

Saved: God's Plan of Salvation, Teacher's Guide

Week 4: Repentance Toward God

Acts 17:30–31; 2 Corinthians 7:8–11

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

This lesson establishes repentance as an essential, commanded part of God's plan of salvation, and it guards two truths at once. First, repentance is not optional. Paul tells the philosophers of Athens that God "commands all people everywhere to repent," grounding the command in the certainty of judgment by the risen Christ. The universal call assumes a universal ability to respond, which quietly rules out the Calvinistic idea that fallen people cannot turn until irresistibly enabled. Second, repentance is not mere remorse. Using 2 Corinthians 7, Paul distinguishes godly grief that leads to salvation from worldly grief that leads only to death. Your students need a clear definition: repentance is a change of mind about sin and God that issues in a changed life, a turning from sin and toward God.

Locate repentance rightly within the plan of salvation so students neither isolate it nor distort it. Repentance is not a meritorious work by which we earn forgiveness, nor is it an optional extra for the especially serious. It is the turning of a heart that has heard the gospel and believed; it flows out of faith and leads on toward confession and baptism. Be careful here: do not present repentance as a single emotional crisis to be left behind, and do not present it as a lifetime of morbid guilt. It is both a definite turning at the beginning of the Christian life and an ongoing posture of the believer who keeps turning toward God.

Aim this lesson at the heart as well as the head. Repentance is intensely personal; every student has something to turn from. Lead the class to see repentance as good news, the open door home, the prodigal rising from the pigpen. Help them taste the relief and freedom of genuine turning, and help anyone trapped in worldly grief, the cycle of guilt without change, find the way out into godly sorrow that actually leads to life.

Question 1

Student Question:

Paul says God "commands all people everywhere to repent" (Acts 17:30). Based on this passage, what does it actually mean to repent, and what does it tell us that repentance is a command from God to every person rather than a suggestion or an optional add-on to faith?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Define repentance from the word itself. The New Testament word means a change of mind, but in biblical usage it is never a merely intellectual shift. It is a change of mind so fundamental that

it reverses the direction of the life. The Old Testament background is “to turn,” to wheel around and walk the other way.

Stress that it is a command, not a suggestion. “Commands all people everywhere to repent.” This levels every hearer, just as Week 1 did with sin: no one is exempt, the philosopher and the pagan alike. The universality of the command also implies the genuine ability to obey it; God does not command what people are utterly unable to do.

Distinguish repentance from its neighbors. It is more than feeling sorry (that may be only worldly grief), more than confessing facts (the demons could do that), and more than reforming a single habit. It is a reorientation of the whole self away from sin and toward God.

Frame it as good news. A God who merely tolerated us would leave us in the pigpen; a God who commands repentance is opening the road home. The command to turn assumes there is Someone worth turning to.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Repentance as a change of mind that reverses the direction of life
- The universality of the command and the genuine ability to obey it
- Repentance distinguished from mere remorse, mere confession, mere reform
- Repentance as good news: the command to turn assumes a Father to turn to
- Rejecting the notion that sinners cannot respond to God’s genuine call

Discussion Prompts

- How is repentance more than just feeling sorry for sin?
- What does it tell us that God commands, rather than merely invites, repentance?
- Why can the call to repent be heard as good news rather than bad?

Question 2

Student Question:

Repentance always begins somewhere specific. As you consider your own life right now, what is the one thing you sense God is most clearly calling you to turn away from? Be honest about what has made you slow to turn.

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-examining question moves from definition to the particular. Repentance is never generic; it always has an object. Help students name the specific thing rather than confessing sinfulness in the abstract.

Explore what makes us slow to turn. Often a sin persists because it still feels like a friend, a comfort, a source of control or pleasure we are unwilling to surrender. Naming why we cling is part of learning to let go.

Keep the tone hopeful, not heavy. The goal is not to wallow but to turn. Encourage students to bring the specific sin into the light, perhaps to a trusted brother or sister, since hidden sin is the hardest to repent of.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Repentance as specific, not generic
- Understanding why we are slow to turn from a particular sin
- Bringing hidden sin into the light as a help to repentance
- Turning, not wallowing, as the goal

Discussion Prompts

- What is the one sin God is most clearly putting His finger on right now?
- What makes it hard for you to let go of it?
- Who could you bring this into the light with, so you are not turning alone?

