



Repentance

The word “repent” occurs in the New Testament more than ten times as many as the word “regeneration.” When John the Baptist showed up for the first time preaching, he said, “Repent” (Matt. 3:1–2). Christ’s first sermon after being baptized was: “Repent” (Matt. 4:17). In the Gospels, the apostles “preached that men should repent” (Mark 6:12). At Pentecost, Peter told the Jews responsible for crucifying Jesus Christ: “Repent” (Acts 2:38, 3:19). The Apostle Paul preached “repentance” (Acts 20:21). Christ told those churches in Revelation 2:3 to “repent” (Rev. 2:5, 16, 21–22, 3:3, 19). God commands repentance. “And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men everywhere to repent” (Acts 17:30). It is the burden of the heart of God that all should repent. “The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to usward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance” (2 Pet. 3:9). Failure to repent can lead to damnation, according to the Lord Jesus Christ. “I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish” (Luke 13:3). Repentance comes before believing the Gospel.

Christ preached: “Repent ye” *first*, and *then* “believe the gospel” (Mark 1:15). Repentance comes before forgiveness: the Gospel message is “**repentance**” *first*, and *then* “**remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations**” (Luke 24:47). God’s goodness leads a sinner to repentance (Rom. 2:4). Repentance brings mercy and pardon from God (Isa. 55:7). Heaven rejoices when a sinner repents (Luke 15:7). And if the Lord didn’t love you, He wouldn’t tell you to repent (Rev. 3:19). It’s amazing that with such an emphasis laid on the doctrine, that you don’t hear preachers preaching much about it. When was the last time you heard a preacher preach on repentance to any TV or radio audience, or to any big church congregation? If you want to know what repentance is *not*, just check out the following list of subjects, preached all the time to modern congregations, which have absolutely nothing to do with *repentance*.

1. “Sharing Christ’s love.”
2. Learning to “live with *yourself*.”
3. Resolving conflict, stress, and “tensions.”
4. “Reaching out and touching others.”
5. Having faith in *yourself*.
6. “Coping” with others.
7. “Realizing your *potential*.”
8. “Promise keeping.”
9. Changing your “lifestyle.”
10. Getting a “purpose driven life.”
11. Banishing all *negative thoughts*.
12. Feeling *good* about *yourself*.

None of that is repentance; it is *amateur psychology*. Those are not even Bible subjects. All twelve of those things teach you to *think* about YOURSELF, *talk* about YOURSELF, and *guide* and *lead* YOURSELF. They major in *self*-analysis, *self*-respect, and *self*-love. All those things are on how to win and make friends of egomaniacs who think about themselves 24 hours a day. All those types of sermons do is teach Christians how to deny the cross and fall in love with themselves. American churches are stuffed full of them. Well, then, if all that psychological drivel is not repentance, what is it? Basically, repentance means “to turn from” or having a change of heart, mind, or attitude about something.

That's what the Bible means when you read about God repenting of something (see Gen. 6:6; Jon. 3:10). When Moses tells God to **"repent"** in Exodus 32:12, he's not telling the Lord to turn from His sin; he's telling Him to change His mind about what He was about to do to the children of Israel. Of course, there are some things of which God will never repent because they are *fixed* (Num. 23:19). When God swears by Himself (see Heb. 6:13), there is no **"shadow of turning"** on the subject (cf. James 1:17). But there are many things in the Scriptures where God will change His mind about a thing depending on whether *man* repents or not (e.g., see Jer. 22:3–5). "Evangelical" repentance (i.e., *Gospel* repentance) is turning *from sin and to God*. It is not merely *sorrow for sin*. Paul wrote to the Corinthians: **"Now I rejoice, not that ye were made sorry, but that ye sorrowed to repentance: for ye were made sorry after a godly manner . . . For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of: but the sorrow of the world worketh death"** (2 Cor. 7:9–10).

There is many a sinner who weeps over his sin but never gets right. Judas **"repented"** and said, **"I have sinned"** (Matt. 27:3–4), and he went to the Bottomless Pit (Act 1:25). Balaam repented of his sin and confessed, **"I have sinned,"** and he went to Hell (Jude 11–13). King Saul said, **"I have sinned,"** and the Lord rejected him, and he wound up in Hell (1 Sam. 15:23–24, 28:16). Pharaoh confessed, **"I have sinned,"** and asked for prayer (Exod. 9:27–28), and he died and went to Hell (Rom. 9:17, 22). Evangelical repentance is not sorrow for what you have *done*; it is sorrow for what you *are*. This is clearly demonstrated in the Scriptures in the cases of Simon Peter, Job, and Isaiah.

