

A Look at "REPENTANCE" and Various Other Terms Related to Salvation

(Terms found within the context of the word "repentance")

- PART 1 - Background and Need for Repentance
 - PART 2 - Things That Are Directly Associated with Repentance
 - PART 3 - The Benefits (and Responsibilities) of Having Repented
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PART 1 - Background and Need for Repentance

A. God and his part in repentance: God relates to humans in different ways.

1. Some verses focus on God's relationship to us as the Sovereign Creator. This "behind the scenes" perspective - the Creator's view - can be seen in Scripture, but is difficult for us to understand, since we can only comprehend reality from the perspective of created beings. (This perspective is probably the basis for the verses listed in Section A-3, below.)
 2. Other verses focus on God as coming down to our own level and interacting with us in ways that we *can* understand - and which leave us, therefore, accountable for our response. This is the more "visible" way that God relates to us. It is on this level that God gives us his Word, and that Jesus died and rose again. It is on this level that he shows us his kindness and offers us salvation. Also on this level, we will one day bow down before him, as our Savior, King and Judge. (This perspective is probably the basis for the verses listed in Sections A-4, A-5, and A-6.)
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3. God grants, or gives, repentance to people - Acts 5:31; 11:18; 2 Timothy 2:25.
 4. God commands us to repent - Acts 17:30. [Those who are willing to obey God will choose to obey this command.]

5. God patiently holds back the day of judgment, because he desires for us to repent (rather than perish) - 2 Peter 3:9. [Verse 10 - He will *not* hold it back forever; judgment will eventually come.]
6. God shows kindness to us, for the purpose of leading us toward repentance - Romans 2:4. (Of course, this doesn't guarantee that we will pay attention to his leading.)

B. Why should a person repent?

1. Because of the coming of God's kingdom - Matthew 3:2; 4:17; Mark 1:15. [Note: In one sense, God's kingdom has already come: It is now present in the heart of everyone who turns to God in repentance and faith. In another sense, it has not yet come: When Jesus returns, it will be visibly, physically present; Jesus himself will rule over the earth.]
2. Because God commands it; because we have sinned, and judgment is coming - Acts 17:30-31; 2 Peter 3:7, 9-10, etc.

C. Before a person can repent, he must be made aware of his need to repent.

1. Through someone preaching or proclaiming the good news - Matthew 4:17; Mark 1:4; 6:12; Luke 3:3; 24:47; Acts 13:24; 19:4; 20:21; 26:20; etc.
 2. By paying attention to what was learned in the past - Revelation 3:3. (This would apply if the person already knew the truth.)
 3. Under certain conditions, miracles could apparently help make a person aware of his needs - Matthew 11:21; Luke 10:13. But miraculous events are *of no value* to anyone who has rejected God's Word - Luke 16:30.
 4. [Note that repentance is one of the "basic teachings" of the faith - Hebrews 6:1.]
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5. EXAMPLE - Jesus came to call sinners to repentance - Luke 5:32. He came to proclaim repentance to people who needed it and who were willing to admit they needed it. (This is also found, in some translations, in Matthew 9:13 and Mark 2:17.)
 6. NOTE: Jesus didn't come to spend his time with those who wouldn't admit that they had any need for repentance, and who wouldn't pay attention to what he said

- Luke 5:32. After all, righteous people don't need to repent, according to Luke 15:7! [Actually these people (in Luke 5:32) who refused to repent could probably be better described as "*self-righteous*," for apart from Jesus, *nobody* is righteous!]

7. Comment #1: Some passages focus on people who need to repent, who have *never* done so in the past. Other passages focus on people who have already turned to the truth, but who have fallen into sin. A person must repent (and believe) when he wants to receive salvation. But he must also have a continuing attitude of repentance, every time he discovers sin in his life. (None of us are totally sinless, and we will not be totally sinless, until the day we see Christ in person, and he completes the changes he has begun in our lives.)
8. Comment #2: It is possible for a person to have a shallow, temporary "repentance." Such a person may appear to accept the truth (and salvation), but it never really takes hold in his heart. Many of these people eventually turn away from the truth, and never come back. A verse that illustrates this can be found in Section E-3.

D. A person must know that repentance involves turning "away from" one thing, and going "to" (or "into") another thing.

1. Away from evil deeds and wickedness, etc. - Acts 8:22; 2 Corinthians 12:21; Hebrews 6:1; Revelation 2:21; 9:20-21; 16:11.
2. To God, to the knowledge of the truth, into a lifestyle that is characterized by actions that please God, etc. - Acts 3:19; 20:21.

