

Tried and True, May We Abide in You

A narrow finger jutted out from the prophet with a sorrowful yet sincere declaration, "You are the man!"

History hung in the balance along with the whole Messianic line. Quite possibly, heaven observed with intense interest. God knew the outcome ahead of time but no one else did – neither the prophet nor the accused. The man was guilty, that was clear. But the man was a king, the deed was despicable, and the question remained – how would David react?

He repented!

You're all familiar with this famous story. David had blown it in the Bathsheba affair, and now he was exposed by his trusted friend, the prophet Nathan.

Understanding the need for and the nature of repentance is fundamental to our spiritual health. History is indeed hinged upon it, the world's as well as yours and mine individually.

The Bible is filled with examples of those who failed to repent as well as those who did. Consider Cain. After killing his brother, Abel, you never see even a hint of repentance. Consider Esau. He begged his father Isaac to repent (change his mind) concerning the blessing to no avail – yet Esau himself never repented of his ungodly attitudes. Consider King Saul. He never truly repented of esteeming the people's opinion higher than God's. Consider Judas. He was remorse over selling out Christ but he never turned to God.

But then there's Jacob, Moses, David, the Ninevites, Peter, Paul and others who when confronted with their failures and shortcomings, embraced the humiliating truth about themselves, turned toward God and changed.

In fact, as uncomfortable as it is to some to realize, there's no neutral ground here. Everyone, yep, everyone is eventually either repentant or reprobate. Repentant means to have a genuine change of mind while the word reprobate is literally to be unapproved – to have failed the test. But we need to understand God's 'testing' – we're not talking SATs.

Let's first consider repentance. "There is great difficulty in expressing the true idea of a change of thought with reference to sin when we translate the New Testament "repentance" into other languages. The Latin version renders it "exercise penitence" (poenitentiam agere). But "penitence" etymologically signifies pain, grief, distress, rather than a change of thought and purpose. Thus Latin Christianity has been corrupted by the pernicious error of presenting grief over sin rather than abandonment of sin as the primary idea of New Testament repentance. It was easy to make the transition from penitence to penance, consequently [some] represent Jesus and the apostles as urging people to do penance (poenitentiam agite)."

"The English word "repent" is derived from the Latin *repenitere*, and inherits the fault of the Latin, making grief the principal idea [rather than the] conception of a change of mind with reference to

sin. But the exhortations of the ancient prophets, of Jesus, and of the apostles show that the change of mind is the dominant idea of the words employed, while the accompanying grief and consequent reformation enter into one's experience from the very nature of the case." (International Standard Bible Encyclopedia)

"Worldly repentance is nothing but remorse and regret for the consequences of our action. It has no redeeming qualities; it only puts us under the burden of our guilt. Judas repented of his actions, but he did not turn to God for forgiveness. He tried to remove his guilt by arguing with the priest. They didn't care that he betrayed innocent blood and said so. He then tried to ease his conscience by casting the money into the temple. Undoing a wrong is like trying to unscramble an egg. Giving the money back did not erase the burden or undo the consequences. Because of the weight of his guilt, Judas hanged himself as though that would offer restitution. It does not. In death, Judas was just as guilty as in this life, only now he had no opportunity to be redeemed."

"Worldly repentance does not turn us toward God, but instead it drives us away from God. We feel unworthy of God's mercy because we are not looking at God or His word; we are looking at our actions and our guilt. Guilt can never bring us to true repentance. Only the light of God's word can produce true repentance...[a] repentance [which] is not merely sorrow over what you have done in your life, but the joy of what God offers in exchange for your life..." (Eddie Snipes)

Now, a common misconception concerning repentance is that if you truly repent with regard to a specific sin-attitude or conduct, that you'll never need to deal with it again. That's not necessarily true. There are sinful attitudes in most if not all our hearts that require wisdom and diligence to deal with throughout our lives, and they can rear their nasty heads even after you've previously truly repented of them -- a critical heart, a loose tongue, entertaining a haughty, prideful or lustful thought, need I go on? But here's wisdom...

