

They long to put off critical speech, harsh attitudes, unloving communication, and self-worship, among other things and, they long to repent of the heart issues that drive them (1 Peter 2:1; Ephesians 4:22-32).

Such longings cause them to humble themselves and look deeply into God's Word for wisdom and insight. They ask God to reveal His thoughts to them and revel in God's sovereign plan for their life.

- Concern

There is now a concern for others instead of self-focus (2 Samuel 24:17; Philippians 2: 3-4). The repenting person begins to develop a deep desire to root out the evil in their heart and gain victory over the specific sins identified in their lives. This is displayed as compassion and concern for how their sin has affected others. There is gratitude towards God for revealing their sin and enabling them to repent. They deeply desire to honor God and love others more than they love themselves.

- Readiness to see justice done

A repenting person adopts a radical change in their worldview from self-serving rights and having to have their way to a Godly worldview that focuses on loving others more than they love themselves (Philippians 2:3; Matthew 22:39). They fully accept responsibility for their actions and are willing to remain in the consequences of their sin for as long as necessary (Psalm 51:3; 2 Samuel 24:10).

The person becomes content to wait until those they harmed are ready to move forward. Their changing heart will reveal new beliefs and desires and lead to an ongoing change in their thinking and behavior (1 Corinthians 6:19; 1 Peter 1:18-19). Instead of demanding their way, they will be at peace, trusting God to work out the details of their relationships as they obey Him.

#### Accepting Consequences

There are always consequences to sin, even when repentance takes place. We like to think that repentance would be a get-out-of-consequences-free card, but it does not work that way. God intends we learn from our sinful decisions, and in some cases, the consequences of sin are enormous.

In the Old Testament, King David is a biblical model to examine for consequences of sin even after repentance. He endured great emotional suffering and torment. His sin affected his wife, children, and his kingdom (2 Samuel 12; Heb.10:31).

While the repenting person won't suffer just as David did, they may have to watch the pain of their spouse and other family members.

They may bear the guilt of their sin's effects on other people, including their church family and other meaningful relationships. The repenting person is content to wait until the person(s) they harmed are ready to move forward and not push their own timetable.

#### Be Repenting

Repentance unto salvation and forsaking the sinful past must occur for the outworking of repentance in a person's life to be visible. Initial repentance marks the beginning of a life of transformation – what we call progressive sanctification- that lasts the rest of our lives.

When repentance unto salvation has occurred, there will be a fundamental change in the person's attitude towards sin. These changes occur first in the inner man, what the Bible refers to as the heart. In this sense, repenting is a result of and an aspect of heart change. Psalm 51:17 says The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; [and] a heart that is broken and contrite. The Psalmist says God will not despise such a heart.

A repenting person is humble and aware of their own sins. They understand their sin is grievous to the Lord, and so they no longer desire to participate in it, which is also an act of obedience. It's a visible sign that they want to change, even if they continue to struggle with sin.

The repenting person has been cut deeply to the heart by the Spirit of God and God's Word and will ask God to change their thoughts, beliefs, and desires because they know they are sinful.

It's important to note that repentance can and often does come quickly, but in the case of a hard heart, it can take years of discipline or chastisement by the Lord. However, one thing is for sure: a regenerated Christian will repent.

Without repenting, there will be no way for a person to live under the Holy Spirit's conviction and ministry. The inability or refusal to repent would call into question whether repentance unto salvation ever took place.

Repentance is to be ongoing in the life of a Christian. We are to BE repenting.

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## THE REPENTANT HEART



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# The Repentant Heart

According to the unanimous testimony of Scripture, repentance — turning away from sin and turning toward Christ — is essential in regeneration (Luke 5:32; Acts 2:38, 3:19, 8:32, 17:30, 20:21, 26:20; 2 Cor. 7:10; 2 Tim. 2:25). Only those who turn from their sin (repent) and trust in Christ by faith can be saved. Thus, faith and repentance are two sides of the same coin. When a person is saved, they turn from sin (repent) and turn to Christ in faith.

Repentance unto salvation is a unique, one-time event prompted by the Holy Spirit in the heart of an unbeliever, which leads to saving faith and regeneration in the Gospel, as Paul states: **For the sorrow that is according to the will of God produces a repentance without regret, leading to salvation, but the sorrow of the world produces death.** (2 Cor 7:10). In 2 Timothy 2:25, Paul says to Timothy that “in humility [he should] correct those who are in opposition [to the gospel], if God perhaps will grant them repentance, so that they may know the truth.”

Repentance is something God “gives” or “grants” as part of salvation: which is one extraordinary and supernatural event that God initiates and completes independently of us (Acts 5:31; 11:18). It is a monergistic work, meaning He is the sole agent of regeneration. Through repentance and faith, there is regeneration, justification, and positional sanctification. The person is immediately indwelt by the Holy Spirit, who, among many other things, convicts them of sin and is a guarantee of their inheritance (Eph 1:13-14).

Experientially, being saved perhaps was the first time a person experiences a feeling of guilt and their need for the mercy of God as they realize that they are under condemnation for their sin. (Ps.119:28; 51:4; 109:21; 130:4). Perhaps they experienced a feeling of hatred for their sin and desire to rid themselves of it at that moment. In one magnificent movement, they desire to turn away from the life they had been living and turn towards God (1 Thess. 1:9; Acts 3:19). With that repentance, they now desire and are determined to obey God and not live sinful lives (1 Jn). With eternity in Christ secure, they begin to walk the road of progressive sanctification.

Progressive sanctification continues after regeneration. It is the process of becoming more and more like Christ and part of the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit in the life of a Christian.

Practically speaking, it looks like ongoing confession, repenting from sin, and increasing in holiness, moving the convert closer and closer to what it is to be like Christ. This only happens by the power of the Holy Spirit. The language of repentance indicates that repenting is something we will do as part of progressive sanctification until the day we leave this earth.

Another role of the Holy Spirit’s ministry is to convict Christians of ongoing sin. Even the most mature Christian continues to sin, consciously and unconsciously, and will be convicted by the Holy Spirit as sin is brought to the surface (Proverbs 20:9; Isaiah 53:6; 1 John 1:8). He helps mortify sin within the believer and enables us to put it to death in a practical (Romans 7:6, 8:13)

## Worldly Sorrow

How will you know when someone is genuinely repentant or has worldly sorrow over their sin? The truth is, someone can say all the right things, appear repentant on the outside, and still actively be engaging in intentional sin. This is because they continue to have their mind set on things of the flesh. We often see this when a person has a problem with sexual sin or abuse. They talk about wanting to stop, cry over it, and make promises and proclamations but continue to return to it- even after they are caught. The focus is often on how the sin or its exposure affects them, not how they dishonor God.

According to 2 Corinthians 7:10, this is worldly sorrow or “unsanctified remorse” focused on feelings of regret, fear, and even desperation. Worldly sorrow leads to death. Judas would be an example of worldly repentance. He also “repented,” meaning he had a change of heart about betraying an innocent man. The Scripture says he felt guilty about it, disliked the consequences of his actions, and sought to rectify it by returning to the chief priests and elders and saying he betrayed an innocent man. He hoped to erase his guilt and somehow undo what he had done. So yes, he had a change of mind, but it brought nothing else but despair and sorrow. There was nothing redemptive in his repentance because he then went and hung himself (Matthew 27:3-5).

There is also a mistaken belief or understanding that repentance is “one and done.” When a person repents, according to 2 Corinthians 10:7-11, they are “fixed” and will never sin again. This misbelief fosters the idea that every “failure” means they are not repentant. This is not and cannot be accurate. It must be understood that no Christian is ever free of all sin in this life. Perfection or a complete absence of sinful behaviors in this life is not possible.

