Remorse and Penance vs. Remorse and Repentance

Repentance is a word used by many yet understood by few. Some see repentance as doing lots of things to make up for wrong done, feeling really bad about a past evil action, or simply telling God your sorry about a recently committed sin. Other words used to describe repentance at times are remorse and penance. My goal will be to discuss exactly what remorse and repentance look like while contrasting it with remorse and penance.

First we must define each of the three terms remorse, penance and repentance. Remorse is a “gnawing distress arising from a sense of guilt for past wrongs.”¹ Another source defines it as “deep and painful regret for wrongdoing; compunction.”² From the outset, it must be understood that there are two types of remorse. One type is a remorse leading to repentance and salvation while the other leads to death and destruction. 2 Corinthians 7:9-10 says, “Now I rejoice, not that ye were made sorry, but that ye sorrowed to repentance: for ye were made sorry after a godly manner that ye might receive damage by us in nothing. For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of: but the sorrow of the world worketh death.”³ Worldly remorse leading to death can be seen in Matthew 27:3 when Judas repented of his betrayal by bringing back the 30 pieces of silver. The word for “repent” in this verse is metamelomai. “The verb metamelomai is used of a change of mind, such as to produce regret or even remorse on account of sin, but not necessarily a change of heart. This word is used with reference to the repentance of Judas (Matt. 27:3).”⁴ Judas’ repentance was without faith in Christ, therefore all Judas could offer was remorse. In the end he tried to return the money to


³King James Bible.

make things right without having a change of heart. This is a prime example of worldly remorse which led to penance.

Penance can be defined as “man’s effort to save himself by his own suffering.” A catholic source cites penance as “The punishment by which one atones for sins committed, either by oneself or by others. And finally the sacrament of penance, where confessed sins committed after baptism is absolved by a priest in the name of God.” Another source defines penance as “a punishment undergone in token of penitence for sin. An act of self-mortification or devotion performed voluntarily to show sorrow for a sin or other wrongdoing.” As can be seen, penance centers on what man can do. It influences men to pay for their own sins by their good works and sufferings. Moral reformation rooted in self-discipline, Bible Study, church attendance and sometimes volunteering for leadership are all common traits of the person who looks within himself for the source of life to atone for a guilty conscience. Assuredly this fails him. So, if he is strongly religious he will give himself over to “will worship” (Col. 2:20-23) and begin to force even more stricter works upon himself looking to God for enough grace to be self-disciplined within himself, yet not thirsty enough for a consistent flow of The Living Water (John 7:37-38).

Penance keeps the sinner focused on what he or she is feeling and seeing within themselves. It makes repentance something that is man-centered instead of God-centered. Although displeasure of sin (remorse) is present, he “loves every bit of it and even finds perverse pleasure in the guilty misery it brings.” This terrible cycle produces a penance that leaves the

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sinner feeling guilty and powerless. Instead of experiencing the joy heaven feels over one sinner that repents (Luke 15:7, 10), this counterfeit repentance brings bondage. Penance brings bondage as it restricts trust in God, choosing rather to act upon self-trust. As a result the sinner hangs in a state of penance entirely unstable because his repentance is founded on what his human unrighteousness can do instead of what Christ’s righteousness has done and can do for him if he will but trust in Christ’s full atonement.

Realizing the need to atone, he seeks human intervention to appease a guilty past by seeking out a human priest instead of the High Priest. When Christ is not sought the penitent look towards the professional counselor, pastor, or priest. Thus we see the success of the papists in ascribing virtue to sacraments like confession to a priest or human forms of punishment as a means to satisfy Christ. The problem with this is

“Christ’s blood only can merit pardon. We please God by repentance but we do not satisfy him by it. To trust to our repentance is to make it a savior. Though repentance helps to purge out the filth of sin, yet it is Christ’s blood that washes away the guilt of sin.”

In the Old Testament two words are used primarily for repentance nā am and šāḇ. “Nā am is used infrequently of man (Ex. 13:17; Jb. 42:6; Je. 8:6; 31:19), but regularly of God, where it is often said that God ‘repents of evil’ proposed or initiated.” 10 This word does not imply that God is capricious or indecisive, but basically that his relation to man has changed. Specifically when sinful man moves away from God through rebellion in choosing sin over


obedience to the Lord, man finds God’s direction and care are changed for him as a consequence of chastisement and judgment.

The other word often used for repentance in the Old Testament is šûḇ. Šûḇ is the word that often describes the repentance a man has. It “expresses the idea of turning back, retracing one’s steps in order to return to the right way.”11 Šûḇ is more than a feeling of remorse; it is a changing of one’s mind, a turning around in motivation and direction towards God’s moral will according to the scriptures. The New Testament words for repentance are greatly influenced by this word in the Old Testament.

