

REPENTANCE - A Worksheet

The following is an outline that shows what the New Testament says about repentance. Beginning with the verse references provided, the topic can be explored to whatever degree desired.

- PART 1 - Repentance is Necessary; All People Have an Obligation to Repent
 - PART 2 - Repentance is a Common Theme Throughout the New Testament
 - PART 3 - Concerning Those Who *Do Not* Repent
 - PART 4 - Concerning Those Who *Do* Repent
 - PART 5 - Repentance in the Book of Revelation
 - PART 6 - Two Misc. Verses
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PART 1 - REPENTANCE IS NECESSARY; ALL PEOPLE HAVE AN OBLIGATION TO REPENT

- 1. Repentance is what God requires of us, and what he desires for us.**
 - God commands all people to repent - Acts 17:30.
 - God desires that all people repent - 2 Peter 3:9. (He does *not* desire that they perish - the only alternative to repentance.)
- 2. Repentance is made possible by God, and is for all people everywhere.**
 - For the Jews (Israel) - Acts 5:31.
 - For the non-Jews - Acts 11:18
 - The message (or command) is for all nations, all people everywhere - Luke 24:47; Acts 17:30.
 - It is made possible because of God's kindness - Romans 2:4.
- 3. How does a person repent?**
 - **WHAT WE MUST DO:** We must have godly sorrow over our sin - 2 Corinthians 7:10. This sorrow results in a turning away from sin, and choosing to do what is right in God's sight. (In contrast, worldly sorrow accomplishes no such changes, but leaves a person continuing in the way of death.) Godly sorrow is more than just a feeling of remorse; it leads to change. [The article, "Repentance and Remorse," provides a more in-depth look at these concepts.]

- WHAT GOD DOES: He gives/grants repentance to us - Acts 5:31; 11:18; 2 Timothy 2:25. (Our hearts are so stubborn that repentance is *not* a natural condition for us.)
4. **The responsibility of preachers/leaders:**
 - The message of repentance must be preached - Luke 24:47.
 - Preachers and leaders must do their part (instructing, etc.), but must leave the final outcome (that is, whether or not the person will repent) to God - 2 Timothy 2:25 (an example).
 5. **Repentance is necessary for both "sinners" (unsaved people) and "saints" (saved people).**
 - FOR UNSAVED PEOPLE: Jesus' focus was to bring sinners to repentance - Luke 5:32 [This is also mentioned, in some translations, in Mark 2:17 and Matthew 9:13.]
 - FOR UNSAVED PEOPLE: The apostle's message was that repentance was a requirement for forgiveness - Acts 2:38 (an example). [See also other examples in the book of Acts, etc.]
 - FOR SAVED PEOPLE: Repentance is necessary whenever a person stops doing what is right in God's sight - Revelation 2:5 (an example). [See also other examples in Rev. 2-3.]
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PART 2 - REPENTANCE IS A COMMON THEME THROUGHOUT THE NEW TESTAMENT

1. **Taught by John the Baptizer:**
 - In connection with the Kingdom of Heaven - Matthew 3:2.
 - In connection with baptism and forgiveness - Matthew 3:11; Mark 1:4; Luke 3:3; Acts 13:24; 19:4.
 - In connection with works (the "fruit" of one's life) - Matthew 3:8; Luke 3:8.
2. **Taught by Jesus:**
 - In connection with the Kingdom of Heaven / Kingdom of God - Matthew 4:17; Mark 1:15.
 - In connection with his lifelong goal: to rescue sinners, so that they will not perish - Luke 5:32 ; 13:3, 5. [This is also mentioned, in some translations, in Mark 2:17 and Matthew 9:13.]
3. **Taught by the Disciples:**
 - A part of their ministry with Jesus - Mark 6:12.
 - A part of the "Great Commission" that Jesus gave them - Luke 24:47.
 - A part of the message of salvation - Acts 2:38; 3:19; 8:22; 20:21; 26:20.

