

What is Biblical Repentance

We often hear the word repentance tossed around in sermons and Bible classes and occasionally it is said that repentance means regret. While that is true; repentance is much deeper than that. We will be looking at some scripture in an attempt to define Biblical repentance; but before we do, let us note the dictionary definition.

The dictionary on my computer defines repentance as: (1). *To be sorry – To recognize the wrong in something you have done and be sorry about it, and (2). To change ways – to feel regret about a sin or past actions and change your ways or habits.*

From Webster's dictionary we have the following definition for repent: *intransitive verb. (1). - to turn from sin and dedicate oneself to the amendment of one's life. (2). - to feel regret or contrition.* From these definitions we see the idea of regret and sorrow.

Now let's consider scripture. ***Matthew 21:28 But what think ye? A certain man had two sons; and he came to the first, and said, Son, go work today in my vineyard. (29) He answered and said, I will not: but afterward he repented, and went.***

Here we see a father giving instructions to two sons and one of them said, "I will not" but afterwards repented and did as instructed. Now what did this son do? He refused but later repented and obeyed – **HE CHANGED HIS MIND WHICH LED TO A CHANGE IN BEHAVIOR.** This passage gives a good Biblical definition of repentance which is "changed thinking that is manifested by changed doing." So, Biblical repentance has something to do with change.

We see this idea further illustrated for us in Luke 11:32. ***Luke 11:32 The men of Nineve shall rise up in the judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: for they repented at the preaching of Jonas; and, behold, a greater than Jonas is here.*** The people of Nineve repented. To learn what they did, one needs to read the Old Testament book of Jonah. The book begins by God telling his prophet Jonah to go to Nineve to tell them what they needed to do to be saved, but Jonah didn't want to go apparently because the people of Nineve were enemies to Israel and he didn't want them to be saved. Perhaps you remember the story how Jonah tried to run and hide from God, but God found him and had a great fish swallow Jonah. After three days in the "belly of the whale" Jonah was vomited on dry ground.

The Lord told Jonah a second time to go into Nineveh. ***Jonah 3:3-4 So Jonah arose, and went unto Nineveh, according to the word of the LORD. Now Nineveh was an exceeding great city of three days' journey.*** We see an example of repentance in Jonah. He was running from Nineveh but now goes to the great city. This is change of heart and actions, which is repentance.

(4) And Jonah began to enter into the city a day's journey, and he cried, and said, Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown. Now look at verse number 10 and notice what Nineve did in their repentance. ***Jonah 3:10 And God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God repented of the evil, that he had said that he would do unto them; and he did it not.*** These people "turned from their evil way."

In our quest to find a Biblical definition for repentance we have noted that repentance entails a changed mind and a turning from sin.

Let's consider what the apostle Paul writes the church at Corinth about the subject. **2 Corinthians 7:10** *For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of: but the sorrow of the world worketh death.* There are two types of sorrows mentioned in this passage; godly sorrow and worldly sorrow. The term "godly sorrow" is an important expression. It speaks of a sorrow brought on by God's will. Godly sorrow is when one is sorry, he has violated God's word (i.e. sinned). This kind of sorrow leads a person to change; it leads to a "repentance to salvation." Such repentance has God's approval; it has no regrets because it is in compliance with God's will.

On the other hand, worldly sorrow is something altogether different. While it is sorrow, it is not approved by God. Such sorrow is brought on by circumstances of the world that does not lead a person back to God. It may be the sorrow which arises from the loss of friends or property; from disappointment, or from shame and disgrace. It may include a view of worldly consequences with no looking to God for pardon and consolation.

Godly sorrow is a sorrow of conviction. **Acts 3:19** *Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord;* Here we find people listening to the preaching of apostles Peter and John about how they had treated Jesus and they were convicted. We see the same attitude one chapter earlier in Acts 2 where we are told the people were "pricked (i.e. pierced, cut) in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do?" (**Acts 2:37**) Here we see godly sorrow. We see men being told to change as they had a conviction stemming from the inspired words of God spoken through the mouths of the apostles. Godly sorrow leads to salvation.

