

REPENTANCE

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Repentance is mentioned often in the Bible and is part of the fundamental steps towards salvation. It is good to remind ourselves that repentance is what should happen at the altar and that changes our lives, but it is also an ongoing process through a life of continuously repenting of things that the Lord asks us to give up.

Not surprisingly, repentance is listed as the first step towards maturity listed in Hebrews:

"Therefore, leaving the discussion of the elementary principles of Christ, let us go on to perfection, not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, of the doctrine of baptisms, of laying on of hands, of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment" (Hebrews 6:1-2, NKJV).

First, what is repentance? I appreciated the description printed below as provided by *Christianity Today*:

"Before going further, it's important that we clearly understand what repentance really means. In the Old Testament, two Hebrew words help us understand repentance. The first is the word *nacham*, which means to turn around or to change the mind. The second is the word *sub*. It is used over 600 times in the Old Testament and is translated by such words as "turn," "return," "seek," "restore." You see it very often in phrases like 'to turn to the Lord with all your heart.'"

When you come to the New Testament there is one word you need to know - the Greek word *metanoia*, which literally means "to change the mind." Repentance fundamentally means to change your mind about something. It has to do with the way you think about something. You've been thinking one way, but now you think the opposite way. That's repentance - the changing of the mind.

An additional interesting fact is that the word *repent* in the Greek New Testament is a military term that means "to turn around." It describes a soldier marching in one direction who does an about-face and then marches in the opposite direction. In other words, it is a complete changing of our minds and directions and then walking in a different way spiritually.

John the Baptist was given the ministry of preparing the hearts of those who would hear, to receive the coming Lord. He preached a simple message of repentance, *"In those days John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea, and saying, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!' For this is he who was spoken of by the prophet Isaiah, saying: 'The voice of one crying in the wilderness: Prepare the way of the LORD; Make His paths straight'" (Matthew 3:1-3, NKJV).*

In Jesus' day, the Jewish people were expecting the Messiah to come and physically set up the Davidic kingdom. Most understood that

when John the Baptist said *“the kingdom of heaven is at hand”* that it must have meant that the establishment of a physical kingdom was imminent. When John the Baptist qualified this statement by requiring repentance it became a stumbling block to the Jews. Few could believe that the coming kingdom of God was dependent on repentance.

How true it is that this new gospel of grace, this new gospel of the kingdom, is always preceded by a continuous act of repentance. As believers, we must have the experience that we change our minds and walk in a new direction. This requirement has never changed. When Jesus began his public ministry, He began his preaching by saying: *“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand”* (Matthew 4:17, NKJV).

Most likely, the “Church Age” had its birth on the day of Pentecost. Peter had the privilege of preaching, for the very first time in history, the message of Jesus crucified, resurrected, and ascended into heaven. As part of the message of this momentous chapter, we see the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, prophecy, and the proclamation of scriptures that spoke of the return of Christ at the end of the age. Peter spoke with Holy Spirit boldness which struck fear in the hearts of the listeners when he said:

“Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ. Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, ‘Men and brethren, what shall we do?’” (Acts 2:36-37, NKJV).

Peter answered, *“Repent.”* He preached the same message as John the Baptist, repent, change your mind and your ways. He preached the same message as Jesus did as recorded in Matthew 4:17, *“Repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”* It was a calling to walk in a new way, with a new hope, with a new heart, with a new power and strength given by the Holy Spirit.

“Then Peter said to them, ‘Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call’” (Acts 2:38-39, NKJV).

The message of repentance on the day of Pentecost was immediately fruitful with 3,000 souls immediately added to the church. *“And with many other words he testified and exhorted them, saying, ‘Be saved from this perverse generation.’ Then those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them. And they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers”* (Acts 2:40-42, NKJV).

The life of Saul, who would ultimately become Paul the Apostle, is a classic testimony of the power of repentance. The Scriptures record a powerful story of Saul’s repentance, and of his change of mind, attitude, behavior, and destiny.

The Scriptures tell us that Saul wrought havoc on the church. The word havoc in this scripture literally means, “to ravage like a wild beast”. What an accurate word to describe the intense hatred Saul held towards Christians. He would ultimately repent and change from a vicious persecutor of the church to a kind shepherd who would give of his own life for the sake of the gospel.

“At that time a great persecution arose against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered throughout the

regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles. And devout men carried Stephen to his burial, and made great lamentation over him. As for Saul, he made havoc of the church, entering every house, and dragging off men and women, committing them to prison” (Acts 8:1-3, NKJV).

