



Guided by His Word,
Serving in His Love

News of His

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Adjusting to a New Home

I received a forward from Ron Wachob tonight that touched on the "Texas state of mind," and he asked me, tongue-in-cheek, if it was true. I wrote him back a couple of paragraphs of state trivia that probably mean nothing to anybody but me, but it was enough to make me realize, "I guess it must be a little bit true." I started thinking about it. I have a University of Texas sweatshirt, a T-shirt and a couple of caps. I would probably have a lot more items of Longhorn paraphernalia than I do, but unfortunately, burnt orange clashes with the Blue and Silver of God's favorite NFL team.

Then, I did the math. Fifty-five percent of my total years have been spent in states *other* than Texas. It could be argued that Texas should be out of my system. Of course, Texans hardly have a corner on irrational loyalty to their state of origin, to their hometown or to their college alma mater. Many of you still talk about where you are from even though you have not been from there for a long, long time. In many ways, we are what we were forged to be, and no amount of time will ever take that away from us.

We are tediously slow to convert our identity and loyalties to a new home, no matter how long we have lived away from our old home, and no matter how many miles of distance are represented. For the most part, this tendency is harmless. It can even make us more interesting to one another. HOWEVER, there is an arena where this tendency is neither interesting, charming nor safe.

The Jews were waiting for the kingdom of God. When John the Baptist arrived, He preached, "*Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near*" (Matthew 3:2). When the King Himself arrived, He preached a very similar message: "*The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!*" (Mark 1:15). As believers, when we heeded the call to the kingdom, our citizenship changed. The kingdom of God became our home. But, have you ever noticed how long it can take to cease living like we are citizens elsewhere?

I suspect that our struggles with the notion of repentance may account for our slowness to transition to new loyalties, new habits, new values, a new place to rest our trust and a new way of conducting ourselves. Perhaps, we would benefit greatly from learning to see this "repentance" to which the kingdom calls us as something more than just being sorry for this or that vice and striving in our own strength to knock it off. Turning from sin is certainly a part of repentance, but, more than that, repentance is a call to reorient ourselves to a new way of looking at life, understanding that we are daily learning to live according to a new citizenship. Ultimately, this "repentance" is essential if we are ever to really enjoy ourselves in our new home.

When Jesus began to teach the values of kingdom living to His disciples, there is no doubt that they ran counter to the values in which these men were rooted. Jesus taught them to prefer humility over self-advancement, meekness over force, tenderness to others over self-preservation and authentic purity of heart over merely keeping the demands of the Law of Moses. Anytime a man seeks to live out these new values without a reorientation of the way He sees life (repentance), he simply re-enslaves himself to "new rules," rules not befitting the old nature that still clings to him. Life in Christ can seem more oppressive than life under the Law for now, rather than simply "policing" his behavior, he finds himself struggling to police his imagination, his negative emotions and his thoughts as well. And yet, Jesus said,

²⁸"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. ²⁹Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰For my yoke is easy and my burden is light." - Matthew 11:28-30

Of Jesus' expectations for us, John echoed: "*His commands are not burdensome*" (1 John 5:3). However, I think even John might concur that trying to live as a Christian without deep repentance is as burdensome of a lifestyle as any man could embrace. The yoke just won't fit, and the results never look like the authentic fruit of the kingdom. Kingdom living without repentance is a certain recipe for dour spirits, smug Pharisaism, joyless grayness behind big plastic smiles and, ultimately, out-and-out worldliness in what is supposed to be a community of believers. Nonbelievers recoil from such phoniness.

Have you been looking for more in your Christian experience than you have known? After you've exhausted all the books out there on spirit-filled living and experimented with all the new worship styles and bounced around to a dozen different fellowship settings, you might want to revisit the earliest call to the kingdom; "Repent!" "Turn and reorient!" Amazingly, "repentance," which to fallen human imaginations sounds like the most oppressive thing in the world, is in fact, the most liberating thing we can ever do.



Karl's Korner