



[Video—J.I. Packer on repentance](#)

That's J.I. Packer, by the way. If you don't now who is he, I suggest you rush home after church and read his classic book, *Knowing God*. And he's right about repentance. We don't talk about it enough. I got thinking about it more after I mentioned last Sunday about the guy who told me that repentance is not necessary for salvation. He said we need to repent after we are saved but not in order to be saved.

I got to wondering how is it possible for something so basic to get so twisted? And this guy is no heretic. He's a solid believer and a nice guy. But he's far from alone. I think it is too easy to get a wrong idea about repentance and worse still, to shy away from it. For this we will return to Luke chapter three when John was baptizing the crowds for repentance.

In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, Pontius Pilate being governor of Judea, and Herod being tetrarch of Galilee, and his brother Philip tetrarch of the region of Ituraea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias tetrarch of Abilene, ² during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John the son of Zechariah in the wilderness. ³ And he went into all the region around the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. ⁴ As it is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet,

"The voice of one crying in the wilderness:

*'Prepare the way of the Lord,
make his paths straight.*

*⁵ Every valley shall be filled,
and every mountain and hill shall be made low,
and the crooked shall become straight,
and the rough places shall become level ways,*

⁶ and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.'"

⁷ He said therefore to the crowds that came out to be baptized by him, "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?"⁸ Bear fruits in keeping with repentance. And do not begin to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' For I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham. ⁹ Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees. Every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire." ¹⁰ And the crowds asked him, "What then shall we do?" ¹¹ And he answered them, "Whoever has two tunics is to share with him who has none, and whoever has food is to do likewise." ¹² Tax collectors also came to be baptized and said to him, "Teacher, what shall we do?" ¹³ And he said to them, "Collect no more than you are authorized to do." ¹⁴ Soldiers also asked him, "And we, what shall we do?" And he said to them, "Do not extort money from anyone by threats or by false accusation, and be content with your wages." ¹⁵ As the people were in expectation, and all were questioning in their hearts concerning John, whether he might be the Christ, ¹⁶ John answered them all, saying, "I baptize you with water, but he who is mightier than I is coming, the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. ¹⁷ His winnowing fork is in his hand, to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his barn, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire." ¹⁸ So with many other exhortations he preached good news to the people. ¹⁹ But Herod the tetrarch, who had been reprovved by him for Herodias, his brother's wife, and for all the evil things that Herod had done, ²⁰ added this to them all, that he locked up John in prison. ²¹ Now when all the people were baptized, and when Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, the heavens were opened, ²² and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form, like a dove; and a voice came from heaven, "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased."

1. True repentance prepares the way for the Lord.

Preparation for the Lord was John the Baptist's purpose for existence. Luke tells us that John fulfilled the prophecy in Isaiah 40. Valleys will be filled, mountains made low, crooked made straight and rough places made level. This was John's life calling—to prepare the people for the coming of the salvation of God. This is what repentance does for you and me. If we willingly hold onto our sin, God's work cannot flow through us. He will discipline us and prune to get our attention but in the absence of repentance, our hearts are not prepared for him. When the mountains of our pride are made low and our crooked paths made straight through repentance, we will be prepared for what the Lord has for us.

2. True repentance assumes God's righteous standard.

Last Sunday I talked with a parent of a three year-old and he told me about "the look." Parents, you know what I'm talking about, don't you? "The look" is what young children give you when they are set in defiance to you. There is always some kind of lip action that accompanies the look. The look communicates that they don't plan to heed your call to obedience. Even if young children are not talking much yet, that's OK, because the look says it all—that they don't buy into your standards of right and wrong. This is what Adam and Eve did. They did not merely disobey God. They rejected God's right to rule over them. In seeking their own autonomy, they refused God's standards.



At high school camp I spoke on forgiveness one evening. I was trying to communicate the idea that forgiveness toward the person who offended you is dependent on their repentance. For example, what if you caused me great harm but didn't think you did anything wrong. Can I forgive you? Well think about it. If I came to you and said, "I forgive you," what would you do? You would think I was crazy. You

don't think you did anything wrong so how can I forgive you? You won't repent because you don't think you did anything wrong. Even if I am forever willing to forgive you, there is no transaction of forgiveness because you reject the standard by which I am offering forgiveness.

True repentance requires that we recognize that God has a righteous standard and that he has a right to call us to this standard. Otherwise, we will never repent. If we haven't done anything wrong, we have nothing for which to repent. We must always be seeking to place ourselves under God's righteous standards.

I have found this booklet, *Helping Children to Understand the Gospel*, to be very helpful. After Don is done with his evangelism training session this Thursday, the last two Thursdays during the youth study we plan to walk people through this resource. In addition to parents, we also need grandmas and grandpas available to disciple their grandchildren. It is part mini instruction manual and part devotional for families. There are ten devotionals in the booklet. Here are the first three titles.

