

BEING OF THE SAME MIND REGARDING REPENTANCE

OUTLINE:

INTRODUCTION

- I. Defining Repentance (English)
- II. Defining Repentance (Hebrew & Greek)
- III. New Testament use of Repentance
- IV. Repentance and Salvation

INTRODUCTION:

I wish to thank Brother Demory and the members of the *Heartland church of Christ* for their foresight and courage to organize this endeavor. My prayer is that this will be the first of many lectures in this area. I would also like to thank the brethren for allowing me to present this lesson. The lack of unity among our own brethren is one of the most effective means that Satan has in his arsenal of weapons against the church. I hope that the information presented here will be beneficial as well as unifying, on this important subject of repentance.

Much has been written on the subject of repentance. The main goal of this presentation is to organize the available information in such a way as to make it easier to present and teach God's truth on this subject. First, we will define the English word *repentance*; second the Hebrew and Greek words translated as *repent* and *repentance*, will be defined. Next, we will examine the different usages as determined by context, and finally examine the specific usage of *repentance* in relationship to salvation. The end result should enable those who are studying God's Word, on this important foundational subject, to be in unity with other brethren.

Scripture makes it quite clear how important it is that those who wish to be followers of Jesus Christ must *repent*. John the Baptizer commanded all men to repent for the Kingdom of Heaven was at hand (Matthew 3:2). Jesus began His ministry by preaching that men should repent (Matthew 4:17). He then instructed His disciples to preach likewise (Mark 6:12). Peter's first sermon on the day of Pentecost instructed those present to repent (Acts 2:38), and Paul stated unequivocally that God commanded all men everywhere to repent (Acts 17:30).

While there is no question for the need to repent, often the magnitude of repentance is overlooked. Repentance is one thing which man does that affects heavenⁱ. Jesus said; *there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine just persons who need no repentance... Likewise, I say to you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.*" (Luke 15:7, 10)ⁱⁱ. So the question we must ask is, "What is repentance, and how do we fulfill this commandment of God?"

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I. DEFINING REPENTANCE (English)

Let us begin by defining the English word REPENTANCE.

Webster's 1828 Dictionary defines repent as:

1. To feel pain, sorrow or regret for something done or spoken; as, to repent that we have lost much time in idleness or sensual pleasure; to repent that we have injured or wounded the feelings of a friend. A person repents only of what he himself has done or said.
2. To express sorrow for something past.
3. To change the mind in consequence of the inconvenience or injury done by past conduct.
4. Applied to the Supreme Being, to change the course of providential dealings.
5. In theology, to sorrow or be pained for sin, as a violation of God's holy law, a dishonor to his character and government, and the foulest ingratitude to a Being of infinite benevolence.

Webster's 1828 Dictionary further defines repentance as:

1. Sorrow for anything done or said; the pain or grief which a person experiences in consequence of the injury or inconvenience produced by his own conduct.
2. In theology, the pain, regret or affliction which a person feels on account of his past conduct, because it exposes him to punishment. This sorrow proceeding merely from the fear of punishment, is called legal repentance, as being excited by the terrors of legal penalties, and it may exist without an amendment of life.
3. Real penitence; sorrow or deep contrition for sin, as an offense and dishonor to God, a violation of his holy law, and the basest ingratitude towards a Being of infinite benevolence. This is called evangelical repentance, and is accompanied and followed by amendment of life.

Webster's 1981 New Collegiate Dictionary defines repent as:

1. To turn from sin and dedicate oneself to the amendment of one's life.
2. To feel regret or contrition. To change one's mind.
3. To cause to feel regret or contrition.
4. To feel sorrow, regret, or contrition.

Synonyms include: regret, sorrow, remorse, penitence, atonement, shame, contrition.

Wikipedia.com has this definition of repentance: (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Repentance>)

Repentance is a change of thought and action to correct a wrong and gain forgiveness from a person who is wronged. In religious contexts it usually refers to confession to God, ceasing sin against God, and resolving to live according to religious law. It typically includes an admission of guilt, a promise or resolve not to repeat the offense; an attempt to make restitution for the wrong, or in some way to reverse the harmful effects of the wrong where possible.ⁱⁱⁱ

Although Wikipedia is an ever evolving and changing source of information that is influenced by current culture, it was a promising sign that such a flexible source of definitions would have such a well stated explanation.

