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Introduction

I'm so excited to share this book with you, mainly because I didn't realize how many of you had questions about the topic of Biblical repentance.

I care a lot about the nature of biblical repentance because I struggled so much with these questions when I was walking through sexual addiction and sin. As someone who struggled in that area, repentance was always a really a big question mark for me. I began to grapple with questions that you probably have had: What does the Bible say about repentance? How do I know that I did it right? Is there a formula to reference?

The first time I reckoned with these was in my early twenties as I studied for my religion degree. I found so much freedom and joy and the true repentance that scripture talks about. Before we can get to that point, though, we have to know what the Bible says about it

and stay rooted in those truths. Jesus talked extensively about repentance. If anyone tells you that he didn't, they're not preaching the full gospel, because Jesus preached a message that said: "*You need to turn and change your mind and come into the true kingdom of God.*" That's the power that repentance and restitution can bring—and we'll come full-circle into this concept after a walk through the biblical definition of repentance.



Biblical Repentance

As we begin our hunt for truth, it's important to move through the biblical timeline chronologically beginning with the Old Testament.

2 Chronicles 7:14 says,

"If my people who are called by my name will humble themselves and pray, and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven—and I will forgive their sin and I will heal their land."

2 Chronicles 39 says,

"For the Lord your God is gracious and compassionate. He will not turn his face from you if you return to him."

Joel 2:13 says,

“Rend your heart and not your garments. Return to the Lord your God, for He is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger, and abounding in love—and He relents from sending calamity.”

We begin to see the theme of repentance and forgiveness long before Jesus’ sacrifice in the New Testament—further highlighting God’s unchanging and providential nature. From this point in the OT, we can move over to the NT, where we see the theme of forgiveness continue.

Jesus says: *“Repent for the kingdom of God. The kingdom of heaven has come near”* in Matthew 4:17. Additionally, in Acts, the apostles then begin preaching the gospel that Jesus had lived—and they said to the people who were coming at Pentecost to hear Peter speak: *“Repent then and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord.”*

Lastly, 1 John 1:9 says,

“If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins, and purify us from all unrighteousness.”

As you read through both the Old and New Testaments, it's worth looking at what the word for repent means in context—across Hebrew and the New Testament Greek translations.

In Hebrew, the word repent means to return to the starting point—to turn back or to start again. In the Greek translation, repent means a change of mind; specifically, an active mental shift, turning from sin toward God. As a result of this type of repentance one would be challenged to think differently about sin or to reconsider the path they're on. In today's world, I've seen some people say that to repent simply means a change of mind, and this can be a change of mind to whatever it is you want to change your mind to. We've had people reinterpret the word repent to mean, "*Well, I changed my mind, and now I don't believe that life is sacred/I don't believe that sex is holy.*" Therefore, I've "*repented,*" because I changed my mind about something. I encourage you to consider biblical ethics and context when evaluating the meaning of repentance in the Bible and in your own life. The argument I mentioned above isn't linguistically or intellectually honest to how these words are used in their context. It also denies what Jesus and the apostles taught which in turn aligned with what the Old Testament had

been teaching. Everything the prophets have said about repentance was in the context of the revealed law of God in the Jewish Torah. The Torah, by definition, extends from Genesis through Deuteronomy, working as the active law of God. God provided this to Israel as a means of grace and purification that would allow them to live with Him, remaining “set apart,” or holy. God gave the law not because He was trying to show them how they couldn’t keep it, but to give them a way of communing with His glorious holy presence. God’s law was created for the good of all— given first to Israel in the Old Testament and fulfilled through Jesus in our present-day. This then is our basis for understanding what sin is. Without a foundation for understanding what sin is, we have no need for repentance. In Scripture, repentance is always talking about a turning back, a returning to the starting point, away from sin and toward God. It is not, “I’ve changed my mind about God’s law,” or “I don’t like it anymore. I don’t agree with it.”

