

Saved: God's Plan of Salvation

Week 4: Repentance Toward God -- Acts 17:30–31; 2 Corinthians 7:8–11

Paul stands in the cultural capital of the ancient world, surrounded by altars, statues, and clever men who love nothing more than a new idea. The Athenians have a god for everything, and one altar even hedges its bets: “To the unknown god.” Paul could have flattered them. Instead, standing on Mars Hill, he says something that must have landed like a thunderclap in that polished crowd: the God who made the world “now commands all people everywhere to repent.” Not to admire. Not to discuss. To repent. To turn. To change direction. The God they did not know has stepped out of the shadows and issued a summons to the whole human race.

We tend to flinch at the word repentance. It sounds like a street preacher's placard, or a guilt trip from a harsher age. But strip away the caricature and you find one of the most hopeful words in all of Scripture. To repent is not merely to feel bad about ourselves; it is to change our mind so deeply that we change our direction. It is the moment the prodigal “came to himself” in the pigpen and turned his face toward home. Repentance is the hinge on which a wasted life swings back toward the Father. It is not the slamming of a door; it is the opening of one.

But here we must be careful, because there is a sorrow that looks like repentance and is not. Paul tells the Corinthians that “godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret, whereas worldly grief produces death.” Worldly grief is sorry it got caught, sorry about the consequences, sorry it feels so bad, and it changes nothing. Godly grief is sorry before God, and it gets up out of the pigpen and walks home. One sorrow wallows; the other turns. One produces excuses; the other produces a changed life.

So this week we look honestly at repentance, the second great motion of a living faith. Having heard the gospel and believed in Jesus, a person does not stay as they were. They turn. They turn from sin and turn toward God. And this turning is not a single tearful moment we leave behind; it becomes the posture of the whole Christian life, a daily turning of the face toward home. Read these verses slowly, and let God show you where He is calling you to turn.

Group Discussion: In Athens Paul declares that God “commands all people everywhere to repent” (Acts 17:30). Why do you think the word “repentance” makes so many people uncomfortable today, and what misunderstandings about it might lie behind that discomfort? How is genuine repentance actually good news rather than bad?

Personal Reflection: Sit quietly for a moment and ask God to search your heart. Is there an area of your life where you have been feeling regret without ever actually turning, sorry about a sin but unwilling to change direction? What would it look like this week to move from simply feeling bad to genuinely turning?

Read Acts 17:30–31; 2 Corinthians 7:8–11

Study Questions

1. 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?
2. 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.
3. 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?
4. 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?
5. 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?
6. 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?
7. 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?
8. 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?
9. 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?
10. 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?

Now or Later

Reflect on these passages: Luke 15:11–24, the prodigal who came to himself and turned home; Luke 13:1–5, unless you repent you will all likewise perish; Acts 3:19, repent and turn back that your sins may be blotted out; Acts 26:20, deeds in keeping with repentance; 2 Peter 3:9, the Lord is patient, not wishing that any should perish but that all should reach repentance.