

Forgiveness and Repentance¹



MEMORY VERSE: “Or perhaps you despise [hate] his [God’s] great kindness, tolerance [acceptance] and patience. Surely you know that God is kind, because he is trying to lead you to repent”² (Romans 2:4, TEV).



THE CAR’S BUMPER STICKER (LABEL) had only one word written across it: “Repent!”

Just that one word showed that the owner of the car was a Christian. That is because the idea of repentance is so closely tied to Christianity. The word did not only show the faith of the owner, that word was also a form of witnessing.³

This week, we will look at the word *repent* both as a verb, “repent” and as a noun, “repentance.” Repentance is something a follower of Jesus does.

THE WEEK AT A GLANCE: How important is the idea of repentance to Christianity? How does repentance help us understand what it means to be forgiven? How does our understanding of the Cross help us repent? What is true repentance? Why must repentance involve more than just being sorry for the results of sin? Why is it dangerous to make repentance a part of salvation by works?

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, April 19.

¹repentance—being sorry for your sins and wanting to stop sinning.

²repent—to say you are sorry for your sins and that you want to stop sinning.

³witnessing—teaching people about God and living a Christian life.

SUN "TO COME TO REPENTANCE."

"The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish [die], but everyone to come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9, NIV).

Read all of 2 Peter 3. The setting of 2 Peter 3 is just before the Second Coming, when this world as we know it ends. Peter also is talking about scoffers⁴ who laugh at the idea of Jesus' return. The Second Coming is a time that will lead to the "destruction of ungodly⁵ men" (2 Peter 3:7, NASB) In the middle of these thoughts, Peter says that God's promises are not delayed and that He will fulfill His purpose among us.

Second Peter 3 is about "gloom and doom," scoffers, delay, and destruction. But what does 2 Peter 3:9 say that should give us hope and safety? What does 2 Peter 3:9 teach us about God's love for people who make fun of the idea of Jesus' return?

God does not want anyone to perish. But some people clearly will die (Daniel 12:2; Matthew 25:41; Revelation 20:14, 15). God wants all humans to be saved. But He respects our freedom of choice and free will even if our choices lead to sin and death. Second Peter 3:9 presents

a powerful testimony to the importance of free will and free choice.



**God gave us free will and free choice.
How will you choose?**

Repentance is the word in 2 Peter 3:9 that separates "dead" people from "living" people. God does not want anyone to perish. That is why He wants all people to "come to repentance." This clearly shows that people who repent will not perish, while people who do not repent will perish. Repenting has eternal⁶ results.

Write down your understanding of what it means to "come to repentance." When this week's lesson ends, again write down your thoughts on repentance. Contrast⁷ what you learned through the week with what

⁴scoffers—people who doubt and make fun of the Second Coming.

⁵ungodly—not of God.

⁶eternal—forever; without beginning or end; lasting forever.

⁷contrast—show how things are different.

you wrote for today's lesson. Share the differences with your class on Sabbath.

MON TO BE FORGIVEN.

“ ‘But go and learn what this means: “I [God] desire mercy,⁸ and not sacrifice.’ ” For I did not come to call the righteous [holy people], but sinners to repentance’ ” (Matthew 9:13, NKJV).

The first duty of Christians is not to learn to forgive, but to be forgiven. To be forgiven is a necessary part of Christianity. Without being forgiven, good deeds and faith have no more value before God than the idols Israel made and worshiped while claiming faith in the same God we claim to worship.

How, then, do we learn to be forgiven?

We learn to be forgiven when we admit we cannot do anything to earn or deserve God's grace. We learn to be forgiven when we understand just how bad our sinful condition is. We learn to be forgiven when we understand why we must fall before God with nothing but our own need of His mercy. We learn to be forgiven when we experience true sorrow for our sins themselves and not just for the results of those sins. We learn to be forgiven when we learn to repent.

Read all of Matthew 9. (Also read Mark 2:17; Luke 5:32.) What did Jesus mean when He said that righteous

(holy) people do not need repentance, but sinners do need repentance? Are we not all sinners (Romans 3:23)?