Question 3

Student Question:

Paul grounds the call to repent in the fact that God “has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness” by the risen Christ (Acts 17:31). How does the certainty of coming judgment, confirmed by the resurrection, give weight and urgency to the call to repent?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Unfold Paul’s logic in Acts 17:31. The command to repent is grounded in a coming day of judgment, “fixed” by God, conducted in righteousness, by an appointed Man. The resurrection is the public proof and guarantee that this day is certain.

Show how the resurrection functions as assurance. God “has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead.” The empty tomb is not only the ground of our hope (Week 1) but also the proof that Jesus is the appointed Judge. The same event that comforts the believer warns the unrepentant.

Apply the urgency without manipulation. Judgment gives weight to the call, but the motive is not raw fear; it is the seriousness of reality. We are accountable beings living toward a real appointment. To ignore this is not bravery but denial.

Connect to the larger study. This is consistent with our conviction that Christ reigns now and will judge; there is no endless delay or earthly political reign to wait for. The next great event on God's calendar is judgment, and the time to turn is now.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Repentance grounded in the certainty of coming judgment (Acts 17:31)
- The resurrection as God's public assurance that judgment is fixed
- Christ as the appointed Judge of all
- Urgency rooted in reality and accountability, not mere fear
- The certainty of judgment versus speculation about an earthly reign

Discussion Prompts

- How does the resurrection make the coming judgment certain rather than merely possible?
- Why does the reality of judgment give urgency to repentance?
- How do we hold the warning of judgment and the love of God together?

Question 4

Student Question:

It is easy to push the thought of judgment to the far edges of our minds and live as though this life is all there is. How would your priorities, habits, and relationships look different this week if you truly lived each day in light of the coming day of judgment?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-focused question presses the reality of judgment into daily living. Most people functionally live as practical materialists, as though this life is the whole story, even while affirming a future judgment in theory.

Invite a concrete reordering. If we truly lived each day toward that appointment, what grudge would we drop, what habit would we break, what relationship would we repair, what eternal investment would we finally make? Judgment clarifies what matters.

Guard against morbidity. Living in light of judgment is not living in dread; for the one in Christ the Judge is also the Savior. It is living with clear eyes and right priorities, "numbering our days" so as to gain a heart of wisdom (Psalm 90:12).

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The drift toward practical materialism even among believers
- Judgment as a clarifier of true priorities
- Reordering habits, grudges, and investments in its light
- Living toward judgment with clear eyes, not dread (Psalm 90:12)

Discussion Prompts

- What would you change this week if you lived each day toward the judgment?
- What does the way you spend your time and money reveal about what you truly believe?
- How does knowing the Judge is also your Savior change how you face that day?

Question 5

Student Question:

In 2 Corinthians 7, Paul contrasts “godly grief” that “produces a repentance that leads to salvation” with “worldly grief” that “produces death” (v. 10). What is the difference between these two kinds of sorrow, and why does one lead to life while the other leads only to death?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Open the two sorrows of 2 Corinthians 7:10 carefully, because the difference is life and death. Both feel like sorrow; both involve real pain. The difference is direction. Godly grief is sorrow oriented toward God that turns to Him; worldly grief is sorrow oriented toward self that turns inward and stays there.

Describe worldly grief concretely. It is sorry about consequences, sorry it got caught, sorry it feels so awful, ashamed before others. Judas felt this kind of grief and it ended in death. It can look intense and tearful and still change nothing, because it never actually turns to God.

Describe godly grief concretely. It grieves the sin itself as an offense against God, and that grief moves the person to turn. Peter, who also failed grievously, wept and returned. The proof of godly grief is not the volume of the tears but the reality of the turning.

Make the pastoral point. The question is not whether we feel bad when we sin; even hardened people feel bad about consequences. The question is whether our sorrow drives us to God or only deeper into ourselves.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Godly grief oriented toward God; worldly grief oriented toward self
- Worldly grief: sorry for consequences, capable of intense feeling yet no change (Judas)
- Godly grief: grief over sin that turns to God (Peter)
- Direction, not intensity, as the mark of true sorrow
- Sorrow that drives us to God versus sorrow that drives us into ourselves

Discussion Prompts

- What practical signs distinguish godly grief from worldly grief?
- Why can worldly grief be intense and tearful yet still lead to death?
- How do the examples of Peter and Judas illustrate the two sorrows?

