

7 Things You Should Know About Repentance

June 26, 2022 | [Dan Stegeman](#)

I grew up in a church-going family, for which I am grateful. But if memory serves me well, what I often heard from the pulpit was only a “half gospel.” Yes, I heard a lot about “believing in Jesus” but little about sin and repentance and the righteousness of God.

I don’t think I am alone in this.

I recently had the opportunity to speak to around 100 youth at a Christian school in our area. I began by asking the question, “what is repentance?” After waiting for some time, only one student mustered the courage to respond. I can’t remember exactly what he said, but it was clear from that little exercise that most of the students haven’t heard much about repentance.

Few would argue that teaching about the doctrine of repentance is lacking in our churches and Christian organizations. And if there is going to be revival and renewal in our churches today, it will be preceded by a clear and robust teaching on this core doctrine.

Here are 7 things you simply must know about repentance.

Jesus preached repentance

“From that time Jesus began to preach saying, Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” ([Matthew 4:17](#)). The four gospels show us that Jesus preached on numerous topics, but first and foremost, Jesus preached a message of repentance.

The apostles also preached repentance. Jesus said in [Luke 24:46-47](#), “Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning in Jerusalem.” The apostles heeded these words, beginning with Peter on the day of Pentecost (see [Acts 2:38](#)).

If Jesus preached repentance, and the apostles preached repentance, then it goes without saying that the church for all time should preach repentance.

Repentance is a command

While the apostle Paul was preaching in Athens, he said, “The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now *he commands all people everywhere to repent*, because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by *a man* whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead” ([Acts 17:30-31](#)).

In other words, repentance is not optional. God will hold everyone accountable for their words and deeds ([2 Corinthians 5:10](#)).

Repentance involves “turning” or changing your mind

In another instance where Paul was speaking to King Agrippa, he said, “they should repent and turn to God, performing deeds in keeping with their repentance” ([Acts 26:20](#)).

A simple (yet Biblical) way to think of repentance is doing a “180” in terms of how you think and live. At one point you were going one direction in life and then you turn around and go the opposite direction. You are acknowledging that you were in the wrong and that God was right about everything. You are saying in effect, “I need to change.” In this sense, repentance is linked with faith and conversion.

It is, however, important to note that repentance is not limited to one’s conversion narrative. Luther famously stated, “When our Lord and Master Jesus Christ said, ‘Repent’, he intended that the entire life of believers should be repentance.” It is not a one and done kind of thing. It is a lifestyle.

John the Baptist forcefully told the Pharisees and Sadducees, “Bear fruit in keeping with repentance” ([Matthew 3:8](#)). He knew they were self-righteous. He knew they thought they were close to God. But what they really needed was to humble themselves before a holy and righteous God and repent of their sins.

Repentance involves “sorrow” over your sin

In order for a person to be saved, God must convict them of their sin. They must see the heinous nature of their sin and how it has estranged them from Almighty God. If a person remains proud and self-righteous, he will die in his sins.

One illustration of sorrowing over sin is that of Job. “I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees you; therefore, I despise myself, and repent in dust and ashes” ([Job 42:5-6](#)). Along with that, James writes, “Be wretched and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you” ([James 4:8-9](#)).

Only when we realize that we have offended a holy and righteous God and that our sins are piled as high as the sky, can we truly come to God in faith. The Bible says, “For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret, whereas worldly grief produces death” ([2 Corinthians 7:9-10](#)).

God is patient with us

“The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient towards you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach *repentance*” ([2 Peter 3:9](#)). God doesn’t just give us one chance to repent. He is remarkably patient and kind towards us.

In [Romans 2:4](#) it says, “God’s kindness is meant to lead you to repentance.”

Paul’s transparent words in [1 Timothy 1:15-16](#) are also helpful. “Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost. But I received mercy for this reason, that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display *his perfect patience* as an example for those who were to believe in him for eternal life.”

Repentance leads to life

Scripture presents two ways (and only two ways) to live. The way of life is outlined in [Acts 11:18](#). “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.*’”

When preachers hold back and neglect to tell sinners they are dead in their trespasses and sins, and that they must repent, then they fail in their God-given calling. The fact that there is hope and deliverance in Jesus’ name is glorious news to the sinner. God will grant them repentance, but they must first hear the message in order to respond in faith ([Romans 10:14-17](#)).

An unrepentant heart leads to death

The second way to live is the path that leads to death. The “weeping prophet” Jeremiah cried out to the Lord, “O Lord, do not your eyes look for truth? You have struck them down, but they felt no anguish, you have consumed them, but they have refused to take correction. They have made their faces harder than rock; *they have refused to repent.*”

The most tragic thing in all the world is when sinners remain hard-hearted. They don’t heed the call of the gospel to repent and believe the good news ([Mark 1:15](#)) and thus they choose the path that leads to death.

The gospel is the glorious news of a Savior who has come down to earth to heal and rescue sinners from their plight. But the reality which Scripture makes clear is that there is no salvation apart from repentance, which leads to faith.

May God convict our hearts.

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