

# The Pathway to Repentance

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## LESSON ONE: The Process and Point of Repentance

### Introduction

Jesus declared that “repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations” (Luke 24:47).

Paul, taking his cue from Christ, fulfilled the command in his own ministry proclaiming, “I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and teaching you in public and from house to house, <sup>21</sup> testifying both to Jews and to Greeks of repentance toward God and of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ” (Acts 20:2-21).

### The necessity of repentance

- John preached, “Repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Matthew 3:2)
- He baptized people with “a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness” (Luke 3:3)
- Jesus preached, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Matthew 4:17)
- Jesus warned, “I tell you, no, but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish.” (Luke 13:3)
- The disciples, when sent out: “They went out and preached that men should repent.” (Mark 6:12)
- The gospel asks, “Repent, and each of you be baptized 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)
- The Jews rejoiced when, “God has granted to the Gentiles also the repentance that leads to life.” Acts 11:18
- Paul taught, “Therefore having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is now declaring to men that all people everywhere should repent” (Acts 17:30)
- It is as if we “turn or burn”

### So, how is one to repent? What is involved in true repentance?

Recently, over this last year, we have had several people come forward confessing sin in their lives. While we rejoice in both their willingness to confess, God’s righteousness to forgive, and the culture here at South which accepts those who come forward, we don’t want to drop the ball in helping a person in their recovery from said sin.

We understand that repentance is a requirement for forgiveness,

*Acts 8 “Therefore **repent** of this wickedness of yours, and pray the Lord that, if possible, the intention of your heart may be forgiven you.”*

But is repentance merely a one-time confession of sin coupled with a verbal commitment to change? Often you hear pushback if any more is asked of a repentant sinner: “I repented, isn’t that good enough, just let me be”, or “They’ve repented, we should forgive them and restore them to their former role.”

Let us understand, that reluctance to follow through on repentance, is to let repentance fail to bear its intended fruit. Consider **Matthew 3:8**

But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming for baptism, he said to them, "You brood of vipers, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? 8 "Therefore **bear fruit in keeping with repentance**; 9 and do not suppose that you can say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham for our father'; for I say to you that from these stones God is able to raise up children to Abraham. 10 "The axe is already laid at the root of the trees; therefore every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire."

We sometimes fail to realize that repentance is a process and not simply a onetime act. In this lesson we want to introduce the **process** and the **point** of repentance. Lord willing, we will elaborate next time on the *process*.

## Lesson

### 1. The Process of Repentance

When approached by the Pharisees to be baptized, John dismissed them saying, "You brood of vipers, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Therefore **bear fruit in keeping with repentance.**" Matthew 3:7,8

John refuses to baptize them until they had both repented and offered **proof/evidence** of their personal repentance by the fruit thereof. In this we see a process, a pathway, not just a one-time action, or else they could have repented on the spot and then immediately been baptized.

Let us look at the three main words which John uses to describe the process...

#### A. First, **REPENTANCE**

- a. **metanoeo** - This is a compound word. "Meta" means *after, change*; "noeo" means thinking "to direct one's mind to a subject". This word is derived from "nous" which means mind. So, metanoeo literally means "after directing one's mind to a subject." means to "change your mind"
- b. *metanoëō* (from [3326](#) /*metá*, "changed after being with" and [3539](#) /*noiëō*, "think") – properly, "think differently after," "after a change of *mind*"; to *repent* (literally, "think differently afterwards").
- c. It can then mean "to change one's mind" or "adopt another view" or "to change one's feelings"; [an afterthought, to think differently] if the change of mind derives from recognition that the earlier view was foolish, improper or evil, there arises the sense "to regret," "to feel remorse," "to rue."

#### B. Second, **WORTHY**

- a. The expression "worthy of" (*axios*) originally had to do with objects that were of equal weight, i.e., one item "corresponded to" another in weight.
- b. Two examples:
  - i. Worthy of wages, "worthy of" support (Matthew 10:10; 1 Timothy 5:17-18)
  - ii. Worthy of death, for a capital crime (Acts 23:29; 25:11).

C. Finally, **FRUIT**

Since repentance itself is a matter of the heart, it is not able to be seen. Yet, true repentance cannot be hidden for it manifests itself by the corresponding change in lifestyle – thus we have the **fruit** of repentance which must be seen. If there is no change in behavior, then you can be certain that there has been no repentance!

All three of these components of repentance are seen in Paul's address to King Agrippa:

"...that they should **repent** and turn to God, **performing deeds appropriate** [worthy] to repentance" Acts 26:19-20

"You have to change your mind before you change the way you live and move."

