

## False Repentance

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*I preached that they should repent and turn to God and prove their repentance by their deeds.*

Acts 26:20

I am sure that everyone has had to deal with someone who says that they are sorry, but who continues to do what they are supposedly sorry for. True repentance is an actual a turning away from the wrong path with an active desire to stay off of it, not just saying the words, "I'm sorry." I have had to deal with oppressive people who 'repented,' but then continued to oppress. We must prove our repentance by our deeds. I think that this idea is echoed in several scriptures: "These people come near to me with their mouth and honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me (Isaiah 29:13)," "Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like a man who looks at his face in a mirror and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like (James 1:23-24)," and "Of them the proverbs are true: 'A dog returns to its vomit,' and, 'A sow that is washed goes back to her wallowing in the mud (2 Peter 2:22).'"

This is truly the story of the nation of Israel, where they continued in the cycle of falling away, repentance, restoration, and falling away again. A great example of a person who repented in words only is king Saul. Saul was disobedient many times, and was frequently repentant. This repentance only lasted until the next time his evil spirit re-emerged.

When David entered the picture, Saul became very jealous of him for the glory he received after killing Goliath. Saul tried to spear David while he was playing the harp for him. When David did become a leader in Saul's army, Saul plotted to get him killed acquiring the dowry for Saul's daughter Michah. This didn't work, so Saul became even more afraid of him, and he remained his enemy the rest of his days. Saul then told his son Jonathan and all the attendants to kill David. But Jonathan was very fond of David and would not let this happen. He arranged with David for him to go into hiding. Meanwhile, Jonathan stood up for David and convinced his father to not pursue David. Saul made an oath, where he said, "As surely as the LORD lives, David will not be put to death." But not long after, Saul tried to kill David again with his spear. David escaped and eventually Saul cooled off and 'repented' again. The final straw that drove David out of the city occurred when David absented himself from the king's presence. Saul was so mad that he threw his spear at his own son Jonathan. This was a clear signal to David that he must leave for good. David stayed in the desert strongholds and hills. Day after day Saul searched for him, but God did not give David into his hands. This would happen as Saul would periodically try to kill David and then leave him alone for awhile.

On one of these occasions, Saul went into a cave to relieve himself. As it happened, David was hiding from him in this very cave. Though his men wanted to kill the king, David forbade it. When Saul had left the cave David made it clear to him the great opportunity that he had passed by. Saul realized that David was not trying to kill him and was repentant. But it wasn't long before he was after David again. The next time, David and Abishai went into Saul's camp while they were asleep and took some of his personal equipment. As before, David called to him and proved that he meant no harm to Saul. And once again Saul repented, saying that he had sinned. Eventually Saul met with more pressing problems with the Philistines which ended in his death on the battlefield.

The key here is that because of Saul's ego and anger he could not truly be sorry, and no matter how many attempts he made at it he could not hold the proper attitude. He continued to oppress David and try to kill him just as he always had. His 'repentance' only ended up being a delay.

On the other hand, we do know of great stories of repentance. Zaccheus, for instance, promised to stop oppressing people in his tax collection, and declared that he would give half his possessions to the poor and would return four-fold whatever he might have taken wrongly. This is the way we should be when we find out that we have been wrong. And in the great parable, the prodigal son promised to be only a servant; he did not even dare to return to his former position. He knew that he deserved a demotion instead of expecting to return to prominence.

We must make sure we mean it when we say that we are sorry. We must not continue to oppress after we have done so. We must be faithful, or perhaps we could say we must be 'repentant' unto death.

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