



REPENTANCE

Course 5, *Real Christian Living*, Lesson 3

The Problem: How can anyone be justified before God? How can we, as sinners, be made righteous? Is it enough to feel sorry for the outcomes of our actions, or must we experience a transformative grief for the sin itself? Can true change occur if our regret is focused solely on avoiding negative consequences rather than on healing the broken relationship with God?

True repentance is far more than regretting the painful consequences of our misdeeds—it is an inward transformation born of a deep sorrow for having estranged ourselves from God. Imagine a moment when, overwhelmed by the weight of your own failing, you not only grieve over the hardships your actions have wrought but also feel a profound sorrow for having breached the intimate relationship with your Creator. Such sorrow is not merely about the fallout; it is a heartfelt turning away from sin and a longing to be restored.

True repentance consists of heartfelt sorrow for sin combined with a decisive turning away from it. We cannot genuinely renounce sin unless we recognize its inherent depravity; only when our hearts truly change can lasting transformation emerge in our lives.

It is solely through Christ that we are reconciled with God and made holy. Yet how do we come to that Christ? Many wrestle with this question—the very same one the multitude asked on the Day of Pentecost when, convicted of sin, they cried out, "What shall we do?" Peter's first response was simple: "*Repent*" Acts 2:37-38. Shortly thereafter, he urged, "*Repent, therefore, and turn to God so that your sins may be wiped out*" Acts 3:19.

In this lesson, we will delve into Scripture's teaching on genuine repentance. We'll examine the difference between superficial remorse and the deep, life-changing sorrow that realigns our hearts with God's will. Join us as we explore the essence of true repentance and discover how a sincere turning to God paves the way for complete renewal and lasting freedom.

Objectives:

- I. We discover the path to coming to Christ by examining the way the Lord has prescribed for salvation.
- II. We discern how superficial regret over sin's consequences is inadequate for true repentance, clarifying that remorse lacking genuine contrition before God is not acceptable.
- III. We understand how true repentance is not a product of our own efforts but a work of divine grace—a transformation of the heart initiated and sustained by the Holy Spirit that reorients us away from sin and toward God's will.
- IV. We study biblical examples of authentic repentance, drawing insights from those who have experienced real transformation.
- V. We affirm that Calvary makes repentance possible, recognizing the cross both as the compelling call to turn from sin and the sure promise that no one is too sinful to be saved.

I. HOW DO WE COME TO CHRIST?

Scripture consistently emphasizes that sincere repentance is crucial—not only for receiving forgiveness of our sins but also for restoring our relationship with God.

Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations are from the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV).

The Word:

1. What was John the Baptist's message? Matthew 3:2
2. What was the theme of Jesus' first sermon? Matthew 4:17; Luke 13:3, 5
3. What was Peter's message on the Day of Pentecost? Acts 2:38
4. What special instruction did Paul give? Acts 17:30; 20:2.

Explanation: Throughout history, God's call to repentance has resonated powerfully. From Jonah's urgent message to Nineveh and Ezekiel's stern plea in Ezekiel 18:30 to the New Testament, where the necessity of repentance is declared some 70 times, Scripture is clear. John the Baptist, Jesus, Peter, and Paul all insisted that genuine repentance is indispensable for salvation. Without turning from our sins, we cannot be reconciled to God.

Relevance: In Scripture, the command to repent is both urgent and non-negotiable. It is not simply a matter of regretting the consequences of sin if we desire eternal life—God warns, "Repent or perish!" Reflect on your own journey: have you experienced a profound, heart-level transformation, and can you confidently affirm that you have renounced the sinful patterns of your past?

II. WHAT REPENTANCE IS NOT

Scripture offers many examples of individuals who display regret only for the negative consequences of their actions rather than expressing genuine contrition for the sin itself. Many fail to grasp the true nature of repentance. They may express sorrow for their sins and even make outward changes; driven primarily by a fear of the consequences they might endure. However, this response does not reflect Biblical repentance. True repentance is not merely a lament over suffering but a profound sorrow for having offended God.

The Word:

5. What two kinds of sorrow for sin did Paul mention? 2 Corinthians 7:9-10
6. Was Esau sorry for what he had done? Why? Did he repent? Genesis 25:29-34; 27:34; Hebrews 12:16-17
7. Was Pharaoh sorry for his treatment of enslaved Israel? Did he repent? Exodus 8:8, 24-25; 9:27-28; 14:5-6
8. Did Judas express sorrow for what he had done? Was it repentance? Matthew 27:4-5

Explanation: The sorrow experienced by Esau, Pharaoh, and Judas was the kind of worldly sorrow that leads to spiritual death rather than repentance. Their grief was not for their sin itself, but for the consequences it brought upon them.

