

Repentance

Have you ever seen someone carrying a sign that says, "Turn or Burn" or with the words "Repent or Perish" written on their t-shirt? Even if these messages look comical, they capture an important truth. Repentance is the first step of a genuine relationship with God (Acts 3:19).

THE CONCEPT OF REPENTANCE

The Old Testament's favorite term for repentance is turn (Ezekiel 33:11). There are always two sides to turning; there is turning away from sin and turning to God. The Greek word *metanoia* is used in the New Testament for repentance (*meta* means "change" and *nous* means "the mind"). The concept behind repentance is change; a change of mind about sin, God, and the direction of our lives.

Repentance is also a change in our perspective, leading to a change in values, attitude and behavior. There's no repentance where there's no change in behavior.

REPENTANCE AND CHRISTIAN LIVING

Both John the Baptist and Jesus began their ministries with the message, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near" (Matthew 3:2; 4:17). The Christian message and the Christian life begin with repentance (Acts 11:18). Turning "to God from idols to serve the living and true God" is a sure sign of new life in Christ (1Thessalonians 1:9). Even after we are well on our way, repentance still plays a role in our Christian life because it helps us return to God whenever we've done wrong and to improve our behavior when we discover there's a better way to live. Godly people aren't sinless, but they always come back to God after they've sinned (1 John 1:8-10). We go through many changes as we're "transformed into his likeness" (2 Corinthians 3:18). Repentance helps to carry us forward in spiritual maturity.

MORE THAN BEING SORRY

The motive for repentance is frequently sorrow over our failure. But there's a "worldly sorrow" that brings death. Some people are sorry they did wrong, others are sorry they got caught, but repentance is being sorry enough to quit. "Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation..." (2 Corinthians 7:10).

Change is normally difficult for humans, so it isn't surprising that repentance is sometimes preceded by pain. If we're comfortable with our current behavior, why improve? Pain and grief compel us to examine our lives, to face what is wrong, and to work at fixing the problem. "Come," said the prophet Hosea, "let us return to the Lord. He has torn us to pieces but He will heal us" (Hosea 6:1; 2Corinthians 7:11).

HOW TO REPENT

Repentance begins with your confession of sin (Psalms 51; 1 John 1:9). Without admitting we've done wrong or need God's help, we can't repent. God gives us powerful resources for change, but we have to confess our sin and weakness. Through confession we make our problem His problem.

Secondly, we need to really receive forgiveness. Think of Jesus personally telling you, "Your sins are forgiven, leave your life of sin." Pray, "Lord, I receive Your forgiveness in the depths of my being."

Thirdly, we ask God to help us change, to turn closer to His ideal. Sometimes we need the prayers of others so we can be completely "healed" (James 5:16).

Then begin some specific actions that demonstrate your intent to change (Matthew 3:8). Paul's message was that people "should repent and turn to God and prove their repentance by their deeds" (Acts 26:20). This may mean you pour your booze down the sink, make

restitution to someone, apologize to a friend, or join a support group for accountability.

If you would like to know more about repentance or have someone walk you through it, please call us. We want you to discover the joy of God's forgiveness and the freedom of a genuine relationship with Him.