Truth One: God is the sovereign Creator of all things
Truth Two: God created people for His glory
Truth Three: God is holy and righteous¹

Karen said recently that if everyone—children and adults—could really get truth two, that alone would transform our lives. And she's right. If we made our lives about Jesus and not about ourselves, we would see everything differently. Karen said she grew up thinking of God as the great Santa Claus in the sky, even after she was saved. It was not until college that she heard that God created us for his glory and not the other way around. I think I heard that even much later. Think about it. How many times do we feel like God has let us down; that life is not fair; that we got the wrong end of the stick? We feel this way because we have a Santa Claus kind of God.

Blair and Sue Alvidrez, missionaries from Albania that our church supports, were with us last month. They stayed at our house for three nights, so we had a lot of great conversations. Sue told us that when she was pregnant with their daughter, Kathryn, at month six, she was diagnosed with breast cancer. Can you imagine? And it was a bad prognosis. The type of cancer was

“poorly differentiated” and growing extremely fast. Sue had surgery and started chemo. Sue said that ironically, when Kathryn was born, Kathryn had hair, but Sue did not. Sue told us that Scriptures like Psalm 119 give her great courage and strength when life is hard. She specifically mentioned these two verses.

⁷¹ It is good for me that I was afflicted,
that I might learn your statutes.

That’s not how we think, is it? We never call affliction good. We don’t tend to look for lessons in the pain. If you think that verse is challenging, take a look at verse 75.

⁷⁵ I know, O Lord, that your rules are righteous,
and that in faithfulness you have afflicted me.

Now hang on—God afflicted me? God might cause me pain? Is this what the Psalmist meant? Now that sounds unfair. At least to some it does, but this is just the Father pruning us, right? Jesus is the vine. We are the branches and the Father is the vinedresser. This is a reminder of the John 15 passage we looked at a few weeks back. The Psalmist says that God’s afflictions are a result of his faithfulness. Jesus said that the Father’s pruning is an example of his perfect love. These truths require us to completely realign our thinking; to renew our minds with His truth.

It is clear that Sue’s God is not a Santa Claus in the sky kind of God. Sue understands what we need to get—God created us for His glory and not the other way around. Now I’m not saying it’s wrong to have strong emotions. Life is hard. Cancer does not seem fair. Dwight replaced me as associate pastor at my former church in Prairie du Sac. Dwight became wheel chair bound at age sixteen from a car accident. He has struggled with a lifetime of health issues as a result. He just retired in March. This week his mother died and next week Dwight has tests to determine the cause of the mass on his liver. A cancer diagnosis seems likely. That doesn’t seem fair, does it?

There’s nothing wrong with having strong emotions when you are in pain. The Psalms are full of this very thing—people lamenting and mourning. People crying out to God for deliverance. But in their grief they always find hope. Not just in their grief do they find hope but because of their grief. Pain points us to Jesus. And once we embrace the fact that God even causes us pain, we will start to learn from our afflictions.

Can you see what John the Baptist was doing here? Merely by calling people to repentance, John was assuming God’s righteous standards. Otherwise, why call them to repent? Repent of what? If I didn’t do anything wrong, I don’t need to repent. If I reject God’s authority over me, he can’t tell me what to do. But the call to repent assumes that God does have authority over us. The call to repentance assumes that God does have righteous standards and that we have violated those standards.

The world wants life to be fair and too often, Christians are the same way. Much of the world hates the idea of God simply because there is evil in the world. But where did that evil come from? That’s on us, isn’t it? The call to repentance is a way out of the evil that we caused.

3. True repentance is not a work.

I think this is where my friend was stumbling when he said that repentance is not needed for salvation. Sometimes repentance is taught to mean that you need to stop sinning before you get saved. Sometimes this is called Lordship Salvation, but I think that is an unfair way to define lordship salvation. Let me be clear. If God asked us to stop sinning before we got saved, we'd all be in trouble. If we had to cleanup our act first, what would be the point of his cleansing power if we were already clean?

If that's what repentance meant, repentance would be a work. We would have to do a lot of work in order to be forgiven. But repentance is not a work because true repentance does not ask you to stop sinning. But it does ask you to commit to that direction. You've probably heard that the word repent is from the Greek word metanoia, which means a change of mind. In the video, J.I. Packer said it well. Repentance means to "Turn their backs on the direction they were going and start marching in the opposite direction."

I think a good way to see true repentance is to compare Judas and Peter. Both were guilty of grievous sin. Judas betrayed Jesus and Peter denied Jesus three times. And amazingly, both of their responses were very similar.

Matthew 26:75—Peter

Suddenly, Jesus' words flashed through Peter's mind: "Before the rooster crows, you will deny three times that you even know me." And he went away, weeping bitterly.

Peter recognized that he had sinned and went away and wept bitterly. He knew that he had done wrong and he had an emotional response to his sin. He felt deep sorrow.

Matthew 27:3-4—Judas

Then when Judas, his betrayer, saw that Jesus was condemned, he changed his mind and brought back the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and the elders, saying, "I have sinned by betraying innocent blood."