Question 6

Student Question:

Most of us lean toward one of these sorrows. Do you tend more toward worldly grief, regret, self-pity, and being mostly sorry about consequences, or toward godly grief that actually turns to God? What does your usual response to your own sin reveal about your heart?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-examining question asks students to identify their default sorrow. Most of us have a habitual response to our own failure, and it is worth naming honestly.

Help them read the symptoms. Worldly grief sounds like “I can’t believe I did that, I’m such a failure,” a sorrow curved in on self. Godly grief sounds like “Lord, I have sinned against you; restore me,” a sorrow that lifts its eyes. Self-pity keeps the focus on me; repentance shifts the focus to God.

Offer a way forward for the chronically self-pitying. The cure for worldly grief is not to feel worse but to turn outward and upward, to bring the sin to God in confidence of His mercy. Wallowing is not humility; it is a subtle refusal to believe grace.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Identifying one’s default response to personal failure
- Symptoms of worldly grief (self-focus, despair) versus godly grief (God-focus, turning)
- Self-pity as a subtle refusal to believe grace
- Turning outward and upward as the cure

Discussion Prompts

- When you sin, is your first instinct self-pity or turning to God?
- What does your typical response to failure reveal about what you believe about grace?
- How can you move from wallowing to genuine turning?

Question 7

Student Question:

Paul describes the fruit godly grief produced in the Corinthians: “what earnestness... what eagerness to clear yourselves, what indignation... what longing... what zeal” (v. 11). What does this teach us about the difference between merely saying we are sorry and genuinely repenting, and why must true repentance bear visible fruit?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Walk through the fruit Paul lists in 2 Corinthians 7:11: earnestness, eagerness to clear themselves, indignation, fear, longing, zeal, readiness to see justice done. Real repentance produced a whole cluster of visible changes, not just an apology.

Draw the principle. Repentance that is genuine bears fruit; it shows up in action. John the Baptist demanded “fruit in keeping with repentance” (Matthew 3:8), and Paul preached that people should “do deeds in keeping with their repentance” (Acts 26:20). Words of sorrow without changed deeds are not yet repentance.

Distinguish fruit from earning. The fruit does not earn forgiveness; it evidences a real turning. A turned life looks different, just as a tree that is alive bears fruit. We are not producing fruit to be saved; the living, repentant heart produces fruit as a matter of course.

Apply it gently to apology culture. We are fluent in saying “I’m sorry” while changing nothing. True repentance makes restitution where it can, alters behavior, and welcomes accountability. The proof is in the pattern of life that follows.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The visible fruit of repentance in 2 Corinthians 7:11
- Fruit in keeping with repentance (Matthew 3:8; Acts 26:20)
- Fruit as evidence of turning, not as the earning of forgiveness
- The difference between saying sorry and changing direction
- Restitution and accountability as marks of genuine repentance

Discussion Prompts

- What kinds of fruit show that repentance is real and not just words?
- Why is “I’m sorry” without change not yet repentance?
- How is bearing fruit different from trying to earn forgiveness?

Question 8

Student Question:

True repentance shows up in changed actions, not just changed feelings. Where in your life has your repentance stalled at the level of feeling sorry without ever producing the fruit of real change? What concrete fruit is God asking to see this week?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-examining question presses for fruit. Ask students to find the place where their repentance has stalled at feeling, the habit they have grieved over for years without ever truly changing.

Help them get specific about the missing fruit. Repentance over a sharp tongue bears fruit in actual gentleness; repentance over greed bears fruit in actual generosity; repentance over a broken relationship bears fruit in an actual conversation. Name the fruit, not just the feeling.

Encourage one concrete step this week and, where helpful, an accountability partner. Fruit grows in community; we are far more likely to change when someone is walking with us and praying for us.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Repentance that has stalled at feeling rather than fruit
- Naming the specific fruit a particular repentance should bear
- One concrete step of changed action this week
- Accountability and community as soil for lasting change

Discussion Prompts

- Where has your repentance stopped at feeling sorry without producing change?
- What specific fruit would prove that turning is real in that area?
- Who could walk with you and help you bear that fruit?

