

Repentance. A very brief scripture-based summary

Throughout scripture there are many calls to “repentance”. Most of us have a notion of “repentance” or what it means to “repent”. However, we must assure we understand what scripture says because it is comprehensive in its meaning and life impact.

Wayne Grudem defines repentance as:

Repentance is a heartfelt sorrow for sin, a renouncement of it, and a sincere commitment to forsake it and walk in obedience to Christ.

Repentance begins with sorrow; personal sorrow that is directed to a Holy God. The sorrow is more than just being “sorry”. It carries with it a strong sense of guilt for violating God’s standard of obedience (Ps. 51:3,4). The feeling of guilt must be sincere and measured in relationship to God’s holiness, His righteousness, His grace available to us, and His desire for our fellowship (Ps. 51:1,2,14-17).

Next follows renunciation, which is agreeing with God’s evaluation of our sin and abandoning it (Ps 51:10).

After renunciation comes turning away from sin with a personal commitment to obedience to God’s commands (guidance in life). (Ps 51:11,12).

In summary, repentance is a confession that can and should occur at any specific point in time. Repentance understands that sin is wrong, it is a sorrow and hatred for the sin, and includes a personal decision to turn away from that sin. True repentance will prompt a change in our behaviors, thoughts, and desires. However, some of those changes will require the help of the Holy Spirit to solidify the change.

Repentance and Conversion to Christ

Submitting your life to Christ involves both repenting of your sin and placing your faith in Christ, at the same time. Like a coin, it is one item/piece/commodity with two features. Conversion is two aspects (faith and repentance) with one objective; Christ as Lord of our lives in reconciliation to God.

Conversion to Christ as Savior and Lord is a turning away from your previous life to a life of faith in Christ as your only means of being reconciled to a Holy God.

Repentance and Daily Living

After conversion, sadly, we are still sinners. We still sin, despite our best efforts. The Christian life is a life of faith and trust in God, who has declared us as “justified” sinners; which means sin does not impact our eternal security as a child of God (John 10:28,29).

The Christian life is a life in which repentance must be present. Jesus taught us to pray “forgive our debts” (Matt 6:12). We must ask for God’s forgiveness continuously, as a discipline of daily reflection. Our sin should grieve us, yet we know we can confess (John 1:9) and are forgiven (Heb 10:10) in advance.

Considerations of great importance

Sin is not always sins of “commission”, ones in which we commit an act that is disobedient to God’s standard. We are also vulnerable to sins of “omission”, sins in which we do not perform an action that is expected. These sins of “omission” are difficult to identify and must form a part of our daily review of our actions. Examples of such sins are: avoiding certain people because they are “different” than us, not helping those in need when we have the means and opportunity to help, not sharing the gospel when opportunities arise.

Repentance must often include a repentance to someone that we have wronged, treated with contempt, disrespected, or ignored a need in their life. After our repentance to our Heavenly Father, we must repent to anyone (Christian or non-Christian) who has been wronged by our actions or behaviors.

Source Material

Life Application Bible (NIV), 1991, Zondervan Publishing House/Tyndale Hose Publisher, Reformed Systematic Theology, Man and Christ (volume 3), Joel R. Beeke, Paul M. Smalley, 2020, Crossway Systematic Theology, Wayne Grudem, 1994, Zondervan