

## What is Repentance? (Luke 15:17-24)

**Introduction:** *Is sincere remorse or regret? Or penance?*

“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Matt 4:17). The *New Oxford American Dictionary* says it is to “feel or express sincere regret or remorse about one’s wrongdoing or sin : the priest urged his listeners to repent” (cf. *Random House, Collins, Miriam-Webster*). Or is *penance*, to “make satisfaction for’ or ‘expiate’ [our] sins” (CCC #1459)? It’s “repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ” (Acts 20:21).

### 1. The Elements of Repentance

- (a) *conviction*: “he came to himself;”
- (b) *regret*: “I perish with hunger;”
- (c) *confession*: “I have sinned against heaven and before you;”
- (d) *humiliation*: “I am no longer worthy to be called your son;” and
- (e) *a desire for new obedience*, “make me like one of your hired servants.”

**WSC Q. 87.** *What is repentance unto life?* A. Repentance unto life is a saving grace,<sup>(g)</sup> whereby a sinner, out of a true sense of his sin,<sup>(h)</sup> and apprehension of the mercy of God in Christ,<sup>(i)</sup> does, with grief and hatred of his sin, turn from it unto God,<sup>(k)</sup> with full purpose of, and endeavor after, new obedience.<sup>(l)</sup>

<sup>(g)</sup> Acts 11:18 <sup>(h)</sup> Acts 2:37,38 <sup>(i)</sup> Joel 2:12; Jer. 3:22 <sup>(k)</sup> Jer. 31:18,19; Ezek. 36:31

<sup>(l)</sup> 2Cor. 7:11

### 2. Grasping the Mercy of God

What’s the first reaction of his father? Compassion. There are many sons like the prodigal son, but not many fathers like this father. The most interesting feature is not that the son turns to the father, but that the father turns to the son. Everything about him, his terrible appearance, his rags, his smell, every stain only deepen his father’s pity.

### 3. Grasping the Mercy of God in Christ

The father runs to meet the prodigal, and this is the echo of the cross. God is the one who’s been sinned against. God has been offended, spurned and rejected. And yet, God leaves his home. God lays aside his glory. God humbles himself and makes himself of no reputation (see Phil 2:5-11). God has come in Christ, to seek and save the lost.

### Questions of conscience

#### 1. Am I truly repentant?

It’s not primarily a matter of being truly sorry, although there’s no repentance without it (but see Judas in Matt 27:5). Have you turned to the Lord your God? Are you going forward now with him? The Lord says, “Without Me you can do nothing” (John 15:5). C. H. Spurgeon, “If we are limping towards him, he will run towards us.”

#### 2. Do I have to wait to turn back to God?

Don’t say “I will get better and return to God.” Say, “I will return to God and then I will get better.” “Repentance, the soul’s pump, is dry ... until faith pour in the blood of Christ” (Zachary Crofton, cited in Packer, *Pursuit of Godliness*, p. 173).

**Conclusion:** *A life of repentance toward God*

“When our Lord and Master, Jesus Christ, said ‘Repent,’ He called for the entire life of believers to be one of repentance” (Luther, *95 Theses*). “Do not sorrow, for the joy of the LORD is your strength” (Neh 8:10).

## Through Judgment to a Remnant (Micah 1:6—2:13)

**Introduction:** *Poetic justice (1:6-16)*

The allusions are literary, not literal. As David had to flee from Saul to live in exile at the Cave of Adullam, so the sons of David—the rulers will be driven out (1:15). Judgment is announced against the northern kingdom in 1:6-7 (which is already certain), and then the southern kingdom in 1:8-16. The spiritual condition is reflected in 2 Kings 17:18-19, as Judah follows in the ways of Israel.

“The small landowner ... where once he was self sufficient, he now became dependent on others ... his livelihood lost ... but also his “inheritance” (verse 2), that which he might have bequeathed to his children for their future and support and survival. ... The greed of the wealthy created a category of “new poor.” A section of society that once fended for itself could no longer do so; the nation’s socio-economic foundation was crumbling” (Peter Craigie, *Twelve Prophets*, 2:18).

### 1. The justice in judgment (2:1-5)

In God’s justice, the punishment is to fit the crime, no more. “you shall do to him as he thought to have done to his brother; so you shall put away the evil from among you” (Deut 19:19). Compare Jer 14:15, Ezek 36:6-7, Dan 6:24, Psalm 7:15-16, 2 Sam 12:10-12, Esther 7:9, Matt 26:52. In justice, God remembers mercy. Jesus would later say, “Some will be beaten with many stripes; some with few” (Luke 12:47-48). Nevertheless, there is perfect fairness and equity in the justice of God.

Compare Dante’s vision in *Inferno*. As C. S. Lewis said in *The Great Divorce*, “There are only two kinds of people in the end: those who say to God, ‘Thy will be done,’ and those to whom God says, ‘thy will be done.’”

### 2. The death of truth (2:6-11)

Soft preaching has made for hard hearts. “The preaching of God’s word is opposed in two main ways. The first way is to reject or even attack the faithful preachers. The second is to pay your own preachers to give sermons more to your liking. It was the second kind of opposition that especially galled the prophet Micah” (R. Phillips, *Jonah and Micah*, p. 176). Compare Isaiah 30:9. We get the kind of government—and ministry—that we deserve. They say, “You are what you eat,” but far more profound is “you are what you hear.”

### 3. The grace of a remnant (2:12-13)

The remnant who survive are those who take refuge in Jerusalem during the invasion of 701 B.C. They alone are spared the devastation that Sennacherib visits upon the rest of Judah. God always preserves a remnant of his people who remain, by his grace, faithful to him (e.g. Noah’s house, the 7,000 who did not bow the knee to Baal, etc.). “Out of Jerusalem shall go a remnant. ... For I will defend this city to save it, for my own sake and for the sake of my servant David” (Isa 37:32-35). “Long ago I ceased to count heads. Truth is usually in the minority in this evil world” (Charles Spurgeon, *The Forgotten Spurgeon*, p. 138).

**Conclusion:** *A call to hear*

The great need of every generation is to listen to God, “Hear you peoples!” (1:2). We tend to forget God when times are good and are easily lulled into a false security. The causes of danger are in our midst, though we fail to notice.