Jesus called sinners to repentance because the righteous had already repented. Having already repented is the only way they could be righteous. Righteous people are people who have confessed⁹ their sin. They have accepted God's forgiveness for their sin. And they have Jesus' righteousness credited (given) to them as their own. Under the Holy Spirit's leading, they have confessed their sins, put away their sins, and surrendered themselves to God. By faith, they have accepted the promise of forgiveness and righteousness (holiness) made available through Jesus' sacrifice. Righteous people have already come to repentance. They have learned to be forgiven.

Why is learning to be forgiven important to the Christian life? Have you learned to be forgiven? If so, how could you explain what it means to be forgiven to someone else? How does repentance teach us what it means to be forgiven?

TUE THE GOODNESS OF GOD.

“Or perhaps you despise [hate] his [God's] great kindness, tolerance [acceptance] and patience. Surely

⁸mercy—kindness we do not deserve.

⁹confessed—to have admitted that you have sinned.

you know that God is kind, because he is trying to lead you to repent” (Romans 2:4, TEV).

The human condition comes down to one simple point. Because of Adam’s sin, we have been separated from the Creator. If this separation is not removed, it will lead to our eternal death (Romans 5:12).

But the good news is that Jesus has removed this separation at the Cross (Romans 5:8-10). How? Jesus died as a human for the sins of the world (Galatians 3:13).

But do we really know what it means that Jesus died as a human for the sins of the world? What it means is that Jesus has already been punished at the Cross for our sins (Isaiah 53). It means that Jesus paid in full, now and forever, the legal penalty for our sin (Romans 3:25). It means that if you stole something, God’s penalty for that sin has been taken care of. It means that if you murdered someone, God’s penalty for murder has already been satisfied. It means that if you lied, if you cheated, or if you seduced your best friend’s spouse, God’s anger at those sins has been met through Jesus’ death (1 Peter 2:24). You still may have to go to jail for your sins. But if you have surrendered in faith and obedience to God, you will never have to face God’s punishment for those sins. We will face God’s final judgment for our sins (Romans 14:10). But we will not face His punishment, because Jesus faced that punishment at the Cross.



God’s penalty for sin was paid for at the Cross.

Your lies, dishonest¹⁰ dealings, and thoughts have already been punished at the Cross (John 12:31). Your lusts, greed, and wrong sexual actions have already been punished at the Cross. Your hate, jealousy, and rebellion have already been punished at the Cross.

This is the solution that God, through His love (John 3:16), has given as the only way to forgive us for our sins (2 Corinthians 5:19).

Does today’s lesson cause you to want to continue in sin? Or does it

¹⁰dishonest—not honest.

cause you to hate your sin and want to be forgiven of your sin? Do you want to be cleansed of your sin so you will never sin again? If your answer to the last two questions is yes, then you understand the meaning of this verse: “The goodness of God leads you to repentance” (Romans 2:4, NKJV).

WED “GODLY SORROW.”

“But now I [Paul] am happy—not because I made you [the Corinthian church members] sad, but because your sadness made you change your ways. That sadness was used by God, and so we [Paul and Titus] caused you no harm. For the sadness that is used by God brings a change of heart [repentance] that leads to salvation—and there is no regret in that! But sadness that is merely human [worldly] causes death” (2 Corinthians 7:9, 10, TEV).

Paul had received some terrible reports about the situation at the church in Corinth (1 Corinthians 5:1; 1 Corinthians 6:1-8; 1 Corinthians 11:20-30). This was the church that he himself had started (Acts 18:1-11). Paul wrote a stern warning that they had responded to in the right spirit. Second Corinthians 7 explains why Paul was happy about their positive response.

In 2 Corinthians 7:9, 10, Paul shows two kinds of sorrow: godly sorrow and worldly sorrow. Godly sorrow leads to salvation. Worldly

sorrow leads to death. Clearly, there is a big difference between the two types of sorrow. With 2 Peter 3:9 in mind (Sunday’s lesson), what do you think that difference is?

