

Do You Understand Real Repentance?

What does it mean to repent? Is real repentance just an emotional feeling? Is it merely being remorseful over past mistakes?

There is actually much more to godly repentance than most people realize. Let's examine the Bible to learn and understand God's definition of real repentance.

1. How is sin defined in the Bible? I John 3:4. Has every human being sinned? Romans 5:12. What is the penalty of sin? Romans 6:21, 23.

Sin is "lawlessness" — the *transgression* of God's law of love. Since all who ever lived have sinned (with the exception of Jesus Christ), all have therefore earned the penalty of sin. That penalty is eternal death — complete cessation of life forever.

All who have not repented of their sins are on spiritual "death row," awaiting execution of a justly deserved capital punishment. That eternal penalty was earned by simply "doing what comes naturally" — sinning.

2. Has God, in His great mercy and love for humanity, provided a way by which we can avoid paying that ultimate penalty? John 3:16, Romans 5:8-10.

3. How can we have our sins blotted out by Jesus Christ's sacrifice — be forgiven of our transgressions of God's law, and be delivered from the penalty of eternal death? Acts 2:38, 3:19.

Acts 2:38 summarizes the initial steps of the salvation process in just one verse. And the first word of that crucial passage is *repent*. "Unless you repent you will all likewise perish," said Jesus (Luke 13:3, 5). So repentance is a vital step to salvation.

But what is real repentance in God's sight, as revealed in His inspired Word? What exactly does it involve — what must we *do* in order to repent?

The Hebrew and Greek words from which *repent* and *repentance* are translated mean to turn, to change direction. True repentance is exactly that. It is a complete about-face from disobedience toward God to obedience, love and cooperation with Him.

Real repentance is something far more than a

temporary emotional experience or a human feeling of remorse. True repentance — the result of "godly sorrow" (II Corinthians 7:10) — involves a permanent change in our thoughts and deeds and natures.

But what, exactly, do we repent of?

Sin!

4. Is it the law of God to which sinners are to turn? Ezekiel 18:21-22.

To repent of sin, then, simply means to stop sinning and begin submitting to and obeying God's law of love.

As we learned in last month's ministudy, God's law shows the way to peace, happiness and joy. It is God's greatest gift to humanity, given to teach humans how to be happy, to lead into the full, abundant life, both in this life and for all eternity.

The multitude of worsening evils humanity suffers from today are not caused by the law of God, but by the breaking of it!

5. Should true repentance be a deep, moving and heartfelt experience? Joel 2:12-13.

God will not accept those whose "repentance" is merely an outward show, where there is no real change of attitude.

Notice what God says: "Turn to me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning. So rend your heart, and not your garments."

6. Is real repentance clearly toward God? Acts 20:21.

Sin is against God the Father. He is the lawgiver whose perfect law we have broken. To repent means to be so humbled and broken up at the thought of having rebelled against the living, holy God — so abhorrent of the deceitfulness, vanity and selfishness of our natures (Jeremiah 17:9, Romans 8:7) — that with godly sorrow we turn to God for mercy and forgiveness. We begin to obey God's law — we begin to live the way *God* wants instead of the way *we* want.

Some have thought that repentance is merely a matter of grasping God's truth intellectually, or some part of it, and being good enough to embrace and accept it. But that is not repentance. That is *self-righteousness* — sin (Isaiah

64:6. Luke 18:9-14) — something else to repent of.

All of us must ultimately come to see God as Job did, and to see ourselves as God does (Job 42:5-6).

By studying God's Word, we begin to understand that we all fall far short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23), and desperately need His forgiveness and help.

But how is it possible for a human to come to that kind of repentance? How can one start to change from self-centered love to God-love and begin showing love toward God and one's neighbor as directed by God's law?

The answer is that true repentance must come from God!

7. Does God's goodness and mercy lead one to repentance? Romans 2:4. And is God patient and loving in leading one to repentance? Same verse.

8. Is it God who grants repentance? II Timothy 2:25, Acts 11:18.

9. Did Jesus plainly say that no one can come to Him unless the Father draws him? John 6:44, 65.

In light of the above scriptures, we see that our call to real repentance comes from God, who puts within us the desire to come to Christ.

10. Does real repentance involve total, unconditional surrender to God, putting Him ahead of and above all else? Matthew 10:37, Luke 14:26.

"Hate" in Luke 14:26 means to love less by comparison, as the parallel account in Matthew 10:37 shows. Jesus is actually talking about giving one's life completely to God. No other person or concern is as important.

But surrendering to God is not a matter of giving up everything good, as so many have falsely believed. Repentance is positive. Not only does one escape the eternal penalty of sin, but God's way leads to innumerable blessings in this life.

Repentance emphatically does not mean we must give up the use or appreciation of material things. God wants us to prosper and be in good health (III John 2). What God is interested in is the attitude we have toward material things — whether we seek first, as our highest priority, His Kingdom and His righteousness (Matthew 6:33).

God wants us to give up only those things that are bad for us — that hurt us spiritually and physically. Repentance and conversion make possible the right use of God's material creation through the guidance of His laws and His Spirit.

11. Ancient King David is a chief example of one who deeply repented of his sins. Did David

admit that he was guilty of committing sins? Psalm 51:9. Did he further admit that his heart (attitude and motivation) had not been right with God? Verse 10.

12. Did David thoroughly abhor his sin? Verses 2-3. Did he cast himself upon God's mercy? Verse 1.

David did not minimize his sin. He did not attempt to justify it. He did not try to explain it away. Nor did he blame it on others. Rather, he was aghast at what he had done and simply prostrated himself before God and implored God's mercy and forgiveness.

David confessed what he had done — confessed, actually, what he was — and asked God to cleanse him spiritually (Psalm 51:2, 7). This is the same attitude we should have when we repent of our own sins.

13. How can you know if you are truly repentant before God? Matthew 3:8. What kind of attitude is God looking for? Isaiah 66:2, last part.

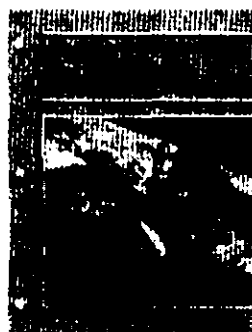
God's eyes are upon those who are of a meek and contrite spirit — those who tremble before His Word. God recognizes a repentant attitude, a broken spirit, a humble seeking for forgiveness and mercy. He will truly honor all who turn from deeds and motivations that His Word defines as sin.

Have you given up walking contrary to God and surrendered yourself completely to Him? Have you sized yourself up by means of the Ten Commandments, as magnified by the entirety of God's Word, and seen where you fall short? Are you willing to keep all of God's commandments from now on?

That is the kind of repentance God will accept — that is the way you must repent.

Real repentance requires a *permanent change of direction*. It is a total commitment to a course from which there is no turning back. It is not a temporary, spontaneous emotional response so prevalent today in religious revival meetings. You have learned that it is something much deeper and vastly more profound!

Have you really repented? □



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