

Repentance

Many Roman Catholics believe that giving something up for Lent is a way to attain God's blessing. But the Bible teaches that grace cannot be earned; grace is "the gift of righteousness."

Romans 5:17 For if by one man's offence death reigned by one; much more they which receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness shall reign in life by one, Jesus Christ.)

Also, Jesus taught that fasting should be done discreetly.

Matthew 6:16-18 ¹⁶ Moreover when ye fast, be not, as the hypocrites, of a sad countenance: for they disfigure their faces, that they may appear unto men to fast. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward. ¹⁷ But thou, when thou fastest, anoint thine head, and wash thy face; ¹⁸ That thou appear not unto men to fast, but unto thy Father which is in secret: and thy Father, which seeth in secret, shall reward thee openly.

Jesus' command to "wash your face" seems to conflict with the practice of rubbing ashes on one's face on Ash Wednesday.

Fasting can be a good thing when done for the right reason, and God is pleased when we repent of sinful habits. There's absolutely nothing wrong with setting aside some time to focus on Jesus' death and resurrection. However, repenting of sin is something we should be doing every day of the year, not just for the 46 days of Lent (then don't count the six Sundays).

Similar definitions

Repentance - the action of repenting; sincere regret or remorse.

Penitence - the action of feeling or showing sorrow and regret for having done wrong; repentance.

Lifestyle Repentance

John 15:1-10; 1 John 1:5-10, 3:5-10

There are three principles of repentance. The first two are a comparison between worldly repentance and true godly repentance and the third is how repentance applies to our lifestyle so that we walk in hope and the joy of knowing God on a personal level.

1. Worldly repentance - Remorse

There are two Greek words for repentance. Worldly repentance is translated from the Greek word 'metamelomai' which literally means to have remorse for one's actions. Worldly repentance is destructive. Here is a biblical example of worldly repentance:

Matthew 27:1-5 When the morning was come, all the chief priests and elders of the people took counsel against Jesus to put him to death: ² And when they had bound him, they led him away,

and delivered him to Pontius Pilate the governor. ³ Then Judas, which had betrayed him, when he saw that he was condemned, repented [was remorseful] himself, and brought again the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders, ⁴ Saying, I have sinned in that I have betrayed the innocent blood. And they said, What is that to us? see thou to that. ⁵ And he cast down the pieces of silver in the temple, and departed, and went and hanged himself.

The King James Version translates remorseful into the word repentance. The product of worldly repentance is not a changed life, but defeat and destruction. Worldly repentance is not a change of heart, but remorse, regret and the burden of one's guilt.

That is why you may hear critics of the Christian faith say things like, "I don't like church because all they do is make you feel guilty" or "to be a Christian means you have to [carry your Bible everywhere/do certain works/abstain from anything enjoyable in life/or any list of ideas] and hang your head down in shame". Every Christian I know that is living their faith has a valid self-image and lives joyfully because of the freedom God has given them.

Where does this perception come from? In our modern culture, it comes from counterfeits of the faith. There are countless religions that base salvation on penance, deeds, and rules. God is not impressed with our religious efforts.

A relationship with Christ produces godliness, holiness and good works. Good works, penance, godliness and an effort to be holy will never produce a relationship with God. The relationship must come first.

Pslam 36:5-8 Your love, LORD, reaches to the heavens, your faithfulness to the skies.

⁶ Your righteousness is like the highest mountains, your justice like the great deep. You, LORD, preserve both people and animals.

⁷ How priceless is your unfailing love, O God! People take refuge in the shadow of your wings.

⁸ They feast on the abundance of your house; you give them drink from your river of delights.

Another source of this worldly repentance is a rejection of grace and the need we feel to bear the penalty for our own wrongs. Judas was such a man. He saw that his actions had given the religious leaders the opportunity to condemn Jesus to die on the cross. Judas' motivation all along was his own self-interest. He followed Jesus as long as he thought he was to rule along side Jesus when He set up His kingdom. But when Jesus started talking about the world to come and a heavenly kingdom, Judas' visions of greed and prosperity began to melt. When he saw the consequences of his actions, he was very remorseful and had worldly repentance.

Worldly repentance is nothing but remorse and regret for the consequences of our action. It has no redeeming qualities; it only puts us under the burden of our guilt.

Undoing a wrong is like trying to unscramble an egg.

Worldly repentance does not turn us toward God, but instead it drives us away from God. Guilt can never bring us to true repentance.

2. True repentance

True repentance or godly repentance comes from the Greek word 'Metanoia', which means to change one's mind and purpose - to turn from our purpose and toward God's purposes. A good example of this can be found in 2 Corinthians 7.

2 Corinthians 7:10-11 (NIV) Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death. ¹¹ See what this godly sorrow has produced in you: what earnestness, what eagerness to clear yourselves, what indignation, what alarm, what longing, what concern, what readiness to see justice done. At every point you have proved yourselves to be innocent in this matter.

