

What Does the Bible Say About Repentance?

Repentance is preached less today than it once was, and that is to our hurt, because the Bible puts it near the front of the gospel. John the Baptist preached it, Jesus preached it, and the apostles preached it on the first day the church existed. Yet it is often softened into a vague sorrow or skipped over entirely. So we should ask plainly what repentance is, why God requires it, and what it looks like when it is real.

What Repentance Is

Repentance is more than feeling bad about sin. It is a change of mind that turns a person away from his sin and toward God. Peter joined the two together, *"Repent ye therefore, and be converted"* ([Acts 3:19](#)), where to be converted is to be turned around. A man may be sorry and still go on sinning. That is not repentance. Repentance is the turning. It is deciding, before God, to be done with the sin, and then living like it.

Godly Sorrow Leads to It

Sorrow has its place, but not every sorrow leads to life. Paul drew the line carefully. *"For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of: but the sorrow of the world worketh death"* ([2 Corinthians 7:10](#)). We see both in the men who failed Jesus the same week. Judas was filled with remorse, and it drove him to despair and death. Peter wept bitterly, and it drove him back to the Lord. The difference was not how badly each man felt. It was where the sorrow led. Sorrow that does not turn a man around is not yet repentance.

God Commands All to Repent

Repentance is not a suggestion for the especially wicked. It is a command laid on every soul. *"but now commandeth all men every where to repent"* ([Acts 17:30](#)). Jesus said it twice over, *"except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish"* ([Luke 13:3](#)). God's patience is meant to lead us to it, for He is *"not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance"* ([2 Peter 3:9](#)). But patience is not the same as approval, and the day to repent is always today.

Repentance Bears Fruit

Real repentance shows. John told the crowds to *"bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance"* ([Matthew 3:8](#)), and Paul preached that men should *"do works meet for repentance"*

(Acts 26:20). When Zacchaeus repented, he did not merely feel ashamed of his greed. He said, *"the half of my goods I give to the poor; and if I have taken any thing from any man by false accusation, I restore him fourfold"* (Luke 19:8). The proof of repentance is a changed life, and where wrong can be made right, repentance makes it right. As Solomon said, *"whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy"* (Proverbs 28:13). It is the forsaking that tells the truth about the confessing.

The Christian Repents Too

Repentance is not only the doorway into Christ. It goes on as long as we sin, which is as long as we live. When a Christian named Simon sinned, Peter told him, *"Repent therefore of this thy wickedness, and pray God"* (Acts 8:22). The Lord told a whole church to *"repent, and do the first works"* (Revelation 2:5). The faithful keep short accounts with God, turning from sin as soon as they see it, confessing it and forsaking it again and again.

Heaven Rejoices Over It

We should not think of repentance only as a hard and bitter thing, for heaven does not. There is no event on earth that brings more joy in heaven than a sinner turning to God. Jesus said that *"joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance"* (Luke 15:7), and again, *"there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth"* (Luke 15:10). He told the story of a son who wasted everything and came home in rags, fully expecting to be made a hired servant. Instead his father saw him a great way off, ran to him, and fell on his neck. Repentance is not God grudgingly taking back a failure. It is a Father running to meet a son who has finally turned for home. The shame is in staying away, not in coming back.

So do not put it off, and do not mistake feeling sorry for turning around. *"the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance"* (Romans 2:4). He has been good to you, more than you know, and His goodness is calling you to turn. Turn from the sin, turn to the God who made you, and do it today, while the door is still open.

Every Scripture reference in this study links to the King James Version. Open it and read for yourself.