

“THE SEVEN LAWS OF SPIRITUAL SUCCESS”

“Stay Close to God”

Scripture Reading – John, 15:1-8

Jesus said, “I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me.

“I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. If anyone does not remain in me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you. This is to my Father’s glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples”.

‘If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word has no place in our lives.’

1 John, 1:8-10, NIV

This series is based on the book ‘THE SEVEN LAWS OF SPIRITUAL SUCCESS’.

Shortly after his seventieth birthday, Selwyn Hughes sat down to compile a list of the truths the LORD had taught him as he walked with Christ for more than half a century. This original list contained between forty to fifty issues which he felt could be passed on to the Christians of tomorrow. In asking what was ‘absolutely essential to living an effective and successful Christian life’, the writer whittled them down to an irreducible minimum of seven.

Selwyn Hughes decided to call these seven key concepts ‘LAWS OF SPIRITUAL SUCCESS’.

However, this is not a call to legalism but a call to engage with the spiritual laws God has built into his Kingdom, which in turn enable us to experience more of his power and his presence.

Let the Holy Spirit unfold for you the basic laws that govern all spiritual success...

“STAY CLOSE TO GOD”

‘Staying close to God is the sixth law of spiritual success... This requires that we carefully consider the issue of repentance, because repentance is a law of the spiritual life as sure and certain as the others previously stated.’

Selwyn Hughes

WHAT REPENTANCE IS NOT

REGRET IS NOT REPENTANCE

Regret is being sorry for oneself, deploring the consequences of one’s actions but not necessarily making a change.

REMORSE IS NOT REPENTANCE

Remorse is sorrow without hope at its heart; it is an emotion of disgust. It eats its heart out instead of seeking a new heart.

REFORMATION IS NOT REPENTANCE

Reforming or changing one’s way of life may follow repentance, but it never precedes it.

REPARATION IS NOT REPENTANCE

Reparation or restitution may well be a practical proof of the reality of repentance, but it should not be mistaken for the actual act of repentance.

‘I am afraid that what often passes for repentance in the Christian community is not real repentance at all; it is only remorse or regret. And one of the tragedies in contemporary Christian circles is that there are many people sitting in our churches who regard themselves as Christians but who have never experienced true repentance.’

Selwyn Hughes

WHAT REPENTANCE IS

Dictionary: *‘to feel such regret or dissatisfaction over some past action, or intention, as to change one’s mind about it; to feel so contrite over one’s sins to change, or decide to change, one’s ways’.*

The word ‘REPENTANCE’ comes from the Greek ‘METANOIA’, meaning ‘A CHANGE OF MIND’.

‘Repentance means TURNING’, or – more specifically – ‘TURNING TO GOD’. In turning to God, the penitent also turns away from something – from that which he has come to realise is displeasing to God. The act is accompanied by sorrow, for that makes repentance necessary. If there is not this sorrow for the evil deed or for the evil condition, then there is no true repentance.’

“BLACK’S BIBLE DICTIONARY”, Madeleine Miller & J Lane Miller

1. REPENTANCE & SALVATION

‘When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, “Brothers, what shall we do?” Peter replied, “Repent and be baptised, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit”.’

Acts, 2:38-39, NIV

'I think there is little doubt that the teaching of salvation without repentance has lowered the moral standards of the Church and produced a multitude of deceived religious professors who erroneously believe themselves to be saved when in fact they are still in the gall of bitterness and the bond of iniquity.'

Aiden W Tozer

'We believe that repentance toward God, faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, and regeneration by the Holy Spirit are necessary to salvation.'

"THE SALVATION ARMY, ARTICLES OF FAITH", Doctrine 7

A Biblical example of repentance is found in the story of David and Bathsheba.

In **II Samuel, 11:1-27**, David notices the beautiful Bathsheba bathing. He is smitten and lusts after her. Although she is married, the King is not put off. He decides to get rid of her husband, Uriah the Hittite. David moves Bathsheba into the palace. She becomes his wife and bares him a son... **'BUT THE THING DAVID HAD DONE DISPLEASED THE LORD'**. In **II Samuel, 12:1-31**, the Lord sends Nathan to the palace to rebuke David. Then David said to Nathan, **"I HAVE SINNED AGAINST THE LORD"**. We read his tremendous prayer of repentance in **Psalms, 51:1-12**.

David was truly sorry for his adultery with Bathsheba and for murdering her husband to cover it up. He knew that his actions had hurt many people. But because David repented of those sins, God mercifully forgave him. No sin is too great to be forgiven!

