

Do You *REALLY* Repent?

Repenting is something many are doing the most and succeeding the LEAST! Too many of us CONTINUALLY sin. Do you have Godly sorrow or a worldly sorrow? You need to know the answer!

by Charles F. Hunting

HOW MANY times in frustration and hand-wringing despair have you said, "I've had to repent of this or that sin *time after time*, and I *never* seem to succeed"?

What is the problem? Does it have to be this way? Did God intend we should continue to wallow around in the same old rut and filth year after year? Or is it because we're just *weak*?

The answer is **NO!** God doesn't want it this way. It wouldn't be this way **IF WE HAD TRULY REPENTED!**

You may say, "Well, I was really *sorry* for what I did. I acknowledged my guilt. I asked God for His forgiveness, but I still *keep on sinning*."

Has this happened to you? Do you *think* you've repented and then find you have disastrously committed the same sin again? I'm not talking about the times we let down in prayer or Bible study. I'm not talking about the times of great temptation or when we sin because of the tremendous degenerate weaknesses and habits we have. I'm talking about those sins we *could* and *should* be freed from—if we started in the right direction.

Let's get one thing straight: when we repent—really—we **CHANGE!** We don't repeat the sin! **IF** we don't change—stop sinning—we **HAVEN'T REPENTED!**

More Required Than Tears

You say you really *felt* sorry for what you did—so did *Judas!* Esau *felt* ghastly! He was all broken up about what *he had lost*, and sought the inheritance he'd thrown away "*carefully with tears*" (Heb. 12:17).

Tears rolled down Esau's cheeks. Judas was so remorseful he killed himself. But neither repented! They didn't change.

We know *repentance means to change!* We desperately want to be different! But this *desire* is only a natural, *human desire*. Even the world wants to change!

Does this surprise you? Well, just look at the mountainous evidence of proof. Peace conferences will *try* to initiate legislation to sidetrack the world from the road of total destruction to peace. National governments will *try* to initiate changes to bring their people from poverty to prosperity—eradicate social injustices and remove inequality.

No, your desire to change is *not* unique. Very few people are satisfied with *any* facet of their lives. They *want* to change their physical shape by diet, exercise or foundation garments—change their faces by paint or surgery—their hair with dyes all hues of the color spectrum.

Few are happy with *what they have, where they are, or what they are!*

They are filled with inferiorities. They hate their inadequacies. Bootstrap-lifting courses by the score are offered to change the timid into fire-breathing, self-confident swashbucklers capable of facing any person or problem of life.

Everyone Desires to Change

From the least to the greatest, *all* want to change.

An oil magnate, reputedly the richest man on the face of the earth, wants desperately to **CHANGE**. He said so! In a London T.V. program he stated his *greatest* desire was to have the ability to sit down with a group of people and not be a bore. He wanted to change from an extreme introvert to one who could be outgoing and pleasantly entertaining.

Psychiatric couches are booked solid

with mentally distressed who want to change to confident, uninhibited, happy people—just *like* we do.

Perceptive scientists realize the need to change human nature. They want to alter the mind by genetic control and produce this change.

And many people DO change!

By exercising a great amount of *self-discipline*, the fat become slim, the drunks become teetotallers. The timid become socially acceptable. But is it a step toward eternal life? Obviously not!

Christ said, "**UNLESS** you *repent*, you shall all likewise *perish!*" (Luke 13:3, 5.) Paul *said* there is a *worldly* repentance that leads to death (II Cor. 7:10).

The Need to Change Apparent

With God's truth, we in the Church can come to a greater point of self-analysis. God's Word spotlights the wretchedness of **OUR** human nature—we see our total selfishness. We **KNOW** "... the heart [the basic core of the human being] is deceitful above **ALL** things, and *desperately wicked*" (Jer. 17:9).

At least we *accept* the fact that this is what the Bible *says* and *mentally* agree with it.

We see our lack of ability to overcome this wretched nature. We even learn to repeat the words, "I abhor myself." Yes, we see the *need*, and *want* to change.

It's not so difficult to come to abhor oneself—to despise and hate *our* weaknesses. We detest our feelings of inferiority. So does the rest of the world.

We *say* we hate ourselves and abhor our sins, *but is it really true?* If you had a rotten, stinking, maggot-infested

piece of putrifying meat in your kitchen, you would have such a revulsion toward it that you would *immediately* get rid of it. But we put up with so much of the filth that we *claim* to abhor about ourselves. How come?

Here's why!

WE DON'T REALLY ABHOR the sin!

What we *usually* mean when we say "we're sorry" is that we are sorry for the effect our shortcomings have on *our* sense of well-being — *our* happiness.

We feel guilty or unhealthy. What we want is to be comfortable *mentally* and *physically*. Then we can live at peace with ourselves or others we may have offended.

