and at any time it is possible to drop some of our worst habits and to do better than ever before. Because self improvement, including moral reformation, is at least occasionally practiced by millions of persons with or without religious inclinations, it has been called "pagan repentance."

2) Temporary Improvements

Many people come to Church or come to an altar some place and cry and weep leaving the impression that there has been change and when improvement over the next few days and weeks is noted, some are inclined to think they repented. But sinners don't need to improve; they are dead in trespasses and sins and need to be born again. The truly repentant are born again by the Spirit of God and are not merely 'improved' but they are a new creature (II Corinthians 5:15; Galatians 6:15). This is not to say that a newborn Christian don't have struggles and need to be disciplined; but there is a marked CHANGE in nature that comes with genuine repentance.

Dr. J. Vernon Mcgee once told a story of a family who took a baby pig into its home to try to give a pet for their young children. They gave it a good bath and put a bow around its neck. Then even sprayed some perfume on it and gave it a name. Things went well for some time and the kids really believed that the pig

was feeling quite at home. Then one day the baby pig happened to be by the front door when it was opened and it turned and made a 'b-line' for the mud hole. Of course the kids were disappointed. The moral of the story is that the pigs always return to the 'pig pen' and the sons always return to the Father's house. Oh, there were some temporary improvements made externally on the pig- but it still loved the mud at heart. The son on the other hand was never at home in the pig pen- and seeks to clean the mess off of him as soon as possible. Humans are not comfortable as a muddy mess. If a person has genuinely been born again their nature is that of Christ which is to love righteousness and hate iniquity.

3) 'Surface' Salvation

How many times have we heard a person say, "I tried Christianity and it didn't work for me." The fact is they tried to come to God in their own terms and refused to sell out. Christianity is not a program or a step by step procedure for getting better. Genuine Christianity changes the heart. Many take a few biblical principals and add them to their life and call it salvation. They may even quit a few bad habits such as cussing, smoking, and drinking. Although these things are wonderful changes, they must not be confused with genuine repentance that results in a born again experience. If you are born again your desires have changed- the direction of your life is altered. Your priorities have changed because your nature has changed. Too often we are working ourselves to the bone trying to make improvements on people who sit in our churches and have never really been born again. They find it difficult to desire the things of God and have an insatiable thirst for sin. They keep coming to Church as a sort of fire insurance- but they need to be born again of the Spirit and become a low maintenance- high impact child of God.

E) MYTH #5 REPENTANCE AND SELF-DEFENSE CAN COEXIST TOGETHER

1) Sin Has No Defense

Richard Owens Roberts Writes, "A tremendous consequential myth that we frequently see illustrated in our day is the myth that it is possible for somebody to be repentant and self-defensive at the same time. Those two things can never be put together. You will never find true repentance and self-defense linked. Whenever a person is seemingly repentant and yet busily defends himself, you can be sure his repentance is not genuine."

2) Repentance Does Not Make Excuses

When people start pointing fingers and making up excuses you can be sure they have not repented. When we truly see our sin for what it is we agree with God about it and turn to Him for relief from it. Pride is at the center of excuse making. It is impossible for a proud person to genuinely repent. A friend of mine recently asked a man to simply confess the sin that he had committed and the man replied, "I have my dignity." A person should confess their sin to the extent of the damage caused by it.

3) Repentance Does Not Give Explanations

How often have we been in trouble for doing something wrong and been asked for an explanation for our behavior? The reality is, when we see our sin for what it is we know there is no explanation that could possibly justify the sin. A better question to ask would be, "What were you thinking?" Either way the question seeks to position a person to have to try to justify their sin. When Nathan confronted David he did not ask for an explanation, David volunteered all the info needed when he exclaimed, "I have sinned against the Lord!"

4) Repentance Does No Make Comparisons

Citing the sins of others is one of the oldest tricks in the book when it comes to being confronted with sin. Many people believe that because they have some 'dirt' on someone else then they can use that 'dirt' to keep the heat off their own back when the revelations of their sin draw near. This is a childish tactic and is truly a sort of blackmail. But the sinner must remember something; such things do not move God. Man is not the primary offended party in sin anyhow. You may manipulate man and get out of repentance, but God is not moved to anything but anger by such a tactic. The words of Christ are clear when it comes to concerning ourselves with God's business in other peoples lives; "What is that to thee, follow thou me." (John 21:23) Just because you see someone else doing things that are worse than what you may be doing does not justify your sin. This is obviously not repentance. It is a self-defense/self-preservation maneuver... "If you tell on me- I'll tell on you." Nay! Except you repent BOTH of your sins will be proclaimed from the housetops. (Luke 12:3-5) God told David through Nathan the prophet; For thou didst it secretly: but I will do this thing before all Israel, and before the sun. (II Samuel 12:12) It is unwise to make comparisons between ourselves. (II Corinthians 10:12) In the judgment we will not be able to do as many have done with their siblings before their parents, or their peers before the principal at school. "Everyone was doing it" will not fly in the judgment; because everyone who is guilty will be judged.

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