

Repentance Study Guide Relationship 1.3

Committing our lives to obeying Jesus leads us to a basic question: What does Jesus command His disciples to do? What is the first command Jesus gives to all of us?

You might be surprised to learn what Jesus emphasizes in His first recorded sermon:

Matthew 4:17 From that time Jesus began to preach, saying, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”

REPENT – the first thing Jesus emphasizes in his public ministry is repentance. In fact, if you dig a little deeper, Jesus defines His whole purpose for coming like this:

Luke 5:32 I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance.”

As the new testament church forms in the book of Acts we read things like this in several places:

Acts 17:30 The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent,

Jesus emphasizes repentance. The early church preaches repentance. So just what is repentance all about?

Modern day preaching, for the most part, emphasizes faith as the critical component every disciple of Jesus must possess. In fact, many preachers will tell that faith is all we need. “Just believe,” they say.

While it certainly is true that faith is part of the process of coming to know Jesus, please notice that Jesus doesn’t say, “**Believe**, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. Paul in Acts 17 doesn’t say, “the times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to **believe**. No, it says God commands all people everywhere to REPENT. The New Testament clearly emphasizes repentance much more than most modern day preaching.

When Jesus commands us to repent, what is He telling us to do? **Repent**, as used in the Bible, really has two basic meanings:

- 1) grieve or lament or be sad about something
- 2) to change one’s mind or to change one’s direction; to turn from one way to go another.

Honestly, biblical repentance is not understood very well in modern times. We like to think that God is love and that God loves everyone unconditionally and accepts us just as we are regardless of the lifestyle we choose to live.

But what does Jesus command? The command is to repent - to grieve or lament or be sad about how we’re living combined with the idea of change: to change our minds about our behaviors and direction; to turn from going our own way and choose to go God’s way.

This is not unconditional acceptance of any lifestyle we want to adopt. No, God is commanding us to reevaluate our lives and change our direction in light of Who He is. We grieve over the way we've been going. We confess our error and, if possible, we right our wrong. From there, we stop dishonoring God in thought word and deed.

Here's an example for you: Luke 15. The prodigal son is a story you may remember. The kid tells his dad that he wants his inheritance early. He goes off and parties his money away. He ends up feeding pigs for a living. He experiences such ruin that the pig food starts to look good.

And then what happens? He comes to his senses, goes back to his father and says,

Luke 15:21 And the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.'

How does this kid repent?

- 1) He confesses that He's offended God – I have sinned against heaven
- 2) He confesses that he's offended his father AND after confessing his error he volunteers to make it right with his father by working for him as a hired servant.

The Prodigal Son confesses his sin before both God and his earthly father and then proceeds to attempt to rectify his wrong by volunteering to be a servant. He repents.

Let's look at another example ...

Luke 19 – Zacchaeus. Zacchaeus offends God and people in many ways. He's a tax collector who is ripping off the people and getting rich by stealing. But one day he meets Jesus. Listen to what he says to Jesus:

Luke 19:8 And Zacchaeus stood and said to the Lord, "Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor. And if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I restore it fourfold." **9** And Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, since he also is a son of Abraham.

First, Zacchaeus calls Jesus Lord. Zacchaeus has come under the command of Jesus – he has believed that Jesus is who he says he is – he recognizes Jesus as the One who is True. Then what does Zacchaeus do?

He gives half his possessions to the poor AND he gives four times the amount back to all the people he's stolen from.

Jesus says what? – "Today salvation has come to this house ..."

Zacchaeus recognizes his sin before God. Then he does what he can to rectify his wrong by making restitution to those he's hurt. Zacchaeus changes his mind about how he's been living and decides to honor God with his possessions instead of hoarding them.

So repentance first demands that we acknowledge to God that we've offended Him the most. As the Prodigal Son put it, we've sinned against heaven.

Lord it's your law we've broken
Lord, it's your love we've refused
Lord, it's your anger we've provoked
Lord, it's your judgment we deserve
Lord, it's your mercy we need

As King David put it in Psalm 51 as he repented from his sin with Bathsheba:

Psalm 51:4 Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you may be justified in your words and blameless in your judgment.

As we admit and acknowledge before God who we really are and what we've really done, we're led to godly sorrow.

2 Corinthians 7:10 For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret, whereas worldly grief produces death.

Repentance is not exclusively about regretting our actions. In other words, we can regret our actions and still not repent. For instance, Cain regretted murdering Abel. But he never repented.

Repentance is first about changing our minds. Instead of thinking we're right about our attitude and actions, we acknowledge that God's the only one who is right about how we should live. This will lead us to understand that God is better than we thought and we are worse than we thought. Our evil deeds are extremely evil, but, as we repent we understand that even our good deeds are worthless. Look at this:

Isaiah 64:6 We have all become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are **like a polluted garment**. We all fade like a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, take us away.

It doesn't translate well from Hebrew to English but Isaiah is comparing our good or righteous deeds to a filthy feminine hygiene rag.

Another example of proper self-evaluation in repentance comes from Paul in Philippians 3:

Philippians 3:8 Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and **count them as rubbish**, in order that I may gain Christ **9** and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith—

When we repent, we acknowledge that our righteousness is as far from God's standards as our evil deeds. We recognize we are totally dependent on God's grace and mercy to save us from our sin.

Repentance is designed to strip us down – to get all the covering off – to bring us to what’s real about us - to help us understand who we really are as God sees us.

And repentance is specific when it comes to how we’ve offended God and others. Repentance isn’t just a casual, “Sorry about that God.”

We confess our sins to God specifically when we repent. We do our best to make restitution to the people we’ve damaged whenever possible. We forsake evil behavior. That’s repentance.

Repentance is not telling the priest all the wrong we did last week so we can feel better about our moral condition before we go out and do more wrong this week. Repentance calls us to turn away from evil and follow the Lord in Spirit and in Truth.

Repentance is a process that takes a lifetime. When we genuinely repent, we accept responsibility for the wrong choices we’ve made. When we repent, we change both our thinking and our behavior to reflect the Person and character of God.

Isaiah sums up repentance like this:

Isaiah 55:7 let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; let him return to the LORD, that he may have compassion on him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.

When God says marriage is holy, we marry our partner instead of living together outside of marriage. When God says sex is a sacred act between a man and a woman and the marriage bed is holy, we adjust our thinking and our behavior to obey. And on and on it goes. As we learn about Who God is and what He commands, we alter our lifestyle and thought life to comply with His word.

Those following Jesus spend each day engaged in the effort to turn away from what God hates and to embrace what God loves. We acknowledge our mistakes and turn from them. That’s repentance. Repentance is what Jesus commands all of us who follow Him.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1) Have you repented? If, “Yes,” take a minute and make a list of the attitudes and behaviors you’ve specifically confessed to God and others as well as the ways you’ve forsaken those behaviors:

2) Is it enough just to believe when coming to Jesus? Explain your answer below:

3) Please define repentance based on this lesson:

4) Who can you think of in Scripture that repented? Who didn't repent?

5) Name what the Prodigal Son and Zacchaeus did to repent:
