

Repentance

Acts 2:38, “Then Peter said unto them, “Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.”

This is one of the Bible’s most controversial verses; many systems of false religion have been built on it. The most prominent is the concept of baptismal regeneration, the idea that water baptism is required for salvation. Baptismal regeneration is the most widely taught form of salvation legalism, the idea that a person can actually do something like be baptized to help save himself.

Any ritual involving human activity, human merit, human works like water baptism is a ritual in which someone is doing something.

Works or whatever they are, are not accepted by God as contributing to a person’s salvation.

“For by grace are you saved, through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God, not of works, lest any man should boast.” (Eph. 2:8, 9)

“Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Spirit,” (Titus 3:5)

Repent

The English word repent is from Latin, re + poenitere, meaning to regret; to be sorry. The Oxford English Dictionary has the following meanings:

1. To affect oneself with contrition as regret for something done or for something inherently wrong, some fault, misconduct, sin, or other offense.
2. To feel contrition, compunction, sorrow or regret.
3. To change one’s mind with regard to past action or conduct through dissatisfaction with it or its results.

You can see that peoples’ opinions of what is required for salvation is colored by which of the above definitions they chose. That is, if you choose number one or number two you could assume that, in order to properly repent, you must feel great sorrow or regret for your sins.

Now, regret can range from a mild regret to a life-threatening sorrow. A mild regret says, “Oh, I see I’ve been wrong; I’ll do it the other way.” A severe regret is a raging sorrow which can destroy one emotionally and physically, as from some unintentional action that harms a loved one.

So, a person may feel a tremendous regret about sin: the offense to God, the effect on others, etc. A person may not know enough about sin, or its consequences, to have much regret at all. For many people, the first they hear about sin is in an evangelistic message or Bible class.

For example, someone who grows up in a permissive family in a permissive society may not know that sex outside of marriage is a sin and has very bad consequences. It takes Bible doctrine to know sin for what it is!

Regret over past sins actually grows as one is edified, as a person gains divine viewpoint and sees real issues in life. If a believer doesn’t learn about forgiveness, confession and restoration to fellowship, he might build up a tremendous guilt complex about his past. This is why it is such a blessing to know that past sins have been forgiven. “As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us.” Psalm 103:12

Now if repentance is feeling sorry for sin, then how sorry do you have to feel? Mild sorrow or raging sorrow? How do you demonstrate this sorrow to God? These thoughts lead people into such extremes as asceticism and self-punishment of one kind or another great attempts to impress God, and other people, with the extent of one’s contrition.

Another question arises from this, Will I have to wait until the end of my life, or until I face God, to know whether my sorrow has been enough?

What about my lack of knowledge of sins? How many sins are there that I do not even know about? How much sorrow must I have about each type and variety? Must I feel as sorry for gossip as I would for murder?

The question here, of course, is works. Can repentance be misconstrued to support a works doctrine? Yes it can, **if feeling sorry is made a necessary constituent of salvation**. Just as in all forms of legalism, there is great potential here for bullying by clergy and informed laymen.

Definition number three, on the other hand, taken alone, indicates that repentance can be just a mental change that does not necessarily involve emotional sorrow.

To resolve these vocabulary problems, the Greek word must be studied.

The Greek for repent is **metanoeo**, which means to change the mind; to rethink something. The cognate noun **metanoia**, Rom 2:4, means a change of mind; a conversion; a turning away. Divine viewpoint changes every bit of human viewpoint you have learned.

There is no emotion or feeling involved in this activity. Therefore, if we are going to use the English word repent to translate **metanoeo**, we must be certain that the English definition number three above is meant!

Metanoeo, as an active verb, needs to have an object in context. One must change one's mind about something. You might change your mind because of an honest mistake. You bought a Ferrari and now you can not pay for it. You may receive some education and that changes your thinking about many things.

Repentance is a theological concept we study to explain the mechanics which occur at salvation.

If you have accepted Christ as savior, at some point you changed your thinking about your sin, your relationship to God, and about the work of Christ for salvation.

Likewise, if you have studied the Bible as a Christian, the word of God has led you to change your mind about many things.

“That you put off concerning the former manner of life the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts,”

“and be renewed in the spirit of your mind;”

“and that you put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness.” (Eph. 4:22-24)

When you decide to commit a sin, you are certainly not thinking divine viewpoint. When you are convicted by the word of God, and by the Holy Spirit, you have an opportunity to adjust your thinking to God's point of view. This leads to your confession, expressing the same viewpoint as God. Before you confess your sin, you first undergo a change of thinking about the sin. Metanoeo precedes homologueo.

Repentance is not a turning away from sin in order to accomplish salvation. A person is guilty of sin; he does need forgiveness; and he should stop sinning. But, victory over sin is a process of the Christian life.

An unbeliever cannot have victory over sin. A person can turn over a new leaf, clean up in a few surface areas, spruce up the facade a little. But who would a person be satisfying. One might fool himself and others that he had done enough if he did not have a very good idea of what God's demands actually are.

Sin is too pervasive; there are too many sins. Mental attitude sins, sins of the tongue, open and public sins. You can not turn away from all your sins, even temporarily.

You can see what a vicious circle the legalist is in, the one who thinks he can lose his salvation. If it were possible to lose salvation, assuming someone were successful in earning it in the first place, salvation could never be maintained.

Let us compare Acts 2:38 and Acts 16:31, in which the Philippian jailer is told simply to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ.

We can see that believe (**pistueo**) and repent (**metanoeo**) are virtually synonymous in their application.

- Both require focusing one's attention on Christ.
- Both require positive volition to the gospel.
- Both require acceptance of divine viewpoint regarding Christ and His work on the cross.
- Both mean that you have information that you did not have before and that you accept a point of view.

- Both mental attitudes are non meritorious, that is, neither involves any sort of works.

The Jew, however, is going to have a more wrenching experience as he turns from his religion to Christ. Repentance means that, however much he loves his religion and follows his religious practices, he no longer trusts in the works of his religion to save him. He trusts Christ.

The Philippian jailer has no such hold over his mind. He accepts Christ readily, with no religious reservations. He is simply a man in trouble grasping at a straw which turns out to be a lifeboat.

When witnessing, you only give information, you do not try to get the unbeliever to repent. That is the function of God the Holy Spirit using the gospel information you have provided. God the Holy Spirit will encourage people to change their mind about Christ. Whether a person actually does repent depends on that person's volition when hearing the gospel message.

Regret in the New Testament

There is a Greek word for regret, **metamelomai**, which should always be translated regret, never repent, because it has an emotional connotation. It means to feel sorry for something you have done.

It is used to express regret for a previous action (Matt. 21:29-31).

It describes the attitude of Judas Iscariot (Matt. 27:3) where he regretted what he had done to our Lord, but he never repented, he never believed in our Lord for salvation.

It is used for God having no regrets about saving people and giving spiritual gifts in the church age, (Rom. 11:29).

Likewise, the Father has no regrets regarding the appointment of Jesus Christ as our high priest, (Heb. 7:21).

Illustrations of Repentance

Exo. 13:17. The Jews were not mentally prepared to fight for their freedom. God knew they would change their minds, say that slavery is better, and attempt to go back to Egypt, if they saw war coming. So here repentance means to come up to a new set of facts, be influenced by these facts rationally, and then to retreat.

Jer. 8:3-6, speaks of Judah. When you fail, you do not quit or give up. You get up and move on.

When a person does not repent with regard to salvation also an unbeliever, or Bible doctrine called a believer, then your lifestyle is out of control due to evil in your life.

Believing in Christ: Repentance for Salvation

Salvation repentance is that change of mind which occurs when a person understands and believes the gospel.

This is the principle of common grace, in which the Holy Spirit takes the message of the witness and makes it a reality in the mind of the unbeliever.

An unbeliever cannot understand spiritual phenomena, 1 Cor. 2:14.

Therefore the Holy Spirit acts to bring about the perception of the gospel, John 16:8-11; 2 Tim. 2:25.

After understanding the issues of the gospel, a positive volition expresses itself in a change of mental attitude: faith in Christ. Faith in Christ and repentance are two sides of the same coin. A change in mental attitude about the person and work of Christ equals repentance.

Repentance results in faith in Jesus Christ, salvation adjustment to the justice of God. And it is at the moment of repentance that God the Father provides the whole salvation package to the new believer.

Topic: Salvation Doctrines

Mark 1:14-15 teaches that first you change your mind about Christ and then you believe. Read Matt. 12:41; Luke 13:2-3, 5; 15:7, 10; Acts 17:30; 20:21; 26:20; Rom. 2:4; Heb. 12:17.

2 Pet. 3:9, "The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance."

Growth in the Christian life demands repentance toward human good, Heb. 6:1.

Human good is good works produced by any person, Christian or non-Christian, apart from the filling and control of the indwelling Holy Spirit.

An unbeliever, of course, does not have the indwelling Holy Spirit, and cannot be filled with the Spirit. All good produced by an unbeliever is categorized as human good.

A Christian is, at any moment, either filled with the Holy Spirit defined as spiritual or not filled with the Spirit also called carnal.

The good produced by a spiritual believer is divine good defined as gold, silver and precious stones. The good produced by a carnal believer is human good also called wood, hay and stubble.

- Human good is dead to the plan and policy of God, Gen. 2:17.
- Human good is linked with arrogance and produces boasting, Eph. 2:9; Rom. 4:2.
- Human good is never acceptable to God, Isaiah 64:6.
- Human good will not save man, Eph. 2:8-9.
- An unbeliever's human good will be judged, Rev. 20:12-15.
- The believer's human good will be judged at the judgment seat of Christ, 1 Cor. 3:11-16; Rom 5:10; 2 Cor 5:10.

A change of attitude about sin is taught in Rev. 2:5, 16, 22.

A change of attitude toward Bible truth is the basis for recovery from backsliding, Rom. 2:5; Rev. 3:19.

When God Repents

In the Bible, God is said to repent of things. Read Gen. 6:6; Exo. 32:11-14; 1 Sam. 15:35; Psalm 90:11-13.

But God is immutable and does not change. He does not change His mind. Therefore, these passages ascribe to God a human characteristic, in order to explain or describe God's judgment in a human frame of references. This is an anthropopathism.

An anthropopathism ascribes to God a human characteristic He does not possess, but explains divine policy in terms of human frame of reference.