



GUIDELINES DAILY COMMENTARY ON LIVING
WITH DR. HAROLD J. SALA

Subject: Sin/Repentance/Forgiveness

Date: August 2, 2017

FIVE ELEMENTS OF REPENTANCE

I am happy, not because you were made sorry, but because your sorrow led you to repentance. For you became sorrowful as God intended and so were not harmed in any way by us. Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death. 2 Corinthians 7:9-10

"To deny sin is bad news, indeed," wrote John Alexander. Continuing, he said, "The only good news is sin itself. Sin is the best news there is, the best news that there could be in our predicament. Because with sin, there's a way out. There's the possibility of repentance. You can't repent of confusion or psychological flaws inflicted by your parents—you're stuck with them. But you can repent of sin. Sin and repentance are the only grounds for hope and joy, the grounds for reconciled, joyful relationships."ⁱ

Did you notice the phrase, "There's the possibility of repentance"? "Just a minute," you may be thinking, "what does repentance have to do with forgiveness? I thought that when God forgave me, He just wiped the slate clean and that was all there was to this business." Scores of people consider forgiveness to be a kind of "I'm OK; you're OK, too" sort of business with God, whereby we acknowledge our failure and God forgives us. Is that an oversimplification?

First, let's define our terms. The Greek word for repentance means "a change of mind," and the word is used throughout the Bible in relationship to the transaction of genuine forgiveness and restoration. For example, John the Baptist preached a simple Gospel. "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near," he cried. And Jesus proclaimed the same theme. Following the 40 days of temptation, Jesus began His public ministry. "From that time on," says Matthew, one of his biographers, "Jesus began to preach, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near'" (Matthew 4:17). The disciples of Jesus proclaimed the same thing, "They went out and preached that people should repent," says Mark 6:12.



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On the day of Pentecost, Peter stood and boldly cried, “Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ, for the forgiveness of your sins” (Acts 2:38).

Throughout the letters of Paul, the same theme continues. In fact, when Paul wrote to the Corinthians, he stressed there are two kinds of sorrow over wrongdoing: that kind that comes because you get caught, an embarrassment which causes you to lose face, and authentic repentance which is a deep sorrow for wrongdoing which leads to change.

OK, we acknowledge that this element of repentance seems to be missing from our thinking today. It’s been replaced with a kind of forgiveness which makes us feel good about ourselves, the kind that makes us acknowledge wrongdoing but with no real sorrow attached to it. But here’s my question. Is this kind of forgiveness genuine? Or put another way, can there be real forgiveness without repentance?

Not if you believe what the Bible says.

Biblical repentance, contended John Woodbridge, includes five concepts:

1. A change of mind or thinking.
2. A deep sorrow for wrongdoing, the kind that David had following his affair with Bathsheba.
3. The confession of sin.
4. A forsaking of wrongdoing which involves a clean break with what you know to be wrong, and
5. A turning to God, who alone offers pardon and strength to do right.

A wayward son wanting to come back home wrote his father and said, “Dad, if you and Mom can forgive me, please tie a small white flag to the fence out front of the house, and I’ll know it’s OK to come back. But if there is no white flag, I’ll not come in.” To his surprise the lad saw not a white flag, but a white bed sheet flying in the breeze.



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Of one thing you can be certain. God is far more willing to extend forgiveness for your wrongdoing than you are to turn from your sin and to embrace it. Think about it.

Resource reading: 1 John 2.

ⁱ John Alexander in *The Other Side*, as quoted by *Christianity Today*, February 9, 1998.