

REPENTANCE: WHAT IS IT?

by Dee Bowman

His name was Jackson. He was a fine old gentleman. He wore a Hoss Cartright hat, sat on the second seat on the right hand side at the services, and was almost always there. He was a fine Bible student, even able to argue for the truth with his friends at the "spit and whittle club" downtown. But he was not a Christian.

He had heard some of the best preachers on the Plains. He always listened attentively, with great interest, and was appreciative of the speaker's efforts. Actually he knew more Bible than many people who had been Christians for many years. But he was not a Christian.

Once, after we had just concluded a fine gospel meeting, I asked my Dad, "Dad, why do you think old Mr. Jackson does not obey the gospel? He knows enough truth to save the world and yet he has never done anything about it. Why do you suppose that is?" With that special glint in his eye that made you know he knew the answer, he said, "Well, he just never has repented."

Dad was right. Again. Mr. Jackson knew. He understood. He could even stand for truth. But he just never had repented.

Repentance is a misunderstood concept. Many people think of it as turning from sin. And it does have to do that, but it is the predicate for it, not the turning itself. In Acts 3:19 (ASV), Peter says, "Repent, and turn again, that your sins may be blotted out." The turning follows the repentance. That's why Brother Jackson had not turned, he had not repented in order that he might turn.

Repentance, then, is neither just sorrow for sin nor is it the turning from sin. It lies between the two. Repentance is the change of a man's will with regard to sin. Prompted by godly sorrow, it results in a reformation of life. While it is true that there is no repentance in the absence of godly sorrow and while it is equally true that there is no real repentance if there is not a resultant change of conduct, repentance is actually neither of these. It is the decision to do better.

Repentance is the predicate for all manner of good changes. It will cause one to obey the gospel (Acts 2:38). It brings about a clearing of oneself; encourages righteous indignation toward ungodliness; promotes a fear of judgment; demands a desire to do good; directs a zeal for right, a spirit of revenge against evil (see II Cor. 7:11).

Repentance is the forgotten command in this age. We do not hear enough about it. It deserves better treatment, a greater exposure than it presently receives. Repentance is necessary to reformation. Perhaps if we taught more about it, maybe if we spoke more often in a way so as to convict men of sin so as to show them the need of it, we would see

more people obey the gospel, more wayward members decide to do better, more daily devotion to right living. We sometimes forget that repentance is a constant need for each of us.

My little story has a happy ending. Before he died, Mr. Jackson finally repented, was baptized, and spent his last days as a faithful and dedicated child of God. And all because he finally repented.