

Why Are Many Churches and Pastors Avoiding the 'S' Word?

Many are aware of 2 Chronicles 7:14, "If My people, who are called by My name, will humble themselves and pray, and seek My face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and will heal their land."

It's no secret that there is a significant shift in the church today to avoid sin and repentance. God's Word says to confront, confess and turn from sin, whereas many encourage us to ignore, overlook and continue in it.

One popular TV preacher actually said, "I don't talk about sin," and was proud of it. Silence about sin minimizes the cross and makes it less offensive. But the cross only makes sense in light of the consequences of sin. "To convince the world of the truth of Christianity, it must first be convinced of sin. It is only sin that renders Christ intelligible" (Andrew Murray).

The gospel—the Good News that Jesus came to save sinners—is an insult to the world. Jesus Himself said that His message of redemption would be offensive. He spoke the truth because of His love for the lost, and we should seek to do the same. The good news can only be appreciated and properly understood with the bad news as the backdrop. How can we discuss God's love, mercy and grace without mentioning His justice, righteousness and holiness? How can we discuss heaven but not hell; relationship but not repentance; a Savior but not sin? We can't.

The one word that changes everything is: repentance. Richard Owen Roberts said, "You can be certain that at the forefront of every significant recovery from backsliding ... the doctrine

of repentance has been among the precious truths that God has quickened and used." Repentance is one of the first commands in the gospel and it may be the most important word that a person hears. "Wait a minute. What about love?" Yes, thank God for John 3:16, but love doesn't nullify repentance; it encourages it—the love of God leads us to repentance.

Many mistakenly believe that Jesus didn't mention sin—after all, He was "a friend of sinners." However, Scripture reveals quite the opposite. For example, in John 5:14, Jesus exhorted a man to sin no more or a worse thing would happen to him. He also told the woman caught in the act of adultery to "go and sin no more."

In Luke 10:13-14, Jesus reprimanded cities that did not repent and turn from sin, and in the fifth chapter of Matthew, He said to remove anything that causes us to sin. It's clear that "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners" (1 Tim. 1:15). Why, then, is there a move within the church to avoid mentioning sin? John 12:43 may reveal the answer, "They loved the glory that comes from man more than the glory that comes from God."

I'm not promoting a works-based religion; I'm demonstrating the importance of having a genuine relationship with Christ—a relationship that produces godly fruit. Genuine faith is reflected in a transformed life, a love for God and His Word, sincere humility, selfless love, true repentance and a disconnect from the world. Does your life reflect these characteristics? As you can see, a correct view of sin is vitally important.

Believe it or not, many within the church are seeking to replace the word "repent" with "rethink." Apparently, we need to rethink our narrow view of the gospel and our restricted view of biblical hermeneutics, so they say. This re-scripting seems ridiculous, but it's true. They argue that "repentance" may not actually mean what we think.

In reality, it's no surprise that they take this position. In order for Christianity to appear palatable and less intrusive to our culture, many feel that we need to rethink, redefine and rename difficult truths, including repentance. If your church rarely mentions sin and avoids talking about repentance, some hard questions need to be asked.

Repentance is a true gift from God that affects everything in our lives. If our priorities, our passions, our goals and our desires are not aligning with God's, have we truly repented? I only say this because so many today have religion and not a true relationship with Christ. They are simply going through the motions. They have never truly repented, and thus, they lack passion for God.

It's been said that if your religion has not changed your life, change your religion. Of course there are hobbies, activities and certain friendships that will continue, but if our overall nature is not changing, or at least heading in that direction, we should reassess our commitment—was it genuine? Did we truly repent and turn to God? Do we truly “know” Jesus Christ (relationship), or do we only know “about” Him (religion)?

John 10:10 says that Jesus came to give us life, freedom and a relationship with God. Are you experiencing this abundant life? Or are you bound by sin, rules, compromise or tradition? That can be changed: 2 Corinthians 5:17 says that if anyone is in Christ they are a new creation. The old has gone and the new is here. You must trust in Him as Lord and Savior.

If you're a believer, but find yourself trapped in sin, misery and depression, there is also hope. God's continually calls His people back to Him. If you return with all of your heart (repent), He will return to you. That's a gift of the greatest value ... a promise that will never fail. {eo}

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