Humans will go to any length to escape personal predicaments. Even in suicide people are merely trying to escape from *their personal* despair and hopelessness!

But that doesn't mean we are REVOLTED BY THE SIN! If we were, we'd get rid of it! And we can! But there has to be a starting place.

Judas-like Repentance

Notice first the type of repentance all too often experienced by people in God's Church. Judas hated himself and he had every reason to. He had been in the presence of the Master Teacher. He had seen miracles performed. He had been offered a position of tremendous authority, yet he scorned the greatest chance a man ever had — rulership with Christ. He was given a responsible *job in the Work*, then he stole. His next act was a deed of infamy unparalleled in history. He was a traitor to his Savior. His final act was one of self-destruction.

He saw his horrible mistake. He even acknowledged his guilt. He "repented" — showed *real* remorse — in the same way too many of us do!

Notice Matthew 27:3-5: "Then Judas, which had betrayed him, *when he saw that he was condemned*, repented himself, and brought the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders, saying, I HAVE SINNED in that I have betrayed the innocent blood . . . and he cast down the pieces of silver . . . and departed, and went and *hanged* himself."

His remorse, his acknowledgment of guilt, and his repentance, *only led him into another sin!* Why? Because it wasn't *real* repentance!

Judas had an *afterthought* and was distraught about the effect upon himself. He had a deep dread of the consequences — *on himself!* Death became his way of escape.

Judas didn't remotely experience the type of repentance Paul preached about and made a main part of his message ". . . REPENTANCE TOWARD GOD!" (Acts 20:21.)

Stop and think! Do you know what *repentance toward God means*? If you don't or can give only the vaguest answer, you could be in *serious* trouble!

It is *because* we are not *continually* experiencing repentance toward God that we continue to needlessly *repeat* the same sins over and over!

There is a fantastic difference in *self-remorse* and repentance toward GOD. YOU'VE GOT TO KNOW THE DIFFERENCE!

David KNEW the Difference

When David realized the horrible sins he committed, he *knew* they were AGAINST GOD.

There was no self-centered remorse in his repentance! He cried out, "Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy lovingkindness: according to the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. For I acknowledge my transgressions: and my sin is ever before me. AGAINST THEE, THEE ONLY, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight" (Ps. 51:1-4).

HIS REMORSE WAS TOWARD GOD!

He was going to suffer for the rest of his life for his horrible deeds. He became the object of ridicule and was humiliated before the whole nation of Israel. He committed adultery! He caused perpetual war with all its horror and suffering to Israel. And he was responsible for the murder of Bathsheba's husband, and the death of her son (II Sam. 12:9-14). In spite of all the wretchedness he had brought upon

himself and *others*, he still said that his ONLY sin was against God!

Why? The answer is *extremely* important!

When Judas robbed, *he* became critical of Christ and accused Christ of wasting money (John 12:5). When David sinned, he was HORRIFIED at what he had done to God.

Had he "hurt" God? Had he diminished God's power or taken away any of His authority or thwarted His plan? Had he lessened any of the beauty or splendor of God's Throne? No!

God could have disintegrated David on the spot. If He had desired, He could have obliterated even the annoying memory of David from His mind.

Sin is Against God

Let's understand! Sin is the transgression of the law! (I John 3:4.) God was the Lawgiver. The sin was against God.

David was asked by Samuel, "Wherefore hast thou DESPISED the commandment of the Lord to do evil in His sight? . . . Now therefore the sword shall never depart from thine house: BECAUSE YOU HAVE DESPISED ME!" (II Sam. 12:9-10.)

Ancient Israel despised God just as David did, but with one GREAT difference! God had called them for a *special* purpose. He called them to obey His revealed law so that He might prosper them — thus showing to the surrounding nations through their example what would happen to a nation honoring God.

God wanted to give them everything that was good for them. He brought them out of physical slavery. He performed miracles, clearly proving His ability to make good His promises.

Did they appreciate all of the fantastic blessings? Did they bow down in total obedience and thankfulness for their release from captivity? To the contrary. "And ye [the people] murmured in your tents, and said, Because the Lord HATED us, he hath brought us forth out of the land of Egypt . . . to *destroy us*" (Deut. 1:27). They imputed wrong motives to God and ac-

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cused Him of hatred and murder!

When they began to pay the penalty for disobedience, they saw their tremendous mistake and admitted their sins. "We have sinned against the Lord" (Deut. 1:41).

The Israelites Never Learned

That statement seems to prove that the people had learned their lesson. But they hadn't. They were sorry for the difficulties they'd gotten themselves into, but it wasn't repentance!

Notice the *rest* of the sad story. God commanded through His servant, Moses: "Go NOT up, neither fight; for I am not among you; lest you be smitten before your enemies. So I spake unto you; and ye would not hear, but rebelled against the commandment of the Lord and went presumptuously up into the hill" (Deut. 1:42, 43).