In the New Testament, three words are used to describe repentance. These words are metamelomai, metanoeo and metanoia. As discussed earlier, metamelomai describes a change of mind that produces regret, but not necessarily a change of heart. Judas’ form of repentance in Matthew 27:3 describes this type of repentance. The person with this repentance “regrets his actions because of their consequences (usually to himself), not necessarily because they are wrong as sin against a holy God.”12 Another example of this counterfeit repentance is Esau. Hebrews 12:17 says “…as Esau, who for one morsel of meat sold his birthright. For ye know how that afterward, when he would have inherited the blessing, he was rejected: for he found no place of repentance, though he sought it carefully with tears.” Esau’s sorrow and concern was not over his disobedience to God, but in his loss of the blessing. In spite of his emotional outbursts, his regret did not amount to repentance.

Genuine repentance on the other hand might have sorrow (2 Cor. 7:9-10), but the evidence of authenticity is a change of heart or mind in a way that leads to a change of action.


This leads us to the other two terms for repentance found in the New Testament. As stated previously, *metanoeo* and *metanoia* often describe genuine repentance. “Metanoeo, meaning to change one’s mind and purpose, as the result of after knowledge. This verb, with the cognate noun *metanoia*, is used of true repentance, a change of mind and purpose and life, to which remission of sin is promised.”

Therefore we could rightly define repentance as “rethinking of one’s behavior, attitudes, and beliefs. It is coming to a different opinion or viewpoint, one so different that it calls for different thought patterns and a different lifestyle.”

At this point, the question can be asked, “Can sorrow or emotional outbursts accompany true repentance?” The word *metanoia* does not mean sorrow; in fact it speaks nothing of it at all. However, it is quite possible and often expected that genuine repentance could bring about an emotional response although scripture does not demand it. Emotional outbursts as a result of offending and sinning against a Holy God certainly would not displease God “The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God wilt thou not despise (Psalms 51:17).” Psalms 34:18 says “The Lord is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit.”

So remorse can be apart of genuine repentance, just like it can be apart of counterfeit repentance. Yet worldly remorse which usually involves various forms of penance leaves the sinner empty of joy and fruitful life change. On the other hand, remorse involving godly sorrow brings joy and fruitful life change. An example of this can be seen in Luke 7:36-50. Jesus was eating in the home of a Pharisee when a woman known in the city as a prostitute came into the house and washed Jesus’ feet with her tears and cleaned them with her hair as she kissed his

feet. Jesus told her she was forgiven and then made this statement “Thy faith hath saved thee, go in peace.” The prostitute had great emotional grief as she repented. Thus we find her leaving the presence of the Lord Jesus in peace. So, remorse should not be discouraged as a part of true repentance, but not used as evidence. As seen in the following example, godly grief can lead to a wonderful hearty repentance. John Coloquoun sums up the concept of remorse as it relates to penance and repentance:

“It, Godly sorrow of Biblical repentance, is also a lively grief, a grief that quickens the soul. The sorrow of the world works death; it indisposes a man for activity in duty. But godly sorrow quickens a man to the spiritual performance of duty. The former arises from slavish dread, which chills and stiffens the soul, so renders it unfit for action, the latter from faith and love, which warm the heart, and dispose it to be ardent and active.”

Jesus said in Luke 10:13, “Woe unto thee, Chorazin! Woe unto thee, Bethsaida! For if the mighty works had been done in Tyre and Sidon, which have been done in you, they had a great while ago repented, sitting in sackcloth and ashes.” Clearly Jesus does not discourage remorse, yet He does not use it as evidence of genuine repentance.

The best example of genuine repentance can be observed in Isaiah 6:1-8. Isaiah sees the Lord and is quickly confronted with his sinfulness. The beginning element of Isaiah’s repentance was when he saw God. Penance sees only self-pity, while repentance sees a holy God. Instantly, Isaiah cries out “Woe is me! For I am undone…” Here is another difference between the two. Penance has no change of heart, while repentance does. Isaiah becomes “undone.” He is experiencing an inward change as a result of seeing God, which in turn exposes the debauchery of his own soul. Isaiah knows that he is not half-guilty as penance implies, but his guilt has come full circle and he can do nothing more but confess to God.

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Isaiah cries out “I am a man of unclean lips.” He confesses his sin, but not to make himself feel better. Doing such would be a form of penance. Many confess sin because they believe it helps clear the guilt. Confession of sin to God and others does bring relief, but the essence of true repentant confession is in comparison to God’s holiness, we can do nothing but admit the obvious as Isaiah does “I am unclean.” Isaiah admits his sinfulness with no thoughts about how it will make him “feel.” He confesses his sin as he realizes there is nothing good within himself. Consequently, his only hope is to fall before the Lord of glory and trust in his forgiving mercy. So we could accurately say that Isaiah had a change of heart as a result of seeing the Lord, which resulted in a change of thinking and ultimately a change in action. We see this pattern through the next couple of verses.

