

True Repentance

There was a hymn in one of the books from which we've worshipped over the years (though I forget which one) entitled "Did You Repent, Fully Repent?" While I admit that John the Baptist did question the "repentance" of some of the Jewish leaders who came to him to be baptized (cf. [Matthew 3:7-9](#)), I'm not sure such provides a prerogative for us to question the repentance of someone else in all the ways the song seemed to suggest. However, it is imperative that we understand the true *nature* and *requirements* of biblical repentance in order to distinguish it from its counterfeits- especially for ourselves.

Repentance is typically defined as "to turn again." This is literal and certainly accurate. But there are other factors that come into play for a complete understanding of the word and its implications. For instance, "**repentance**" can be:

- **General.** That is, the word can stand for an *overall* "turning from sin and to righteousness," as in that which was urged upon unbelieving Jews, "*Repent therefore and return, that your sins may be wiped away, in order that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord,*" [Acts 3:19](#). Here the word is used of the need to "turn" or change the direction of one's entire life.
- **Specific.** After "*Simon himself believed*" and was "*baptized,*" he committed a particular sin for which Peter condemned him, and further stated that he needed to "*repent of this wickedness of yours, and pray the Lord that if possible, the intention of your heart may be forgiven you,*" [Acts 8:13,22](#). In this case, the "turning again" was specific to a particular sin of which Simon needed to repent.

Beyond these two "types" of repentance, there are other particulars we need to note:

1. Repentance is **not** *being sorry* that your sin (general or specific) has been discovered, or has come to light; it **is** *being sorry* that your sin has offended the righteousness of your Father in heaven, and brought disgrace to the name "Christian" that you and your brethren wear, cf. [1Peter 4:16](#) and [Colossians 1:22](#).
2. Repentance is **not** *regretting* that you will have to *turn away* from the sin(s) that you enjoy; it **is** *regretting* that you need to turn away from sin *yet again*, [2Corinthians 7:10](#). Moses apparently never *regretting* his repentant choice of "*ill-treatment with the people of God*" over "*the passing pleasures of sin; considering the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt,*" [Hebrews 11:25-26](#). But the *rich young ruler* of [Matthew 19:16-22](#) evidently wasn't able to make the same type of choice since he "*went away grieved*" when Jesus explained "the cost" of discipleship.
3. Repentance is **not** just being *sorry* that you sinned; it **is** being *sorry enough to change-* to *turn away* from sin. Judas was *sorry* that he had "*betrayed innocent blood*" (of Jesus), but his *sorrow* was of the *worldly* variety since it produced only *death-* both *physically* and presumably *spiritually* also, cp. [2Corinthians 7:10](#) and [Matthew 27:3-5](#). Contrastingly, Peter was also *sorry* that he had denied Jesus, and even "*went out and wept bitterly*" because of it, [Matthew 26:75](#). But Peter's *sorrow* produced *life-* *spiritual life*, not only for him, but also for those that heard him preach

Jesus, cf. John 21:15-18 and Acts 2:14ff! Both of these men were “sorry” for their sin, but only one of them truly *repented* of it.

True repentance is not easy. It can be, and usually is, hard... very hard... because it requires us to “change” our *hearts* and *minds* about our sinful path, and to change our *course/direction* (our *lives*). But it is only when our *hearts*, *minds*, and *lives* have been “turned again” toward God that our *affiliation* and our *future* changes, “*when a wicked man turns away from his wickedness which he has committed and practices justice and righteousness, he will save his life. Because he considered and turned away from all his transgressions which he had committed, he shall surely live,*” Ezekiel 18:27-28. So yeah, really understanding “repentance” and its requirements is pretty important. (Philip C. Strong; Southport Church of Christ; 7202 Madison Ave, Indianapolis, IN 46227; online at southportcofc.org; email to mrpcstrong@hotmail.com)