Judas' response was very similar to Peter's. It's quite obvious that he recognized his own sin because he said, "I have sinned by betraying innocent blood." But did he also have sorrow for his sin? The ESV is not clear on this question. It just says that "he changed his mind." That's the definition of repentance, isn't it? In fact, the KJV says that "he repented himself." But other translations are very different.

KJV—he repented himself

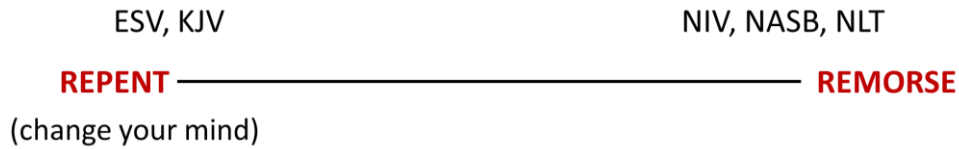
NIV—he was seized with remorse

NASB—he felt remorse

NLT—he was filled with remorse

Three common translations use the word remorse—in this case, a deep sorrow for sin. The Greek word used here is interesting because it really does have a range of meanings between repent and remorse. The word is metamelomai. One the one end of the spectrum, it is identical to metanoia,

the word for repentance. The ESV and KJV translate it this way. But at the other end of the spectrum the NIV, NASB and NLT all translate it as remorse.



So which is it? Did Judas merely change his mind or did he feel remorse? You're probably thinking some of both, and I think you're right. Paul helps a lot when he writes in 2 Corinthians.

For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret, whereas worldly grief produces death. (2 Corinthians 7:10)

Paul said that “godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret.” The word translated as regret here is the same word—metamelomai. I would say that regret fits somewhere in the middle of the spectrum between repent, or a change of mind, and remorse. If you change your mind about something, you naturally feel a little regret. And when you are regretful, there is always a little bit of remorse attached to it.

Paul said that true repentance leads to a salvation without regret. What he means is that your salvation will eventually leave you with no regret, but that doesn't mean that you had no regret during the repentance phase. In fact, what Paul described next is one of the best descriptions of regret you will ever find.

For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret, whereas worldly grief produces death. For see what earnestness this godly grief has produced in you, but also what eagerness to clear yourselves, what indignation, what fear, what longing, what zeal, what punishment!

Look at those descriptive words and phrases:

Earnestness—this means you're very serious

Indignation—you can't believe how wrong you have been. Being indignant is like being disgusted. You're disgusted at your own sinful behavior.

Fear, longing, zeal—these are all strong emotions



That's a vivid picture of regret—mind, emotions and will, all rolled into one. This is a great picture of what sorrow for sin really looks like. Backing up a bit, we're still building a picture of true repentance vs. false repentance between Judas and Peter. I think we can say with confidence that Judas was at regretful if not remorseful for his sin. He had an emotional response. He had

genuine sorrow for his sin. Here’s what we have so far when we compare Judas and Peter. Remember, their sins were very similar. They both betrayed or denied Jesus.

FALSE Repentance	TRUE Repentance
Judas	Peter
Recognition of sin	Recognition of sin
Sorrow for sin	Sorrow for sin

They both had a recognition of sin and a sorrow for their sin. In this sense, they were basically identical. If you could hop in a time machine and actually observe their reactions, you would not be able to tell them apart. Both Judas and Peter were burdened with their guilt and at this point in time, you would not be able to determine the outcome. They looked identical at that point. So how can we tell them apart? We know that they were different but how were they different?

Let’s go back to the 2 Corinthians passage and I’ll show you something I skipped over the first time. Paul wrote, “but also what eagerness to clear yourselves.” If this were a 21st century politician, “what eagerness to clear yourself” would mean that the person was on a mission to make sure everyone knew he was innocent. This would be heavy duty political spin.

FALSE Repentance	TRUE Repentance
Judas	Peter
Recognition of sin	Recognition of sin
Sorrow for sin (worldly grief)	Sorrow for sin (Godly grief)
Did not seek forgiveness (turn away from God)	Sought forgiveness (turn toward God)

But this is not what Paul meant. What he meant by “clearing yourselves” is that the person sought forgiveness. In his despair, Judas went out and hung himself, but Peter’s sorrow led him back to Jesus. Now entire sermons could be preached about why Judas turned away from God and why Peter turned toward God. They obviously had very different ideas about God’s mercy but regardless, Peter turned toward God and Judas turned away. Once you see the end result, you can look back and understand that Judas had worldly grief and Peter had Godly grief.

As you think about the sin in your life, which of these three parts of repentance do you struggle with the most? Are you likely to downplay the recognition or significance of your sin? Are you earnest and serious about it? Do you grieve over your sin? Do you have Godly grief and appropriate sorrow? Or do you struggle with the final step of turning toward the Lord and asking for forgiveness

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¹ *Helping Children to Understand the Gospel*, © 2010 by Sally Michael, Jill Nelson and Bud Burk, p. 42.