"A.B. Simpson, the founder of the Christian and Missionary Alliance, told of a man who advertised for a coachman. Among those who came were two who seemed to him to be particularly bright. He took them aside and asked them how near they could drive to the edge of a precipice without falling over."

"The first candidate answered that he could go within half an inch and had frequently done so, just shaving the edge and feeling perfectly safe. He then asked the other the same question. 'Well, sir,' replied the man modestly, 'I really cannot tell, because I have never allowed myself to venture near the edge of a precipice. I have always made it a rule to keep as far as possible from danger, and I have had my reward in knowing that my master and his family were kept from danger and harm.'"

"The master had no difficulty in deciding between the two candidates. 'You are the man for me,' he said, 'the other may be brilliant, but you are safe.'" Victory Yap

The saved, repentant person has the power of God's Spirit and is free

from the domination of sin but not necessarily from the attacks of the enemy, the world or the sin nature. "Hard times can often lead to temptation... In our suffering the evil one is quick to come to our aid and offer one of his solutions; pursuing pleasure to numb the pain, coping an attitude, becoming bitter, getting even, feeding anger....." (Joni Erickson Tada) When Satan left off tempting Christ in the wilderness, it says that *"he departed from Him until an opportune time."* (Luke 4:13) That's why we are told to wear our spiritual armor!! (Eph 6:11-18)

Although the emphasis in the following verse is surely upon forgiveness, we should also consider what is also implied about repentance when Jesus told his disciples, *"Take heed to yourselves. If your brother sins against you, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him. And if he sins against you seven times in a day, and seven times in a day returns to you, saying, 'I repent,' you shall forgive him."* (Luke 17:3,4) Jesus did not mean that repentance is double-minded or wishy-washy. Sincere repentance means change, change of mind and consequently change of action/direction. But neither is it a once and for all, now I can cruise deal. We all have much to repent of – therefore we must also be very forgiving!!

All right now, since we've briefly considered repentance, let's look at the opposite side of the coin so to speak, that is, the reprobate. What makes one as such? Is it a committing of sin, a moral failure, a lack of good performance? Since the term literally means to be 'unapproved', to answer this we need

to consider the approval or testing process as described in scripture.

Some people don't like the idea that God tests us. But the Bible is very specific about it. Testing, trying, proving, and tempting are generally used in translating the most frequently used terms in the original languages of Old and New Testaments. There are, however, two principle ideas involved – the first is given by the Hebrew word 'tsaraph' and Greek 'dokimazo' which come from roots meaning to smelt, refine and also to recognize as genuine. The second is 'chaqar' in the OT and 'peirasmos' in the NT which emphasize a search, examination or experiment.

We find the first concept in verses like:

Psa 17:3 "You have tested my heart; You have visited me in the night; You have tried me and have found nothing..."

Psa 26:2 "Examine me, O Lord, and prove me; Try my mind and my heart..."

Psa 66:10 "For You, O God, have tested us; You have refined us as silver is refined."

Isa 48:10 "Behold, I have refined you, but not as silver; I have tested you in the furnace of affliction."

Dan 12:10 "Many shall be purified, made white, and refined, but the wicked shall do wickedly..."

Zech 13:9 "I will bring the one-third through the fire, will refine them as silver is refined, and test them as gold is tested."

1 Cor 3:13 "each one's work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one's work of what sort it is."

1 Thes 2:4 "But as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, even so we speak, not as pleasing men, but God who tests our hearts."

1 Tim 3:10 "But let these also first be tested, then let them serve..."

Refining or smelting requires heat, lots of heat. The process is generally repeated to produce greater and greater purity in the metals. But the important thing to note is that the process does not simply destroy the pollutants but rather exposes them, bringing them to the surface. The Smelter then removes them. The same is true spiritually. Oh, how we would love for people to only see the final result, to somehow rid ourselves of the dross in our lives such that everyone thinks we've always been and only are 99.9999999% pure! But that would be a lie. And it would only do us harm ultimately.

