

## REPENTANCE

### Background

Repentance means more than saying sorry. It means a genuine turning away from the sins that we have committed, asking God's forgiveness and making up our minds that we want to follow God's way when we next face the temptation to sin (for information on sin, see Study No. 1). True repentance means a radical change of mind, and genuine sorrow for sin. This is a 'change of heart', as well as an act – the act of formally asking for God's forgiveness. Feeling remorse, or 'doing penance', are in themselves not real repentance.

The Bible gives clear teaching about the confession of sin, whether public or private:

### Confession is to God

It acknowledges that the sin is against God.

Psalm **32:5** – *Then I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity. I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the Lord" – and you forgave the guilt of my sin.*

Psalm **51:4** – *Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight.*

### Confession is vital

–but not necessarily public: God's promise of forgiveness depends on confession as part of repentance. (See 1 John 1:9.)

### Confession to the one wronged?

–if possible, though this should always be done with great sensitivity and, if unsure how to proceed, the advice of a trusted Christian friend or minister should be sought (Numbers **5:6–7**).

### Confession of sins to other Christians

James taught that we should confess our sins to one another (James **5:16**). Jesus taught that repentance, and sometimes restitution, are necessary before coming to him (Matthew **5:23–24**). This seems to refer to situations where an injured party knows he has been wronged. So, if he suspects nothing, it could do more harm to tell him, for example, of hateful thoughts that you previously felt towards him.

Matthew **21:28–31**; **27:3–5**; 2 Samuel **12:13–18**; Psalm **51:10**; Luke **15:17, 18, 20**; Acts **8:21–22**; 2 Corinthians **7:9–10**

### Repentance must precede the new birth

(See John **3:1–16**.)

Repentance is the key that opens the door through which a person enters by faith into eternal life. Saving faith is impossible without repentance.

Matthew **3:2, 8**; **4:17**; **9:13**; Luke **24:47, 48**; Acts **2:38**; **17:30**; **20:20–21**; **26:19–20**

### Unwillingness to repent blinds a person

and eventually hardens his or her conscience.

Matthew **11:15, 20, 22**; 1 John **1:6, 8, 10**, Isaiah **1:13–15**; Hebrews **6:6**; Luke **13:3**

### God repeatedly warns the unrepentant person

—but God's arms are always outstretched to receive the penitent.

Ezekiel **18:31–32**; 2 Corinthians **5:20** and **6:2**; Luke **15:7**; **15:20**; Revelation **2:5, 16, 21**; **3:3, 19**; Romans **10:21**

## **Summary**

True repentance is essential if humans are to find peace with God. True repentance necessarily involves a change of mind – a change of heart. God is completely righteous so he will ultimately judge sin. But he has provided a complete and permanent remedy for sin: the sacrifice Jesus made on the cross for our sins. We are to repent of (turn away from) our sins, have a real, complete change of heart, believe and trust in Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour, and then go on believing and trusting in him.

God promises that as we ask him he will fill us with his Holy Spirit. He will go on helping us to overcome whenever we are tempted to sin again. That is a truly amazing thought.