- Esau despised his birthright until he realized what he had lost. His tears were born of regret over his material loss, not genuine repentance for scorning the spiritual calling God had given him.
- Pharaoh expressed remorse multiple times—but only because of the devastating plagues afflicting Egypt. His repentance was fleeting, driven by suffering rather than a true desire to turn from his rebellion against God.
- Judas, upon realizing his betrayal had separated him from God forever, mourned—not from love for Christ, but because his plan had failed. He did not expect Jesus to accept His fate, and his sorrow stemmed from fear of consequences, not heartfelt repentance.

True repentance is marked by a sorrow for sin itself, rather than just its results.

Relevance: There is a vast difference between regret for consequences and true sorrow for sin. The sorrow of the world—grief over punishment, loss, or personal suffering—leads only to despair and separation from God. Genuine repentance, however, is sorrow born out of love for God—a deep mourning over having wounded the heart of the One who loves us. It is this kind of godly sorrow that brings forgiveness, healing, and transformation in the life of a believer.

III. WHAT IS REPENTANCE? HOW DO WE REPENT?

Many people struggle with the idea of repentance because they hear that it is essential for salvation, yet they are uncertain about what it truly means or how to practice it. The Bible, however, provides a clear definition and outlines the path to genuine repentance—showing us how we can turn away from sin and experience true deliverance through God's grace.

The Word:

9. What two aspects were involved in the “godly sorrow” of which the Apostle Paul spoke? 2 Corinthians 7:10-11
10. What is the first step in repentance? Who is responsible for this? John 6:44; 12:32
11. What is the second step in repentance? Who is responsible for this? Revelation 3:20; Acts 2:3
12. What is the third step in repentance? Who is responsible for this? Acts 5:31; Romans 2:4; 2 Timothy 2:25

Explanation: The true repentance that the Apostle Paul commended in the Corinthians consisted of two essential elements:

- Genuine sorrow for sin—not merely regret over its consequences, but deep mourning over having grieved God.
- A complete turning away from the habits and practices of the past, embracing a transformed life.

These principles of repentance have been recognized throughout history. Shakespeare observed, "Repentance is the heart's sorrow, and a clear life ensuing." Martin Luther affirmed, "To do so no more is the truest repentance." Robert South wrote, "True repentance has a double aspect; it looks at things past with a weeping eye and upon the future with a watchful eye."

Repentance is far more than sorrow for past mistakes—it is a complete renewal that leads to joy in Christ. It does not involve self-punishment or excessive introspection but rather a heartfelt surrender to God's transformative love. There are three steps to repentance—two are God's, and one is ours:

- God must call. The Bible teaches that repentance begins with God's invitation. If we ignore His calling, our hearts grow resistant, making it harder to respond later.
- The sinner must respond. We must invite Jesus in, allowing Him to work within us.
- Repentance is God's gift. When we answer His call, He grants us true sorrow for sin and the power to turn away from it. Repentance is not a prerequisite for acceptance—it is God's free gift to those who seek Him.

Relevance: Have you responded to God's call? His love invites you into a new life—one of redemption, joy, and transformation. You can open your heart to Jesus right now, and He will give you true repentance, restoring you in His grace.

IV. EXAMPLES OF TRUE REPENTANCE

Scripture abounds with examples of sinners who turned to the Lord and were given repentance for sin. Their lives were dramatically changed. Instead of being victims of Satan's attacks, they became joyful sons and daughters of God.

The Word:

13. Why was the publican (tax collector) accepted by God? Luke 18:13-14

14. How did true repentance change Mary Magdalene's life? Mark 16:9; Luke 7:36-50

15. What did Jesus do for the paralyzed man who responded to His call? Mark 2:1-12

Explanation: Pride blinds the heart to its need for grace. The Pharisee, who proudly thanked God that he was not like other men, was rejected by heaven—not because of his actions, but because of his self-righteousness and lack of repentance. In contrast, the Publican, deeply aware of his sinfulness, humbly pleaded for mercy, and was accepted, forgiven, and transformed.