There was a time when Jesus spoke about two disasters of his day. One was the gruesome murders by Pilate of some Jews of Galilee during their worship. It was the view of Jews during that time that if one suffered a tragedy, then it was punishment because of some sin they had committed – the more severe the tragedy; the greater the sin. They failed to realize that while some did suffer because of misdeeds, there was also suffering among the righteous. They also thought if nothing bad happened to them, then they stood in favor with God. To this thinking Jesus gives them some teaching. **Luke 13:1-5** *There were present at that season some that told him of the Galilaeans, whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. (2) And Jesus answering said unto them, Suppose ye that these Galilaeans were sinners above all the Galilaeans, because they suffered such things? (3) I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.*

In verse 3 he tells them that all need to repent of else they will perish like the Galileans at the command of Pilate. Even though they may not have experienced a tragedy in their life as the Galileans, they still needed to repent of else perish, because they (we) all had sinned and come short of the glory of God (Rom 3:23).

Next, Jesus gives them another instance of a tragedy. He tells them about a tower falling and killing eighteen people. **(4) Or those eighteen, upon whom the tower in Siloam fell, and slew them, think ye that they were sinners above all men that dwelt in Jerusalem?**

Again, the thinking of the Jews would be these eighteen people must have really been wicked people. They must have been sinners. And again, Jesus repeats what he told them in verse 3. **(5) I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.** The point we want to make from this passage is that repentance

is a salvation matter. Jesus mentions it twice. If a person fails to repent, then he will perish.

This thought is complemented in Acts chapter 17. In this chapter we find the apostle Paul in the city of Athens discussing with the philosophers of the day about the “unknown god.” During that discussion he gives some inspired instruction on the matter of repentance. **Acts 17:30 *And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent.***

Paul’s speech had a logical course to run. He proclaimed one God, one human race, one way to salvation and one judgment. In times past the Gentiles had nature and providence to bring them to God which led to them worshipping idols. This day of stumbling in the dark was over. The full revelation of God through Jesus was now revealed for all men. The time had come for them to repent of their past idolatry and the sin that went with it. Paul commands repentance to all. It is not an optional decision and the next few verses tell us why; **(v31) *because Christ will judge the world in righteousness.***

Paul had explained the true God to them and imbedded in that message was how their worship of idols was to false gods and one day they would be held accountable for that; therefore, they were to repent. This judgment would be done by the God of heaven’s appointee – Jesus. It is Jesus, the Son of God, who is “ordained” to judge the world; it is Jesus who was raised from the dead.

Many other passages make this point such as **John 5:26-27 *For as the Father hath life in himself; so hath he given to the Son to have life in himself; (27) And hath given him authority to execute judgment also, because he is the Son of man.*** Or you can read **Romans 2:16 *In the day when God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ according to my gospel.*** This passage shows the significance of the gospel. We will be judged by the “word.” (John 12:48)

Acts 17:31 also reinforced the matter that this judgment will be a “righteous” judgment. There will be no false claims of unfair sentencing. Back to that section of scripture in John, Jesus said his judgment would be “just”, that means fairly. **John 5:30a *I can of mine own self do nothing: as I hear, I judge: and my judgment is just;***

Now notice Acts 17 verse 32 ***And when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked: and others said, We will hear thee again of this matter.*** Sad to say, the people in Athens, like many people today, did not heed Paul’s message. Some mocked while others wanted to wait. Paul soon left the city without any indication that the people ever heard him again. But Paul’s efforts were not futile; there were some that believed. **Acts 17:34 *Howbeit certain men clave unto him, and believed:***

This describes people today regarding the gospel. Some will make light of it; others will procrastinate but some will obey. **2 Peter 3:9 *The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.***

Do you need to repent? Repentance is discarding the old garments of sin and be clothed with Christ. Repentance is a u-turn from the sinful ways to God’s way. It’s a step toward salvation.

Invitation.