However, sometimes a person attempts to use progressive sanctification as an excuse to continue to sin with abandon. In this case, they are compounding their sin and trying spiritual manipulation to avoid consequences. They may say too much is being expected of them, and because sanctification is an ongoing process, it is unreasonable to expect to see evidence of change. Often such people will tell you they are changing and that you are unreasonable. This plea for patience under the guise of progressive sanctification is a sin when repeated ongoing sinful actions occur.

Romans 6:1-2 and 12-14 are clear. Paul tells the Christian they cannot continue or excuse habitual, willful sin because there is grace to cover it. Living that way is not excusable by the process of progressive sanctification. In fact, resisting the Holy Spirit in repentance and change leads to a hardened heart (Romans 2:5).

A person using progressive sanctification as an excuse for ongoing, willful sin (such as sexual sin, abuse, drunkenness, and so on) is either attempting to be manipulative, is likely deliberately rebelling against God’s known commands, is unregenerate, or all three.

Appealing for ongoing grace in the face of continuing sin is not repentance, heart change, or progressive sanctification. A genuine Christian cannot continue to live in ongoing, persistent, willful sin. They will not be a slave to any sin. If sin still has life-dominating power over a person, they are not “in Christ.”

## Godly Sorrow

Godly sorrow has as its first concern the honor of God. Second, it leads to repentance and salvation of the soul and rescues us from the power of sin in our lives (Romans 6; 12). Repentance is first God-oriented and second other’s oriented and is produced by the Holy Spirit acting on the conscience of a sinner. Third, it creates sorrow that causes the sinner to cry out, “Woe is me,” and to weep bitterly over the sin they have committed.

When the Apostle Peter denied Christ three times after the arrest of Jesus, he went off and wept. He was heartbroken over his sin and over how he had betrayed the One he loved. He was cut to the heart by the Spirit of God and lived the rest of his life proclaiming Christ.

## Evidence of Repentance in Everyday Life

When repentance is taking place, there will be evidence in everyday life. The God-focused heart will generate new fruit, righteous fruit that will be evident. 2 Cor. 7: 9-11 is the premier passage on repentance. From these verses, we learn that:

- Godly sorrow produces earnestness. When repentance is genuine, there will be willingness demonstrated to submit to ecclesiastical discipline and the accountability of the counseling process (1 Corinthians. 10:12; 2 Corinthians 7:8). We can be encouraged that repentance is taking root when the person voluntarily admits to their sinful behaviors and takes responsibility for their thoughts and actions. They will start acknowledging sin without being prompted, admitting and confessing their critical thoughts before they grow into bitterness.

The person will be sincere in helping create and executing a specific, concrete plan of action. This plan details what their put off/put on will look like, and they are determined to work it for the glory of God, not primarily to get out of trouble or to avoid or limit consequences (Ephesians 4:22-24). The fruit of heart change is visible as the individual expresses gratitude for the patient endurance of those who have experienced their sin (Psalms 51:6-12; Lk 19:1-10).

- Eagerness The repenting person will demonstrate an eagerness to make things right with the person they sinned against. For example, they will repent of resentment or gossip and desire to go to those they sinned against to make things right. There will be little hesitation in dealing with their heart issues and then moving forward by putting the necessary changes into action.

- Indignation The repenting person recognizes their unjust treatment of others and is angry at their sin. They are humbled and won’t attack those trying to help them change, their emotions of anger and indignation are turned towards solving their heart problems (James. 4:9).

- Alarm As their sin’s seriousness is realized, the person is alarmed at the destruction, pain, grief, and misery their sin has wrought. As a result, they begin to hate their sin and experiences fear as they understand the impact of their sin on their relationship with God and others in their life (Ps. 32:5; 51:1-4; 2 Sam. 12:13).

- Longing Repentance is demonstrated by a longing for personal righteousness (Rom. 7:14-25; 2 Cor. 7:10-11). There develops an earnest desire to bring glory to God, and the person stops consistently defending their ideas and beliefs. Pride is replaced by an eagerness to confess what God calls sin and reverent fear of God (James 4:7-10). There is a fervent desire to be free from their sinful thoughts, beliefs, desires, and actions.