

Christianity and the Art of Car Repair

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Introduction

How many of you, who are not car mechanics, have ever worked on a car? If you are like me you do this under duress and only tackle the little jobs. What starts out be a simple task quickly deteriorates into a major mechanical exercise. As the job progresses your hands get dirty, you skin more knuckles and you quickly realize from your language that there must have been a Marine in your ancestry.

I can remember several years ago when one of our boy's cars blew a head gasket. He was in college and so couldn't afford the repairs and my Scottish ancestry came to the top of my personality and I didn't want to put the money out for it either. In my younger days I had always worked on my own cars. This was probably from financial necessity rather than any talent or skill. So in a moment of complete loss of sanity I said I would fix the car.

When I used to work on cars there was an engine under the hood. There was enough room that you could climb in the engine well with the engine while you worked on it. Everything was easy to pull apart and put back together. Usually everything went well; although I can remember one time I had to change a rear axle on my mother's car. When I finished it had 4 reverse gears and 1 forward as I had put the differential in backwards. So here I was ready to work on Chris's car. I don't know if you have looked under the hood of a car today? I opened the hood and looked in. Where was the engine? The whole engine well was full of stuff. There wasn't even room for my hands let alone climbing in there to work. Male machismo kicked in and the testosterone was flowing. This wasn't going to beat me. I would do this. Several days later the air in the garage was very blue and there were cars parts strewn all over the garage, but I did have the head off. I quickly realized I had achieved the simple part of the job. The head was cracked so we had to go to the wreckers to get a replacement. The parts just lay strewn all over the floor. No matter how much I looked them over, how much I prayed for a miraculous flying together of parts they just stayed there on the floor and the car in pieces. The only way it would get out of the garage is if I pushed it. I felt like saying last rights over the car. It were severely broke.

Prayer

- Glad we can laugh together about life's little dramas.
- Pray for Holy Spirit to be among us.

Scripture Reading

- Acts 3:11-19

Scripture Background

In this passage we have Peter taking advantage of a crowd that had gathered to proclaim the Gospel. To understand the background to this passage we need to see what happened immediately prior to this reading.

At the beginning of Chapter 3 we see Peter and John going to the Temple at 3 in the afternoon for the mid-afternoon prayer. Fixed prayers throughout the day were standard for the people and if they were in Jerusalem they would go to the temple to say them. This is where we find Peter and John on Solomon's Porch heading to pray. As they came in through the gate to the temple they were accosted by the usual beggars who gathered there looking for help. On this day the place was occupied by a man who had been crippled since birth. When he saw Peter and John he asked for the usual help hoping to make it through another day. Peter's response is very interesting. Peter tells the man he doesn't have any money to give him but what he has he will give him. With that he tells the man to get up in the name of Jesus and walk. Immediately that man gets up and walks. The former cripple starts running around exclaiming what had happened to him. I can imagine myself doing that. You would be ecstatic at being able to walk after being a cripple all your life. He grabs on to Peter and John and I can just see the three dancing around in circles with the man yelling and whooping in joy.

Guess what happened next? A crowd gathers to see what is happening and what all the noise is about and they recognize the man who had been crippled. We are told they could not believe what they saw. I am sure word spread quickly through the temple and more and more people came to see the spectacle.

Peter seeing a crowd gathered grabbed the opportunity and used it to proclaim the gospel. The passage we just read from Acts contains Peter's words to the crowd. Peter is pretty hard on the people. He is quick to point out it was not his power that healed the cripple but it was the power of their God manifest through Jesus that allowed this to happen. Peter then goes on to accuse the people in the crowd of not seeing who Jesus really was and having him crucified. Peter, at the end of the passage we read calls for the people to repent – to change their ways and have their sins blotted out by turning and following Jesus. Peter is very explicit that the people that had gathered and we are included in that crowd, should repent and turn to God.

Message for Today

This account of Peter's actions shows us how we can give and how we should act. Peter did not have anything of the world to give the beggar but gave what God had given him. Due to the miraculous healing that occurred Peter saw the gathering crowd and took the opportunity to deliver a message to the people. Peter was a good steward of what God had given him. If you had told Peter when he was out fishing, before he met Jesus that he would be making a cripple walk and then stand up in front of a crowd in the temple and be teaching them he would have laughed at you. Now we see the bold impetuous Peter leading the group and being a different person. Jesus and the Holy Spirit had overtaken his life and he was a new man. This was not Peter the Fisherman we meet at the beginning of the Gospels but Peter the humble servant who grabs any opportunity to tell people of what he has received. We have all been renewed in Christ and are different people. Like Peter we have new gifts, the gifts of the Spirit, that God expects us to use to bring him glory.