God can and will forgive you of any sin.

While God forgives us, however, he does not always erase the natural consequences of our sin. David's life and family were never the same as a result of what he had done.

Although David had sinned with Bathsheba, he had really sinned against God.

When someone steals, murders, or slanders, it is a sin against someone else – a victim. According to the world's standards, extramarital sex between two consenting adults is acceptable if nobody gets hurt. But people do get hurt – in David and Bathsheba's case, a man was murdered, and a baby died. All sin hurts us and others, but ultimately it offends God because sin in any form is a rebellion against God's prescribed way of living. When you are tempted to do wrong, remember that ultimately you will be sinning against God.

A modern-day example of repentance is found in the conversion of Charles Colson.

Charles Colson was a former White House assistant during the presidency of Richard Nixon, and was convicted and went to prison for his part in the Watergate Scandal. It was in August 1973 that Colson first felt the claims of Christ on his soul. He had just spent time with Tom Phillips, President of the Raytheon Company, the largest employer in New England. Phillips shared with Colson the story of how he had come to Christ and sensing Chuck's interest read him a chapter from the book **'MERE CHRISTIANITY'** (by **Clive S Lewis**) – a chapter about pride. As he heard Lewis's words, the tough politician felt them biting into his conscience. His view of himself began to change as he saw himself as he truly was...

'Suddenly I felt naked and unclean, my bravado defences gone. I was exposed, unprotected, for Lewis's words were describing me... Just as a man about to die is

supposed to see flash before him, sequence by sequence, the high points of his life, so as Tom read on that August evening, key events paraded before me.'

"BORN AGAIN", Charles W Colson

Later that evening, as Colson got into his car and started the engine, he was caught up in a wave of deep emotion. As he drove away, tears were flowing uncontrollably. Do not be tempted to think that he was in the middle of a nervous breakdown. What actually happened was that he found himself in the throes of repentance – the spiritual revolution that takes place in the soul when one begins to realise one's need to find forgiveness for sin and turn one's life over to God. This is how Colson described the experience in his own words...

'I was crying so hard it was like trying to swim underwater. Then came the strange sensation that water was not only running down my cheeks, but surging through my whole body as well, cleansing and cooling as it went. They weren't tears of sadness or remorse, nor of joy – but somehow tears of relief. And then I prayed my first real prayer: "God, I don't know how to find you, but I am going to try. I'm not much in the way I am now, but somehow I want to give myself to you". I didn't know how to say more so I repeated over and over the words: "Take me". I stayed there in the car, wet-eyed, praying, thinking for perhaps half-an-hour, perhaps longer, alone in the quiet of the dark night. Yet for the first time in my life I was not alone.'

"BORN AGAIN", Charles W Colson

We believe that repentance toward God ... is necessary for salvation...

WHAT REPENTANCE INVOLVES

CONVICTION OF SIN

The penitent recognises that he is guilty and deserving of punishment.

'Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you are proved right when you speak and justified when you judge.'

Psalms, 51:4, NIV

HATRED OF SIN

The penitent turns against the sin which he formerly loved, realizing it to be evil in the sight of God, and condemning himself for committing it.

'Those who escape will remember me – how I have been grieved by their adulterous hearts, which have turned away from me, and by their eyes, which have lusted after their idols. They will loathe themselves for the evil they have done and for all their detestable practices.'

Ezekiel, 6:9b, NIV

SORROW FOR SIN, OR CONTRITION FOR SIN

The penitent regrets his wrongdoing, and wishes that he had not acted so shamefully towards a loving God. He has sorrow for the act of sin itself, not merely for its

consequences. Godly sorrow means sorrow for having sinned against God, while worldly sorrow is sorrow without faith in God, or mere regret for the consequences of sin.

‘Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death.’

II Corinthians, 7:10, NIV

RENUNCIATION OF SIN

The penitent is willing there and then and forever to give up the sinful ways and actions which he regrets. If a man is unwilling to do this, and if he does not actually intend to give up wrongdoing as far as he can, his repentance is insincere. Willing to give up sin does not necessarily imply the power to do so, because such power comes only with salvation.

‘Let the wicked forsake his way and the evil man his thoughts. Let him turn to the LORD, and he will have mercy on him, and to our God, for he will freely pardon.’

Isaiah, 55:7, NIV

CONFESSION OF SIN

The true penitent makes a full confession of his sins to God. He is also willing to acknowledge his sinfulness before men, and to confess his sins to those he has wronged.