After seeing the power of God in the miracle of the draught of fishes, Peter falls down before Jesus and says, **"Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord"** (Luke 5:8). His sorrow over his sinful state brought mercy and acceptance from Christ (Luke 5:10). When Job had a head-on collision with Deity, he didn't say, "I am so sorry I made a mistake and said the wrong thing"; he said, **"I abhor myself and repent in dust and ashes"** (Job 42:6). When he did that, the Lord restored him two-fold what he had lost (Job 42:10). Isaiah's sins were taken away when he said, **"I am a man of unclean lips"** (Isa. 6:5–7). You don't read one word in that passage of him confessing any specific sin; he's bemoaning his *sinful state*.

"Doing penance" is not repentance, for it gives the sinner some merit to earn in order to gain salvation or forgiveness, and it often hinders true repentance. In the New Testament, it's **"works meet for repentance"** (Acts 26:20); that is, it's works that match the profession. It's not works done in order to gain salvation or forgiveness (Eph. 2:8–10; Tit. 3:5). Evangelical repentance is *turning away* from your sin and *coming to* God for forgiveness and restoration. Paul preached to the Gentiles in order **"to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive the forgiveness of sins"** (Acts 26:18). He said about his converts in Thessalonica that they **"turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God"** (1 Thess. 1:9). Repentance has to be in the way God prescribed, or else it does you no good. In 2 Timothy 2:25, we read: "if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth." There is a great deal of difference between real repentance based on the Pauline Gospel of 1 Corinthians 15:3–4 and the Catholic, Campbellite repentance based on the Messianic message to Israel in Acts 2:38. In Acts 2, Peter is telling the *nation of Israel* (Acts 2:5, 14) to repent of their sin of *rejecting their Messiah* (Acts 2:22–23). He didn't say one word about a sinner repenting of the sins he had committed that were driving him to Hell without the righteousness of Christ's finished atonement.

There is not one word in Peter's Acts 2 message about Jesus Christ dying for anyone's sins, and that is part of the New Testament Gospel as defined by the Apostle to the *Gentiles* (1 Cor. 15:3). These "Water Dogs" who repent and are "BUPTized" for the forgiveness of sins don't repent "to the acknowledging of the truth." When Peter preached to the Gentiles for the first time in Acts 10, he was all ready to pull his Jewish formula from Acts 2 on Cornelius when the Lord interrupted him and showed that Acts 2:38 was no longer the way to receive the Holy Spirit (Act 10:44–45). In Acts 2, Simon Peter went by what he knew at the time, and that was right; but in Acts 10, God gave him additional information. *God changed the message*. "The truth" (2 Tim. 2:25) after Acts 10 is **"repentance toward God, and FAITH TOWARD OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST"** (Acts 20:21). If a preacher tells you to "repent, believe, confess, and be BUPTized" to be saved, mark it down, that is an unsaved "elder" trying to drag you down to Hell with himself, and he's using water to do it. You receive forgiveness of sins through repentance and faith in Jesus' name (Acts 20:21, 10:43; Luke 24:47). Repentance is the work of the Holy Spirit who convicts of sin, righteousness, and judgment (John 16:8); and you "receive the promise of the Spirit through FAITH" (Gal. 3:14), *not water baptism*.

Moreover, repentance does not stop upon salvation. The command of God is that "ALL MEN EVERYWHERE" are "to repent" (Acts 17:30). *Nobody* is exempt, saved or lost. Of course, a Christian no longer has to repent for salvation, but he does have to repent to maintain fellowship with his Saviour. The Pauline Epistles are filled with commands for the believer to turn from his sins and do right to serve God (e.g., Eph. 4:21–32). Repentance is *negative*; it means "quit it." Quit what? Quit your devilment; quit your meanness; quit your wickedness. Repent of your laziness in studying the word of God; repent of your indifferences for souls and start trying to win people to Jesus Christ; repent of your cowardice in not telling the lost that they're headed for Hell. Repent! Quit your drinking, quit your cussing, quit fouling up your lungs with cancer, quit telling dirty jokes. Turn from your sins; REPENT! Repentance is a revolution of mind and attitude. It changes your views toward sin, righteousness, and the Scriptures. It teaches the Christian to hate sin and love the truth of God. It gets the prodigal out of the hogpen and away from the far country and back to the Father's house. A redeemed sinner should never cease to be a penitent sinner and should, from time to time, check up on himself. He should turn away from his individual sins, confess them, and judge them. He should turn again to God to stay in fellowship with Him. "But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin. If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:7–9).