

“Repent” or “Perish”

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Jesus twice stated, “except ye repent, ye shall...perish” (Luke 13: 3–5). His statement signals the indispensable place of repentance in the scheme of redemption. We will thus do well to understand its meaning and its relationship to other elements of the Lord’s plan of salvation. By definition, the verb *repent* translates the compound Greek word, *metanoeo*, which means to change the mind afterward or upon reflection of one’s behavior.

A common perception views repentance as merely experiencing sorrow for one’s behavior. However, this view mistakes cause for effect. Paul wrote that “godly sorrow **worketh** [i.e., produces] repentance unto salvation” (2 Cor. 7:10, *emph. DM*). Thus, sorrow and repentance are not the same. However, not sorrow of just any sort will lead to saving repentance. One can sorrow over his behavior because of its costs to health, bank account, freedom, or family, and he might repent because of that sorrow. However, if it is not a sorrow rising out of his offenses toward God (i.e., “godly sorrow”), it will not serve his soul’s salvation.

Another mistaken idea is that to repent is to change one’s life. This notion confuses effect with cause. Paul preached that men “should repent..., doing works worthy of repentance” (Acts 26:20b). Earlier, John likewise preached repentance and told his auditors: “Bring forth therefore fruit worthy of repentance” (Mat. 3:2, 8). These statements make it obvious that repentance **precedes** reformation (and is therefore **not** itself reformation), but also that true repentance will manifest itself in reformation. Therefore, saving repentance is a change of mind produced by godly sorrow; appropriate reformation of behavior is its byproduct.

The New Testament several times echoes Jesus’ initial statement of the necessity of repentance. Just before His ascension, He told the apostles to preach unto all nations “repentance and remission of sins, ...beginning at Jerusalem” (Luke 24:47). Paul told the Athenian philosophers that God “commandeth men that they should all everywhere repent” (Acts 17:30). Were these passages all that the New Testament says about repentance, we might conclude that we need do nothing more to be saved, or that salvation is by repentance alone. However, so concluding is as erroneous as concluding that Jesus’ statement, “He that believeth on the Son hath eternal life” (John 3:36, *et al.*) means that salvation is by faith/belief alone. Such statements are figures of speech (i.e., synecdoches) that are intended to include other factors. So, when the apostles, following Jesus’ command, preached repentance and remission of sins in Jerusalem (on Pentecost), they said to believers, “Repent ye, and be baptized...unto the remission of your sins...” (Acts 2:37–38). Faith, repentance, and baptism are all required for salvation (Mark. 16:16; 1 Pet 3:21; *et al.*).

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