## 2. The Point of Repentance

While we can talk of the process of repentance, there is one crucial point in time upon which repentance pivots:

"I now rejoice, not that you were made sorrowful, but that you were made sorrowful to **the point of repentance**; for you were made sorrowful according to *the will of god*, so that you might not suffer loss in anything through us." 2 Corinthians 7:9

It is this decisive "ah hah" moment when things begin to change. It is that moment when one makes a choice to turn things around. Let's describe it from Paul's words...

### A. **Godly Sorrow**: the precursor to repentance

- a. Paul speaks of inward pain when one knows (or finally comes to realize) that they have hurt their God, and others around them.
- b. This is different than *worldly sorrow* which is felt pain due to one getting caught and/or exposed in their wrong doing. Such a person will...
  - i. Try to manage the consequences; do damage control
  - ii. Offer excuses, rationalization, blame others
  - iii. Give a trite apology and/or statement of sorrow and repentance
- c. NOTE: Godly **sorrow is not repentance**, but it is the single most important factor which *produces* repentance

### B. The **Point** of Repentance – this is when one makes the change

- a. *eis metanoian* – the point of repentance -
- b. Hitting bottom
  - i. Similar to the person who checks them self into an AA program, because they have come to that point that they realize that they have to make some change.
    - Reconsider/after-thought – "this isn't fun after all"; or, "this is really stupid and I thought it was cool"
    - They come to their senses
  - ii. If they are in a program because of a court mandate, pressure of losing a job, or family pressure, it is unlikely that they will find success. It is not until the person comes to that all decisive point when they realize the gravity of what they have been doing and then make a **choice** to **change**.

C. **Salvation** – a change of life without regret; new behaviors

True repentance brought on by godly sorrow always results in a change of life.

- When did Paul have that point of repentance??
- How about Peter?? He went away and wept bitterly, then returned to Galilee to go fishing.
- David?? Consider Psalm 51

**3. An Illustration: A Cancer check**

- a. If you were to go to your doctor about a concern over a lump (mole, etc) which you have discovered, imagine the following scenario...
  - i. The doctor performs a biopsy on the tissue
  - ii. At the follow up visit he tells you the bad news, “It’s cancer”
  - iii. You respond instantly with shock and denial, “It cannot be, I want another opinion”
  - iv. You seek another opinion and that doctor confirms the first, and adds, “It more progressed than we first thought”
  - v. What has to happen now for you to stay alive?
- b. Several stages/steps – *the pathway to recovery*
  - i. **Acceptance** – “I have cancer, and if it is left untreated, I will die”  
Not a matter about fairness, “why me” – it is just the reality of the situation. Only full acceptance will get you down the path to recovery.
  - ii. **Treatment** –
    1. Determine the appropriate treatment (each cancer is treated differently; such as surgery, radiation, or chemo)
    2. Unger go the prescribed treatment
    3. Deal with the consequences, side effects
  - iii. **Recovery/rehab**
    1. Prolonged hospital stay, or care center
    2. Rest at home, no work, or lifting
    3. Rehab, counseling (if lost body parts)
    4. Lifestyle change (diet, exercise, stress) for recovery and prevention
- c. Dealing with sin is just as serious.
  - i. Even though it is not a physical disease that can be seen like cancer, it will kill if left untreated: “*the wages of sin is death*” Romans 6:23
  - ii. It is a spiritual sickness which afflicts the real you – *your spirit*. It affects everything it touches, destroying everything in its path; it will kill everything around you and eventually you, too.
    1. Your marriage, your health, your career, your reputation
    2. Any opportunity for happiness will be destroyed by sin
  - iii. The steps in dealing with sin are the same:
    1. Exposure: the sin is brought to light
    2. Acceptance: personal acknowledgment
    3. Treatment: godly sorrow produces a change of mind in regard to the sin
    4. Recovery: a pathway of restoring one’s spiritual health.

## Summary

Repentance: It is both a **point** in time (a change of mind) and a **path** (the process of bearing fruit worthy of repentance).

Perhaps this is why Paul had to spend three years in Arabia after his conversion. Being the chief of sinners, there was a lot he had to work out.

Failure to come to both a **point** of repentance and travel the **pathway** of repentance is probably the reason why we repeat the same sin over and over again.

## Additional Material

### Signs of Genuine Repentance

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There are signs that indicate the offender is genuinely repentant:

1. Accepts full responsibility for his or her actions. (Instead of: "Since you think I've done something wrong . . ." or "If I have done anything to offend you . . .")
2. Welcomes accountability from others.
3. Does not continue in the hurtful behavior or anything associated with it.
4. Does not have a defensive attitude about being in the wrong.
5. Does not dismiss or downplay the hurtful behavior.
6. Does not resent doubts about their sincerity or the need to demonstrate sincerity—especially in cases involving repeated offenses.
7. Makes restitution where necessary.

<http://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/how-to-move-from-forgiveness-to-reconciliation>