



THE IMPORTANCE OF REPENTANCE IN SANCTIFICATION

A biblical guide to turning from sin, bearing fruit and walking in holiness

Acts 3:19

"Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord."

Written by
Bro. Michael Bamiduro
Church of Christ Southend-on-Sea
Essex, United Kingdom

Repentance and the Work of Sanctification

Sin has always fought for the human mind and soul. Sanctification is the work of being set apart, consecrated and made holy for God. Repentance is essential to that process because holiness cannot grow where sin is defended, hidden or excused.

A simple definition

Repentance is a genuine change of mind and will that turns a person away from evil and towards what is right. The New Testament idea of *metanoia* points to a changed mind after recognising the true nature of one's actions.

Jesus' picture of a changed mind

In Matthew 21:28-29, a son first refused his father's instruction but later changed his mind and went to work. His change was not merely emotional; it produced obedience. That is the pattern of biblical repentance: the mind turns, and the life follows.

The prodigal son: "He came to himself"

Luke 15 records a young man who wasted his inheritance and was reduced to hunger. The turning point came when he recognised his condition and resolved, "I will arise and go to my father." His sorrow led to a new decision, confession and action.

Luke 15:18

"I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee."

Key lesson

Repentance begins within, but it does not remain hidden. A truly changed heart produces a changed direction.

What Repentance Is Not

Not every painful emotion or outward improvement is repentance. Scripture distinguishes between regret, fear, reform and the godly sorrow that leads to genuine change.

1. Merely feeling sorry

Judas felt remorse after betraying Jesus, but his grief did not turn him back to God. Herod was also deeply sorry, yet still carried out the sinful act he had agreed to.

2. Covering up sin

Repentance requires honesty. Proverbs 28:13 teaches that the person who conceals sin will not prosper, but the one who confesses and forsakes it finds mercy.

3. Fear without obedience

Felix trembled when Paul spoke about righteousness and judgement, but he postponed his response. Fear can awaken the conscience, but fear alone is not repentance.

4. Reformation for selfish reasons

A person may stop a destructive habit because of cost, illness or reputation without turning to God. Behaviour may improve while the heart remains unchanged.

2 Corinthians 7:10

“Godly sorrow produces repentance leading to salvation, not to be regretted; but the sorrow of the world produces death.”

Godly sorrow versus worldly grief

Godly sorrow is grief over having sinned against God. It accepts responsibility, makes no excuses and seeks restoration. David's response in 2 Samuel 12 and Psalm 51 shows this kind of sorrow. **Worldly grief** is mainly regret over being caught, embarrassed or made to suffer the consequences.

A question for reflection

Am I grieved because sin has offended God, or only because the consequences are painful?

The Fruit of Repentance

Repentance is proved by its fruit. Jesus taught that lives are recognised by what they produce. A changed heart must eventually be visible in changed attitudes, relationships, habits and choices.

Matthew 3:8

"Bring forth therefore fruits worthy of repentance."

Fruit of repentance	What it may look like
Honesty	Confessing sin instead of hiding, minimising or blaming others.
Restitution	Correcting wrongs where possible, including returning what was taken.
Purity	Leaving sinful relationships, practices and forms of worship.
Compassion	Sharing with those in need, as taught in Luke 3:10-11.
Integrity	Refusing exploitation, false accusations and dishonest gain.
Contentment	Turning away from greed and learning to live faithfully before God.

The Gospel creates the conviction

Acts 2:37 shows hearers being "cut to the heart" after hearing the Gospel. God's word reveals sin, warns of its eternal consequences and displays God's goodness towards undeserving people. Romans 2:4 reminds us that God's goodness leads us to repentance.

Repentance and sanctification

Sanctification is not instant moral perfection. It is a life of continuing surrender in which the believer responds to God's word, turns from sin and grows in holiness.

When a Christian Sins

Repentance does not end at baptism. Christians still need to acknowledge sin, confess it and return to faithful obedience. First John 1:7-10 teaches that believers must walk in the light and rely on the cleansing blood of Christ rather than pretending they have no sin.

1 John 1:9

"If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

How quickly should we repent?

As soon as sin is recognised, the proper response is immediate. Delayed repentance hardens the heart and gives sin more room. The Lord delights in willing obedience and continues to invite the burdened to come to Him for rest.

The warning of the unfruitful fig tree

In Luke 13:1-9, Jesus warned His hearers not to assume that tragedy only falls on people worse than themselves. He repeated the urgent message: "Unless you repent, you will all likewise perish." The parable of the barren fig tree reveals both God's patience and the seriousness of continued fruitlessness.

God is patient - but the opportunity must not be wasted

The gardener asked for more time to cultivate the tree, but the purpose of that extra time was fruit. God's patience is an invitation to change, not permission to remain unchanged.

Conclusion: turn fully towards God

True repentance is more than feeling bad. It is a decisive turning away from sin and towards God. It grows from a relationship with Him, not merely from fear of punishment. Every person should therefore ask: *Is there a dark corner of my life that still needs to be brought into God's light?*

Final appeal - Acts 3:19

Repent and be converted, so that your sins may be blotted out and times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord.

Church of Christ Southend-on-Sea

Meeting in Southend-on-Sea, Essex, United Kingdom

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