Here is another good example of godly sorrow leading to true repentance:
Psalm 51:1-4

To the Chief Musician. A Psalm of David when Nathan the prophet went to him, after he had gone in to Bathsheba.

Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy lovingkindness: according unto the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions. ² Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. ³ For I acknowledge my transgressions: and my sin is ever before me. ⁴ Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight: that thou mightest be justified when thou speakest, and be clear when thou judgest.

Many people say the Bible makes them feel guilty. But that is because they are looking at their guilt and rejecting the Bible.

Godly sorrow leads to repentance and a clean, forgiven and purified heart.

When I am bearing the burden of my guilt and my focus is on myself. The only hope I have is to try to forget my burden by trying to drown out its memory with things, pleasures and activities. But that only works for a season. Once our guilt becomes overwhelming, depression and despair take over. And too often, the ultimate escape, suicide.

Godly sorrow is just the opposite. When I look at the holiness of God and see myself compared to Him, I clearly see that I fall short. But I also see that God has bridged the gap for me. Mercy and restoration is always God's first choice. God's desire to forgive and heal compared to worldly sorrow when someone sees their sins and chooses to bear the penalty on their own account.

Jesus' example of godly repentance:

Matthew 13:44-46 ⁴⁴ Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto treasure hid in a field; the which when a man hath found, he hideth, and for joy thereof goeth and selleth all that he hath, and buyeth that field. ⁴⁵ Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a merchant man, seeking goodly pearls: ⁴⁶ Who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had, and bought it.

That is what we must do to find God's perfect plan. When we see God's purpose for our lives,

we will evaluate it. We will either reject it and say our way is better and only what pertains to this life counts, or we will see God's plan and the eternal value of it. Once we see the value of God's will, we will count everything we have as worthless compared to God and His purpose.

3. Godly repentance is a lifestyle

Repentance is not a single act, but **a lifestyle choice**. It is a continuous evaluation that I make as I compare my life to God's Word and seek to conform to the image of Christ. I choose to keep myself aligned to His Godly path by focusing on Jesus Christ. He is the author and finisher of our faith. **He equips us to live the Christian life that is beyond our own abilities.**

John 15:1-10 I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman. ² Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away: and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit. ³ Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you. ⁴ Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me. ⁵ I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing. ⁶ If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned. ⁷ If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you. ⁸ Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples. ⁹ As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you: continue ye in my love. ¹⁰ If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in his love.

It is beyond your ability to produce godly fruit.

Many Christians produce meaningless good works that God doesn't acknowledge just because they feel they should be doing something. To find God's will is a profoundly simple task. Abide in Christ.

Inviting Christ into our heart is the beginning. This is the moment we walk through the door and become a citizen of heaven and a child of God. No relationship is vibrant unless it is growing.

The Bible makes it clear, the key to abiding is His Word.

Psalm 119:105 Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path.

1 John 1:5-10 ⁵ This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. ⁶ If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth: ⁷ But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin. ⁸ If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. ⁹ If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. ¹⁰ If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.

1 John 3:5 ⁵ And ye know that he was manifested to take away our sins; and in him is no sin.

⁶ Whosoever abideth in him sinneth not: whosoever sinneth hath not seen him, neither known

him. ⁷ Little children, let no man deceive you: he that doeth righteousness is righteous, even as he is righteous. ⁸ He that committeth sin is of the devil; for the devil sinneth from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil. ⁹ Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God. ¹⁰ In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil: whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother.

In the first passage, John makes it clear that we are forgiven and cleansed from our sins through an abiding relationship with God. To have fellowship, we must be walking with Him in His will. If we are focused on the world, we will walk in the world. If we are focused on Christ, we will walk in Christ and allow Him to shape us.

Chapter one tells us that if we say we have not sinned, we are calling Him a liar and that when we do sin, and we are walking in Him, we confess and are forgiven.

Chapter 1 is saying that we must be walking with God, but we are still human and there will be times when we allow ourselves to be drawn into sin. But we confess, get back into fellowship and continue to walk in the light with the absolute promise that our sins are forgiven.

The scenario in chapter 3 is a different mindset completely. This chapter is talking about a lifestyle. The first point is that we can't abide in Him and sin. We must be drawn away in order to sin. James 1:14 says that each one of us is tempted when we are drawn away by our own desires and enticed. We don't sin in fellowship with God, but we must be drawn into the devil's territory and take the bait.

We have the promise of 1 Corinthians 10:13 that God will never allow us to be tempted beyond what we can bear. The key to resisting temptation is found in James 4:6-8

6 But He gives more grace. Therefore He says: "God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble."7 Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you.8 Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded.

The key to resisting temptation is not resistance, but submission. Satan does not flee from our resistance, but he flees from God when His power rests on us.

A lifestyle of repentance is the most valuable aspect of the Christian life.

The Bible tells us to renew our minds daily. The farther off course we get, the harder it is to make changes and the easier it is to get discouraged. It is the resistance to repentance that causes dread and worldly repentance that burdens us with guilt. Godly repentance gives freedom, satisfaction and fulfillment.