Repentance has to do with the revealed Word of God as it was understood by Jesus and by the Jews in his day. We can see this in what was laid out in the Old Testament and then fulfilled in the New. Knowing this then, we can take what the scholars have determined about repentance and put it into its proper Biblical

context. In my research, I found one scholar's account, claiming that, "*It (repentance) is a change of heart, not behavior reform.*" This implies that because repentance entails a change of heart, one's behavior will inevitably follow. This school of thought brings with it a lot of questions. For example: You might have a change of heart or emotion temporarily, but your behavior long term might not change. What does this mean? Did you actually repent in that moment, or did you just feel sorry for a day or so? What about when you do repent, and you are sincere, and you're grieved by your sin, but then the temptation comes again and you fail—what happens then? Or how about repenting of sins you didn't know you committed? Do you have to do that or do you need to tell other people when you sin? Do you always need to tell them or confess to them, and also confess to God? We're going to talk about all of these questions in this book—but to lay that foundation, I want to look at what pieces make up true biblical repentance. While it is a change of heart, it's also behavior that acts as a reflection of a radical "heart change."



The Steps of Repentance

Have you seen or experienced a parenthood in which we try to teach our kids that you can reconcile without repentance—or you can sin against someone and not have to say you're sorry? I have; a lot. I want to note that this methodology is coming from a really unhealthy and unbiblical view of repentance. What we say when we allow this behavior are two polarizing and incorrect statements. “Let’s reform behavior alone, without addressing the heart behind it,” and “Let’s reform my own feelings, but what other people feel or how they are impacted by me doesn’t matter.” Our biblical view of repentance in our own lives directly impacts our parenting, which is why it’s so critical to get it right. We have to move forward with the understanding that repentance is not just intellectual.

That’s the first thing I want you to take away

from this. It's so important that I want to restate it! Repentance is not just intellectual. However, it is an intentional change of mind. Berkhof's systematic theology laid out a really great way of understanding this. He said: "*Repentance is intellectual. It's a change of mind, but it's also emotional, prompting a true emotional response to sin. Lastly, it's volitional, a change of purpose and intent.*" So, what does this mean? It means that when I sin and I realize it, I might start with the intellectual response. I have the revealed Word of God to show me what is and isn't sin. I have the law of God -- that Jesus upheld, by the way, before He "raised the bar" -- and I can use His examples given in the New Testament to be my guide forward into true, heart-leading repentance. In Matthew He offers the crowd a rhetorical question—asking, "What's the heart of the law?" He then gives an example, stating that He doesn't just want us to *not commit adultery*. He wants us to get to the heart of the issue and deal with the lust in our hearts. He doesn't just want us *to tithe*. He wants a heart that worships Him. Jesus consistently works to bring the law to the spirit of the person, rather than the person to the action alone. In this context, we look at the law of God and we say, "*Okay, I can see where I've sinned.*" And that's the intellectual piece of repentance. The second part that is often overlooked in the worldly

or unbiblical model of repentance is the emotional piece. This is experienced when we have an emotional heartfelt grief over our sin. It's when we realize the impact that it's had on us, other people, and on the heart of God. It's when we see the weight of it, and we grieve. Like the tax collector in the book of Luke said: "*Oh God, oh God, turn your face to me, a sinner.*" When we have that emotional reaction, we've moved beyond the intellectual to the emotional response of a holy heart—allowing us to experience the weight of sin. This transition is made possible through the work of the Holy Spirit in us. After this, we come to the third element of repentance: the volitional change of purpose. This step involves your will. After you have intellectually identified the sin, and you emotionally feel the grief of it, you then have to walk in obedience. This is often the step in the repentance process where you say: "*Okay, I grieve this—but what am I going to do about it? I grieve this and it grieves God. What is God asking me to do here? What is He asking me to remove from my life so that I can walk freely in obedience to Him?*" Before we continue, though, I want to take a moment to warn you against thinking that we can "leave out" or "skip to" this piece in the process. It is so easy to pick pieces of these critical sanctification processes often without knowing it, and then wonder why repentance