

Did You "Repent in the Aisle"?

by Robert Turner

Many years ago while teaching a Bible class I asked a young lady the meaning of "**repent.**" Her immediate answer was, "*Oh, that's what people do in the aisle.*" Then, seeing my puzzled expression, she continued: "*You believe in the seat, repent in the aisle, confess at the front, and are baptized in the baptistry.*"

Very neat, very neat indeed! And I suspect that there are a surprising number of adults who get little beyond this childish conception of the "*plan of salvation.*" We "*repent in the aisle!*" Abject sorrow for sin, that humbles -- brings us trembling before our God -- shakes our complacency and puts steel in our determination to sin no more, is virtually unknown.

If tears are shed this is a rarity and may often be traced to nervous embarrassment or a prolonged emotional appeal on the part of the preacher. Some speakers seem to fear any emotional appeal, while others seek to stimulate a synthetic down-pour by tactics of mass psychology. What has become of genuine, soul-searching conviction that changes a whole life? Well, the necessary ingredients are still with us, and but await recognition and proper use.

Sin is rampant, and if repentance is rare it is not for lack of reason. But sin must be made apparent to the sinner. Platitudes and generalities soothe the flesh -- they do not strike the heart. When men "*come to themselves,*" are "*pricked in their heart,*" then they may repent (Lk.15:17; Acts 2:37-38). Paul feared lest a penitent man be "*swallowed up with overmuch sorrow*" (2 Cor. 2:7.) Does this fit our man "*in the aisle*"?

"*Ye sorrowed to repentance: for ye were made sorry after a godly manner*" -- a portion of 2 Corinthians 7:8-11. Read these verses carefully, for they distinguish between "*sorry I got caught*" and the humbling, self-abasing experience of one who realizes his unworthiness in the presence of God. Such a feeling fills with care, and our very being revolts against our former manner of life -- **the sin**, of which we are now so ashamed.

"*Unclean! Unclean!*" we cry; and turn with joyous gratefulness to the Savior's offer of forgiveness.

Paul taught "*repentance toward God*" as well as "*faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ*" (Acts 20:21). All sin is against God (Lk. 15:18) i.e., the creature wrongs the Creator when sin is committed; and since God alone can forgive, it is fitting that the creature present a contrite spirit to the Throne. The old-time mourner's bench was based on Calvinistic errors too space-consuming to be discussed here; but I sometimes wonder if we may not have "*run past Jerusalem*" in our casual attitude toward repentance.

Jesus said, "*Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish*" (Lk.13:3). **Repent or perish** -- it is an ultimatum of Almighty God, an awesome thing. But the sin-burdened soul who truly repents sees more: "*Repent, and be baptized -- for the remission of sins*" (Acts 2:38). Christ lifts the burden of those who obey Him, and mourning turns to thanksgiving.

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