The second concept is found in such verses as:

Psa 139:1 "O Lord, You have searched me and known me."

Psa 139:23 "Search me, O God, and know my heart."

Jam 1:12 "Blessed is the man who endures temptation; for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him."

Now the examination goes hand in hand with the smelting if you would. But what is being examined? Is God looking to see how 'good' you are or how many religious works you've done or how high you can jump? Will He 'curve' your score if you can walk on coals of fire (extra credit)? Will someone really mess up the curve with their A++? Will God love you less if/when you 'fail'? Most people hate tests. I do. Why? Fear of failure. But

in coming to Christ, we've already admitted failure, so what's being examined? When dross is revealed, the Examiner/Smelter is looking for... nope, I'm not going to tell you yet. Hang on.

There are instances in scripture where someone passed a test – Abraham in his willingness to sacrifice his son Isaac at God's command, Joseph in running from the seduction of Potiphar's wife, Daniel and the boys in Babylon in demonstrating their faithfulness to Jehovah. But there's only one person in all of history who passed every test flawlessly – Jesus. *"For we have not a high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin."* (Heb 4:15) He came through with no dross at all so to speak; not 99.99999999999999% pure but 100% period, test after test after test – all the way!

And this is soooo important to hold on to, for you and I as Christian believers may, like the guys mentioned above, pass a test or two here and there, but frankly, none of us will really 'set the curve' will we? Thus, we must place our confidence in the fact that He perfectly passed it all, He is the 'approved' of God. Now, through faith in Christ, we may appropriate His 'approval' status to ourselves. And this is ultimately what the Smelter is looking for -- He's looking for...

Faith... and what faith?

The two metals which the Bible uses to picture the testing in our lives are silver and gold. Silver is the metal of redemption and gold is associated with our faith. I'll submit this for your consideration – in our

times of testing and trial, it's not necessarily our 'success or failure' that is being examined, but rather the Smelter seeks to know if we will maintain our faith in His redemption through Jesus Christ which is the basis for our relationship with Him. "...now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ, who having not seen you love." 1 Pet 1:6-8

"...let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful." (Heb 10:22,23)

"...having faith and a good conscience, which some having rejected, concerning the faith have suffered shipwreck..." (1 Tim 1:19)

"Now as Jannes and Jambres resisted Moses, so do these also resist the truth: men of corrupt minds, disapproved (reprobate) concerning the faith." (2 Tim 3:8)

And so, back to our question – what makes the reprobate, the disapproved, or as in the KJV, the 'disqualified'? Quite simply, God's testing reveals no faith in His redemptive work, His gracious gift. On the contrary, for this person trials or tribulation only show a hardness of heart – it is written of the Tribulation period in the book of Revelation, "But the rest of mankind, who were not killed by these plagues, did not repent of the works of their hands, that they should not worship demons, and idols

of gold, silver, brass, stone, and wood which can neither see nor hear nor walk. And they did not repent of their murders or their sorceries or their sexual immorality or their thefts." (Rev 9:20,21)

We need to understand that although our Lord does indeed tell us to be conformed to the image of His dear Son (Rom 8:29, 12:2, Phi 3:10-12) and though godly character is indeed one fruit of His testing (Rom 5:3,4), there's only one kind of real failure. That's failing to trust in and submit to Him. If you do well, like Abraham with Isaac, that's ideal. If you need to repent, like David with Bathsheba, and you repent, you're that much less 'drossy'. Praise the Lord! David was not "disqualified" – he was truly repentant and maintained his faith in God. Clearly, there were severe consequences to his failure. Sin has consequences.

But God's testing produces good fruit. Indeed, it's a pruning and cleansing process at times. And the bottom line so to speak is abiding. Jesus said, "Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me." (John 15:4,5)

And so, in conclusion, what I want to make clear is that under all circumstances we must abide in Christ for He is the only one Who is in all ways "**tried and true**". When you 'pass a test', abide in Him. When you fail but truly repent, abide in Him. Always abide in Christ our Lord!

O, Lord, our Lord, Tried and True, may we always, ever, abide in You!