

## Repentance Born of Tragedy

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by Bill Crews

Whenever a person genuinely repents, appropriate obedience will straightway follow. The alien sinner will confess the Lord, be baptized and strive to live as God wants him to live. The Christian will confess his sins to God, ask the Father's forgiveness and endeavor to live a faithful life.

So often, however, in the case of people who know the truth, the heart is hardened, the conscience salved, and repentance long delayed. Then a tragedy strikes, they are filled with fear, and they are constrained to repent and obey in haste. The following are true cases:

1. A young man in his twenties had known the gospel since he was a child, but had never obeyed the Lord. A case of bleeding ulcers put him in a hospital and placed his life in jeopardy. He thought he was close to death. He pleaded for someone to summon a preacher of the gospel, and trembling and weeping, he confessed his desire to be baptized for the remission of sins. He did not die; the bleeding was stopped; he confessed his faith in Christ and was baptized; then he returned to the town where he had grown up. Whether or not he remained faithful, I do not know, but if he regained a full measure of health, he would have been tempted to return to a lost condition.
2. A gray-haired man in retirement learned from his physician that he had an inoperable and malignant tumor in his lungs. He moved to be in the home of a daughter. With time on his hands and mostly bed-fast, he began reading the New Testament. After going through it five times, he knew that he had believed in Christ and repented of his sins, but his baptism with the sprinkling of a little water on his head was no baptism at all. He was shocked and afraid. Soon thereafter he walked into a preacher's study and told him that he wanted to be baptized. He lived less than a year after that.
3. A couple, both members of the Lord's church, drifted away from the truth and remained unfaithful for 23 years. During that time their two children grew up, married and became members of denominational churches. Quite suddenly the wife died. The preacher contacted to conduct the funeral service, the Christians who sang songs at the service were total strangers to the man. The very next Sunday that man was at church services. At the evening service he penitently confessed his tragic unfaithfulness, and for the few years that he lived thereafter tried to be as faithful as he could.

Why will people wait until some stark calamity strikes before they are shaken and terrified sufficiently to bring them to their senses? Why will they live in impenitence until the fear of death itself brings them to repent? Why should it take a tragedy to produce repentance? Suppose such a tragedy never comes? Suppose death strikes swiftly and without warning. Do you know that many who are brought to repentance by the danger of impending death return to their old ways of sin when the danger of impending death is removed? Perhaps their repentance was never genuine. And who really knows whether the Lord will accept service rendered under such pressures?

Are you among the impenitent? Have you been putting off coming into or coming back to the Lord and His spiritual body, the church? Why wait for a tragedy in your life to compel you to do what you can and should do now under calmer circumstances and for better reasons? Repentance must be founded upon sincere conviction that is produced by God's truth. It must be brought about by godly sorrow (**2 Corinthians 7:8-10**). It is the goodness of God that leads to repentance (**Romans 2:4**). It is divine longsuffering that grants one time and opportunity to repent (**2 Peter 3:9**).

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