

"God is making us holy. But there is a requirement for learning how to submit to God's authority: humility. We won't get very far in the development of holiness if we are defensive about our flaws."
—Rebecca Manley Pippert

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Repentance: The Genuine Article (Part Five)

We can learn a great deal from the sore trial of Job, particularly what [God](#) did to bring him to the point of [repentance](#). Notice [Job 40:1-4](#), where we begin to see a marked change in the man:

Moreover the LORD answered Job, and said: "Shall the one who contends with the Almighty correct Him? He who rebukes God, let him answer it." Then Job answered the LORD and said: "Behold, I am vile; what shall I answer You? I lay my hand over my mouth."

Job is a different person now. Something had produced a change in him between his assertion of unimpeachable integrity in chapter 27 and his humble admission of vileness in chapter 40. In the speech of Elihu in Job 32-37, a new line of reasoning enters the argument, and God, speaking out of a whirlwind in Job 38-41, lays Job's self-righteousness bare. God exposes Job for what he really was, despite his careful lawkeeping. Job responds in [Job 42:1-6](#):

Then Job answered the LORD and said: "I know that You can do everything, and that no purpose of Yours can be withheld from You. You asked, 'Who is this who hides counsel without knowledge?' Therefore I have uttered what I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know. Listen, please, and let me speak; You said, 'I will question you, and you shall answer Me.' I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees You. Therefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes."

In listening to God primarily, Job had entered the *rä'äh* stage, where he deeply considered himself and what he had done, and suddenly, he had an entirely different view of himself: He was not the man he thought he was. Now, in his own estimation, he was not righteous but abhorrent and vile—a wholesale change!

What we see in Job 38—41 is that God leads the man through a process in which He reveals *Himself* to Job. He does not directly reveal Job to himself, but He helps Job to realize just who and what *God* is—and this is a major key to true repentance. We truly recognize our need to change when we see, not necessarily how we are, but how we compare to and fall woefully short of the perfect righteousness of God.

A simple illustration may help us understand how this works. Since the United States dollar is the world's reserve currency, there is a considerable problem with counterfeiting here and around [the world](#). U.S. Treasury officials who are specially trained to seek out and identify counterfeit money study, not the counterfeit notes, but the real U.S. currency. They study it until they know it perfectly. Once they do, it becomes relatively easy for them to distinguish a true dollar from a counterfeit: Any bill that does not exactly conform to the real dollar is a fake.

In a similar fashion, God says the same thing to Job as well as to us. If we compare ourselves with the true righteousness and [holiness](#) that is in God, we will recognize just how counterfeit—imperfect, false, and sinful—we are. If we are sincere, we will fling ourselves on God's mercy and repent because

we do not want to be sinful but righteous and holy like God. We will want to prove to God that we have turned from our old, evil way and will henceforth live His way forever.

Notice that Job says, "I . . . repent in dust and ashes." His wording expresses ideas of humiliation, [mourning](#), burial, and death. Donning [sackcloth](#) and ashes was a common Hebrew act of humility and grief ([Esther 4:1](#); [Isaiah 58:5](#); [Jeremiah 6:26](#)). In his [affliction](#), the psalmist writes in [Psalm 102:9](#), "For I have eaten ashes like bread, and mingled my drink with weeping." When God informs Adam that he would die because of [sin](#), He says, "For dust you are, and to dust you shall return" ([Genesis 3:19](#)). The traditional funeral sermon from the Anglican *Book of Common Prayer* includes the memorable line, "Earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust."

Job's turn of phrase reveals the depth of his sorrow, shame, and determination to change. By saying this, he conveys his resolve to put the old, sinful Job to death and become a new man living a life of righteousness. We see this "old man of sin, new man of righteousness" in several places in the New Testament, including [Romans 6:1-14](#), where the subject is repentance leading to a life of righteousness:

What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it? Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ [Jesus](#) were baptized into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through [baptism](#) into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection, knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin. For he who has died has been freed from sin. Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him, knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, dies no more. Death no longer has dominion over Him. For the death that He died, He died to sin once for all; but the life that He lives, He lives to God. Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in

Christ Jesus our Lord. Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts. And do not present your members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin, but present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God. For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law but under grace.

Repentance and righteousness are virtually inseparable. Without repentance, righteousness has no beginning. It is impossible for a person to be righteous while still on the old path that leads to death. One must turn away from that path and then begin living righteously. In the same way, without righteousness, repentance has no fruit, nothing to show for a person's contrition. Thus, one without the other is nothing. They must be done together.

This work in tandem is illustrated in the first occurrence of the word "repentance" (*metanoia*) in the New Testament, [Matthew 3:8](#), in the preaching of John the Baptist: "Therefore bear fruits worthy of repentance." What is repentance without righteousness? Nothing. True repentance is only verified by its fruit, right conduct.

We will conclude this series next time by briefly studying David's Psalm of Repentance.

- Richard T. Ritenbaugh

From the Archives: Featured Sermon

[The Sin of Self-Deception](#)

by John W. Ritenbaugh

In our relationship with God, we must emphasize principle over pragmatism, because pragmatism inevitably leads to idolatry. Jeroboam, in setting idolatrous shrines and festivals at Dan and Bethel, appealed to the carnal desire for practical convenience (I Kings 12:26-33). These practical compromises eventually led to the desecration of the Sabbath and the holy

days, ending in the captivity of Israel. When doctrine is diluted, it turns into outright idolatry. Like ancient Israel, we have to guard against the tendency to gravitate toward ministers speaking smooth and pleasant things at the expense of turning from the truth. If we are led into deception, it is because our carnal nature wanted it that way (Jeremiah 17:9).

From the Archives: Featured Article

[The Beatitudes, Part Four: Hungering and Thirsting After Righteousness](#)

by John W. Ritenbaugh

It is quite rare to see a person who truly hungers and thirsts after God's way, but this is the kind of desire God wants us to have. John Ritenbaugh explains what Jesus means in this fourth beatitude.

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