

Repentance

Words evolve; they change meaning. Over the last 100 years, words like fantastic, conversation, cool, hot, and gay have come to mean very different things from what they originally meant.

Other times, words fall out of favour and so people generally don't understand what they really mean.

Repentance is one of those words.

In Greek, the word has two parts: Meta – which refers to a change; nous – which means mind or thinking.

This results in the Greek word metanoia.

As this word was taken into New Testament thinking, it became much stronger and came to mean “to change one's mind to the point of a radical change of direction.”

This means that it doesn't just mean to change your mind as in, "I think I'll wear my blue shirt, not my black shirt."

1. Repentance begins with godly sorrow

2 Corinthians 7:10

For godly sorrow produces repentance leading to salvation, not to be regretted, but the sorrow of the world produces death.

Imagine you're having a blazing argument with someone. And right in the middle of the argument you yell, "OK, I'm sorry!"

That's not repentance.

Actually that's called lying, because the English word 'sorry' comes from another English word 'sorrow.'

So I'm sorry means I have sorrow.

Generally the real sorrow comes later, after the argument has died down.

That's when you think, "I'm an idiot! I don't know why said / done that."

And feeling somewhat ashamed, you say, "I'm sorry, I should never have said / done that."

The other person may then reply, "Well, so you ought to be. That was really hurtful."

To which you reply, "I know. I'm sorry."

But what happens if you're only partly sorry?

The conversation is more likely to go like this:

"I'm sorry, I should never have said / done that."

"Well, so you ought to be. That was really hurtful."

"I know, but you're not completely innocent in all this. If you hadn't..."

Notice the difference?

Insufficient godly sorrow leads to partial repentance which leads to self-justification

This is clear in the parable Jesus told in Luke 18:9-14.

The Pharisee was not repentant, but smug in his self-justification.

On the other hand, the tax collector had genuine sorrow for his sins and as a result was forgiven. Sufficient godly sorrow leads to complete repentance which leads to forgiveness and restoration.

2. Repentance takes full responsibility

2 Samuel 12:1-15 contains the account of when Nathan confronted King David over his sin of adultery with Bathsheba.

The great thing about this situation was that David immediately repented and took full responsibility.

David didn't say, "But Nathan, you should have seen her. She was gorgeous! And seriously, taking a bath in full view on the roof? I'm just a normal red-blooded male."

That would have been self-justification.

Instead, David said, "I have sinned."

No excuses.

Opposite to the philosophy of the world, the Bible teaches that when we sin, it's nobody else's fault

A newspaper carried an article about young criminals in which psychologists were quoted as saying that they really were nice kids. They were just damaged.

There may be an element of truth in that; I've no doubt that they are damaged.

But we're all damaged, and sin is still sin.

And if I blame my parents, they blame theirs ... It goes right back to Adam and in the end, no one is responsible.

This shirking of responsibility goes right back to Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden.

Genesis 3:9-13

Then the LORD God called to Adam and said to him, "Where are you?" (10) So he said, "I heard Your voice in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; and I hid myself." (11) And He said, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you that you should not eat?" (12) Then the man said, "The woman whom You gave to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I ate." (13) And the LORD God said to the woman, "What is this you have done?" The woman said, "The serpent deceived me, and I ate."

Notice what happened?

Knowing that they've sinned, God starts asking Adam pointed questions. Does Adam own up, admit responsibility? Not a chance.

"Well, it was like this God. It was the woman's fault. The woman You gave to be with me. She gave it to me." And he tagged on the end, almost as an afterthought: "And I ate."

Accepting responsibility means accepting whole responsibility.

The story is told of a man who lost his wallet. A few days later, he received a letter in a package: "Sir, I found your wallet. I feel so guilty I am returning some of your money. If guilt bothers me any more I shall send some more money."

3. Repentance makes a full admission

Whatever the sin, name it – call it what it is. Call a spade a spade and not an agricultural implement.

Don't try to cover up by using euphemisms.

If you're angry, say you're angry, not cranky, or grumpy, or snappy to make it sound better.

Related to this whole idea of full admission, I'm big believer in confession.

Unfortunately, in my view, the Roman Catholics institutionalised it and we Protestants have pretty much discarded it.

But here's what the Scriptures say:

James 5:16

Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.

Why is confession so powerful?

James 4:6

... God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble.

I've found this to be true.

A little while back, I was really having trouble with my thoughts in a particular area. I confessed them as a sin to my wife, Alli. That wasn't easy because I felt embarrassed. Why? Because that's how we feel when we humble ourselves.

But God gives grace to the humble. Alli prayed for me and there was immediate change, a real breakthrough.

There two people involved in confession: the confessant: the one doing confessing; and then there's the confessor: the one hearing the confession.

The confessor does not have to be a priest or a pastor, but you do need to be wise in choosing a confessor.

When looking for a confessor, it needs to be someone you can trust, and won't judge you.

To me, the natural person to choose is a husband or wife, but if you don't have one, or your marriage isn't at that point, it can be anyone you trust – of same gender.

If you choose someone of the opposite gender, you're just asking for trouble.

If you are the confessor, you need to understand two things.

1. Shut your mouth. You can't go blabbing to your friends, "I can't believe that so-and-so has a problem with lying."

So the first thing is shut your mouth.

2. Shut your mouth.

Resist the temptation to give advice unless it's asked for.

James doesn't say, "Confess your trespasses and someone will give you advice."

4. Repentance is a 180 degree turn

1 Corinthians 10:14

... flee from idolatry.

1 Corinthians 6:18

Flee sexual immorality. Every sin that a man does is outside the body, but he who commits sexual immorality sins against his own body.

Hebrews 12:14

Pursue peace with all people, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord.

1 Timothy 6:11

But you, O man of God, flee these things (love of money) and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, gentleness.

2 Timothy 2:22

Flee also youthful lusts; but pursue righteousness, faith, love, peace with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart.

The Christian should be in a constant state of fleeing and pursuing; pursuing what pleases the Lord, and fleeing from that which doesn't.

I can't think of a better description of repentance than to make a complete turnaround.

5. Repentance is a command

Acts 17:30

Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent.

It's popular these days to see God's instructions in terms of suggestions.

Often hear people say, "God asked me to do this or that."

But God never asks me to do anything. He commands.

There are no suggestions and no requests; just commands.

And that includes repentance.

He commands everyone to repent. Everyone is subject to this command.