E. A person must respond to the call for repentance.

1. He may accept the truth and repent. [Go to the verses in PART 2.]
2. He may reject the truth and refuse to repent. [Go to the verses in Section F.]
3. A special situation: a person may temporarily accept the truth, and then totally reject it. A person who has totally rejected the truth he was once exposed to, will never again turn back to it - Hebrews 6:4-6. (He will never *want* to turn back to the truth.) [NOTE: We won't always know when this has happened. God knows, however, for he sees the heart clearly.]

F. What about those who refuse to repent?

1. Some of the verses in this section were written about people who *claimed* to be "Christian," yet had never turned away from their sins. They may have convinced themselves (and even other people) that they were saved, but God knew they were fakes.

2. Concerning those who have unrepentant hearts: This unrepentant attitude is associated with numerous other sins. A few examples include: not paying attention to God's Word - Luke 16:30-31; stubbornness - Romans 2:5; a list of various sins - 2 Corinthians 12:21; and cursing God - Revelation 16:9, 11.

3. A general statement about these people: They are storing-up wrath against themselves; they will perish - Luke 13:3, 5; Romans 2:5.
4. What Jesus said about people who rejected him: A horrible judgment would one day come upon them - Matthew 11:20-22; 12:41; Luke 10:13+; 11:32.
5. What Jesus says to people who claim to be "Christian," yet remain unrepentant: Jesus himself will oppose them; when he returns, they will not be ready - Revelation 2:5 (he will remove their "lamp stand" from his presence); 2:16 (he will fight against them); 2:21-22 (they will be punished); 3:3 (he will catch them unprepared for his return; he will be like a thief sneaking up on them).

6. An effect such people have on genuine Christians: They are often a cause for grief, to genuine Christians - 2 Corinthians 12:21. (The genuine Christians would be concerned over the unrepentant person's condition and potential fate.)

PART 2 - Things That Are Directly Associated with Repentance

A. What else happens, when a person repents?

1. The things in this section are closely connected with repentance. Some appear to occur immediately before repentance, some during, and some immediately after one's repentance.

2. There are many dimensions to the act (or process) of salvation. There are things that God does, to make it possible; there are things that we do, in response to God's call. *Logically*, what God does must come first, but *chronologically*, from *our* perspective, many of these things seem to occur simultaneously. (Part of what God does occurs "behind the scenes," and we wouldn't know about it, except that God has told us about it.)
3. From our perspective, some aspects of salvation, such as the beginning of a new life united with Christ, occurred at the moment that we put our trust in him. Some aspects, such as becoming more "Christ-like," are an on-going process. Finally, other aspects, such as the completion of all that God has begun in us (Philippians 1:6), are reserved for the future.
4. Some aspects of salvation occurred when Jesus died and rose again.
5. From God's perspective, there is even an aspect of salvation that occurred before the world ever existed!
6. The concepts mentioned below are mainly those that are found in context with the word "repentance." These will, more often than not, focus on the "*human responsibility*" aspect of salvation, and are not intended to deny the role *God* has in salvation. This study does *not* give a complete picture of everything related to salvation. (Many other verses focus on the issue of salvation, but they do not contain the word "repentance," which is the focus of this study.)

7. For things we do, that seem to occur *at the beginning of* repentance - Section B.
8. For things we do, that seem to occur *at the same time as* repentance - Section C.

9. For things we do, that appear to be *the immediate result of repentance* (or a *response to it*) - Sections D and E.
10. [See PART 3 for the benefits (and responsibilities) of having repented.]

B. Things we do that appear to be associated with the beginning of repentance.

1. A person must come to his senses (he must "wake-up" to the truth of his condition) - Revelation 3:3.
2. He must do something (be "earnest") rather than passively doing nothing - Revelation 3:19.
3. Godly sorrow - 2 Corinthians 7:9-10.
4. Obeying the message that was received - Revelation 3:3.

C. Things we do that appear to occur simultaneously with repentance.

1. Turning to God - Acts 3:19; 20:21; 26:20.
2. Believing the good news, trusting God, etc. - Mark 1:15; Acts 19:4; 20:21. [Note: Along with repentance, faith (trust) in God is one of the basic teachings of Christianity - Hebrews 6:1.]
3. "Opening the door" to Jesus - Revelation 3:19-20. [Note: These people were claiming that they were already saved and had no spiritual needs.]

D. Things we do that are closely connected to repentance, but which appear to be an immediate (and often ongoing) response to it.

1. Praying - Acts 8:22 [Note: In this specific instance, repentance and prayer were commanded, but it appears that *neither* occurred.]
2. The "fruit of repentance" - works (deeds) that please God - Matthew 3:8; Luke 3:8; Acts 26:20 (deeds appropriate for repentance); Revelation 2:5 (about people who had become lazy in their obedience - they needed to return to the obedience they originally had, as an expression of love to Jesus Christ).
3. Baptism - see Section E.

