

True Repentance



or



Mere Remorse

“I’m sorry. Forgive me.” These are powerful words. As Christians, these are fairly common words and phrases in “our world.” We hear people say them to us or to others. We, undoubtedly, have spoken them numerous times to others and as well as to God. These words can turn around lives, can save marriages and can set people free in many, many ways. As I mentioned previously, these are powerful words... or are they?

As children of the Living, Loving God, we are instructed to forgive, even if the one who offends us does not recognize what they have done to us and never utters the word, “I’m sorry, forgive me.” This, we must and should. This is the attitude of heart, the same attitude as God’s heart that needs dwell within each of us, His people. In the same manner and with the same heart, we need to say those words to those that we may have offended or hurt.

For the purpose of this discussion, I am not going to delve into the area of forgiving and forgiveness on the part of the person who was offended, the “offendee.” Rather, I would like to discuss the attitude and heart of the “offender” when they come and utter those words to those they offended. This comes down to understanding the difference between “true repentance” and “mere remorse.” Is the person that did the offense truly repentant? This question needs to be applied to everyone, including yourself, when we approach those that we offend in this natural, physical realm, as well as, and most importantly, to God.

Without belaboring the point, let’s get into some definitions. Merriam-Webster’s Dictionary defines the term “repent” as - “to turn from sin and to dedicate oneself to the amendment of one’s life; to change one’s mind.” This definition is pretty straight forward and is correct. For many of us this definition makes sense. After all, the typical, simplified “Christian definition” goes something like this - “To repent is to turn 180 degrees away from the sin and walk away from it never to return back to it.” So what is the problem?

The problem is that when we read our Bibles and we come across this word “repent,” we apply that definition every time it is used. This can and does lead to some confusion when we read certain scriptures and apply our one and only definition to a word used in our language that may be translated from a few different Greek or Hebrew words. All of us know this to be true with the word “love.” We read the word “love” but yet we know and understand that it may come from several other Greek and Hebrew words which give different meanings and are used within the context of the scripture they are in. For example - the term “Love” can come from the Greek words *agape, phileo, eros*, etc. The same is true with our discussion word - “repent.” We forget or do not realize that there are different words in the Greek and Hebrew that were translated to this word “repent.” In other words we are losing some vital precepts “in the translation.”

In the New Testament the word “repent” is translated and used from two different Greek words. One of those words is “*metanoēō (verb)*” which means “*to change one's mind; to change one's mind for better, heartily to amend with abhorrence of one's past sins.*” In other words what we would call “true repentance.” This is the word used and translated to the word “repent” in the following scriptures.

- Jesus is speaking and uses this word for “repent” - Matthew 3:2; Matthew 4:17; Mark 1:15 - “*And saying, **Repent** ye (‘to change one's mind; to change one's mind for better, heartily to amend with abhorrence of one's past sins.’): for the kingdom of heaven is at hand*”
- Jesus again is speaking and uses this word for “repent” - Luke 17:4 - “*And if he trespass against thee seven times in a day, and seven times in a day turn again to thee, saying, I **repent** (‘to change one's mind; to change one's mind for better, heartily to amend with abhorrence of one's past sins.’); thou shalt forgive him.*”
- Jesus uses this word in His warnings to the seven churches in the Book of Revelation - Revelation 2:5,16, 21, 22; Revelation 3:3, 19

The other word used in the New Testament for the word “repent” is the Greek “*metamelomai (verb)*” which means, “it is a care to one afterwards; it repents one, to repent one's self.” What this is really saying is that when this word is used it is stating that the person has “remorse” for what they did but they are not truly “repentant” for what they did. Remorse is a “gnawing distress arising from a sense of guilt for past wrongs (Merriam-Webster’s Dictionary).” This word refers more to the idea of have a “self-reproach” and regret. To feel bad for what was done but not necessarily doing anything to amend or atone for what was done. This implies that is really all about One’s self and how it makes them feel bad and not about truly turning from their way and changing their mind and heart to do what is right. It may lead to an action, but not the action of true repentance. This is the word used and translated to the word “repent” in the following scriptures.

- Matthew 21:28, 29 - “*But what do you think? A man had two sons, and he came to the first and said, ‘Son, go, work today in my vineyard.’ He answered and said, ‘I will not,’ but afterward he **repented** (regretted his original refusal because it would disappoint his father) and went.*”
- Matthew 27:3 - “*Then Judas, which had betrayed him, when he saw that he was condemned, **repented** himself, and brought again the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders,*” - Judas was filled with remorse, not repentance. Even though he knew exactly what he did (I have sinned by betraying innocent blood), Judas was more sorry for the *result of his sin* than for the sin itself. There is a huge difference in being sorry about your sin, and being sorry for your sin.
- 2Corinthians 7:8 - “*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.*” - Paul felt bad that he made them sorry but that did not cause him to change his mind and recant what he wrote to the Corinthian Church about their misconduct.

The distinction often given between these words is this; *metamelomai* (remorse) refers to an emotional change, *metanoēō*(true repentance) to an change of choice, *metamelomai* (remorse) has reference to particulars, *metanoēō*(true repentance) to the entire life, *metamelomai* (remorse) signifies nothing but regret even amounting to remorse, *metanoēō*(true repentance) that reversal of moral purpose known as repentance; does not seem to be sustained by usage. But that *metanoēō*(true repentance) is the fuller and nobler term, expressive of moral action and issues, is indicated not only by its derivation, but by the greater frequency of its use and by the fact it is often used in the imperative.

