

## What is genuine repentance? A Series on Genuine Repentance: Part 1

Repentance is often defined as the review of one's life, contrition for bad behavior and a commitment to a personal change in thought and life. How is this verb used in the Bible and who is the object of repentance?

Three Greek words describe various nuances of repentance: "metamelomai", "metanoēō" and "epistrephō". Through the study of these word groups in the New Testament, one may gain an understanding of genuine repentance and how it may lead to genuine faith or sanctification.

The word "metamelomai" is found in Matthew 21:29, 32; 27:3; 2 Corinthians 7:8; and Hebrews 7:21 which quotes Psalm 110:4. Read within its context, "metamelomai" means to "regret" and conveys the sense of feeling sorry or sad about a previous act that the person realizes was wrong or mistaken. In all the instances found in the New Testament, the verb "metamelomai" is used with a human being as its object.

An example of this can be seen in Matthew 27:3 where Judas realizes that Jesus was wrongly condemned. In view of Matthew 26:24, where Jesus implied the absence of a saving faith, Judas' "metamelomai" was towards the Jewish religious leaders.

Then when Judas, who had betrayed Him, saw that He had been condemned, he felt remorse (**metamelomai**) and returned the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders, (Matt 27:3)

In the Parable of the Two Sons (Matt 21:28-32), "metamelomai" reflects a judgment one makes on his previous views or behavior and causes one to change their mind (Matt 21:29).

"But what do you think? A man had two sons, and he came to the first and said, 'Son, go work today in the vineyard.' And he answered, 'I will not'; but afterward he regretted it (**metamelomai**) and went. The man came to the second and said the same thing; and he answered, 'I will, sir'; but he did not go. (Matt 21:28-30)

In all of the instances of "metamelomai" used in the New Testament, this term for "regret" is largely confined to a specific act or thought and includes the feeling of repentance; however, it does not involve the turning of a person to God. God is not the object of one's "metamelomai."

Genuine repentance is directed towards God. It involves a significant judgment of oneself and prompts one to turn to God; genuine repentance includes the concept of a radical change – a conversion.

The word "metanoēō" develops this concept of "conversion" with its meaning of "to change one's mind." The term places an emphasis on the thought or the will of a person, and it is in this context that the concept of repentance and conversion arises. This can be seen in the following examples:

Now in those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the wilderness of Judea, saying, "Repent (**metanoēō**), for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." (Matt 3:1-2)

John the Baptist's urgent call for repentance (Mark 1:4; Luke 3:3) was based on the proximity of the kingdom of God; judgment was at hand (Matt 3:7; Luke 3:7)! "Metanoēō!" Change your current thoughts and wills and seek forgiveness for your sins from God, because the Messiah is coming!

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Now after John had been taken into custody, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of God, and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent (**metanoēō**) and believe in the gospel." (Mark 1:14-15)

Now when Jesus heard that John had been taken into custody, He withdrew into Galilee; and leaving Nazareth, He came and settled in Capernaum, which is by the sea, in the region of Zebulun and Naphtali. This was to fulfill what was spoken through Isaiah the prophet: "The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, by the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles - "The people who were sitting in darkness saw a great Light, and those who were sitting in the land and shadow of death, upon them a Light dawned." From that time Jesus began to preach and say, "Repent (**metanoēō**), for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." (Matt 4:12-17)

The arrest and imprisonment of John the Baptist heralds the start of Jesus' public ministry. Resembling the preaching John the Baptist; the kingdom of God is near; however, Jesus indicates that it is both present and in the future (see the article "What is the Kingdom of God? Is it present or in the future?") It is near spatially in the person of Jesus and in the future temporally when God completes the recovery of His Creation.

Just as John the Baptist linked the call for repentance to the kingdom of God, Jesus implied that forgiveness of one's sins from God makes one holy and gains entrance into the kingdom. However, it is not the covering of sin by the Mosaic Covenant (Matt 12:41) but the once and for all forgiveness through a person: Jesus the Messiah.

... solemnly testifying to both Jews and Greeks of repentance (**metanoēō**) toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. (Acts 20:21)

As Paul speaks to the Ephesians, he connects repentance and faith, which indicates that they are distinctly different. The object of repentance is God, and the object of faith is Jesus Christ. In making the association of repentance to faith, Paul summarizes the natural process of reconciliation: a) a self assessment and change of mind, b) the plea for forgiveness from God and c) have a trusting belief that Jesus Christ paid the redemption price for his sins and restored his relationship with God.

In the New Testament, the Greek verb "epistrephō" can be used with a secular or theological meaning. When used as a secular term, it means "turning," "returning" or "turning away" (Matt 10:13; 2 Pet 2:22). When used as a theological term, it has the meaning of "return" with a sense of "conversion."

... so that WHILE SEEING, THEY MAY SEE AND NOT PERCEIVE, AND WHILE HEARING, THEY MAY NOT HEAR AND NOT UNDERSTAND, OTHERWISE THEY MIGHT RETURN (**epistrephō**) AND BE FORGIVEN. (Mark 4:12)

Therefore it is my judgment that we do not trouble those who are turning (**epistrephō**) to God from among the Gentiles, (Acts 15:19)

... but whenever a person turns (**epistrephō**) to the Lord, the veil is taken away. (2 Cor 3:16)

Whereas "metanoēō" has a meaning of "change of mind," "epistrephō" appears to have a wider meaning including a complete conversion of a repentant person. A person "turns" his will from himself to God, or a person "turns away" from sin to "turns" towards holiness.

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Genuine repentance involves a fundamental “change of mind” at both a moral and spiritual level; it is about one’s concept of sin and God.

It can be a “change of mind” of one’s concept of Jesus (Acts 2:31-37).

It can be a “change of mind” of one’s concept of God (Acts 16:25-30).

It can be a “change of mind” of the seriousness of one’s sins (Acts 26:2-20).

It can be a “change of mind” about anything that prevents one from trusting Jesus.

References:

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