It is, in fact, very similar to the biblical definition written by Goebel Music, in his book, *Behold the Pattern*:

If I were to give one basic sentence, a single thought, in my explanation of what repentance is, it would be this: "Repentance is a change of mind, brought about or produced by godly sorrow, that results in a change of life." As far as I am able to detect from all the Word of God on this subject, nothing else is true repentance.^{iv}

It is obvious from these entries that the English word repentance can express many different meanings depending on context and circumstances, but is this the biblical definition of repentance as used by God in His inspired Word?

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II. DEFINING REPENTANCE (Hebrew & Greek)

Let us continue to examine how God's Word defines REPENTANCE. The word *repent* or *repentance* is found in English translations of the O.T. more than one hundred (100) times. In Biblical Hebrew, the idea of repentance is represented by two verbs: *שׁוּב* *shuv* (to return) and *נִחַם* *nicham* (to feel sorrow).^v Although both words are most commonly translated as *repent* or *repenteth* in the KJV and ASV, other translations such as the NKJV show the difference in meaning expressed by the two words.

(Genesis 6:6 KJV) *And it **repented**⁵¹⁶² the LORD that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him at his heart.*

(Genesis 6:6 NKJV) *And the LORD **was sorry**⁵¹⁶² that He had made man on the earth, and He was grieved in His heart.*

The word found in Genesis 6:6 is the Hebrew word *nicham* (Strong's # 5162 - to be sorry, console oneself, repent, regret, comfort, be comforted^{vi}). It is the word most commonly used when describing how God feels about man's sinful actions. *Nicham* is also the word used when God changes His plans to destroy or severely punish His people, such as in Exodus 32:14.

(KJV) *And the LORD **repented**⁵¹⁶² of the evil which he thought to do unto his people.*

(NKJV) *So the LORD **relented from**⁵¹⁶² the harm which He said He would do to His people.*

(NASB) *So the LORD **changed His mind**⁵¹⁶² about the harm which He said He would do to His people.*

The second and much more frequently used Hebrew word is *shuv* (Strong's #7725 - to return, turn back^{vii}). It is used to describe the action necessary in order for the Israelites to gain God's forgiveness and be returned from captivity.

(1 Kings 8:46-50) *"When they sin against You (for there is no one who does not sin), and You become angry with them and deliver them to the enemy, and they take them captive to the land of the enemy, far or near; (47) yet when they come to themselves in the land where they were carried captive, and **repent**⁷⁷²⁵, and make supplication to You in the land of those who took them captive, saying, 'We have sinned and done wrong, we have committed wickedness'; (48) and when **they return**⁷⁷²⁵ to You with all their heart and with all their soul in the land of their enemies who led them away captive, and pray to You toward their land which You gave to their fathers, the city which You have chosen and the temple which I have built for Your name: (49) then hear in heaven Your dwelling place their prayer and their supplication, and maintain their cause, (50) and forgive Your people who have sinned against You, and all their transgressions which they have transgressed against You; and grant them compassion before those who took them captive, that they may have compassion on them.*

Notice how this scripture demonstrates not only the mental change necessary for repentance (*when they come to themselves in the land... and repent*), but it also demonstrates the spiritual change (*and when they return to You*) and

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the physical action that is necessary (*and make supplication to You ...and pray to You*). The Prophet Jeremiah provides us with a good opportunity to see both words in context:

(Jeremiah 18:7-8) *The instant I speak concerning a nation and concerning a kingdom, to pluck up, to pull down, and to destroy it, (8) if that nation against whom I have spoken **turns**⁷⁷²⁵ (*shuv*) from its evil, I will **relent**⁵¹⁶² (*nicham*) of the disaster that I thought to bring upon it.*

Context demonstrates that when God uses the word *shuv*, He is describing man's need to change. Man, when confronted with his improper actions, must turn from evil and return to God. God has no need to change Himself in this manner. When God uses the word *nicham*, He is describing His regret that man has chosen sinfulness over holiness. He is describing the sorrow that sometimes causes Him to stay His hand from punishment against man.