Mary Magdalene, burdened by the weight of immorality, found complete redemption because she embraced Christ's love with a repentant heart. The paralytic, though physically broken, opened his soul to Christ's call and was granted both physical and spiritual healing. Jesus did not merely cure disease—He publicly demonstrated His power to heal souls, revealing that repentance leads to full restoration.

In each of these cases, Christ called, the sinner responded, and the Lord granted repentance—not as a reward, but as a gift of grace.

Relevance: Just as lives were transformed in Jesus' day, so they are today. No sin is too great for Christ's power to heal and redeem. When you respond to His loving, convicting call, He gives new desires, new motives, and strength to overcome sin. Repentance is not a human achievement—it is God's work within you, freely given when you seek Him in faith. Open your heart to Him today, and He will transform your life, filling it with His love and restoring you in His grace.

V. CALVARY MAKES REPENTANCE POSSIBLE

The greatest proof of God's willingness to grant you true repentance—not just sorrow for sin, but a transformed life—is the infinite sacrifice of His Son on the cross. No greater display of love has ever been witnessed in all creation.

Calvary stands as the ultimate testament to God's desire to redeem, restore, and renew. Through Christ's suffering, the gift of repentance is made available to all—offered freely, purchased at the highest price.

If you seek repentance, look to the cross, where love and mercy flowed without measure. Through Calvary, repentance can be yours.

The Word:

16. How does Paul explain the significance of the cross for every human soul? Romans 5:6-9

17. What does the shedding of Christ's blood do for us? Galatians 1:4; Titus 2:14; Revelation 1:5

Explanation: When we see ourselves in the light of Calvary, our hearts awaken to a deep longing for transformation. God does not draw us to Himself through fear or threats—His desire is not forced obedience, but a response to His boundless love. The cross of Christ speaks with unmistakable eloquence, proclaiming the mercy and grace of our heavenly Lord. If you ever think your sins are less serious than those of others, look to the cross—it was your sin that placed Jesus there. If you fear that your sins are too great to be forgiven, look to the cross—every sin was atoned for in that sacred act of love.

If you rely on intellect rather than grace, remember the Pharisees, who prided themselves on knowledge yet remained spiritually blind (John 9:41). Salvation is not won by brilliance or reasoning—it is received as a free gift through Christ's sacrifice. No matter how educated or capable you are, you desperately need His grace.

And if you think you can delay repentance, waiting for a more convenient time, think again. Many will be lost—not because they rejected salvation, but because they procrastinated. The Bible warns that in the final moments, people will desperately seek the Lord, only to find it is too late (Amos 8:11-12).

Now is the time to respond. Now is the moment of salvation (2 Corinthians 6:2). The cross stands as a call to surrender, and Jesus invites you to come—today, not tomorrow.

Relevance: The peace of Jesus Christ is available to you right now—no barriers, no complications. Salvation is His work, not yours; your role is simply to open your heart and allow Him to transform your life.

If you are ready, come before Him in prayer:

"Lord, at this moment, I surrender my life to You. I ask for Your mercy—please forgive my sins, for Jesus died to redeem me. Heal my mind so that my thoughts may be pure, and grant me deliverance from all that has distanced me from You. Lord, I believe in You with all my heart and yield to Your will completely. Take my life, renew my soul, and lead me in Your perfect peace."

His arms are open—will you accept His invitation today?

Review Questions

1. True or False
 - a. You must repent before you can come to God.
 - b. True sorrow for sin is not merely sorrow for the results of sin
 - c. Repentance is God's gift.
 - d. Repentance does not involve a change of heart.
2. Discuss: If repentance and salvation are entirely God's gifts—given freely, not earned—then what role do our actions play in the Christian life? If we are judged by our works but not saved by them, how do they reflect our relationship with God? How can we ensure that our works are a genuine response to His grace rather than an attempt to earn His favor?
3. Discuss: True repentance goes beyond regret—it leads to transformation. How can we cultivate a heart that genuinely turns away from sin rather than simply feeling sorry for its consequences? In what ways does God's love and grace empower us to live a truly repentant life?

Further study: Ellen G. White, [Steps to Christ](#), Chapter 3, "Repentance." The final three paragraphs of this chapter offer profound insight into our last discussion question. They illuminate the relationship between genuine repentance and God's grace, reinforcing how true sorrow for sin leads to transformation. Take a moment to reflect on these passages—they provide a powerful conclusion to our study and offer a deeper understanding of what it means to turn fully to God.