E. Baptism and repentance

1. Note #1: In Jesus' day, when a person turned to God, he didn't wait months or years before he was baptized. Nor did he take "baptism classes." Instead, baptism was considered to be *one of the first expressions of repentance and turning to God*. (This would be followed, of course, by additional expressions of life, such as the "fruit of repentance.") Repentance and baptism were closely associated - though, technically, baptism (if it really meant anything) could *not* occur until the person had repented. [If the repentance didn't occur, then the baptism really didn't have any value. It doesn't *guarantee* salvation. Acts 8:13, 20-23 records an instance in which a person believed something about the truth and was baptized - yet he still had a wicked, unrepentant heart.]
2. Note #2: The *initial act* of repentance must come before baptism. But from another perspective, if we look at repentance as an *ongoing attitude*, we could say it comes after baptism. This assumes that the baptism is being viewed as one of the first expressions of the new life a person receives, when he turns to God. Both of these perspectives can be seen in various verses, below. [Today, since many churches place a large time gap between these two actions, the connection between them is much less evident.]

3. A baptism "of" repentance - a baptism that expresses (or symbolizes) the repentance that has occurred in one's heart - Mark 1:4; Luke 3:3; Acts 13:24; 19:4.
4. Baptism "for" repentance - a baptism that is meant for those who have become repentant or which symbolizes one's entrance into a repentant lifestyle - Matthew 3:11. (The word "for" is *not* used in the sense of "in order to get" repentance.)
5. Repent "and" be baptized - do the one, followed by the other - Acts 2:38. [Note: The people being addressed had already accepted the truth which Peter preached (v. 37). This shows that the "believing" aspect of salvation was *already* present, though not directly mentioned in v. 38.]

6. Water baptism (associated with repentance) is contrasted with Spirit baptism (associated with salvation) - Matthew 3:11. This reminds us that merely changing our lifestyle does *not* result in salvation. We must trust (believe in) Jesus, and what he did, for our salvation. It is because of what *Jesus* did (and does), that we can receive (be baptized by) the Holy Spirit. [The water baptism focuses on *our* response - what *we* do. It has significance only because of what *Jesus* did (and does).]

PART 3 - The Benefits (and Responsibilities) of Having Repented

A. What happens to the person who has repented?

1. Comment #1: As mentioned previously (in PART 2), salvation has many dimensions. There are things that *God* does for us and in us. There are also things that God requires *us* to do - many of which are made possible because of what God has done. The verses that use the word "repentance" tend to focus on what the *person* is required to do (or what happens to him because of his repentance). However, this focus does *not* imply a denial of the other dimensions of salvation, such as what *God* does in salvation.
 2. Comment #2: Repentance focuses on the *human responsibility*. But that alone, without the other dimensions of salvation, will not bring about the following results. An in-depth study of the following concepts would show that *God* is also very much involved. In fact, it would lead us to conclude that we ought to give God the credit and glory for our salvation, rather than taking it ourselves. [We won't deny the fact that *we* did the repenting, but when we realize how terribly enslaved we once were to sin, we would want to give God the credit, even for what *we* did! We would say that what *he* did made our repentance possible.]
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3. Removal of one's sins; forgiveness of sins - Mark 1:4; Luke 3:3; 24:47 (repentance and forgiveness will be preached...); Acts 2:38; 3:19 (sins wiped out); 5:31; 8:22.
 4. Knowledge of the truth (a life-giving knowledge, not mere superficial acceptance of a list of facts and teachings) - 2 Timothy 2:25. [Note: These people may have considered themselves to be part of the church; they may have thought they were saved. But the fact that they did not accept the truth showed differently.]
 5. Salvation and life - 2 Corinthians 7:10 (salvation); Acts 11:18 (life).
 6. Fellowship with God - Revelation 3:19-20. [Note: These people did not have this fellowship. They claimed they were "Christians," and had no need of anything, but Jesus claimed that they had a need for *everything!*]
 7. No regret for having repented - 2 Corinthians 7:10.

B. What impact does one's repentance and salvation have on others?

1. Joy in heaven - Luke 15:7, 10.
2. God is glorified - Revelation 16:9 (implied - these specific people refused to glorify God).
3. Happiness on the part of *other* Christians - 2 Corinthians 7:9 (an example).

C. The need to follow God's example

1. Those who claim that they are God's children must be willing to follow God's example. If, instead, they continue to follow the devil's example, there are good reasons to doubt the genuineness of their "repentance." Remember that the genuineness of our repentance is shown by our deeds - Acts 26:20.
2. We must forgive others who sin against us, when they repent - Luke 17:3-4. (God forgave our sins against him, when we repented. We *must* follow God's example. See Matthew 6:12, 14-15.)