Repentance And Rest . . . Quietness And Trust

"This is what the Sovereign Lord, the Holy One of Israel, says:
'In repentance and rest is your salvation, in quietness and trust is your strength'" (Isa. 30:15).

By Dave Butts

It is so easy for most of us to get caught up in seeing our Christian faith as unending activity. Attending meetings, serving, meeting needs, developing ministry skills all can become the center of who we are as Christians. When that happens, our focus has shifted off of who Christ is and what He has done for us…and begins to be on who *we* are and what we are *doing* for Him. This is never a spiritually healthy situation.

God is always trying to teach us to depend upon Him. It is never about us, but is always about Him. Jesus told us that apart from Him, we can do nothing (John 15:5). Most of us have to be convinced of that by bitter experience.

People try so hard to do ministry. We plan and strategize and budget and dream of all we will do in the Kingdom of God. In a very real sense, those things are admirable. One of our great joys is in serving the Lord. Where we go wrong is when we try to do this in our own strength.

One of the very real reasons for prayerlessness in the Church is our failure to realize our dependence upon Jesus. We want to try it first…and then pray when we get in trouble. One of the most practical aspects of prayer is the way it teaches us to lean upon the Lord. Ronnie Floyd, in his book, *How to Pray*, says there are two critical aspects to remember about prayer:

"1. Prayer occurs when you depend on God.

"2. Prayerlessness occurs when you depend on yourself."

A praying church is one that has learned to depend upon God. A praying Christian is one who has learned to depend upon God. The crying need of our day is not more religious activity, but for Christians who will trust the Lord and serve Him out of a greater dependency.

The text from Isaiah 30:15 speaks strongly to the Church today. In the midst of our busyness and religious activity, Isaiah speaks words that both condemn and comfort: *"This is what the Sovereign Lord, the Holy One of Israel, says: 'In repentance and rest is your salvation, in quietness and trust is your strength.'"*

Repentance is the first response for those who have accepted the truth of who Jesus is. When the crowd heard Peter speak of Christ on the Day of Pentecost, they literally interrupted his sermon with the question, "Brothers, what shall we do?" Peter's first word in response is, "Repent." There is more, but repentance is first.

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What Christians often fail to understand is that repentance is not just a one-time event. It becomes a way of life. As we sin, we are continually called to repent…to turn from our rebellion and move back into a way of life that pleases God. Repentance is in such a primary place because it makes us aware that we cannot in any way earn our salvation. We are dependent upon the mercy of God.

As a matter of fact, our repentance will often be about the fact that we have forgotten how dependent we are upon the Lord. In my own life, it seems that I must again and again come to God, repenting of my tendency to try to do ministry in my own strength. It is crucial then, that we understand why Isaiah put repentance and rest together. The rest spoken of here is not inactivity. Rather, it is an awareness that what counts is God's work through us. It is therefore not our own work, but His strength and power accomplishing what He desires through His servants.

The author of Hebrews spends the entire fourth chapter dealing with the Sabbath rest of the people of God. In verse 10 he writes, *"…for anyone who enters God's rest also rests from his own work."* As we rest from our works, God's work is highlighted and He receives all the glory and praise. We enter into His rest, which is not a cessation of activity on our part, but an awareness that we are called to allow God's work to progress within us. To make it simple, it means going back to the words of Jesus in John 15:5, *"Apart from Me, you can do nothing."*

We need to repent, because we have not entered God's rest. We have tried to build our own kingdoms, in our own strength, and somehow procure our own salvation. We repent and rest, and when we move away from God's rest, we repent again and move back into God's rest. This, Isaiah says, is our salvation…depending upon the saving power of Christ and His continued work within us.

The second half of Isaiah's instruction is similar: *"…in quietness and trust is your strength."* We don't often think of our words as tools or weapons, but we certainly do try to change circumstances and people by our use of words. How many times have you tried to talk someone into or out of something? We sense that there is a power in our words to change people's lives. And so there is! Words can heal or harm, comfort or correct, delight or destroy. We are warned over and over again in Scripture about the power of words.

So often, we find ourselves using words to defend, attack or manipulate a situation, instead of trusting in the Lord. Developing a spirit of quietness is an essential part of learning to trust in the Lord. If we are always speaking into a situation, we often will be excluding the Lord from accomplishing what He desires.

Being quiet is difficult, but silence is a palpable way of expressing faith. When Jesus was hauled before the authorities, He fulfilled Old Testament Scriptures which prophesied of Him: *"He was oppressed and afflicted, yet He did not open His mouth; He was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is silent, so He did not open His mouth"* (Isaiah 53:7). He trusted the situation to His heavenly Father.

Quietness implies not only control of our tongue, but control of our life. It is stepping off the merry-go-round of constant activity in life and allowing the Lord to lead us beside still waters.

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Quietness is a concrete example of trusting the Lord and then depending upon His strength to do and be all that God desires.

There is a great call from heaven to the Church today. It is a call for increased intimacy with the Lord. It is a call back into the presence of God. The way to respond to this call from God is through repentance and rest…quietness and trust.

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