

Reason for Repentance

“God can’t forgive you unless you repent.”

“All I have to do is tell God I’m sorry and He will forgive me.”

“God responds to our repentance.”

Can you spot the underlying error in each of the above statements? (Hint: It’s the same basic error that leads to all false teachings.) _____

There is much confusion among Christians as to the nature and importance of repentance in the life of a child of God. For something so fundamental to the Christian faith, that’s unfortunate. When we look at and listen to what the Bible says about repentance, then we will value it for the treasure that it truly is.

Basic Meaning

English meaning: *Repentance* comes from the Latin verb *poenitere* + intensive prefix *re*. It’s literal definition is *strong regret*.

Greek: *metanoeo*, *to undergo a change of mind*, from *meta* (with) + *noeo* (to understand)

Wide Sense/Narrow Sense: The Bible uses *repentance* in two ways:

As a necessary precursor to faith

Repent, therefore, of this wickedness of yours, and pray to the Lord that, if possible, the intent of your heart may be forgiven you. (Acts 8:22)

As part of faith

Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance. (Luke 15:7)

Notice how in Acts the emphasis is on the “change of mind” in regards to wickedness, but in Luke repentance must include faith sense there would be no cause of rejoicing on the angels’ part, for without faith one cannot be saved.

So, in the narrow sense, repentance simply means to regret the sin. In the wide sense the regret is still present but completed by faith. The same basic ideas are covered in 2 Corinthians 7:10:

For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret, whereas worldly grief produces death.

Cause & Source

The previous passage hints at the cause and source of repentance, which we must be clear on if we are to rightly understand its importance in our lives. Which word in the above passage hints at the cause and source _____ of _____ repentance?

Now consider the following passages and how they clarify the cause and source of repentance.

"I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance." (Luke 5:32)

When they heard these things they fell silent. And they glorified God, saying, "Then to the Gentiles also God has granted repentance that leads to life." (Acts 11:18) _____

God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth, and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, after being captured by him to do his will. (2 Timothy 2:25-26)

Purpose of Repentance

Since God is the source and cause of repentance, He must have a specific and beneficial purpose in mind for us through repentance. Consider that purpose in the following verses:

John appeared, baptizing in the wilderness and proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. (Mark 1:4) _____

God exalted him at his right hand as Leader and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins. (Acts 5:31) _____

For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret, whereas worldly grief produces death. (2 Corinthians 7:10) _____

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. (2 Peter 3:9)

The Chicken & The Egg

So which comes first, repentance or forgiveness? The above verses sound as though repentance must come before God can/will forgive? But consider the following passages:

Let it be known to you therefore, brothers, that through this man forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you, and by him everyone who believes is freed from everything from which you could not be freed by the law

In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth. In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will, so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory. In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit. (Ephesians 1:7-13)

And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross. (Colossians 2:13-14)

For Whose Benefit

Contrary to the understanding of many, it is not God who benefits by our repentance, but we do. God will remain the same faithful and gracious being that He has always been with or without our repentance. We, however, will never trust in Him who is faithful and gracious apart from repentance, as the following verses reveal:

If we say 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. If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us. (1 John 1:8-10)

And to the one who does not work but believes in him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness. (Romans 4:5)

And Peter said to them, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." (Acts 2:38)

To open their eyes, so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.' (Acts 26:18)
