

THOUGHTS

BY DOUGLAS W. SCHROEDER
SPEAKER ON THE WORD TODAY

VOMIT

SEPT Joseph, a man I had never met, came by the church recently to speak with Pastor Paul. He knew that my father had died, but he came to meet the current pastor and talk about Paul. He seemed pleased to learn that I was shepherding the congregation in my father's footsteps, so filling in for Dad, I heard his story. He wished to thank Paul for his guidance and Biblical exhortation 50-some years ago. It was a beautiful warm morning, and sensing this might be a longer conversation, I suggested that we step outside and relish the day as we spoke.

POT Joe is a Christian now but says he was not before he was married and involved in the Roman faith. He had been practicing a perfunctory faith, a veneer relationship with God with no depth to its roots. He came to Our Shepherd to get married, but after a while he wandered and cheated on his wife. Pastor Paul spoke bluntly to him about the need to repent. Joe had never forgotten the analogy that he was told: "You have to vomit out the evil, the bad, and replace it with godliness!"

EMERB I smiled, thinking about the direct, vivid descriptions that Dad used. He grew up in a farming community and had colorful, to-the-point analogies. The moment I heard that Dad had told Joe he needed to vomit out evil, a surge of pride ran through me. Dad was giving this man wise, godly counsel. I wondered if Dad was watching this conversation. The book of Hebrews alludes to a "cloud of witnesses" who observe us running our race in faith (see Hebrews 12:1-3). The prior chapter is one of Pastor Paul's Key Chapters of the Bible, the "Faith" chapter. It discusses what many Christians call the heroes of faith such as Abel, Abraham, Moses, and others, ending with allusions to Christians who were being martyred for adherence to Jesus. I like to think that Dad and other saints in the presence of Jesus cheer us on as we conduct our Christian lives.

ERB Joe was not ready to receive the call to repent, nor the analogy of vomiting out the evil he was perpetrating. The analogy of vomiting was appropriate, for the wickedness we do sits inside as a disease and wrecks us. It must be purged, and the sooner, the better! Vomiting is not fun, but it is a necessary body reaction to something vile being ingested or an attempt to purge a virus or bacteria that have gone systemic. After vomiting, we begin to feel better. Joe didn't want to take strong action to end the adultery and return to his wife fully. The marriage ended in divorce. It was not until about 10 years later that Joe became a disciple of Jesus.

Now, Joe is a born-again Christian, which is redundant. He is a member of a Pentecostal fellowship that emphasizes confessing Jesus to become a believer. That perspective has some theological problems, but I did not point them out during our conversation. The emphasis was on the Holy Spirit entering Joe's heart, leading him to repentance, and how since then the Lord has smiled upon his life.

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*The Bible is God's Word...Jesus is God's "Word" made flesh...
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He eventually remarried a strong Christian woman and now teaches Sunday School and leads a small group at this church. My, what can happen to a person's mind over the decades! What a terrific outcome that brings praise to Christ!

Joe never forgot Pastor Paul's vivid word choice: that Joe needed to vomit out the sin. He regretted that he had been like a dog returning to its vomit. Peter laments the wretched condition of false teachers and the hypocritical, who blemish the name of Jesus with their worldliness, "Of them the proverbs are true, 'A dog returns to its vomit', and 'A sow that is washed goes back to her wallowing in the mud'" (2 Peter 2:22). I reminded him that we live in grace and not to accept Satan's attempt to sandbag us when we recall the past and wish we had repented sooner. I shared that when people are in the throes of rebellion against God's holy will, it can take from five to ten years for authentic repentance - following the consequences falling upon them - to repent.

As an aside, I shared with Joe the account of King David's adultery and murder of Uriah, the innocent cuckolded husband of Bathsheba, then his repentance after Nathan the prophet used a powerful analogy that directed the guilt of sin squarely on David (see 2 Samuel chapter 12). It often takes a long time, on the order of five to ten years, for a person in the throes of sinful rebellion to purge repetitive sin from their life. It is discouraging how slow Christians are to repent when lovingly confronted directly about sin. Many choose to ignore the warning and barge ahead in resistance to the Spirit of God. Joe did, and it was painful for him. Thankfully, he finally relented and received God's grace!

Joe was having a moment of closure, of long-considered gratitude for Paul's pastoral guidance. As pastors receive a disproportionate number of visits with people in need or in need of confrontation of sin, it was gratifying to hear the many times Joe expressed his thanks. It made me wonder how many times the exhortation we give others does not germinate until decades later. We should not be discouraged if we do not see signs of repentance immediately but continue to pray for change in the sinner's heart.

It was a lovely August morning as Joe and I talked, and several hours later, a humble, committed woman from our parish would be given Christian burial. But this meeting was too important to brush aside. As Joe and I stood in the late morning sunshine, his testimony closing the large circle of sin, repentance, and gratitude for God's mercy and grace in Jesus was fitting, as pure as the sunshine flooding over us.

*Blessings,
Douglas W. Schroeder*

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