(Jonah 3:5, 10) *So the people of Nineveh believed God, proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest to the least of them. ...Then God saw their works, that **they turned**⁷⁷²⁵ (*shuv*) from their evil way; and God **relented**⁵¹⁶² (*nicham*) from the disaster that He had said He would bring upon them, and He did not do it.*

III. NEW TESTAMENT USE OF REPENTANCE

What is the New Testament use of REPENTANCE? We find an excellent transition from the Old Testament to the New Testament with the example of Nineveh. In the New Testament, the primary word translated as *repentance* is the Greek word *metanoeo* (Strong's #3340 - *verb* - to change one's mind for better, heartily to amend with abhorrence of one's past sins) and (Strong's #3341 - *noun* - a change of mind, as it appears to one who repents, of a purpose he has formed or of something he has done^{viii}). Thirty-four (34) times in the New Testament this word is used to describe the verb *repent*, *repenting*, or *repented*. Twenty-four (24) times it is used for the noun *repentance*.

Metanoia is a compound word of the preposition 'meta' (after, with), and the verb 'noeo' (to perceive, to think, the result of perceiving or observing). In this compound word the preposition combines the two meanings of time and change, which may be denoted by 'after' and 'different'; so that the whole compound means: 'to think differently after'. *Metanoia* is therefore primarily an after-thought, different from the former thought; a change of mind accompanied by regret and change of conduct, "change of mind and heart", or, "change of consciousness".^{ix}

(Matthew 12:41) *The men of Nineveh will rise up in the judgment with this generation and condemn it, because they **repented**³³⁴⁰ (*metanoia*) at the preaching of Jonah; and indeed a greater than Jonah is here.*

When the men of Nineveh *turned from their evil way* they were repenting in that same way that God commands us to repent as New Testament Christians. It is the same repentance that John preached in the wilderness (Matthew 3:2; Mark 1:4). It is the same repentance that Jesus and His disciples preached (Matthew 4:17; Mark 1:15, 6:12). It is the same repentance that *all men everywhere* are commanded to do (Acts 17:30).

Before we examine *metanoia* more closely, we must also discuss two other words that are sometimes translated as repent in the New Testament. The Greek word *metamelomai* (Strong's #3338 - *verb*) is translated six times in the

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KJV/ASV as *repent* or *repented*. Another form of this word, *ametameletos* (Strong's #278 - *adjective*) is found twice. In Romans 11:29, the KJV translates it as *without repentance* and in II Corinthians 7:10, it is translated as *not repented*. Although these two words look like *metanoia*, they are formed from a different root word and convey a different meaning. *Metamellomai* is a compound word of the preposition 'meta' (after, with), and the verb 'melo' (to be of interest to, that is, to concern, take care). Newer translations more accurately read as; *regret, change his mind, feel remorse, or will not relent*. Hebrews 7:21, which is quoting Psalms 110:4, shows the similarity of *metamellomai* to the Hebrew word *nicham*, which we have already shown conveys more of the meaning *regret, sorrow, or changing one's mind*.

(Hebrews 7:21 KJV) *(For those priests were made without an oath; but this with an oath by him that said unto him, The Lord swore and will not **repent**³³³⁸ (metamellomai), Thou art a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek:)*

(Hebrews 7:21 NKJV) ..."**THE LORD HAS SWORN AND WILL NOT **RELENT**³³³⁸ ...**

(Psalms 110:4 NKJV) *The LORD has sworn And will not **relent**⁵¹⁶² (nicham)...*

The main point to emphasize here is that the English word *repent*, in different Bible translations, does not always carry the same meaning each time we see it in the Scriptures. We must be sure to always look closely at the original word and the context. (i.e. The son, in Matthew 21:29, did not *repent* when he finally did what he was supposed to do, he *regretted*³³³⁸ it. Judas, in Matthew 27:3, did not *repent* of his action of betraying Christ, he simply *regretted*³³³⁸ it). This is extremely helpful in trying to understand II Corinthians chapter 7:

(II Corinthians 7:8-10 KJV) *For though I made you sorry with a letter, I do not **repent**, though I did **repent**: for I perceive that the same epistle hath made you sorry, though it were but for a season. Now I rejoice, not that ye were made sorry, but that ye sorrowed to **repentance**: for ye were made sorry after a godly manner, that ye might receive damage by us in nothing. For godly sorrow worketh **repentance** to salvation not to be **repented** of: but the sorrow of the world worketh death.*

Now read the NKJV with a clearer translation of the differing words:

(II Corinthians 7:8-10) *For even if I made you sorry with my letter, I do not **regret**³³³⁸ (**metamellomai**) it; though I did **regret**³³³⁸ it. For I perceive that the same epistle made you sorry, though only for a while. Now I rejoice, not that you were made sorry, but that your sorrow led to **repentance**³³⁴¹ (**metanoia**). For you were made sorry in a godly manner, that you might suffer loss from us in nothing. For godly sorrow produces **repentance**³³⁴¹ leading to salvation, not to be **regretted**²⁷⁸ (**ametameletos**); but the sorrow of the world produces death.*

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IV. REPENTANCE AND SALVATION

How does REPENTANCE relate to salvation? Using II Corinthians 7:10 as a starting point, we can now discuss God's message of repentance as it relates to Christians and salvation. We will define what "repentance leading to salvation" IS and IS NOT by utilizing the earlier definition - *Repentance is a change of mind, brought about or produced by godly sorrow, that results in a change of life.*

1. **Sorrow or regret alone IS NOT repentance.** Although there is both Godly and worldly sorrow (II Cor. 7:10) neither alone is repentance. Judas regretted his action (Matthew 27:3), but his actions that followed were not examples of true repentance. Those who were present on Pentecost were apparently sorry for their actions (...*they were cut to the heart...* Acts 2:37), but Peter said they still needed to repent (2:38). Paul said that he rejoiced that the Corinthian's sorrow led them to repentance (II Corinthians 7:9). Godly sorrow is the starting point, but is not the end of repentance.
2. **Yet, Godly sorrow IS required.** Godly sorrow produces repentance and only an acknowledgment of one's own sinfulness can produce Godly sorrow. "*For I will declare my iniquity; I will be in anguish over my sin*" (Psalms 38:18). Also in the Old Testament, God was very clear that Israel's need for repentance stemmed from their sins against God (*Perhaps everyone will listen **and turn** from his evil way...* Jeremiah 26:3; *Thus says the Lord GOD: "**Repent, turn away from your idols, and turn your faces away from all your abominations.*** Ezekiel 14:6). In the New Testament, Jesus made the same need very clear in His preaching when He said; *...I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance* (Matthew 9:13)
3. **Change alone IS NOT repentance.** People can decide to change habits in their lives for many different reasons. A person might quit smoking because of a breathing problem. One person might stop stealing because he was caught once and doesn't want to go back to jail. Another person might stop drinking because of an alcohol related tragedy in their life. All these changes are good, but they are not repentance. True repentance involves a turning to God, not just a turning^x. "*Now, therefore," says the LORD, "**Turn to Me with all your heart, With fasting, with weeping, and with mourning.**" So rend your heart, and not your garments; **Return** to the LORD your God, For He is gracious and merciful, Slow to anger, and of great kindness...* (Joel 2:12-13).

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4. Yet, change IS required.

- a. First there must be a change of Mind. Thayer's lexicon defines repentance as; "to change one's mind for the better, heartily to amend with abhorrence of one's past sins." When the Corinthians learned that their past actions were sinful they *were made sorry in a godly manner* (II Corinthians 7:9). Godly sorrow is the change of mind that points a person's will in the correct direction, such as when the prodigal son *came to himself* (Luke 15:17). When a person finally knows that they need to change, then they become aware of what to change and how to change it.
- b. Second there must actually be a change of conduct. It was not enough that the prodigal *came to himself*; but he also needed to *rise and go* to his father. Repentance requires work that is visible. Matthew 12:41 says the Ninevites repented, and Jonah 3:10 says, *Then God saw their works*. Jesus said, *bear fruits worthy of repentance* (Luke 3:8). It is not enough to simply know that one's past actions are wrong, and expect that to be the end of repentance. One must stop committing the sin, change one's course, and do whatever is possible to make restitution.

5. Repentance IS required of the non-Christian and the Christian:

- a. Repentance IS required for a person to become a Christian. Jesus came to call sinners to repentance (Matthew 9:13; Luke 5:32). Peter's command to repent and be baptized was directed to those who had not yet been added to the church (Acts 2:38, 41). Paul declared that God commands *all men everywhere to repent* (Acts 17:30). He later told King Agrippa, in Acts 26:20, that he had *declared first to those in Damascus and in Jerusalem, and throughout all the region of Judea, and then to the Gentiles, that they should repent, turn to God, and do works befitting repentance*. Yet, when one has heard the gospel, believed, confessed Christ, repented, and been baptized for the remission of their sins, the work of repentance is not over.
- b. Repentance IS a continual process, NOT a one-time action. When Simon sinned (Acts 8:18-22), Peter admonished him and commanded him to *repent* of his wickedness. When Paul called the Corinthians to repent (II Corinthians 12:21), he was speaking to Christians already in the church. God desires all men everywhere to repent of their sins (II Peter 3:9; I Timothy 2:3-4), both inside and outside the church, *for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God* (Romans 2:23). Since no sin can enter

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into Heaven (Ezekiel 37:23; Revelation 21:27), sin must be forgiven and this demands repentance.^{xi}

Jesus said; *"I tell you, no; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish."* (Luke 13:3)

CONCLUSION:

What is repentance?