What gift do you have that you are hiding? We need to be like Peter and use what we have been given, not just at church but in our day-to-day lives. How often do we have opportunities to let people know of Christ's love for them during the day as we talk with fellow workers or friends? Like Peter we need to grasp the moment and use it as God intends.

We now come to what I think is the main message in this passage. We find it in verse 19 and 20, "Repent therefore, and turn to God so that your sins may be wiped out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord."

Repentance is something we shy away from today. When we hear someone say, "You need to repent," we tend to ignore what is being said. We think of people standing on street corners telling us we are damned to hell unless we repent. We think of the hell, fire and brimstone tent ministries that travelled the country. Most of us think we are better than that. We come to church most Sundays. We live a good life. Modern religion plays down the fact we are all sinners. We love a happy message and we do not want to hear that we are broken. But if we look at Scripture we have "all sinned and come short of the glory of God." This is what Peter is telling us we need to repent and turn back to God.

What does it mean we need to repent and turn back to God. Remember that car we talked about earlier. It was in pieces, broken, not performing the task it had been built for. With the parts all over the floor of the garage I had to try and work out how to put it all back together. This was to be the height of my mechanical prowess. After 3 nights working on trying to reassemble the engine, even more Marine language I wished I had labeled the parts. Then in a flash of light I had an epiphany a moment of enlightenment. I was defeated and the car was broken so I admitted I was a failure. Yes my manhood was crushed and I lowered myself to call in help. We found a mechanic who was willing to take on where I had left off. I called and pleaded for help and it came.

How often have you felt like my son's car? You used to be running great. Everything was going good in your life. Things couldn't be better and then something happens. You blow a gasket or worse you engine makes weird noises and you are stopped in your tracks. If you're like me in a situation like this the first thing you do is try to fix it yourself. If I were a woman I would be out buying new clothes. What can you do to help what is going on? We tend to try everything we can to fix what is happening. Have you ever felt like that car with all the pieces strewn over the floor and at the end of your rope as to what to do? Maybe you try a Krispy Kreme Glazed Donut Chocolate sundaes or a Chocolate Martini but none of those things help.

Peter in his address to the crowd has the answer. "Repent and turn to God." God knows what has gone wrong. God knows how to put it all back together. Remember how I turned to an expert to help put the engine back together. I would not have turned to an attorney to help me. If I did this I would have probably ended up being sued by my son for destroying his car. God is our designer and builder. He knows all about us. He is our mechanic. When things have gone wrong all we need to do is turn to him. That is what repent means, to turn, to recognize we have issues. Peter told people that when they repent they should turn to God. This message still applies to us today. Like my car we are all broken. I don't want to sound like a doomsday preacher but we all know we are not perfect. There was only one perfect person and he suffered and died for us so that we don't have to go through all that suffering. No matter how long we have known Christ as our Lord and Savior, whether it is 50 years or 50 minutes we all need to be repaired and restored as we go through life.

This is what Peter means by repenting and turning to God. Let the great mechanic repair us and restore us back to full running order. Take on a tank of the Holy Spirit to fuel us as we walk through life. The Holy Spirit is our life blood, the gift of God to us.

Have you ever had the experience when your car won't start? You look under the hood. Everything looks normal to you. You pull on some of the wires, try starting it again. No luck. You call AAA or a friend who knows all about cars. As you wait you become more frustrated. The expert arrives, looks under the hood, appears to lay hands on the engine and says "try it now." You turn the key and magically the engine bursts into life. This is what happens when you repent and turn to God. You are not running properly, maybe just on 5 cylinders, but when you turn to God you are restored and life is back to normal.

Repent is not a word we use very much but in our life as Disciples of Christ it is an important aspect of our life. We constantly need to repent of the ways we have fallen short of what God expects and turn to him for help. Only God through the Holy Spirit can repair us and get us running properly. Turn to God regularly for that tune up you need to get through life and keep running in top condition.

Let us pray

- **Short prayer of repentance**