Question 9

Student Question:

Repentance stands alongside faith, confession, and baptism in God's plan of salvation, and Scripture calls every person to it as the appointed response of a believing heart. How does repentance fit together with faith and grace, so that turning from sin is neither an attempt to earn God's favor nor an optional extra, but the necessary turning of a heart that has truly trusted Christ? And why is repentance not only the doorway into the Christian life but a lifelong posture for the believer?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This is the heaviest doctrinal block: how repentance fits within the plan of salvation. Place it carefully alongside faith, confession, and baptism. Repentance is not a rival to faith but its companion; it is faith turning from everything that is not Christ. Where there is genuine faith in Jesus as Lord, there is a turning from sin, because one cannot cling to the sin and to the Savior at once.

Address the grace-and-works tension head-on, since it recurs all study long. Repentance is not a meritorious work that earns forgiveness. We do not turn from sin to put God in our debt; we turn because we have heard the gospel and believed, and a believing heart cannot keep facing the wrong direction. Repentance is the appointed response of faith, not the payment for grace.

Acts 11:18 even calls it a gift God grants, and 2 Timothy 2:25 says God grants repentance, underscoring that it is bound up with grace rather than set against it.

Show its place in the apostolic pattern. When the crowd at Pentecost believed and asked what to do, Peter said, “Repent and be baptized” (Acts 2:38). Repentance stands between faith and baptism in the consistent New Testament response: hear, believe, repent, confess, be baptized. Removing repentance leaves a faith that never turns, which Week 3 showed is no living faith at all.

Now make the second crucial point the question asks for: repentance is both initial and ongoing. There is a definite turning when a person first comes to Christ, but the believer continues to repent throughout life, turning daily from newly exposed sin toward greater Christlikeness. This is not because salvation is perpetually insecure, but because the Christian life is a continual turning toward God. Revelation 2 and 3 repeatedly call churches and Christians to repent, proving that repentance remains the believer’s posture.

Steer between the ditches. Do not present repentance as a work that earns salvation (works-righteousness), and do not let it be quietly dropped as though faith alone, without any turning, were enough (faith-only-ism). The faith that saves is a repentant faith, and the grace that saves is a grace that changes us.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Repentance as the companion of faith, not its rival: faith turning from sin to Christ
- Repentance as the appointed response of grace, not a meritorious payment (Acts 11:18; 2 Timothy 2:25)
- Its place in the apostolic pattern: hear, believe, repent, confess, be baptized (Acts 2:38)
- Repentance as both an initial turning and a lifelong posture (Revelation 2–3)
- Why a faith that never turns is no living faith (connection to Week 3)
- Avoiding both works-righteousness and faith-only-ism

Discussion Prompts

- How do faith and repentance belong together rather than compete?
- How would you answer someone who says repentance is just earning forgiveness?
- Why does the Christian keep repenting throughout life, not only at the beginning?

Question 10

Student Question:

Look back over both passages, the universal command to turn and the godly sorrow that leads to life. Name one specific way Jesus is calling you to turn this week, whether for the first time or as an ongoing follower. What is the next step in actually walking home to the Father?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This capstone calls for a specific turning. Gather both passages: the universal command to repent and the godly sorrow that leads to life. Ask each student to name one concrete turn, whether an initial turning to Christ or an ongoing one.

Read the room. For the not-yet-Christian, the honest next step may be the first great turning toward God that leads on to confession and baptism. For the believer, it may be a long-postponed turn in a specific area. Hold both warmly and be ready to help after class.

End at the Father's house. Frame repentance with the image of the prodigal rising and walking home to a Father already running to meet him. Repentance is not crawling back in fear; it is coming home to open arms. Let students leave wanting to turn, not merely knowing they should.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Naming one specific, concrete turn this week
- Discerning initial versus ongoing repentance for each student
- Readiness to help the seeker take the first great turning
- Repentance as coming home to a running Father (Luke 15:20)

Discussion Prompts

- What is the one specific turn God is asking of you this week?
- Is this a first turning to Christ or an ongoing turning as His follower?
- What is the next step in actually walking home to the Father?