"Repentance is a change of mind, brought about or produced by godly sorrow, that results in a change of life."

How do we fulfill this commandment of God?

In true repentance, there is conviction, contrition, and conversion as one turns **from** his sin **to** Christ for salvation.

- 1) Conviction -- where sin is admitted.** We must see ourselves as lost sinners without hope or help, in danger of hell. In repentance, a lost sinner not only sees himself as a sinner, but he recognizes the fact that he has sinned against a righteous and holy God. The message that Paul preached was: *"repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ"* (Acts 20:21). In repentance, there will be confession of sin to God. *"I acknowledged my sin to You, And my iniquity I have not hidden. I said, 'I will confess my transgressions to the LORD,' And You forgave the iniquity of my sin."* (Psalm 32:5).
- 2) Contrition -- where sin is abhorred.** When one sees himself as he appears before God, he is brought to a place where there is godly sorrow for his sin and hates it altogether. *"For I will declare my iniquity; I will be in anguish over my sin."* (Psalm 38:18); *"For godly sorrow produces repentance leading to salvation, not to be regretted;"* (2 Cor. 7:10). To hate sin is to love God. In true repentance, there is not only the desire to escape the consequences of sin, but to be rid of sin itself as a thing displeasing to God.
- 3) Conversion -- where sin is abandoned.** Repentance involves the forsaking of sin: *"Let the wicked forsake his way, And the unrighteous man his thoughts; Let him return to the LORD, And He will have mercy on him; And to our God, For He will abundantly pardon."* (Isaiah 55:7); *"He who covers his sins will not prosper, But whoever confesses and forsakes them will have mercy."* (Proverbs 28:13). Repentance is not only a heart broken **for** sin, but also **from** sin. We must forsake what we would have God forgive. It should be stressed that it is not enough just to **turn away from** sin; one must also **turn to** God for salvation: *"... to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who are sanctified by faith... they should repent, turn to God, and do works befitting repentance."* (Acts 26:18, 20).^{xii}

How important is repentance?

Brother Goebel Music answered this question in a way I believe we must take very seriously:

Repentance... is the key to being able to hear the "well done..." and the "enter in..." Remember, the church in Ephesus did not need a larger missionary program, the churches in Pergamum and Thyatira an extended benevolence work, the church in Sardis a bigger budget, or the church in Laodicea to become more socially involved and "meet the needs of the members." What they each need to do, said the Lord, was to repent. REPENT OR PERISH was the message for FIVE OUT OF THE SEVEN churches of Asia, and it very well could be the message that the churches of Christ need to hear today.^{xiii}

Who is wise? Let him understand these things. Who is prudent? Let him know them. For the ways of the LORD are right; The righteous walk in them, But transgressors stumble in them. (Hosea 14:9)

For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope. (Romans 15:4)

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END NOTES

ⁱ Wendell Winkler, “Repent Or Perish” *Things That Accompany Salvation* (Winkler Publications 1972) pg. 95

ⁱⁱ All Scriptures references are from the NKJV unless otherwise noted

ⁱⁱⁱ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Repentance>

^{iv} Goebel Music, “The Pattern - and the Command of Repentance” in *Behold the Pattern* (Austin McGary & Company, Fifth Printing 1992) pg 467

^v <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Repentance>

^{vi} Brown -Driver-Briggs’ Hebrew Definitions (E-Sword edition, version 7.8.5)

^{vii} *ibid*

^{viii} Thayer’s Greek Definitions (E-Sword edition, version 7.8.5)

^{ix} <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Repentance>

^x Wendell Winkler, *ibid*, pg. 98

^{xi} Goebel Music, *ibid*, pg. 464

^{xii} Modified from the original outline: (www.rapidnet.com/~jbeard/bdm/Introduction/repent.htm)

^{xiii} Goebel Music, *ibid*, pg. 480