

Being Sorry, Not Saved

By Brannon S. Howse

In several books, from the Worldview Weekend platform, and in various articles you've hopefully read here, I've sounded the alarm about the sorry state of the worldviews of many evangelical Christians. Numerous studies—perhaps the most stunning of which was done by the Southern Baptist Church of its own youth—reveal that the lifestyles, values, and the resulting worldview of most of those that attend “evangelical churches” is no different from the world and that a large majority of students leave the church after graduating from high school, never to return.

While the studies reveal the problem, they don't explain what has caused it, but I believe I know. The root is that our churches are filled with false converts. And it's a problem I identify with all too readily because, despite being raised in a Christian home, taught in a Christian school, and a member of a Bible-believing church, I was a false convert myself until I was an adult. And the scary part of it is that it's not all that hard to do!

I played the “game” (even though I didn't know I was playing a game). I thought I was saved because I believed in Jesus Christ, had prayed the “sinner's prayer,” walked the aisle, and had been baptized. I was “sorry” for my sins but it was not the kind of sorrow that produced repentance unto salvation.

My wake-up call came when I read the book of 1 John and recognized ten clear signs of a true convert but saw very few of those signs manifested in my own life. After searching the Scriptures further, I discovered the source of my dysfunctional attempt at Christianity in 2 Corinthians 7:9-10:

Now I rejoice, not that you were made sorry, but that your sorrow led to repentance. For you were made sorry in a godly manner, that you might suffer loss from us in nothing. For godly sorrow produces repentance leading to salvation, not to be regretted; but the sorrow of the world produces death.

True repentance was missing from my heart and, hence, my life! “Godly sorrow” causes someone to turn and go in the opposite direction of a willfully sinful life. True repentance leads to a change in a person's life, priorities, and desires, and it produces God-honoring fruit.

You see, many people say they believe in Jesus, but this does not make them saved. Recall that the Bible says demons believe in Jesus (James 2:19) but so what? It's not a saving belief.

Too often people say they are saved because they are sorry for the bad things they do, but they continue to willfully practice sin (can you say “Sunday Christian”?). The 2 Corinthians passage makes clear that there is a worldly sorrow that leads to death and another, godly, sorrow that produces repentance leading to salvation.

What really caught my attention and caused me to realize I was not a good person, that I was totally depraved and deserved hell, was when I encountered the Biblical teaching and doctrine of the moral law or the Ten Commandments. That made me realize only a godly sorrow that leads to repentance and salvation would do. The moral law revealed my true condition—my extreme sinfulness and depravity.

Sadly, repentance is *not* a Christian doctrine we hear taught often enough (many churches never teach it), and as a result, the church is filled with false converts. This dire reality should concern all of us. Scripture is forthright about how important this is:

- The word “repent” and its various forms is used over 100 times in the Bible.
- John the Baptist preached in the wilderness, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!” (Matthew 3:2).
- Jesus preached this same message of repentance. Mark 1:14, 15 says, “Now after John was put in prison, Jesus came to Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, and saying, ‘The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe the gospel.’”
- In Mark 6, Jesus sends out the 12 disciples two by two. Verse 12 states, “So they went out and preached that people should *repent*” (italics mine).

Every day 150,000 people step off into eternity, and a frightening percentage of them fall into eternal judgment. And many who wind up under judgment are likely shocked when they realize their situation. Many will have thought they lived a good life as defined by today’s standards. They went to church, perhaps even walked the aisle and got baptized. Some even taught Sunday school. But Jesus warned us this would happen:

“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. On that day many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?’ And then will I declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.’”
(Matthew 7:21-23)

I thank God someone once spoke doctrine into my life, revealed the true condition of my heart and mind, and declared Code Blue for my soul. It’s time for the American church to declare Code Blue and return to teaching sound Biblical doctrine—to our children, teens *and* adults—because hearts and minds are at eternal risk.

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Verses to study...

The Test of Knowing Him

1 John 1:6-7 If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin.

1 John 1:8-10 If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.... If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us.

1 John 2:3-4 Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments. He who says, “I know Him,” and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him.

1 John 2:15-16 Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world.

1 John 2:22-23 Who is a liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ? He is antichrist who denies the Father and the Son. Whoever denies the Son does not have the Father either; he who acknowledges the Son has the Father also.

1 John 3:7-10 Little children, let no one deceive you. He who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous. He who sins is of the devil, for the devil has sinned from the beginning....In this the children of God and the children of the devil are manifest: Whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is he who does not love his brother.

1 John 3:13-14 Do not marvel, my brethren, if the world hates you. We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love his brother abides in death.

1 John 4:5-6 They are of the world. Therefore they speak as of the world, and the world hears them. We are of God. He who knows God hears us; he who is not of God does not hear us. By this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error.

1 John 4:14-15 And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent the Son as Savior of the world. Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God.