The story of Saul’s conversion is recorded in Acts 9:1-6, *“Then Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest and asked letters from him to the synagogues of Damascus, so that if he found any who were of the Way, whether men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem.”*

As he journeyed he came near Damascus, and suddenly a light shone around him from heaven. Then he fell to the ground, and heard a voice saying to him, ‘Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?’ And he said, ‘Who are You, Lord?’”

“I am Jesus. At this moment Paul identified the Lord Yahweh (or Jehovah) of the OT, whom he had attempted so zealously to serve, with Jesus of Nazareth, whom he had so ferociously persecuted through His saints” (Ryrie Study Bible Notes).

“Then the Lord said, ‘I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. It is hard for you to kick against the goads.’”

“Pricks (goads) were sharp, pointed sticks used to get animals moving. Paul was evidently under conviction and was trying to stifle the goading of his conscience by increasing the intensity of the persecution of the Christians” (Ryrie Study Bible Notes).

“So he, trembling and astonished, said, ‘Lord, what do You want me to do?’ Then the Lord said to him, ‘Arise and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do.’”

I am touched by Acts 9:6 where Paul *“trembling and astonished”* said, *“Lord, what do you want me to do?”* This is often the fruit of repentance. The innate desire to simply do the will of God is the fruit of repentance caused by the conviction of the Holy Spirit.

When through Peter repentance was preached on the day of Pentecost, the crowd cried out corporately *“What must we do?!”* When John the Baptist preached with passion the message of repentance, the crowd cried out, *“What shall we do?”* (Luke 3:10)? When Paul met the living Savior on the road to Damascus, he fell to the ground and said *“Lord, what do you want me to do?”*

Saul repented and changed his direction of life. He would no longer persecute the church. Instead, at great personal peril and cost, he would help spread the gospel all the way to Rome (considered at that time to be the ends of the earth). Even his name was changed.

Saul of Tarsus had much that he could boast about. He was taught at the feet of the respected teacher, Gamaliel (Acts 22:3). He was circumcised precisely on the eighth day according to the law. He identified as a member of the tribe of Benjamin. He was a great Hebrew, a Pharisee and the list goes on. And yet, after the conversion of Saul of Tarsus, after his great repentance, Paul considered all of his past credentials *“rubbish”* (Philippians 3:8, NKJV).

When the light of God shines on our hearts, suddenly our earthly treasures, credentials, and achievements become like rubbish in comparison.

“For we are the circumcision, who worship God in the Spirit, rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh, though I also

might have confidence in the flesh. If anyone else thinks he may have confidence in the flesh, I more so: circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews; concerning the law, a Pharisee; concerning zeal, persecuting the church; concerning the righteousness which is in the law, blameless.

But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ. Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ” (Philippians 3:3-8, NKJV).

The parable of the prodigal son in Luke 15 expresses the attitude of true repentance. After the son had wasted his father’s inheritance in a far country, he “came to himself” and chose to repent, change his direction, and go to his father.

“But when he came to himself, he said, ‘How many of my father’s hired servants have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger! I will arise and go to my father, and will say to him, Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you, and I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Make me like one of your hired servants’” (Luke 15:17-19 (NKJV).

Just as the prodigal son learned, when we “come to ourselves” and acknowledge our sin, we can only be saved by repenting and going to our heavenly Father. We must confess when we have wandered into the “far” country, far from the presence of our Father, and repent and make our way back home to our God.

And like the prodigal son, when we repent of our sins and recognize how far we are from God, upon our return we are welcomed with open arms into His presence.

“And he arose and came to his father. But when he was still a great way off, his father saw him and had compassion, and ran and fell on his neck and kissed him (Luke 15:20, NKJV).

When should a soul repent? Well, of course, to receive our salvation and forgiveness of sins we are required to repent, to change our ways. Repentance must be there to start our new spiritual journey. There should be evidence or fruit of a changed, repentant life, but repentance is not something that we do just once at the beginning of our life as a believer. Life-long repentance is much like making many course adjustments when flying a plane. The plane may appear to be going straight, but many slight adjustments are constantly being made to keep it straight and on the correct path.

As a soul journeys through life, we have many opportunities to veer off the path of righteousness. When the Lord reveals our error, we have the great privilege of repenting, changing our direction, making a course adjustment, and getting back on the correct path. David, in the Psalms, would invite the Lord to search his heart, to assure that he was walking properly.

“Search me, O God, and know my heart; Try me, and know my anxieties; And see if there is any wicked way in me, And lead me in the way everlasting” (Psalm 139:23-24, NKJV). This is a very appropriate prayer for all of the saints to pray daily.

