

How many times do you repent? A series on genuine repentance: part 3

If Jesus Christ died for our sins once and for all, how many times does a Believer repent? Once? Twice? Or numerous times until one dies? What does the Bible say about repentance and Believers and its implications on faith and salvation?

The Bible speaks of repentance within the context of Believers in a few instances particularly in Paul's epistles. An example of this can be seen in Paul's letter to the Christians of Corinth. In 2 Corinthians 7, Paul refers to an earlier letter (now lost) that was sent via Titus which sternly confronted the Corinthian Christians with their sin (2 Cor 7:8). Uncertain of their reception, Paul was comforted not only by Titus' safety but by their response to his letter (2 Cor 7:5-7). Because the Corinthian Christians received Titus with such respect, it meant that they still honored Paul and his apostolic ministry.

"I now rejoice, not that you were made sorrowful, but that you were made sorrowful to the point of repentance; for you were made sorrowful according to the will of God, so that you might not suffer loss in anything through us. For the sorrow that is according to the will of God produces a repentance without regret, leading to salvation, but the sorrow of the world produces death." (2 Cor 7:9-10)

The Corinthian Christians respond to Paul's previous letter with sincere repentance. While the content of the lost letter is unknown, circumstantial evidence found in 2 Corinthians point to the presence of false teachers promoting their own theology and discrediting the apostle and his message (2 Cor 2:17; 4:2; 6:3, 12-18; 7:12; 11:3-6).

The Christians of Corinth apparently had a "change of mind" about their sin, acknowledged their sin in "godly sorrow" and corrected their behavior. As evidence of genuine sorrow, Paul cites their "earnestness" to make amends, "indignation" at Paul's opponents, a "fear" and "longing" concern for Paul, a "zeal" to "avenge" the wrong and "vindicate" themselves (2 Cor 7:11).

Scholars believe that the Corinthians sinned, not by doing wrong, but failing to do what was right.

When confronted by Paul, the Corinthian Christians had a choice of responding positively or negatively, and Paul referred to this as two types of repentance (2 Cor 7:10):

"Worldly sorrow" is an example of a negative response.

It is a sorrow that does not reflect a genuine repentance or "change in mind." The sin is justified and the confrontation is resented or leaves one embittered. There might be an assuaging of hurt feeling with words or behavior of contrition but not with any genuine intent of repentance. Sinful behavior is resumed.

As God knows the heart of each man, this path leads to the sinner's harm and a hardening of the heart (see the article "What does it mean to be hard hearted"). Paul's confronting letter is an example of a divine judgment that often serves two purposes: an act of justice and an attempt to bring about repentance.

"Godly sorrow" is an example of a positive response.

God's intended way brings one to see his own guilt and produces a change of mind; this repentance leads to salvation. However, what salvation is this if Paul is speaking to Believers?

In context of a non-Believer, salvation is referred to as "initial salvation" (justification salvation) and is when one is **saved from the penalty of sin**.

How many times do you repent?
A series on genuine repentance: part 3 (page 2)

In the context of a Believer, salvation is referred to as “sanctification salvation” and is when one is being **saved from the power of sin** (Phil 2:12-13) and becoming more Christ like (2 Cor 3:18).

With God’s way, repentance is not a regrettable act; it serves in sanctification salvation and is a blessing.

It is apparent that a Christian, who seeks to live a holy life, will be repenting often and as part of the process of sanctification.

References:

1. Gaebelein FE, ed., *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, vol. 10, Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, (1976).
2. Brand C, Draper C and England A, eds., *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, Nashville: Holman Bible Publishers, (1998)
3. Walvoord JF and Zuck RB, eds., *Bible Knowledge Commentary*, Wheaton: Victor Books, (1985).
4. Swindoll CR and Zuck RB, eds., *Understanding Christian Theology*, Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, (2003).
5. Keener CS, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament*, Downer’s Grove: InterVarsity Press, (1993).