



The Difference Between True Repentance and Temporary Regret!

In the story of the crucifixion of Jesus Christ, there were two men who were sorry for their actions—Peter and Judas. Peter truly loved Jesus and boasted that he would even die for him if necessary. However, when Jesus was arrested and taken to the house of the high priest for a trial based on trumped-up charges, Peter's resolve crumbled at the first taunt from a servant girl who recognized him as one of Jesus' followers. Peter boasted a bit too loudly and trusted in his own strength to get him out of difficult situations. When he came face to face with real trouble, Peter found himself weak and unfaithful. ***Have you ever been there?***

Jesus warned him to expect rough times ahead, and even predicted that Peter would deny him three times before the rooster crowed at the dawn of the next morning. The first time Peter denied Jesus he should have recognized that he had fallen for Satan's trap. But reckless and impulsive Peter continued to lie and protect his own self-interests as he was backed into a corner. ***How many corners have you lied and manipulated your way out of?***

The second denial was a more willful and deliberate sin than the first since the denial was accompanied by an oath—calling on God to be a witness to the truth of his testimony. The second denial compounded the lie with blasphemy, and in the third denial he added cursing and swearing. Cursing and swearing was not the same as our four-letter words which are commonly used today. To curse meant to assign a curse on himself that he would die at God's hands if his words were untrue.

Peter had really dug himself into a deep hole of deceit and hypocrisy. When the rooster crowed the second time, Jesus turned and looked into Peter's eyes. Immediately, Peter remembered Jesus' prediction, and was so ashamed that he ran out and wept bitterly.

Judas was also a trusted disciple of Jesus who acted as the treasurer of the group. Jesus predicted his behavior in the upper room during his last Passover feast with the disciples. Judas did not boast like Peter about his love for Jesus. Instead, he hid his evil heart and concealed his true character from the others. He had already conspired to betray Jesus before sitting down to the table with him, and his greed for the 30 pieces of silver revealed a heart of evil and rationalization.

Judas may have thought he could keep his money while Jesus escaped arrest and trial just as he had in the past. He may have convinced himself that if Jesus was really the Messiah, his betrayal would have no serious or lasting consequences.

Judas had allowed Satan easy access to his heart as he began stealing from the disciples' treasury. Bit by bit, he resisted truth and embraced a lie until he was able to rationalize his actions and retain his respectability while perpetrating evil right under the

noses of his fellow believers. Even when Jesus indicated to the disciples that one of them would betray him, no one suspected Judas. ***Do you know church leaders who lie and get away with malicious evil because no one believes they could possibly be guilty?***

When Judas saw the consequences of his sin, he experienced guilt and tried to offer restitution by giving back the 30 pieces of silver. He confessed his crime and affirmed Jesus' innocence. The scriptures even say Judas "repented." But the Greek word used for Judas' repentance meant "deep regret." It was not the usual Greek word for being truly sorry, hating the sin, and refusing to get involved in that particular sin again. Judas hated the consequences and feelings of guilt, but not the sin itself. Peter demonstrated his character by *instant repentance* while Judas simply wanted to get past the guilty feelings.

In his book, "The Murder of Jesus," John MacArthur writes, *"Tears of repentance can in no way atone for sins. But genuine sorrow is nonetheless an important sign of true repentance, signifying that a change of mind and heart have truly taken place. Not all sorrow signifies true repentance, however. Judas was remorseful over what he had done and tried to return the blood money to the ruling priests. His guilt over what he had done finally even motivated him to go out and kill himself. But that kind of sorrow is a worldly sorrow that only leads to death. It may involve sincere remorse over the consequences of one's sin—regret over the loss of prestige or friends or influence. But it reflects no true change of heart, and thus no true grief over the sin itself."*

Peter's sorrow was of a different sort. It was the deepest possible sorrow of heart—mingled with shame over his sinful behavior, hatred of the sin itself, and a desperate longing to be restored to a right relationship with Christ."

This depiction of Peter's repentance is a model for all relationships, especially in an abusive marriage where the sincerity of an abuser's repentance is being evaluated. Does he/she:

- admit that *their* abusive behavior is a sin and refrain from blaming someone else for their actions?
- feel ashamed for the sinful behavior?
- hate the sin itself so much that they will get help to keep from repeating it?
- have a desperate longing to restore their relationship to Christ and their family?

When someone has this kind of true repentance, God steps in to redeem them from their worst failures and restore their lives and homes. John MacArthur writes, *"He drew them back, forgave them, commissioned them for service, and empowered them to succeed where they had once failed so miserably."*

When you have suffered at the hand of another person, it may be hard to determine whether or not they are sincerely sorry. It is right to be cautious and to question their motives when they say they're sorry. However, if you see true repentance, based on the model above, be aware that God's grace and mercy is at work in their lives. As you allow His mercy to flow through you toward the offender, you will facilitate the first step toward restoration and reconciliation.