To understand godly sorrow, which leads to repentance, we must first understand the real problem with sin. We can understand the real problem of sin by looking at the Cross. Jesus’ death on the Cross did not save us from the physical results of sin such as sickness. Instead, Jesus’ death struck at the heart of sin. He came to destroy sin itself.



Godly sorrow is sorrow that leads to repentance. Godly sorrow is sorrow for sin itself not just for the results of sin. Jesus did not die to save the child of an

adulterer from suffering the pain of divorce. He did not die to save a thief time in jail. Sin is so much more than the results of sin.

Godly sorrow may include sorrow for the results of sin. But godly sorrow also includes sorrow for what sin means to God and His creation. Only when we understand just how bad sin is can we be sorry enough to want sin removed from our lives. Wanting sin removed from our lives is godly sorrow.

If we could just avoid the results of sin, or not be truly sorry for the sin itself, we probably would not try to avoid sin. How does this idea help us understand what true repentance means?

THU WHAT REPENTANCE DOES NOT DO.

This week's study on repentance and forgiveness shows how important repentance is to forgiveness. Without repentance, there can be no personal forgiveness of sin. Repentance is the process of accepting what Jesus has done for us. We are saved when we accept what Jesus has done for us (Romans 5).

Where does repentance come from? Acts 5:31; 2 Timothy 2:25, 26.

Repentance is important to the process of forgiveness. But repen-

tance is not how we are forgiven. We do not earn forgiveness because we repent. There is nothing in repentance that makes us acceptable to God. Repentance itself does not help cleanse us from sin. Forgiveness comes only through what Jesus did for us on the Cross. Repentance, like faith (Ephesians 2:8, 9), is God's gift that lets us take advantage of the promise of forgiveness. This promise is made possible only through the Cross.

We must not turn the doctrine¹¹ of repentance into salvation by works. Sorrow for sin and a real desire to repent are not enough to solve the problem of sin and forgiveness.

The Greek word for true repentance is *metanoia*. *Metanoia* means "a change of mind." How does that idea help us understand what repentance involves?

Repentance is a gift from God. But the same as all gifts, we must accept the gift of repentance. Not everyone will accept the gift. What are some of the reasons why people might refuse to accept the gift of repentance? Can you see yourself refusing to repent? If so, how can Romans 2:4 help?

FRI **ADDITIONAL STUDY:** Ellen G. White, "A Knowledge of God," *Steps to Christ* [Jesus], pp. 85–91.

¹¹doctrine—church belief.

“As you see how terrible sin is and how terrible you are as a sinner, do not give up! Jesus came to save sinners. Only Jesus can bring us back to God (2 Corinthians 5:19). Jesus’ tender love is pulling the hearts of His sin-weakened children toward Himself. No earthly parent could be as patient with the faults and mistakes of his children, as God is with the people He works to save.”—Adapted from *Steps to Christ* [Jesus], p. 35.

“Paul always honored God’s law. He showed that the law has no power to save us from being punished for disobedience.¹² We must repent of our sins and humble ourselves in front of an angry God, because we have broken His law. We must also have faith in Jesus’ blood as our only way of receiving forgiveness.



Jesus is our Representative in heaven so we can be free from the penalty of sin.

The Son of God died as our sacrifice and has gone to heaven to stand before the Father as our Representative (Lawyer). By repentance and faith, we can be freed from the penalty of sin. Through Jesus’ grace we can receive help to obey God’s law.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 393.

“There are many who fail to understand what repentance truly means. Thousands of people feel sad that they have sinned. They change what they do, because they fear they will suffer for their wrong doing. But they do not change their heart. They are sorry only for their suffering, not for their sin. Esau showed false grief when he saw that he lost his birthright forever.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Conflict and Courage*, p. 63.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Why can there never be repentance without sorrow? In what ways can Satan try to get us to have false sorrow? Why would he try to get us to have false sorrow?
2. Repentance involves guilt. But what type of guilt should we no longer have after we repent?
3. We learned this week that repentance does not earn us salvation. So what does Acts 26:20 mean when it says we should “do the things that would show they [sinners] had repented”?

¹²disobedience—not obeying.