Dear Open Door Family,

Down through the years in meeting with people for discipleship, or in small groups there have been times when I have seen someone who said that they were sorry for something that they had done. But even though they said the right words their attitude showed that they were more upset about being caught then they were actually broken over their sin. In some cases it turned out that they really did not think what they had done was all that bad. And unless there was a true brokenness and a realization that they have sinned against a holy God there is seldom any real change in their lives. We must ask the question: Do we have the same tendency in our own lives? Are there sins in my life which I actually enjoy and really do not want to give up? Are there things that I do or think that I know do not honor God but which I'm unwilling to part with yet? Let's look at these verses together.

Joel 2:12-13 *(NLT) ... the Lord says, "Turn to me now, while there is time. Give me your hearts. Come with fasting, weeping, and mourning. [13] Don't tear your clothing in your grief, but tear your hearts instead." Return to the Lord your God, for he is merciful and compassionate, slow to get angry and filled with unfailing love. He is eager to relent and not punish.*

Psalms 34:18 *(NLT) The Lord is close to the brokenhearted; he rescues those whose spirits are crushed.*

Time for Israel was running out. God spoke through the prophet Joel reminding the people that unless they repented and truly turned back to Him with all their hearts they would experience God's horrible judgment. The fascinating thing is that He challenges them to TRUE repentance. God makes it clear He is NOT interested in having them merely go through the motions. Outwardly ripping their clothes as a sign of mourning and humility over sin meant absolutely NOTHING if their hearts were still focused on their sin. God called them to return to Him - God called them to be BROKEN hearted. He did not want them to say I'm sorry, go through the motions, and continue having their thoughts and hearts focused on themselves or other gods. God longs to forgive, to show His grace and compassion, and restore. But He can ONLY forgive those who are truly broken. Only those whose hearts are ripped up over their sin can rightly expect God's forgiveness and restoration. Going through the motions no matter how elaborate or how good they look never fools God. Psalm 34 reminds us that God is close to those who are brokenhearted. Perhaps the application would be that He is close to those who are truly brokenhearted over their sin. The reality is that we must be truly broken over what we have done. We have to be convinced in our own hearts that we deserve God's anger and judgment for what we have done. We should realize there is no HOPE or FORGIVENESS apart from God's mercy and compassion. He longs to forgive and to draw us close to Himself. But pretend repentance, fake remorse, no matter how elaborate will NEVER fool God.

PRAYER Lord God, please keep me from going through the motions and pretending about anything with You. May I have a growing hatred for my own sins and those things which dishonor You in my life. Please, Lord God, help me to be genuinely broken over anything that could bring shame on You. Please Lord, break my heart open before You and do what You Must to draw me closer, and closer to You.

Pastor Mark Kieft

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