They hadn't really repented. It wasn't firmly fixed in their minds that God knew best—that His *every desire* was for their good.

So *great* was their misunderstanding of God that He inspired the prophets to record it as a perpetual reminder of them. "Thus saith the Eternal, your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel: I AM the Lord thy God, which teacheth thee to profit, which leadeth you by the way that thou shouldest go. O that thou hadst hearkened to MY commandments! then had thy peace been as a river, and thy righteousness as the waves of the sea" (Isa. 48:17-18).

Look at the *intense* desire God had. He wanted to *GIVE* the people of Israel *every good thing*.

But did they believe this? By their words and actions they showed they regarded Him as some harsh, cruel, vindictive, restrictive Being who did things out of avarice and selfish desire.

There was no vivid concept in their minds of a great and magnificent Being who wanted their peace to be like a river. They had no consciousness of a Being who revealed His laws to them for *their good*—not His. They clearly demonstrated a total lack of understanding.

You Must Understand God

God had called them out so that He could bless them in the most fantastic way. But so distorted was their picture of this awesome, merciful, compassionate, loving Being that they claimed His very acts of love and power were done out of malice.

What was the big difference between David and the Israelites at the time of Moses? The answer is quite plain!

"...and Nathan said unto David, The Eternal also hath put away thy sin, THOU SHALT NOT DIE" (II Sam. 12:13). Death was the penalty David *should* have paid, but God accepted his *repentance*. But to the Israelites, God said, "And ye returned and WEPT before the Eternal; but the Eternal would not hearken to your voice nor give ear unto you" (Deut. 1:45).

David had a right attitude toward God. His remorse was a *Godly sorrow*. He realized his sinning was an expression of disrespect and hatred toward his Creator.

He realized the tremendous opportunity and responsibility God had given him. His *GREAT* desire was to re-establish a right contact with God so he could serve God in *THE JOB* he had been given.

Notice his prayer: "Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation; and uphold me with thy free spirit. Then WILL I TEACH TRANSGRESSORS THY WAYS; and sinners SHALL BE CONVERTED UNTO THEE!" (Ps. 51:12-13.)

David wanted forgiveness so he could serve God. The Israelites wanted to serve themselves!

What About Us?

In *far* too many cases, we don't even have the type of worldly repentance that brings about a *physical change*. Not to mention the establishing of a right relationship with God!

We're quite content to pay the penalty for our own physical sins. We over eat—*knowingly*. We're willing to pay the penalty of looking ridiculously like a balloon. We are content to pay

the penalty in colds and other types of sicknesses. We never consider that our body is God's temple through which He is doing His Work (I Cor. 3:15-16).

We may *mentally* admit that what God does is for our good, and we acknowledge that we are freed from the superstition of modern "Christianity." We're grateful for this knowledge and *know* God gives us many blessings.

But do we realize, and this is MOST IMPORTANT, what *we do* when we sin even on *supposedly minor* points—these *small sins* we laugh at?

Do you ever consider the MONUMENTAL *disrespect* you are showing to your Creator with such a *sloppy* attitude toward His revealed knowledge.

Surely you must realize God gave this knowledge that you be a *witness* to the rest of the world. "You are MY witnesses... and MY servant whom I have chosen..." (Isa. 43:10).

Do you realize that to disregard God's instruction—laws given FOR YOUR GOOD—shows UTTER CONTEMPT to this great and magnificent Being we worship?

Have no doubts! When you sin, you show the ULTIMATE SCORN for the great and fantastic gifts given to you by One who sits at the controls of the universe. How horrible is the sin that we commit against God—NOT AGAINST MAN—*AGAINST GOD!!!*

When we sin, we show an UNBELIEVABLE CALLOUSNESS toward the great gifts of Jesus Christ and His sacrifice. This is when we *continue* to sin!

Don't say to yourself these sins don't hurt God.

God's *GREAT* desire is to share. He is a giving God. His greatest joy would be to share with us His power, His magnificent glory, His eternity. He wants to give us equality with Him. This is ALL that He can do. He *can't* create something greater than Himself.

When we sin, we deny Him this great privilege of *GIVING*. *We thumb our nose at Him*.

What TREMENDOUS INGRATITUDE we express toward God when we sin!

Job Saw God and Repented

Job finally came to real repentance.

He thought God was being unfair to him. But one day he finally had his eyes opened to this awesome, wonderful, all-powerful, merciful and loving God. When he saw Him as he should, *notice CAREFULLY* what happened—your eternal life could depend on it!

Job recognized God's power. He said: "I know that thou canst do every thing, and that no thought can be withholden from thee. Who is he that hideth counsel without knowledge? therefore have I uttered that I understood not; things too wonderful for me, which I knew not..." (Job 42:2-3).