An example I like to give is this: A person has a financial need and they go out and rob a bank of \$1,000,000.00 and they get away with it. Then, after their successful caper, they return back to the bank and express their sorrow for getting everyone upset and frightened; they say they are “sorry” and they ask everyone for their forgiveness. The only problem is that they refuse to give the money back!!! Are they truly repentant for what they did or are they just remorseful because of what they did and how it affected everyone else? In their mind they knew it was wrong. However, they justified their actions within their heart as being right. They were sorry for the result of their action but really took no responsibility for their actions.

The following are two references that I believe bring much light to our discussion.

- Repentance (Greek-noun) - *metanoia* - a change of mind, as it appears to one who repents, of a purpose he has formed or of something he has done; a change of mind of those who have begun to abhor their errors and misdeeds and have determined to enter upon a better course of life embracing both a recognition of sin and sorrow for the deed and a hearty amendment as a token or sign of the changed heart. It is a change of mind by which we turn from, desist from the sin as a result from deep sorrow for the sin committed. (Thayer's Lexicon)
- "Repentance (*metanoia*, 'change of mind') involves a turning with contrition from sin to God; the repentant sinner is in the proper condition to accept the divine forgiveness." (F. F. Bruce. *The Acts of the Apostles* [Greek Text Commentary], London: Tyndale, 1952, p. 97.)
- 1Peter 3:9 - The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that **all** should come to **repentance**.

There is one more point I would like to bring up in our discussion concerning true repentance. As you may or may not have noticed, I had not mentioned anything as to the Hebrew word that is translated to the word “repent.” This is because I would like to briefly discuss what may seem to be some perplexing verses that are found within the Hebrew Old Testament Scriptures. The Hebrew word that is translated “repent” is the word *nacham* (verb), which means “to be sorry, console oneself, repent, regret, comfort, be comforted; to be sorry, **be moved to pity, have compassion; to comfort oneself, be comforted; to ease oneself; to be sorry, rue, suffer grief, to lament.**” It is very similar to our Greek word “*metamelomai*,” or remorse. This Hebrew word is used in Genesis 6:6; Exodus 32:14; Judges 2:18; 1Samuel 15:35 and many other scriptures which state to the affect, “The Lord repented...;” “It repented the Lord...;” etc. As I had mentioned this has perplexed many a Christian. How and why should God “repent?” Doesn’t “repentance” infer some kind of sin or wrong doing?

This is where we must go and find out the Hebrew word that was translated to what we read as “repent.” God, having emotions of His own, was grieved and hurt for what had taken place in the actions of His creation. However, it did not cause Him to change His Word, which is at the root of His Heart and whose sole purpose was for the good of His creation, in what was going to be the result of their actions. He was moved to pity and showed compassion and most of all “longsuffering” towards His creation and His people. God extended His grace and His mercy to allow them time to repent, but ultimately, His Word shall be done because He is a “just” God.

We know the Holy Spirit can be grieved because we are exhorted in Ephesians 4:30 “do not grieve the Holy Spirit.” We can say that God relented from the impending judgment that was deserved by the actions of His people. He grieved for them knowing what the result would be so he held back. He relented in releasing His justice...“for that moment.” This is now where we can gladly state 2Peter 3:9 - “*The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that **all** should come to **repentance**.*”

So there you have it. I leave it up to you, the reader, to chew over, study through and decide for yourself concerning walking in “true repentance or mere remorse.” My intent is to provoke the reader to ponder this within their own life and within their own heart when it comes to this topic. As the scripture states very clearly, we must take the beam out of our own eye (or walk) prior to thinking about what other people are, or are not, doing.

Where is your heart? Have you truly repented - changed your mind, your life, your heart, to turn towards God and accept Jesus as your Lord and Savior? Or have you just been remorseful for your sinful life and just mentally assented to doing the wrong things but yet not totally changed? If you are not saved then you simply need to repent of the sin of denying Jesus as your Lord and Savior and ask Him to come into your heart. If you are saved, you need to wash and purge and cleanse yourself of these things because Jesus is coming for a “Bride without spot or blemish.” Have you “robbed the bank and became remorseful and sorry that you did it and feel bad about how it may have affected others but you are not willing to truly and fully repent and give the money back?” Have you “justified” your actions within your heart and are now possibly living in deception? Read, study and absorb the following scriptures.

- Luke 3:8, 9 - *Bring forth therefore **fruits** (the exhibiting of deeds or actions in agreement with a totally changed heart from sin that was committed) **worthy of repentance**, and begin not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father: for I say unto you, That God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham. And now also the axe is laid unto the root of the trees: every tree therefore which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire.* Actions speak louder than words. A person may say they repent but the real proof is in the actions of true repentance. God is serious about this aspect of true repentance as we see in verse 9.
- 2Corinthians 7:10 - *For godly sorrow (the pain, anguish and mourning that God experiences concerning sin) **worketh** (results in) **repentance** (a total change of mind and purpose) to salvation (deliverance, preservation, safety, eternal life) **not to be repented of** (to not feel regret over totally changing your mind and your purposes from that of sinful things you have now turned away from): *but the sorrow of the world* (the ungodly multitude; the whole mass of men alienated from God, and therefore hostile to the cause of Christ) *worketh* (results in) *death* (the misery of the soul arising from sin, which begins on earth but lasts and increases after the death of the body in hell).*
- 2Corinthians 12:21 - Paul is writing and speaking to “Christians” concerning the lack of true repentance in the everyday life even now as a Christian. - *[And] lest, when I come again, my God will humble me among you, and [that] I shall bewail many which have sinned already, and **have not repented** of the uncleanness and fornication and lasciviousness which they have committed.*

God loves you with an everlasting love. There is no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus. Jesus is coming soon. The message from the beginning is clear. “**Repent for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand!!!**” The choice is yours - True Repentance or Mere Remorse.