

## **Is repentance necessary for salvation?**

Paul wrote to the church at Corinth, “Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves. Do you not realize that Jesus Christ in you –unless, of course, you fail the test?” (2 Cor 13:5) Why is there a need for self-examination regarding our faith- is it possible that one could be deceived into thinking they’re saved by their faith in Christ and not be saved? If a person went to the altar and prayed the sinner’s prayer professing faith in Christ, aren’t they saved (John 3:16, Rom 10:9-13)? God warns, “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; Who can know it?” (Jer 17:9) As we allow the truth of God’s word to search our hearts, God will deliver us from deception.

### **Are You Born Again?**

What part does repentance play in salvation? Is repentance just something we embrace over time after we’re saved as we’re moved by God’s goodness, kindness and patience? Must we repent to be saved? A man confessed to me that he’d had sex with many women and lately picked up men at a gay bar. Due to losing sleep over his sin, he would drink each night to drown his sorrows. He said he was born again and is sorry for his sin and “wants” to stop, but he “just can’t help it”. Is he saved? I frequently run across people professing faith in Christ- they went to the altar, they prayed the prayer, they go to church, they even read their Bibles and can talk spiritual talk, but they won’t repent of their willful, continual sins. Are they saved?

### **Repentance is Necessary for Salvation**

Jesus warned “Unless you repent, you too will all perish” (Luke 13:3). Before ascending into heaven He summarized the gospel, “It was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day, and that *repentance* and forgiveness of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.” (Luke 24:47) Paul “preached that they should *repent* and turn to God and prove their *repentance* by their deeds” (Acts 26:20) and “God...commands all men everywhere to *repent*, because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness.” (Acts 17:30, cf. 2:38, 3:19, and 5:31) Conversion requires both repentance and faith in Jesus Christ.

### **What is Repentance?**

#### 1. Repentance is Godly Sorrow

Repentance is not merely being sorry and confessing our sins, but turning away from our sins. “Godly sorrow brings *repentance* that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death.” (2 Cor 7:10) What is the difference between worldly sorrow and godly sorrow? Have you ever been sorry for just the consequences of sin, rather than the fact that the sin was evil in the sight of God? I know I have. That is not godly sorrow. What are the evidences of godly sorrow? God gave us an example of a church that had godly sorrow over sin: “See what this godly sorrow has produced in you: what earnestness, what eagerness to clear yourselves, what indignation, what alarm, what longing, what concern, what readiness to see justice done.” (2 Cor 7:11) When we have godly sorrow, we see our sin as God sees it: wicked and deserving of judgment. We

abhor it and long for forgiveness. We will do anything we can to make things right and are broken and humble before God and others about it. Instead of seeking to blame others or justify our sin, we plainly face the gravity of our sins and repent of them. Has that kind of sorrow ever gripped you upon the realization of sin? I have several memories of genuine repentance, where I saw my sin in all its darkness and loathed it. Tears were shed. The groaning and agony of conviction of guilt and then true remorse and repentance were followed by the blessings of forgiveness. The weight of guilt was removed from my shoulders and power from God sustained me to live in victory over the sin.

After committing adultery with Bathsheba and murdering her husband, David wasted away in worldly sorrow (*Psalm 32:3-4*). Later when God confronted him with his sin, he came to a place of godly sorrow. Psalm 51 records his earnest prayer of repentance. He cried out for God's mercy (*v1*), cleansing, washing and purging of his sin (*v2, 7*). He acknowledged he had violated God's law and saw his sin for all its wickedness as he reviewed it before God in agony of spirit (*v3*). He recognized that his ultimate sin was that he had violated God's righteousness (*v4*). He plainly called it evil and declared God just in judging him (*v4*). He came to a point of recognizing that he was born wicked and separated from God (*v5*) and needed God's purging of his own wickedness and a new heart to be freed from sin and follow after God (*v6, 10*). He confessed his sin specifically as murder (*v14*) and asked for deliverance from it. He recognized that nothing that he had or did could cover or pay for his sin, but all he had to offer God was brokenness over sin and the desire for change- he offered God his repentance (*v16-17*).

## 2. Repentance is a Turning from Sin to Follow Jesus Christ

There is an exchange in repentance- we exchange our continual, willful lives of sinful rebellion against God for following after Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ offers the gift of salvation, but to receive the gift, we must be willing to let go of our sin. When Jesus called Matthew, a cheating, lying tax collector who hung out with thieves and prostitutes, to follow Him, "Matthew arose and followed him." (*Matt 9:9*) He left his old ways behind him, following a new Master. Peter spoke for the disciples when he told Jesus, "We have left all and followed You." (*Mark 10:28*) A rich young man came to Jesus to seek eternal life, and after justifying himself as one who obeyed God's commandments, Jesus told him to give all to the poor and come follow Him and have treasure in heaven (*Mark 10:21-22*). The rich man loved his riches more than he loved God. In his worldly sorrow he walked away, unrepentant and unsaved, but intact with his idol of money. Jesus once said, "No one can serve two masters...you cannot serve God and money." (*Matt 6:24*) Is there anything in your life that you aren't willing to give up- you have felt the continual alarm bells in your conscience convicting you of sin year after year, but you've found ways of justifying it?

