

MINI STUDY REPENTANCE What It Really Is

The Good News, in conjunction with the Correspondence Course Department, presents brief monthly excursions into the study of the Bible, delving into topics relevant to the development and increased understanding of future members of the God Family. Bible study is one means by which Christians are renewed daily (II Corinthians 4:16), so let's refresh ourselves with more of the precious truths of God's Word!

Instructions: The format of these ministudies is similar to that of the Ambassador College Bible Correspondence Course. Look up and read in your Bible the scripture references given in answer to the questions. Comments following the questions elaborate on the scriptures just read. That's all there is to it! (These studies are based on the King James Version of the Bible, unless otherwise stated.)

What does it mean to repent? Is real repentance just an emotional feeling? Is it merely feeling sorry for having made some mistakes in one's life? Let's examine several basic scriptures detailing 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 penalty is exacted because of sin? Romans 6:21, 23.

All human beings who have not repented are, so to speak, on spiritual death row - awaiting execution of a justly deserved ultimate capital punishment- This eternal penalty was earned by simply doing what comes naturally - sinning!

2. How has God, in His vast mercy and love, provided a way by which we may avoid paying that eternal penalty? John 3:16; Romans 5:8-10

3. What is the only way to be covered by Christ's sacrifice, to be forgiven one's sins and be delivered from the penalty of eternal death? Acts 2:38; 3:19.

Acts 2:38 summarizes the salvation process in just one verse. And one of the first words of that famous passage is "Repent"! Repentance is your first vital step to salvation. Jesus declared, "... Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish" (Luke 13:3, 5).

But what is real repentance in God's sight, as revealed in His inspired Word? What does it involve? What do we have to do?

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

So repentance is something far more than an experience. True repentance - "godly sorrow" (II Corinthians 7:10) - involves a complete about-face in our thinking and being, a commitment to all that is right and good.

But what, exactly, do we repent of?

Sin! To repent of sin, then, simply means to stop sinning and turn to the way of obedience to God's law.

4. Isn't it clearly the law of God to which all who have sinned are to turn? Ezekiel 18:21-22.

5. Is the law of God good? Romans 7:12. Is it just and holy? -Same verse.

God's law is the way to peace, to happiness, to joy. It is God's greatest gift to mankind - given to make man happy, to lead him into the full, abundant life - to protect his happiness and lead him into eternal life. Evil in this world is not caused by the law of God, but by the breaking of it!

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

God will not accept those whose repentance is only outward or where there is no real change of attitude and actions. Notice it once again: "... Turn ye even to me with all your heart, and with fasting, and with weeping, and with mourning: And rend your heart, and not your garments [outward display] ..." True repentance requires total mental and emotional involvement.

7. Is spiritual repentance clearly toward God? Acts 20:2 1.

Sin is against God. He is the Lawgiver whose perfect law we have broken. To repent means to be so humbled and broken up by having rebelled against the living, holy God - so abhorrent of our deceitfulness, vanity and selfishness - that in real contrition we turn to God for mercy, forgiveness and the help we so desperately need in order to overcome.

Some have thought repentance is merely a matter of being thankful that they are so good they have been able to see the truth and are now accepting it. That is not repentance. That is self-righteousness - sin - something more to be repented of.

Everyone of us must ultimately come to see God as Job did (Job 42:5-6) - and to see ourselves through God's eyes, putting Him foremost in our minds. Only then can we begin to love God as Jesus instructs us to do (Matthew 22:37).

But how is it possible for a human being to come to that kind of repentance? How can one start to change from self-centered love to God-love? The answer: it has to come from God!

8. Does God's goodness and mercy lead one to repentance? Romans 2:4. Is He patient and loving in leading one to repentance? Same verse.

9. Is it God who grants us repentance? II Timothy 2:25. Also see Acts 11: 18.

10. 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 scripture, we see that our call to real repentance comes from God, who puts within us the desire to "come to Him.

11. Does real repentance involve our total, unconditional surrender to God, putting Him ahead of and above all else? Matthew 10:36-38.

Before Christ comes to impose His loving rule on mankind and forces this world to surrender to Him, He is calling upon individuals to surrender voluntarily to His authority over their lives now.

But repentance - surrendering to God - is not a matter of giving up everything good, as so many have erroneously assumed. Repentance is positive. Not only do you escape the penalties of sin through repentance, it is also the way to innumerable positive benefits in this life!

Repentance emphatically does not mean we must give up the use or appreciation of material things. What God is interested in is the attitude we have toward Him and material things - whether we seek first His Kingdom and His righteousness (Matthew 6:33).

God does wish for us to prosper and be in good health (III John 2). He wants us to give up only those things that are bad for us - which hurt us spiritually and physically. Repentance and conversion make possible our intelligent use of God's material creation through the guidance of His laws and His Spirit.

12. Ancient King David is a chief example of one who deeply repented of his sins. Did David admit that he was guilty of many sins? Psalm 51:9. Did he admit that his heart (attitude) had not been right with God? Verse 10.

13. Did David thoroughly abhor his sin? Verse 3. Did he cast himself upon God's mercy? Verse 1.

David did not minimize any of his sins. He did not attempt to justify them. Nor did he blame them on others.

Rather, he was aghast at what he had done and simply prostrated himself before God and implored His mercy and forgiveness. He made no attempt to explain it away. He freely confessed what he had done, what he was and asked God to clean him up totally (Psalm 51:2, 7). This is the basic attitude we should all have when we repent of our sins!

Are you still determined to walk with God and His law and remain surrendered completely to Him? Have you "sized yourself up" lately (particularly during this Spring Festival season) by means of the Ten Commandments, as magnified by the entirety of God's Word, and seen where you may yet be falling short? Are you still willing to keep all of God's spiritual laws no matter what adversity may tempt you to give up?

14. How can you know if you are still in a repentant attitude before God? II Corinthians 13:5; Matthew 3:8.

Check the fruits of your life! "... By their fruits ye shall know them," Christ said (Matthew 7:20). Does your life reveal the fruits of having the Holy Spirit in you - love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance [self-control] (Galatians 5:22-23)?

God looks to those who are of a meek and contrite spirit - those who tremble before His Word. God recognizes a repentant attitude of mind - a broken spirit, a sincere desire for forgiveness and mercy. He will truly honor the attitude of all who are willing to turn from works and deeds that His Word brands as sin.

Godly 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 like the temporary emotional experience that is falsely construed as repentance by so many in the world today. You have learned that it is something much deeper and vastly more profound!

With the understanding of what repentance really is, let us observe the Spring Festival season with renewed determination and resolve to live before God in "sincerity and truth" (I Corinthians 5:8)

Prepared by Richard Sedliacik

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