

What is True Repentance?

By John A. Bonin

Many times unrepentant sinners feel that they can acquire some “fire insurance” by saying they are sorry for their sins and accepting Christ as their Savior. Incorrectly, they feel this covers them from the awful penalty of hell. Frequently the important ingredient of true repentance is missing. (In other words, it is just “lip service.” Saying you are sorry is not necessarily true repentance.) Christ said, “You will know them by their fruits.” (Mt 7:16.)

What is true repentance? Webster says: “to turn from sin and dedicate oneself to the amendment of one’s life; to feel regret or contrition; to feel sorrow, regret or contrition for.” Theologically, we could add that it is a beginning step and necessary ingredient of expressing Christian faith (Acts 26:20). James 2:24 says “a person is justified by what he does, and not by faith alone.” Here James attacked all forms of antinomianism¹ that seek to have Jesus as Savior without embracing him as Lord. Just as Paul demonstrated that trusting in one’s own works for salvation is deadly, so James taught that resting on empty or dead faith is equally lethal.²

This list is by no means conclusive, but here are a few verses that describe the efficacy of true repentance on the Christian life: (Emphasis added.)

Romans 6:1-12 (New American Standard Bible)

1-What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin so that grace may increase? 2 May it never be! How shall we who died to sin still live in it? 3 Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death? 4 Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. 5 For if we have become united with Him in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall also be in the likeness of His resurrection, 6 knowing this, that our old self was crucified with Him, in order that our body of sin might be done away with, so that we would no longer be slaves to sin; 7 for he who has died is freed from sin. 8 Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him, 9 knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, is never to die again; death no longer is master over Him. 10 For the death that He died, He died to sin once for all; but the life that He lives, He lives to God. 11 Even so consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus. 12

¹ False teaching that Christians are freed by grace from the necessity of obeying any moral law, such as the Ten Commandments or admonishments in the New Testament regarding morality. This heretical view states that once a person receives Christ as their Savior, they are free to continue in sin because it is covered by the sacrifice of Christ’s death.

² *NIV Spirit of the Reformation Study Bible*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 2003, pg. 2009

Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its lusts,

2 Corinthians 5:17 (New American Standard Bible)

Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come.

2 Timothy 2:19b (New American Standard Bible)

"Everyone who names the name of the Lord is to abstain from wickedness."

Ephesians 1:4 (New American Standard Bible)

just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him In love

Ephesians 4:22-24 (New American Standard Bible)

22 that, in reference to your former manner of life, you lay aside the old self, which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit, 23 and that you be renewed in the spirit of your mind, 24 and put on the new self, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth.

Colossians 3:5-10 (New American Standard Bible)

5 Therefore consider the members of your earthly body as dead to immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed, which amounts to idolatry. 6 For it is because of these things that the wrath of God will come upon the sons of disobedience, 7 and in them you also once walked, when you were living in them. 8 But now you also, put them all aside: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and abusive speech from your mouth. 9 Do not lie to one another, since you laid aside the old self with its evil practices, 10 and have put on the new self who is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him—

Leviticus 11:44a (New American Standard Bible)

For I am the LORD your God; consecrate yourselves therefore, and be holy, for I am holy.

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