

What Is Repentance?

What does the Bible say about repentance?

- In rebuking the unrepentant Israelites, the prophet Jeremiah connected repentance with both sorrow over one's sin and the humility to accept correction from God (Jeremiah 5:3) - **repentance begins in the heart and mind** when one realizes the guilt of his or her sin and chooses to abandon sinful practices (Psalm 97:10-12, 1 John 3:1-10).
- John the Baptist, in his message preparing the people for Jesus, told them to "bear fruits in keeping with repentance" and even suggested specific behavioral changes to specific groups (Matthew 3:7-12, Luke 3:7-14) - **repentance results in a reversal of one's actions** as sinful behaviors are abandoned and replaced with a pursuit of God's righteousness (Romans 12:1-13, James 4:1-10).

What are some examples of biblical repentance?

- After sinning with Bathsheba, **David mourned his guilt and begged God to forgive him**, returning to his belief that God was the one that his soul should seek above all else (2 Samuel 11:26-12:13, Psalm 51:1-19).
- When Jonah disobeyed God and was swallowed by a great fish, he first **petitioned God for rescue and then returned to Nineveh to preach** God's message (Jonah 1:1-3:10).
- Once Apollos learned the full doctrine of the Gospel, **he let his former beliefs go and began proclaiming the truth** about Christ and the plan of salvation (Acts 18:24-28).

What does repentance look like in my life?

- When one becomes a Christian, **repentance involves leaving behind one's sinful practices** and "dying" to sin, so that after being buried in baptism one may walk in newness of life (Acts 2:36-40, Romans 6:1-4). Christians also engage in the **continual process of repentance in mind and action** as they seek to be transformed into the image of Christ and purified daily by His cleansing blood (Acts 3:17-26, 1 John 1:5-10).

Key Verses and Ideas:

- **2 Chronicles 7:14** - “**If my people who are called by my name humble themselves, and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and heal their land.**” ~This statement is made by God in a vision to King Solomon following his construction and dedication of the temple in Jerusalem (1 Kgs 5:1-8:66, 2 Chron 2:1-7:22). A new dwelling place for the Lord’s presence is met with a challenge by the Lord Himself as He once again calls His people to remove themselves from sin in order to retain His favor and honor His holiness (Lev 11:45, Deut 30:1-20). As God’s people in the new covenant, Christians must also be engaged in continual repentance for the same reasons, rejoicing in the enduring presence of the Lord and hope of righteous life in Christ (Rom 5:1-11, Gal 2:20).
- **Ezekiel 18:32** - “**For I have no pleasure in the death of anyone, declares the Lord God; so turn, and live.**” ~ Amongst many oracles delivered by God to the prophet Ezekiel is the one concluded by this statement, which primarily concerns personal responsibility for sin (Ezek 18:1-32). This conclusion drives home God’s point: because each individual is responsible for his or her sin, each individual is also responsible for his or her own pursuit of a restored relationship with God (Rom 1:16-17, Jas 4:17). While the gift of repentance is only available because of Jesus (see Acts 5:30-31 below), each person who is responsible for sin and committed to a right relationship with God must be committed to seeking Him in repentance and being found holy as a result of a transformative relationship with Christ (Rom 3:21-26, 2 Cor 5:17-21, Phil 2:5-13).
- **Matthew 4:17** - “**From that time Jesus began to preach, saying, ‘Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.’**” ~ Matthew presents this command as the thesis of Jesus’s ministry, the first and most important message He wants those around Him to understand as He begins preaching. Ultimately, Jesus’s life, death, and resurrection were all aimed at the opportunity for mankind to be reconciled to God through His sacrifice for sins and example of perfect obedience (Jn 5:19-29, 1 Pet 2:21-25). This reconciliation is only possible through a repentance which is based in the Gospel of Christ and points one towards the pursuit of His righteous character and calling (Col 3:1-17, 1 Tim 1:12-17).
- **Luke 13:3** - “**No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish.**” ~ Jesus actually says this twice in response to His own rhetorical questions about whether there is any partiality with God that can be seen in earthly circumstances (Lk 13:1-5). He creates a parallel between physical death and the spiritual suffering of those who lack repentance, telling those around Him that while not everyone will suffer physically, all who do not seek God in repentance will suffer spiritually (Is 30:8-17, Matt 21:28-44).

- **Acts 5:30-31** - “**The God of our fathers raised Jesus, whom you killed by hanging Him on a tree. God exalted Him at His right hand as Leader and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins.”** ~ This sentiment is expressed many times in the book of Acts, including this one during the trial of apostles for the crime of preaching Jesus to the people in Jerusalem (Acts 5:12-42). The apostles demonstrate their commitment to repentance here by refusing to back down from their new life and hope in Christ even when facing dire consequences (Jn 15:18-27, Acts 26:24-29). By its nature, the decision to seek God in repentance requires a commitment to faithfulness and friendship with God that must be prioritized above all else (Ps 27:1-14, Matt 6:31-33).
- **2 Corinthians 7:10** - “**For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret, whereas worldly grief produces death.**” ~ The situation to which Paul addresses this truth goes back to his first letter to Corinth, in which he told the church to remove itself from a sinful brother in the hopes that he would recognize his sin and repent (1 Cor 5:1-13). Now in his second letter, Paul rejoices in the repentance of both this wayward Christian and the Corinthian church as a whole (2 Cor 7:5-13). Like Jesus, those who would seek to obey God often learn to do so through and in spite of hardship, which can help motivate them to seek God and His righteousness (Heb 5:7-10, 1 Pet 1:6-9).
- **Hebrews 6:1-2** - “**Therefore let us leave the elementary doctrine of Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, and of instruction about washings, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment.**” ~ As he lays the groundwork for a more spiritually mature conversation with his audience, the author of Hebrews lists several basic principles of Christianity as things that will be understood within what he will say next, including repentance. This inclusion gives helpful insight into the objects of repentance, as he notes that repentance is a turning away from “dead works” and towards God-centered faith (Eph 2:1-10, Jas 2:14-26, Rev 3:1-6).
- **2 Peter 3:9** - “**The Lord is not slow to fulfill His promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.**” ~ Once again, the Bible connects repentance to a salvation that lasts into eternity (2 Pet 3:8-14; cf. 1 Thess 4:1-18). It is in the decision to abandon one’s own desire and sin that salvation is found, and it is in Jesus’s perfect sacrifice on the cross that salvation through repentance and baptism is made possible (Mk 8:31-38).

Want to learn more? We would love to study with you!
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