4. **Repentance is one of the "basic teachings" of "the Faith"** - Hebrews 6:1. This is part of the "foundation" we must build upon. (Refusing to go beyond the "basics" is *not* an option.)
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PART 3 - CONCERNING THOSE WHO *DO NOT* REPENT

1. **An example of people who *did not* repent:** The people of Jesus' day - Matthew 11:20.
 - They will have a more horrible judgment because they rejected opportunities for salvation that others were never given - Matthew 11:21-22; Luke 10:13.
 - People of the past who *did* repent, will also testify against them - Matthew 11:22; Luke 11:32.
 2. **The consequences for those who refuse to repent:**
 - They will perish - Luke 13: 3, 5 (even though that is *not* what God desires - 2 Peter 3:9).
 - They are, even now, filling up a "store house" of wrath that will one day be poured out on them - Romans 2:5.
 - (See also what Jesus says about the people mentioned in Section 1, above.)
 3. **Various things about such people:**
 - They are a source of grief, to those who have repented - 2 Corinthians 12:21. (Those who have repented are grieved, because they understand the future doom of those who remain *unrepentant*)
 - Even *miracles* will not change their hearts, if they are unwilling to pay attention to God's Word - Luke 16:30-31.
 - If they *do* understand the truth, and totally reject it (from the heart), there is no way that they will ever want to return to the truth - Hebrews 6:6. [This applies to those who may have temporarily accepted the "basics" of the truth (Hebrews 6:1+), but who now totally reject it.]
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PART 4 - CONCERNING THOSE WHO *DO* REPENT

1. **[Examples of people who repented:** The people who accepted the teaching of John (the baptizer), Jesus, and the apostles. See the context of the verses mentioned in PART 2, above.]
2. **The consequences for those who repent:**
 - Forgiveness, removal of sins - Acts 2:38; 3:19.
 - Salvation, no regrets for having repented - 2 Corinthians 7:10.

- Note: Many things happen in the process of salvation. Repentance is just one of the responses we must have. (Two of the other responses we must have include trust in God and a willingness to live a godly life.) God also is actively involved in our salvation. It is important to realize that, even though a verse may mention only one or two aspects of this multi-faceted event, *all* are present.

3. Various things about such people:

- They are a source of joy in heaven - Luke 5:7, 10.
- They are a source of joy to others who have repented - 2 Corinthians 7:9 (an example). (This specific example focuses on the joy a leader had, when certain people in the church repented of their sin.)

PART 5 - REPENTANCE IN THE BOOK OF REVELATION

1. Warnings to five of the seven churches:

- BACKGROUND: These were seven actual churches in Asia, located in the area of modern Turkey. The issues they had to deal with are similar to those experienced down through the centuries, by both churches and individual Christians. Because of this, these letters have great value, even to this day.
- In some of these instances, the command to repent is directed toward Christians who have fallen into sin, perhaps without realizing it. In other instances, the people in question may have never been genuine Christians, in the first place.

- EPHESUS - Strong in doctrine and works, but weak in love. They were to repent, or lose their place among the churches - Revelation 2:5.
- [SMYRNA - Suffering persecution, but remaining faithful to God. No rebuke; no command to repent.]
- PERGAMUM - Faithful in some ways, but toleration of false teaching and compromise in moral issues. They were to repent of these sins, or Jesus would fight against them - Revelation 2:16.
- THYATIRA - Active in many ways, but (for the most part) as corrupt as the world. They were *already* unwilling to repent. If this unwillingness continued, Jesus would bring them suffering and death - Revelation 2:21-22.
- SARDIS - Having a superficial expression of life, but (with few exceptions) totally dead; religious but unsaved. They were told to turn their attention back to what they had received (the message of the Bible) and repent - Revelation 3:3. [Jesus wanted them to exchange what was *superficial and worthless* for what was *genuine*.]
- [PHILADELPHIA - Weak, but faithful and growing. No rebuke; no command to repent.]

