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## How Men Act When They Repent

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In Matthew 12:41, Jesus said, "The men of Nineveh will rise up in the judgment with this generation and condemn it, because they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and indeed a greater than Jonah is here." According to Jesus, the men of Nineveh repented at the preaching of Jonah.

You remember the story, don't you? God had commanded Jonah, "Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry out against it; for their wickedness has come up before Me" (Jonah 1:2). Now Nineveh was not only a city filled with wickedness, it was also the capital of the Assyrians, hated enemies of the Israelites. Jonah didn't want to go. He fled from God's presence. However, after being given some quality time in the belly of a fish to reflect and pray, Jonah decided to obey God. Jonah walked through the city proclaiming the judgment of the Lord upon these pagan people: "Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!" (Jonah 3:4).

The people of Nineveh repented. They "proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest to the least of them" (Jonah 3:5). When word came to the king of Nineveh, "he arose from his throne and laid aside his robe, covered himself with sackcloth and sat in ashes." He decreed that "neither man nor beast, herd nor flock" were to eat or drink and that "every one" was to "turn from his evil way and from the violence that is in his hand" (Jonah 3:7-8).

The text says that, "God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God relented from the disaster that He had said He would bring upon them" (Jonah 3:10). God can read men's hearts. He knows more about what is going on in our heads than we do ourselves. But He did not need to read the minds of the Ninevites to know that they had repented. He "saw their works, that they turned away from evil". When the men of Nineveh repented, nobody was left to wonder whether or not their repentance was genuine. Nobody was left guessing about their intention to stop committing evil. Nobody would have doubted they had actually repented of their sins.

We really need to learn this lesson from the men of Nineveh. We need to learn how to act when we repent. Repentance isn't just saying "excuse me," "my bad," or "forgive me," and then going on with our lives as if nothing happened. Repentance should produce real change in our actions. We are to "bear fruits worthy of repentance" (Matthew 3:8). I am afraid that too many of us think that our repentance should go unnoticed. We are incognito repenters! And while God hardly asks us to don sackcloth and ashes today, He does ask us to "do works befitting repentance" (Acts 26:20).

Let's resolve to turn away from sin in our lives, and make sure that we behave in such a way that folks can tell that's what we've done!

“For even if I made you sorry with my letter, I do not regret it; though I did regret it. For I perceive that the same epistle made you sorry, though only for a while. Now I rejoice, not that you were made sorry, but that your sorrow led to repentance. For you were made sorry in a godly manner, that you might suffer loss from us in nothing. For godly sorrow produces repentance *leading* to salvation, not to be regretted; but the sorrow of the world produces death. For observe this very thing, that you sorrowed in a godly manner: What diligence it produced in you, *what* clearing of yourselves, *what* indignation, *what* fear, *what* vehement desire, *what* zeal, *what* vindication! In all *things* you proved yourselves to be clear in this matter.”



2 Corinthians 7:8-11

## Welcome Words

by Irvin Himmel

“A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in pictures of silver” (Prov. 25:11).

Words are vehicles which carry thoughts. The appropriate word must be chosen if the thought is to be conveyed with accuracy, and the manner in which the word is spoken helps the vehicle to transport its cargo without loss.

### Fitly Spoken

Please take a moment to consider the following points relative to “fitly spoken” words.

- 1. Timely advice.** Suggestions and recommendations are sometimes excellent, but if the timing is off the counsel misses its mark. There is an art to one’s saying the right thing at the right time. A word of advice that is timely is suitably spoken.
- 2. Carefully thought out.** In the use of words, quality is more important than quantity. The words which fall from the lips of the superficial talker are seldom fitly spoken. He thinks too little who talks too much. The person who desires to make his remarks suitable and worthy of hearing must learn to think with care before speaking.
- 3. Appreciated.** A word fitly spoken is esteemed or valued by the hearer. To be appreciated, a word must be comprehended. Some preachers miss the mark by using the words which their hearers do not understand. Big words baffle; simple language sheds light.
- 4. Adapted to the occasion.** There are times when the most fitting word is in the form of praise or encouragement. Like high-octane gasoline, encouragement helps to eliminate knocking. The appropriate word on another occasion may be an expression of sympathy. The individual who is despondent or discouraged may be assisted by a remark that shows understanding and compassion. Or, on a different occasion the proper word may be in the form of rebuke. Happy is the person who gauges his statements so that they will befit the circumstances.
- 5. Tactfully stated.** The real art of conversation is not only saying the right thing in the right place, but to leave unsaid the wrong thing at the tempting moment. Some people use precious little discretion in their remarks. How a thing is said may determine its results to as great an extent as what is said. Paul wrote about “speaking the truth in love” (Eph. 4:15), and that bears on the manner of speaking as well as what is spoken. If you wish your words to be “fitly spoken,” learn to be tactful in conversation.