

## THE BIBLE VIEW

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### Just A Piece of Stone?

*Bill Brinkworth*

Weeks of visiting different marble quarries finally paid off. After examining many blocks of the art material, the sculptor finally found the stone for which he was looking. Arrangements in the office were made, and the rock was promised to be delivered the following week.

When the delivery was made, the hefty piece was hoisted off the truck, loaded on a dolly, and wheeled into the artist's studio. There it stayed, as it was viewed, admired, and studied for imperfections by the stone carver. Days later, a rough sketch was drawn on the piece of stone to give the sculptor an idea of what material was to be removed.

Soon, the hard work began. A small, pneumatic hammer banged away, removing large chunks of the unwanted material. The floor was quickly littered with marble waste.

After the course outline was followed, the tedious, detailing handwork began. Day and sometimes night, the sculptor chipped off the unneeded rock. Slowly, the block took on a form of a man. A face, appendages, and clothing were slowly revealed on the once shapeless block of stone.

Patiently, weeks passed until finally, the sculptor stepped back and viewed the finished, polished piece of art. Hard work transformed the once unformed piece of marble into a work pleasing to its craftsman and many that would view the artwork for decades.

In like matter, God can masterfully and slowly transform any willing person for His admiration and use. Many may see the person as a hopeless case. However, despite the imperfections He knows about, God has great hopes for what He can make of the person.

When a person sees oneself as flawed with sin, having little hope in this life or the next, and trusts Christ as Saviour, the Master steps in. He sees what the person could be and patiently chips away, if the person allows, and transforms that creature into something the Creator, person, and society admires.

Usually, after a person is saved, guilt from sin is the first sign of salvation. After admitting and trusting God to overcome that iniquity, God begins the patient process of removing that transgression and others from the believer.

One by one, sin's hold on a person is released as God helps dispose of the unneeded sin-caused flaws. Outward and inward iniquities are slowly removed. Some may have a more stubborn hold on the converted life than others. At times, the iniquity's removal may even be hurtful when it is pruned from a life, but God's handiwork continues.

Some cannot stand the strain of having sins removed from their lives. Too often, many disallow the elimination of the clinging iniquity. Although the Master Sculptor patiently waits, he urges the believer to allow Him to remove the hindering imperfections.

After it is clear God's convicting voice is ignored, the Master often halts helping the one that has rejected Him. His disrupted handiwork too often remains unfinished for the rest of that person's life because of his refusal to allow God to continue His work in his life.

Others are more willing to be changed by their Master. The sinners know that their attempts are often futile, and they need the Perfect One's assistance.

Those that allow God to remove what He knows will hamper His use and their "beauty" slowly becomes what their Creator desires. At times, His changes are painful as they are removed, but the trusting heart of the believer knows that His God knows best and willingly endures the changes.

Once thought unfit, blemished, and "unusable," God's creation takes on a new form and usage. Selfishness is redirected to others' needs, and conscience-nagging sins are discarded.

As the Master removes the unneeded "baggage," the once "hopeless case" is now being used by Him. Completion of small tasks given to the Christian-under-construction proves the believer's allegiance. Since the child of God has proven faithful, more opportunities of service are entrusted to that believer.

The believer's obedience to studying and obeying God's Word soon qualifies him to teach a Sunday school class. Witnessing to others and showing God's way to Heaven has proven him fit for a bus ministry, enabling him to win others to the cause of Christ. The reward for the Christian's obedience is more work for the Master.

Days run into weeks; months turn into years, and the trusted believer is still faithfully at His God-assigned tasks. Yes, there were times he did not feel like teaching his class, but still, he labored at the ministry. Souls were told of salvation, and many saw God's glory in the changing and using the once imperfect person.

If one looks closely at the creature God changed, some scars from past sins may remain. However, God looks past all those and sees how the person has become a masterpiece for His use.

God desires to be allowed to have the same liberty in your life. Will you admit your imperfections and let the Master Sculptor change your life? He is willing and awaits your reply!

***“Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus? 21 Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour.”***

***Romans 9:20-21***

## **Inward Changes**

*Bill Brinkworth*

Repentance is the “... pain, regret, or affliction which a person feels on account of his past conduct...” (Noah Webster, 1828). This sorrowful attitude over one’s sins was a vital part of John the Baptist’s ministry and is essential today when one is saved from the eternal wages of one’s iniquities.

Although a repentant person will change one’s behavior, just changing conduct alone will not save anyone. If a lifestyle change were necessary for salvation, those acts would be a type of good work, and no good deed can save anyone from the eternal wages of sin (Ephesians 2:8-9).

John, the Baptist, illustrated that a broken heart over sin would produce a better life when he spoke to four types of people:

- To the religious but not righteous, John told them that if they were convicted over their sins, they would prove it by a lifestyle that would show “fruits” from their inward changes. Their changed heart would change how they lived, and others could see what the changes had done in their life (Luke 3:8).
- To the common people, he told them that a giving attitude would show a changed heart (Luke 3:11). John must have known that they were covetous of the things of this world and that they were not trusting God daily for their needs.
- To the publicans, he also said there would need to be some changes in their lives. Publicans were notoriously dishonest tax collectors. John told them their spiritual remodeling should include honesty (Luke 3:13).
- To soldiers, John did not tell them to quit the army. He told them their change of heart would include halting unnecessary violence, lying, and dissatisfaction with their salaries.

A changed, repentant heart is proof of one’s salvation. The areas John said should change in lives over 2,000 years ago should still change when one’s life is altered by salvation today. *“Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.” II Corinthians 5:17*

***“You cannot repent too soon because you do not know how soon it may be too late.” — Fuller***

## **A Notable Conversion**

*C. H. Spurgeon*

A jail chaplain once told me about a surprising case of conversion in which the covenant of grace was the chief instrument of the Holy Spirit. My friend had under his charge a man most cunning and brutal. He was repulsive, even in comparison with other convicts. He had been renowned for his daring and the utter absence of all feeling when committing acts of violence.

Several times the chaplain had spoken to him but had not succeeded even in getting an answer. The man was sullenly set against all instruction. At last, he expressed a desire for a specific book, but it was not in the library.

The chaplain pointed to the Bible, which was placed in his cell, and said, "Did you ever read that Book?"

He did not answer but looked at the good man as if he would kill him. The question was kindly repeated, with the assurance that he would find it well worth reading.

"Sir," said the convict, "you would not ask me such a question if you knew who I was. What have I to do with a book of that sort?"

He was told that his character was well known to the chaplain, and for this reason, he recommended the Bible as a book that would suit his case.

"It would do me no good," he snapped, "I am past all feeling." Doubling up his fist, he struck the cell's iron door and said, "My heart is as hard as that iron. There is nothing in any book that will ever touch me."

"Well," said the chaplain, "do you want a new heart? Did you ever read the covenant of grace?" The man answered sullenly by inquiring what he meant by such talk.

The preacher replied, "Listen to these words, 'A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh.'" (Ezekiel 36:26)

The words struck the man with amazement. He asked to have the passage found for him in the Bible. He read the words again and again.

When the chaplain came back to him the next day, the wild beast was tamed. "Oh, sir," he said, "I never dreamed of such a promise! I never believed it possible that God would speak in such a way as that to men. If He gives me a new heart, it will be a miracle of mercy, and yet I think, He is going to work that miracle upon me, for the very hope of a new nature is beginning to touch me as I never was touched before."

That man became gentle in manner, obedient to authority, and child-like in spirit from then on. He was a new creature.

**"Too often, deathbed repentance is burning the candle of life in the service of the devil and then blowing the smoke into the face of God." — Billy Sunday**