

## The Need to Repent

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by Wayne Goff

**“Repent”** in its various forms in the New Testament is found 58 times. John the Baptist and Jesus ushered in the Gospel Age with the words: *“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!”* The apostle Paul preached in Athens, Greece: *“Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent,”* (Acts 17:30). So repentance, whatever it is, is essential to eternal life.

### What Is Repentance?

Theology has obscured the meaning of repentance, but in reality it is not too difficult to comprehend. It is not a strange sensation. It is not something God does to people against their will. It is something God commands man to do.

Repentance is not **fear**. Preachers are not supposed to scare everyone to death and then wait for the emotional response. On the other hand, men should *fear* falling into the hands of the living God unprepared (Heb. 10:31). But true repentance is not fear.

Repentance is not **regret**. There are many criminals who have regret over getting caught by the authorities, but they have not repented. There are others who have done things which were wrong, and they truly *regretted* having done them. This regret might lead to repentance, but it should not be confused with it.

Repentance is not **prayer**. Some prayers are abominable to God! *“One who turns away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer is an abomination”* (Prov. 28:9). *“If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear”* (Ps. 66:18). Prayer is **not** a condition to salvation either, though many false preachers will tell you that you need to “pray through” to be saved.

Repentance is not **conviction**. In Acts 2, when the Jews assembled to hear Peter and the rest of the apostles preach, they were *convicted* that they had crucified the Son of God! Luke records in verse 37 that *“they were pricked in their heart.”* In this condition, they were instructed to *“repent, and be baptized...”* (Acts 2:38). So conviction is good and necessary, but it is not repentance.

**Repentance is the mental act determining not to commit sin.** It is illustrated by a parable of Jesus in Matthew 21:28-31. *“But what do you think? A man had two sons, and he came to the first and said, ‘Son, go, work today in my vineyard.’ He answered and said, ‘I will not,’ but afterward he repented and went. Then he came to the second and said likewise. And he answered and said, ‘I go, sir,’ but he did not go. Which of the two did the will of his father?”* ¶ They said to Him, “The first.” The difference between the two sons is found in the word **“not.”** One son rebelled against his father, and said he would not go. But when he made the mental decision to obey his father, he practiced *repentance*. Sin is a violation of God’s law. When we break His law, then we commit sin. When we determine to stop breaking his law, then we have **repented**.

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