True Repentance, Produces Joy in Heaven.

“What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he loses one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness, and go after the one which is lost until he finds it? And when he has found it, he lays it on

*his shoulders, rejoicing. And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and neighbors, saying to them, ‘Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost!’ ‘I say to you that likewise there will be **more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents** than over ninety-nine just persons who need no repentance.’*

*Or what woman, having ten silver coins, if she loses one coin, does not light a lamp, sweep the house, and search carefully until she finds it? And when she has found it, she calls her friends and neighbors together, saying, ‘Rejoice with me, for I have found the piece which I lost!’ ‘Likewise, I say to you, there is **joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents**” (Luke 15:4-10, NKJV).*

In summarizing the importance of the message of repentance we find the following:

1. In proclaiming the coming Son of God, John the Baptist preached the message of repentance. *“In those days John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea, and saying, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Matthew 3:1, NKJV)!*
2. When Jesus began his public ministry, He did so by proclaiming the need to repent. *“From that time Jesus began to preach and to say, ‘Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand’” (Matthew 4:17, NKJV).*
3. On the day of Pentecost, literally the beginning hour of the Church age, Peter preached the inaugural message of repentance. *“Then Peter said to them, ‘Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call’” (Acts 2:38-39, NKJV).*
4. Just before Jesus ascended into heaven, the Lord entrusted the message of repentance to the disciples, *“and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem” (Luke 24:47, NKJV).*

Repentance, a change of heart and direction, should be demonstrated by our lives and actions. Repentance should bear fruit. It is hard to place in a list what the fruit of sincere repentance looks like. It is a live demonstration of a heart and life that is changed. It is evidence of turning from sin and sinful ways and walking with God. Here are just a few examples:

Paul gives an example of changed attitudes that comes from repentance as found in Ephesians:

“Therefore, putting away lying, ‘Let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor; for we are members of one another. ‘Be angry, and do not sin’: do not let the sun go down on your wrath, nor give place to the devil. Let him who stole steal no longer, but rather let him labor, working with his hands what is good, that he may have something to give him who has need. Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice. And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you” (Ephesians 4:25-32, NKJV).

After John the Baptist preached a blistering message of the need for repentance, the crowd asked him what they should do. John replied with practical demonstrable actions.

“So the people asked him (John the Baptist), saying, ‘What shall we do then?’ He answered and said to them, ‘He who has two tunics, let him give to him who has none; and he who has food, let him do likewise.’ Then tax collectors also came to be baptized, and said to him, ‘Teacher, what shall we do?’ And he said to them, ‘Collect no more than what is appointed for you.’ Likewise the soldiers asked him, saying, ‘And what shall we do?’ So he said to them, ‘Do not intimidate anyone or accuse falsely, and be content with your wages’” (Luke 3:10-14, NKJV).

Certainly, Repentance and the Gift of the Holy Spirit Produces the Fruit of the Spirit.

“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law. And those who are Christ’s have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit. Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another” (Galatians 5:22-26, NKJV).

The incentive or motive for repentance is to find grace and forgiveness in the goodness of God. It is to change our course of life or our direction, from following sin as our master to becoming servants of almighty God. True repentance leads a person to say, “I have sinned” and will prove it with a 180-degree change in his/her direction.

1. Repentance requires true brokenness.
2. Repentance is NOT asking the Lord for forgiveness with the intent to sin again.
3. Repentance is an honest, regretful acknowledgment of sin with a commitment to change.
4. Repentance leads us to cultivate godliness while eradicating habits that lead into sin.

What Are Other Practical Things That Perhaps a Believer Might Need to Repent of?

Repent of the way we treat a spouse in a marriage.

Repent of being too occupied with the politics of the day, instead of the kingdom of God which is eternal.

Repent of causing divisiveness among believers by our words, opinions, and actions which include our social media posts.

Repent of robbing God by not tithing.

Repent of having a critical rather than a loving spirit.

Repent of not investing adequate time in your relationship with God.

These are just a few examples of problems that might plague believers. All of these problems can be resolved through true repentance, and a devotion to doing what is right is within our power. Our actions are the fruit of our repentance.

The scriptures teach us that faith without works is dead. Let’s not get confused. We are saved by faith (Ephesians 2:8-9). But faith, with repentance (a desire to change our ways), leads to faith in action which is our works.

Our Works are the Fruit of Repentance

“What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him? If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, and one of you says to them, ‘Depart in peace, be warmed and filled,’ but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what does it profit? Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead. But someone will say, ‘You have faith, and I have works.’ Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works” (James 2:14-18, NKJV). †

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