- LAODICEA - Superficial and pretentious; claiming to be spiritual, but so filled with worldliness that there was no room for Christ. They were to repent and let Jesus come into their midst - Revelation 3:19! [As far as Jesus was concerned, their present condition was as disgusting as vomit.]
2. **A warning about a coming day:** The day will come, in which people will refuse to repent, *even when they know that it is God who is judging them.*
- [BACKGROUND: In Revelation 6:8, one-fourth of the world's population are killed, and the remaining three-fourths of the people survive. In Revelation 9:18, one-third of these survivors (which amounts to one-third of the *original three-fourths*) are killed. This would be an additional one-fourth of the *original total population*, bringing the total dead to half of all who had originally been alive.]
 - Even after half of the world's population has been killed, the survivors refused to repent of their sin and idolatry - Revelation 9:20-21.
 - Later, God let the sun scorch them with a burning heat. At this time, they not only refused to repent and glorify God, but they also cursed him - Revelation 16:9.
 - Then God then sent darkness, along with pain (probably pain from the burns and sores of the previous judgment). At this time the people *still* refused to repent of what they had done - Revelation 16:11.
 - [FURTHER COMMENTS: These people have rejected God so totally, that they will *never* become willing to turn to him for salvation. At this point, there is nothing left for God to do, except to return and bring judgment upon them, at the final battle of Armageddon. These people are so firm in their rejection of God, that, to their dying breath, they will continue to curse him - Revelation 16:21!]
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PART 6 - TWO MISC. VERSES

1. **A required response** we must have, toward people who sin against us: We must forgive them, when they repent of the sins they have committed against us - Luke 17:3-4.
2. **A warning about godlessness:** It could bring about "un-repentable" (unchangeable) consequences - Hebrews 12:17. [In this verse, the word "repent" is used in the way that is more commonly found in the Old Testament. See the separate article, "What about Repentance in the Old Testament?"]

REPENTANCE AND REMORSE

As Used in the New Testament

1. The two terms contrasted: similarities and differences.

- REPENTANCE involves a change in the way we think and act. It results in a change in lifestyle. The normal New Testament use of this word involves a change from a sinful way of life to a way of life that honors God. [See also the definition at the beginning of the "Repentance Worksheet."]
- REMORSE may accompany the admission of wrongdoing, but it can also be present when *nothing* wrong has been done. It focuses on the consequences or effects of one's actions on others, but does not necessarily imply that those consequences were caused by wrongdoing. In 2 Corinthians 7:8-9, remorse is contrasted with gladness or joy.
- A change in one's actions *can* be associated with remorse - though this does not always occur. When it does, the biggest difference between the words "remorse" and "repentance" might be the emphasis. (The one would emphasize the sadness, while the other would emphasize the changes in conduct.)
- Repentance is the more permanent of the two. Remorse can be temporary. The *absence* of remorse can be quite permanent.
- [For those who may be interested in the original New Testament Greek: The word group related to "metanoeo" is normally translated as *repentance*, or *repent*. The word group related to "metamelomai" is normally translated as *remorse*. (In the KJV, this second group is also translated as *repent*.)]

2. God and Remorse: When God makes a promise or commitment, he doesn't regret it at a later time.

- This focuses on the *absence* of remorse. God never regrets promises or commitments he makes, *nor does he ever have a reason to do so*. He will *never* change his mind or regret what he has done. What he says is "irrevocable."

- In the Old Testament, there is a sense in which God *does* have regret over the consequences of actions he must take. When he has to leave people to the consequences of their sins, he does not take delight in their suffering. We must remember that remorse, in this O.T. sense, does *not* suggest that God himself has done anything wrong. (See the article, "What About Repentance in the Old Testament?")
- God does not regret his commitment of love for the nation Israel (a commitment he made to their forefathers) - Romans 11:29. (Many translations use the word "irrevocable.")
- God will never regret (change his mind about) making Jesus the high priest of our salvation - Hebrews 7:21. [Note: Since Jesus can no longer die, he is a *permanent* high priest. This is contrasted with the Old Testament high priests, who would remain in that position only for a few years - that is, until death took them out of that position.]

3. **The Often-Temporary Nature of Remorse - 2 Corinthians 7:8.**

- The apostle Paul had regrets (remorse) over what he said to the Corinthians, because it made them sorrowful. However, because their sorrow led to something good, his regret was only temporary - 2 Corinthians 7:8.
- In this passage, remorse is contrasted with joy. When the Corinthians' sorrow led to the proper response, Paul's remorse changed to joy and happiness.
- NOTE: This passage illustrates the focus of remorse, on the *consequences* of an action. The remorse was present because of the Corinthians' sadness, not because Paul had said something wrong. Paul needed to say the things he did, and he was not wrong for doing so.

