

What Is Repentance?

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Introduction – Mark 1:14-15; Luke 24:46-47; Acts 2:38, 17:30-31

Repentance is such an important subject in the Scriptures. Our eternal salvation hinges upon whether or not we have truly repented before God. But what exactly does it mean to repent?

Transition: When dealing with Bible words, it is always best to allow the Bible to define them for us (see I Peter 4:11). How does the Bible use and define the word *repentance*?

I. How Did Jesus Define Repentance?

Jesus Christ spoke often of repentance. As we have already ready, even from the time He began to preach to the multitudes He commanded them to “*repent and believe in the gospel.*” What exactly did Jesus mean when He spoke of repentance?

A. Repentance Involves Godly Sorrow

- **Matt 11:20-24** – Notice that “*sackcloth and ashes*” was a universal sign of mourning in Jewish culture, making others aware that a person was sorrowful and/or penitent before God.
 - NASU even has a footnote, “i.e. signs of mourning”
 - Tyre and Sidon, those wicked and treacherously carnal cities of the Old Testament, would have repented and mourned before God *because of their sins!*
 - **Ps 51:1-3** – After sinning with Bathsheba, David mourned because of his sins and repented.

Transition: So, from the Scriptures we see that repentance demands sorrow for sin: if a person does not mourn before God because of the things he has done wrong, there is no repentance in his heart. Notice also from the words of Jesus that:

B. Repentance Involves A Change Of Behavior

- **Matt 12:39-41** – Note the words of Christ: whatever Nineveh did back their at the preaching of Jonah, we can mark it down as repentance!
 - **Jonah 3:5-10** – The Ninevites mourned before God and *completely changed their behavior* – they abandon those things that had stirred up God’s anger with them to begin with!
- **Luke 15:11-20a** – This is repentance: the wayward son changed his mind, making a determination in himself to do what is right, then acted upon that determination!
 - *Vine’s Expository Dictionary* defines *repentance* as “to change one’s mind or purpose” – and we see this definition in all of the previous examples.
 - However, true repentance is more than just a change in the mind, but a change of will, of behaviors, or life!

Transition: Now that we have seen how the Bible defines repentance, let’s examine another question: how can we tell when repentance has truly taken place, either in ourselves or in others? If you *say* you have repented, how will other people know your words are true?

II. How Do We Identify True Repentance?

As we saw in the previous point, repentance demands a change in behavior: when a person repents, he or she turns from whatever sin they were committing and strives to obey the will of God. This means that repentance *demand*s an observable change in behavior, evidence that other people cannot question:

- **Acts 19:18-20** – The magicians of Ephesus burned their books of sorcery.
- **I Cor 6:9-11** – The Christians in Corinth turned away from all manner of sins.
- **I Thes 1:6-9** – The Thessalonians turned away from idols to serve the living God, and this change was observed and became example throughout the world!

Some people claim, “You can’t tell me I haven’t repented: you can’t see my heart!” Not true: repentance is impossible, even if a person claims to have repented, if that person is not willing to change the way he lives before mankind, turning from sin to do what is right! Such changes are unquestionable, and much like Jesus said in Matt 7, “*by their fruits you will know them.*”

Transition: Now that we have seen what exactly repentance is and how we can identify it in ourselves and others, let us ask one final question before we conclude the lesson, and that is:

III. What Moves A Person To Repent?

There are many people in the religious world who believe that for a person to repent God must individual work some miracle within their heart. There are numerous scriptural problems with this popular false doctrine, but instead of refuting this one particular idea, let us simply examine what the Bible says about how a person comes to repentance:

A. Repentance Must Be Motivated By The Word Of God

- **Luke 16:19-31** – A miraculous working of God was not going to change the minds of the rich man’s brothers if they wouldn’t simply *listen to the word of God!*
- Think back on the examples of repentance we have already considered in this lesson: how did these people come to repentance?
 - The Ninevites repented upon hearing the word of God preached by Jonah
 - King David repented upon being condemned by God’s word spoken by Nathan
 - The Ephesians, the Thessalonians, the Corinthians repented upon hearing the gospel spoken by Paul and his preaching companions
- Consider other examples you are probably familiar with:
 - The Jewish people in Acts 2 repented upon the preaching of Peter
 - The Samaritans in Acts 8 repented upon hearing the preaching of Philip
 - The Philippian jailer in Acts 16 repented upon hearing the words of Paul and Silas

On and on the list goes, and so we ask ourselves: how do people come to repentance today? Is it by a miracle worked by God on an individual’s heart? Is it by seeing a miracle with one’s own eyes, like a person rising from the dead? No! Repentance must be motivated simply by hearing the word of God and being convicted that your life must change to please Him.

Transition: Upon hearing the word of God, at least two additional things will reinforce in us the need to repent: godly sorrow and the goodness of the Lord.

B. *Godly Sorrow Produces Repentance*

- **II Cor 7:6-11** – The Corinthians heard the word of God in Paul’s letter and were moved by sorrow to repent:
 - Sorrow that they were in the wrong and stood condemned before God
 - Sorrow that their bad behaviors stood as an offense before God
 - Sorrow that the reputation of the church had been adversely effected by them before the world

The Corinthians had many reasons to mourn upon hearing the condemnation of the word of God, but that godly sorrow was therapeutic to them: it moved them to repent!

Transition: And lastly in this lesson:

C. *The Goodness Of God Leads To Repentance*

- **Rom 2:4** – The goodness, forbearance and longsuffering of God are all motivators for us to repent and turn back to Him!
 - When repentance is called for, sometimes it becomes a temptation to focus on the fact that God ask us to make difficult changes and thus feel persecuted
 - At all times, but especially in times when repentance is needed, we need to focus on the blessings of the Lord!
 - The glory of His creation, every good and perfect gift, our families, our talents and abilities, our friendships, all things that bring us happiness, comfort, peace and joy: all of these things flow abundantly from the hand of God!
 - What does the Lord ask in return? That we repent from our sinning, and turn to serve Him!
- **Luke 5:27-32** – Of all the blessings God has given, the greatest of all was His only Son – and Jesus Christ died on the cross that we might have the opportunity to repent and be saved!

Conclusion – Luke 15:1-7

You see, repentance is not something we claim to do with our words but that remains invisible to everyone else. Neither is the fact that God requires repentance a punishment from the Lord. But God sent His Son to this earth to die on the cross so that we would simply look at our own lives and see our need to return to the Lord. And if we truly repent, we will know it, and our friends will know it even if they don’t understand, and our brethren will know it and be encouraged, and the angels in heaven will see it and rejoice! Let each one of us examine ourselves carefully and test our hearts, because God “*commands all men everywhere to repent, because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead*” (Acts 17:30-31).