

DOCTRINE FOR THE YOUNG

REPENTANCE

by the Rev. B. David Holm

All of us know that when we do something wrong we should be sorry for it—truly sorry. Your parents and the Church have taught you that since you were little children. You've probably been told many times to say, "I'm sorry"—or asked by your parents, "Are you sorry?" Sometimes it is very hard to be truly sorry, isn't it? Especially when we like or even love the wrong thing we've done. But when we know a thing is wrong and we have done it, then we really must *try hard* to be sorry for it. This is what is meant by the word "repentance"—to be truly sorry about an evil—to want to turn again to what is right—to turn again to the Lord.

But did you know that in order to be sorry a lot of other things must come first? For instance, you could never be sorry unless you knew the difference between right and wrong, could you? Suppose you did something wrong but didn't really know it was *wrong*. You wouldn't—you couldn't feel sorry for it, because you wouldn't know any better. Now, again, suppose you had never learned any difference between right and wrong. You would just fall deeper and deeper into bad habits and wrongdoing and never feel sorry for it. This would be terrible wouldn't it? Of course the Lord doesn't want this to happen, so He gave us the Word—His Holy Word—to teach us the difference between right and wrong or good and evil. But in order to learn the difference between good and evil, we must willingly listen to the teachings of the Word and go to it ourselves and learn what is right and what is wrong. Only the Lord can tell us the difference between the two. His Word is filled with teachings about this—especially in the Ten Commandments. Still there are times when you may not be sure if something really is wrong. Don't just wonder about it, because you may not have enough of the Lord's truth yet to figure it out for yourself. Go to some older person you trust, who knows more about the Lord's Word, and ask them. Then, if the thing you have been thinking about or doing is wrong, repent of it sincerely and try to stop it.

So it is, that we cannot be sorry for a wrong unless we first know what things are evils. More is needed to be truly sorry—knowing that a thing is evil is not enough. We have to really *believe* that it is evil—believe it because the Lord has said so in His Word. And we must also see that evil shuts out the Lord from our minds and is harmful to others and also to ourselves. When we see this—see that evils are indeed evil—see that they are sins against the Lord because they block Him out of our lives—when we see this then we are well on the way to being able to be truly sorry or *repentant* for the wrong things we have done.

Yet still more is needed. It is easy to see faults in *others*—to see the wrong things they do. It is much harder to see them in *ourselves*. Yet the Lord's Word tells us that this is what we must try to do - to look into our lives, to examine ourselves, and see our own faults and the wrongs we have done. We can see that we must do this if we are to be truly honest people—honest with ourselves. We simply must see our evils and sins or we won't know what to repent of or to be

sorry for. If this is the case, then our evils will remain in us, and this is dangerous to our spiritual lives. Yes, we must really look into our lives and examine ourselves. If we do, we will find a number of wrong things in us. This is no reason to become discouraged or to give up. All of us have a rotten side to our nature. When you see something wrong in yourself, don't give up to it. Think of it as a challenge—a challenge to fight against it and win out over it.

Also the teachings of the New Church tell us that when we see an evil in ourselves we *should* feel guilty about it. Guilty feelings are pains felt by our conscience. When we do something bad we may say, "My conscience hurts me." This is a very hopeful sign. If we had no conscience, we would never feel guilty, and that would mean we would not truly feel that our faults are evil. So, when we feel guilty about something it is a sign that there is every hope we can get over that failing. When we have done something wrong and feel guilty about it, we must go one step further. We should give ourselves a good *scolding* for what we've done. Not only should we *know* that it is wrong, we should also *feel* that it is wrong. A self-scolding helps us to take the evil thing we've done seriously. But, again, we must not get so discouraged that we give up.

After we have examined ourselves and seen our faults and have felt guilty about them and scolded ourselves for them, we must confess whatever wrongs we've done—confess them in detail to the Lord in prayer. To "confess" means to tell the Lord all about it. You might wonder why we should do this. After all, the Lord knows everything. He knows all about the wrong done before we tell Him about it. This is perfectly true. He even knows if we are sorry or not. Why should we tell Him about it then? Because when we do tell Him, we open up our minds to Him. This is very important. The Lord can't enter your mind if it is closed. Confessing our evils to the Lord opens us up so that He can help us with whatever wrong we've done.

When we confess our sins to the Lord, we should also ask Him to forgive us. This is important even though the Lord forgives us of the wrongs that we do the minute that we do them. Still we should ask His forgiveness, for by asking this we open our minds to receive His forgiveness. A closed mind does not receive this forgiveness. Oh, the forgiveness is certainly there, but it does not enter our minds until we open our minds by sincerely and humbly asking for it. Confessing our sins to the Lord is another very important thing. It helps us to admit that we can't get over our failings by ourselves. We need His strength - His power - to overcome each one of our bad habits. We simply don't have any strength of our own to do it. We must admit this by asking the Lord for His great power and help. *With His help we can overcome any evil*, but we must *use* His strength. If we do then we will be successful. There is great comfort in this.

So far we have seen that being truly sorry for a wrong has a lot more to it than what we at first might have thought. First we must know, from the Lord's Word, what is right and wrong. Then we must really believe that evil is harmful and wrong and that good is right and truly helpful. Next we must look into our lives—examining ourselves—and see what wrongs we've done. When we see a wrong in ourselves we should feel guilty about it and scold ourselves for it. We must then confess each wrong to the Lord in prayer, and ask for His forgiveness for the sin and His strength to fight it and overcome it.

There is still one more thing to do if we want to truly repent—to be really sorry. We must begin a new life. We must turn over a new leaf and start again. Trying our very best to use the Lord's

strength in fighting against our evils, if we do this we *will* win out. The evil will be overcome!
The Lord's forgiveness will enter into us! We will be made clean! The Lord's joy over our
victory will become our happiness!

**Texts: Luke 15:11-32;
The New Jerusalem and its
Heavenly Doctrine 159-162**