Is there anything in your life, if Jesus were to come and say, “Give that up, and come follow me” that you wouldn’t let go of? If so, then that thing is your idol, your god- Jesus isn’t your Lord.

Is there no cost to receiving Christ? Jesus told us to “count the cost.” (*Luke 14:28*) “The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and hid; and for joy over it he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.” (*Matt 13:44*) Have you exchanged your sinful life for His immense treasure? A person who willingly and continually engages in a pattern of sin demonstrates they aren’t sorry, haven’t repented and are more in love with their idolatrous sin than with Jesus Christ- it is a choice they make to keep their life of sin and reject Jesus Christ as their Lord. They profess that they know Him, but by their deeds deny Him (*Matt 7:21-23*). “They change the grace of our God into a license for immorality” (*Jude 4*) and by doing thus, “they deny Jesus Christ our only Sovereign and Lord.”

The writer of Hebrews warns, “If we *deliberately keep on sinning after* we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sins is left, but only a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God.” (*Heb 10:26-27*)

### 3. Repentance Results in a Changed Life

When the disciples came to Jesus to ask Him to explain the meaning of the parable of the Sower and the Seed, Jesus told them that if they didn’t understand this parable, they wouldn’t understand any of the parables (*Mark 4:13*). Four soils receive a farmer’s seed: a hard path, a rocky soil, a soil filled with weeds and a good soil. The good soil is the only one that produces a harvest- the others don’t produce anything. The seed on the rocky soil sprouts up quickly, but the heat of the summer sun withers it because its roots don’t go down deep. This represents a person who hears the word of God (the seed) and rejoices for a while, until persecution or trials come about because of following Christ and they fall away. The seed that landed among weeds sprouted up but was choked by the weeds, which represent the “cares of this world, the deceitfulness of riches, and the desires for other things” (*Mark 4:19*). This person was excited to follow Christ until other passions and loves tempted them back into their old desires and idols. This parable unlocks the mystery of why so many call themselves Christians, but in reality have never been converted to Christ. They go to church, listen to God’s word and rejoice in it until trials, tribulations, persecutions, temptations and/or the lusts of this world vie for their attention, and then they fall away. Many of the other parables describe the difference between false converts and true converts: the wheat and the tares, the wise and the foolish virgins, the good fish and the bad fish and the pearl of great price. True conversions result in growth because repentance is genuine as the grace of God and the hunger for righteousness overcomes the temptations and trials of life.

“The grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. It teaches us to say ‘no’ to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives...” (*Titus 2:11-12*)

### **Samples of Sinful Patterns We Must Repent Of**

To deny the need to repent to be saved is to call God a liar. “The man who says ‘I know Him,’ but does not do what He commands is a liar, and the truth of God is not in him.” (*1 John 2:3-6, 1:6*) God warns us about the deception of willfully continuing in patterns of sin and thinking we’re saved: “Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God. And such *were* some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God.” (*1 Cor 6:9-11, cf. Rom 1:18-32, Gal 5:19-21, Rev 21:8*) Note the key word: “were”- these people repented and God gave them victory over their sin.

### **God’s Promise of Victory in Repentance**

No matter what sin you’re enslaved to, if you repent, God will give you mercy and forgiveness: “He who covers his sin will not prosper, but whoever confesses and forsakes them will have mercy.” (*Prov 28:13*) God also promises that in your repentance you will have great victory to overcome all patterns of sin in your life: “Whoever abides in Him does not sin.” (*1 John 3:6, 5:18*) “Everyone born of God overcomes the world!” (*1 John 5:4*) - there is no power greater than God that will be able to hijack the child of God, holding him/her hostage to sin. God “is able to keep you from stumbling.” (*Jude 24*) His infinite power and wisdom are available to His children to overcome the worst of temptations and find an escape: “No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it.” (*1 Cor 10:13*)

If you’re in unrepentant sin, it’s time to acknowledge it- confess it before God, turn from it, forsake it, and trust in the Lord Jesus Christ for forgiveness and the power to overcome it- then run hard after Him- start reading and applying the Word of God in your life and find like-minded believers who can encourage you in your new life in Christ.

In Christ’s Love,  
Mike Porter