Job had a knowledge of God's plan. He was in much the same circumstances as many of us. He was able to articulate the words and repeat as a child does by rote the basic doctrines. But when it came to the *real* meaning of the awesome proportions, the grandeur of God and His plan, he said he spoke things that he *really didn't understand*.

Then he went on to say—when he realized the magnitude of the God that gave him understanding, the light finally dawned upon him—"Hear, I beseech you, and I will speak: I will demand of thee, and declare thou unto me. I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear: but NOW MINE EYE SEETH THEE" (Job 42:4-5).

What did he mean when he said: "Now mine eye seeth thee"?

The eye is the means by which the world around is revealed to us. In the same way, spiritually, the illuminating of the mind comes when we come to understand God.

So Christ said, "If therefore thine eye be single [in a right attitude toward God and on Him and all of His power and greatness], thy whole body shall be *full of light*. But if thine eye be evil [in a wrong attitude toward God], thy whole body shall be full of darkness..." (Mat. 6:22-23).

Why Job Abhorred Himself

Now we can understand what Job meant. He said he had uttered things too wonderful, things beyond his ability to comprehend. He talked about them even as we do.

He knew God's plan. He had knowl-

edge of a resurrection and a change into immortality (Job 14:14-15). He knew there was a Savior and that he was going to be a spirit being (Job 19:25-26).

But, when he came to real understanding of this GREAT BEING—this Eternal Creator, who is above all and over all and whose great mercy, power and magnificence is so clearly evident in His creation—WHEN he *finally* saw THIS GOD, he said, "Wherefore [because of this great God] I ABHOR myself, and repent in dust and ashes!" (Job 42:6.)

Here was no surface, shallow, self-seeking, self-pitying type of repentance. Here was the kind of repentance God was looking for.

When he finally got things in their proper perspective, he couldn't *help* but *abhor* himself by comparison!

Let's ask ourselves: Has our abhorrence been like Job's because of God and our wrong relationship toward Him? Has our sin so overwhelmed us because we have seen how we have been in a callous disregard and disrespect toward God?

Consider that God has called us to represent Him and His Work. Do we hate our sins because they have kept us from doing this *God-given* opportunity and responsibility?

Perhaps the point could be illustrated by a true story. A man commissioned by Ambassador College for architectural work was invited to Pasadena. He and his wife were shown unusual courtesy and considerations far beyond what is normal in the world. He didn't expect it. He knew he didn't deserve it. But he saw and realized that the unusual attention given to him was unlike anything he'd ever experienced before.

It made him feel he would just *bate* to disappoint those who had given him such *undeserved* kindness.

He didn't want to disappoint *humans* who had shown him such consideration. How much *more* should we *bate* to disappoint God in the job He's given us.

The Sorrow of Death

Paul also spoke of a *totally* futile repentance. He said there is a remorse that is utterly worthless in God's eyes! Read it in your own Bible: "The sor-

row of the world worketh *death!*" (II Cor. 7:10.)

Paul had written a letter of correction to the people in Corinth. But he had found a point of rejoicing because of the effect of his letter. He commended them because they had the RIGHT KIND OF REPENTANCE.

He said, "Now I rejoice, that ye were made sorry, but that ye *sorrowed to repentance*: for ye were made sorry after a GODLY MANNER... For *godly sorrow* worketh repentance to SALVATION NOT TO BE REPENTED OF."

You don't have to go through the same process time after time. If you've repented once according to God's way—that's enough (II Cor. 7:9-10).

How could Paul tell their repentance was real? Because of what it produced! There was no question about it.

NOTICE: "For behold this selfsame thing, that ye sorrowed after a GODLY sort,"—here's what it produced—"what carefulness [*careful* self-examination] it wrought in you, yea, what clearing of yourselves [change now], yea, what indignation, yea, what fear [alarm], yea, what *vehement* desire [to change and be cleared before God], yea, what zeal, yea, what revenge! [grabbing the initiative to change]..." (II Cor. 7:11).

Here was the fantastic difference. There were tangible, concrete results and it was CLEARLY EVIDENT IN THEIR LIVES.

They had a right attitude toward God. They didn't want to dishonor their Creator and be guilty of scorning the great sacrifice in the gift of His Son. They were *broken up* over what they had done.

Learn this lesson of Godly repentance, Brethren. Apply it in your lives TODAY—before it's too late. Don't be among those who will be weeping and gnashing their teeth in tearful self-pity, full of *worldly* repentance as Christ rejects them from His Kingdom. Repent in a Godly way and you'll be able to say with the same feeling David did, "He hath not dealt with us after our sins; nor rewarded us according to our iniquities. For as the heaven is high above the earth, so great is his mercy toward them that fear him" (Ps. 103:10-11).