4. **The *absence* of remorse does not indicate that there is no need for it - Matthew 21:28-32.**

- The religious leaders of Jesus' day claimed they had no need for remorse (or repentance). Yet the need was actually there. They should have had sorrow for their sins, and then changed their ways. [Some of their sins are listed in Matthew 23.]

- Jesus described these leaders in the parable of the two sons - Matthew 21:28-32. The one son claimed that he was willing to do what was right, but he didn't do it. This son illustrates the religious leaders, who thought they had no need for John's teaching about righteousness. They thought they were "good enough" without it. [The word "remorse" is used only in connection with the *other* son. See Section 6.]

5. The *presence* of remorse does not always indicate that there is a need for change in conduct.

- Remorse may occur because of something *bad* that a person has done. A person may do something sinful and regret doing it - especially after seeing the consequences of that action. In this instance, the remorse *ought* to lead to a change in conduct. (Whether or not the person is *willing* to make that change is a separate issue. See Section 6.) Example: Judas betrayed Jesus, and later regretted his sin - Matthew 27:3.
- Remorse may occur because of something *good* that a person has done. A person may have to do something that causes pain or sorrow to others, and he may regret that the pain must be experienced by them. (For example, a parent may have to punish a disobedient child, even though he regrets that the child has to experience the pain.) In this instance, remorse does *not* indicate any need for a change in conduct. Example: When Paul had to reprimand the Corinthians, his conduct was godly. Yet he still had regret that they were filled with sorrow - 2 Corinthians 7:8.

6. Remorse can lead a person toward change in conduct, but it does not always do so.

- Remorse without change: Judas - Matthew 27:3. (If he had been repentant, he would have turned back to Jesus.)
- Remorse associated with change: From the parable of the two sons - Matthew 21:28-32. The one son chose to do what was wrong, but later had remorse and changed his ways (repented). This son illustrates many of the "sinners" of Jesus' day, who believed John's teaching about righteousness. They had remorse and changed their ways. [This is in contrast to the *other* son. See Section 4.]

Repentance and Sorrow

2 Corinthians 7:9-10

It is possible to have a situation in which two people *both* have sorrow over sin, but one turns to God in repentance, and the other doesn't. Why the difference in response? It is because the one has *godly* sorrow and the other has *worldly* sorrow.

Here is the difference between the two:

1. **GODLY SORROW:** This is the kind of sorrow that God desires in us - a sorrow which leaves no negative side effects (it does not leave permanent damage) - 1 Corinthians 7:9. This sorrow brings repentance and leads to salvation - 2 Corinthians 7:9-10. [It can also accomplish many other good things - see verse 11+.]
2. **WORLDLY SORROW:** This kind of sorrow brings death - 2 Corinthians 7:10. [This verse focuses only on the end result that it leads to (death) and not on the other negative effects that may come beforehand.]

What about "Repentance" in the Old Testament?

1. The Old Testament Hebrew word related to repentance has a broader focus than the New Testament Greek word. Though the idea of "repentance from sin" is often present, the word is more frequently used in reference to a person changing his actions ("repenting") for *other* reasons.
2. In the Old Testament sense, a person can change his actions because he has compassion or pity on someone who has been affected by those actions - *even though the actions, themselves, are not wrong*. He can also change his actions, when the circumstances requiring those actions have changed.
3. In this sense, even God can "repent." He can change his actions toward people, when their actions (and attitudes) have changed toward him. He can bring judgment upon a nation, when it rebels against him... yet later, if that nation turns back to him, he can "repent" by taking away the judgment and replacing it with blessings.
4. In the New Testament, the word "repentance" is used in this broader sense, in Hebrews 12:17.
5. [NOTE: Sometimes there may be a greater focus on the change of *mind*, rather than the change of *action*. This could be a change to a "positive" state of mind (related to comfort and encouragement). Or it could be a change to a "negative" state of mind (related to sorrow, regret and pity) - comparable to the word "remorse," which is examined in a separate part of this study.]