‘He who conceals his sins does not prosper, but whoever confesses and renounces them finds mercy.’

Proverbs, 28:13, NIV

DESIRE FOR FORGIVENESS

The penitent longs for pardon, and it is this which prompts him to repent.

‘Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love; according to your great compassion blot out my transgressions.’

Psalms, 51:1, NIV

SUBMISSION TO GOD

The penitent yields or surrenders himself to God, willing to obey him and please him in everything.

‘Do not be stiff-necked, as your fathers were; submit to the LORD.’

II Chronicles, 30:8a, NIV

WILLINGNESS TO MAKE RESTITUTION

The penitent endeavours to put right, as far as he can, any wrong that he has done.

‘Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord, “Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount”.’

Luke, 19:8, NIV

‘The entrance into the Christian life is through the door of repentance. The term has a harsh sound in modern ears. People would gladly cut it out of the religious vocabulary if they could. But there it stands. It humbles men and women’s pride. It rebukes self-complacency. It tells us that there is something radically wrong with our lives. It summons us to submit to the righteousness which is God through faith in Jesus Christ.’

Selwyn Hughes

2. REPENTANCE & SANCTIFICATION

‘Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord, and that he may send the Christ, who has been appointed for you - even Jesus.’

Acts, 3:19-20, NIV

Repentance is necessary for sanctification.

Repentance should not be seen solely as the door through which we enter into the Christian life, but also as a way of developing and improving within the Christian life. It must become a daily attitude, a daily perspective.

‘The mood of penitence is a normal Christian mood. The more the believer sees himself in the light of Christ, the more he becomes aware of his own imperfection. His penitence is not necessarily an account of gross and open sins; it is rather penitence for wandering thoughts, for uncharitable intentions, for failures of love, for thinking too much of self, for paying too little regard to self-discipline, and for the neglect of the fruit of the Spirit. The great saints are always the great penitents, because they are most severe in their self-judgment.’

“BLACK’S BIBLE DICTIONARY”, Madeleine Miller & J Lane Miller

‘If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.’

I John, 1:8-9, NIV

‘The repentance God desires of us is not just contrition over particular sins; it is also a daily attitude, a perspective... it is the process by which we see ourselves, day by day, as we really are, sinful, needy, dependent people. It is the process by which we see God as he is, awesome majestic holy... and it so radically alters our perspective that we begin to see the world through God’s eyes not our own. Repentance is the ultimate surrender of the self.’

“AGAINST THE NIGHT”, Charles W Colson

True repentance results from a revelation of the righteousness and love of God.

*While in thy light I stand, my heart, I seem to see,
Has failed to take from thy own hand the gifts it offers me.*

*Lord, thy plenteous grace, thy wisdom and thy power,
I here proclaim, before thy face, can keep me every hour.*

Herbert Howard Booth, SASB 415:3

‘God’s kindness leads you towards repentance.’

Romans, 2:4b, NIV

Consider Isaiah’s response to the revelation of God in the Temple...

‘In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord seated on a throne, high and exalted, and the train of his robe filled the temple. Above him were seraphs, each with six wings: With two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they were flying. And they were calling to one another: “Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory”. At the sound of their voices the doorposts and thresholds shook and the temple was filled with smoke. “Woe to me!” I cried. “I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the LORD Almighty”.’

Isaiah, 6:1-5, NIV

Isaiah had already been used by God – note this is chapter six!

But faced with a vision of the holiness of God, Isaiah disintegrated in his presence!

We need to recognise that day-to-day we are a sinful, needy, dependent people.

It is so easy to move away from depending on Christ to make our lives work. We can come into the Christian life through the door of radical repentance but when we are inside we attempt to live the life God has called us to in our own strength.

Staying close to God always involves repentance.

Sin always breaks our communion with God – and no matter how hard we try, we will always fall into sin in thought, word and deed.

‘God will take nine steps towards us, but he will not take the tenth. He will incline us to repent, but he cannot do our repentance for us.’

Aiden W Tozer

Christians who fail to see themselves as desperately needy and dependent people, requiring the resources of Christ to flow through them in order to live life as he planned it, have not begun to grasp what the Christian life is all about.

‘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. I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without me you can do nothing. If anyone does not abide in me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw them into the fire, and they are burned. If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you. By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be my disciples”.’

John, 15:4-8, NKJV

“YOU STAY CLOSE TO GOD WHEN YOU ABIDE IN JESUS”