In verses six through seven, we see that Isaiah being “undone” has brought about genuine repentance resulting in forgiveness. It must be understood, that without repentance there can be no forgiveness. And when repentance takes place it “consists essentially in change of heart and mind and will.” This holds true for the new convert seeking judicial forgiveness and the seasoned saint seeking parental forgiveness. There must be more than a change in action and a sorrow for how the sin affected the sinner. A change of heart and mind must be present. Thus we see in Isaiah that he had this inward heart change and it all started when he saw the Lord. Hence, the best thing we can do in our own lives when we sin is to get a glimpse of God. Not a visual presence, but an understanding of God’s Holiness, of how God views us and our sin according to the scriptures. We must see our sin as God sees it to have any hope towards being repentant (1 John 1:9).

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Now, we see the result of Isaiah seeing the Lord, repenting, and being forgiven. He is now released into action in verse eight. Isaiah hears the Lord say “Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?” Isaiah responds “Here am I; send me.” We see the fruits of repentance in action at this point. Isaiah is moved into action and he is doing what God’s desires, but not to gain forgiveness or clear guilt. Isaiah is feeling no guilt or need to work for forgiveness, if this were true he would be doing penance. No! He is joy filled and at peace with the Trinity so that he enlists himself for service. John Miller comments on this verse,

For the sure mark of authentic repentance is boldness and joyous enthusiasm for the things of God. So Isaiah, touched by the cleansing fires of grace, stands confidently in the presence of the living God and joyfully accepts a most difficult missionary task. Here am I; send me. Similarly, when Peter is called to be an apostle at the time of the great draught of fish, he is brought to fruitful repentance. Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord is his cry (Luke 5:8). But he need not fear. Real humbling awareness of our sinful weakness is an excellent place for missionaries to begin. To such the Lord draws very near and takes them gently by the hand, saying, Do not be afraid; henceforth you will be catching men (Luke 5:10). 17

Isaiah repents in a way that clearly makes a distinction between repentance and penance.

The biggest difference between the two is that repentance involves not only a change of action, but a change of the heart, mind and will. Paul said “I delight in the law of God after the inward man (Rom. 7:22).” Penance has a change of action and even sorrow many times, but the results are inward bondage, guilt, grief, and destruction.

Thus far we have defined remorse, penance, and repentance. We have also addressed the differences between worldly remorse which often leads to penance and godly remorse which leads to repentance. Furthermore, we have shown some initial differences between penance and repentance through the life of Isaiah. As we discuss the differences between penance and

repentance further, maybe a chart showing the differences between penance and repentance side by side would be helpful.

The difference between repentance and penance can be seen in each one’s consideration of what sin is and its evilness. The repentant see sin as something done to God; those in penance see it as something done to them. In repentance, the sinner brings serious consideration to what sin is and its evilness. He or she will see sin as: a turning from God (Jer. 2:5, Isa. 1:4), a walk contrary to God (Lev. 26:27), injury to God, intense ignorance (Jer. 9:3), filthiness (James 1:21, Isa 30:22), ingratitude for God’s mercies (Hos. 2:8, 2 Sam. 16:17), a defiling thing (Heb. 12:15), damaging to our relationship to God (Matt. 18:35), a burden (Ps. 38:4), a debt one cannot be free from (Matt 18:24), deceitful (Heb 3:13, Pro. 11:18), spiritual sickness (Isa. 5:20), bondage to sin (Rom. 7:18-25), damaging to others (Rom 14:13), a troublesome thing (James 1:13-15), absurd (Rom. 6:1-2), and spiritual death along with final damnation (Rom 6:23).

The repentant bring special consideration to how they have taken advantage of God’s goodness. Romans 2:4 says “Or despisest thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance?” The repentant realize the mercy and longsuffering of God in holding back his hand of justice and judgment. This realization helps to bring about an infusion of God’s power for the sinner to repent with a change of heart, mind and will as he or she realizes how good God has been to them in mercy. Thus, we see a difference between the repentant and its counterfeit penance. Those using penance see God’s withheld judgment as doubt of his chastisement. As a result, they use his longsuffering as a means to continue in sin. While penance of prayer and church attendance is practiced as a means of appeasing God and getting in his good favor.
One of the best New Testament stories that illustrate the differences between repentance and penance is the story of the prodigal son in Luke 15:11-32. The son had messed up and squandered his inheritance on sin, clearly sinned against heaven and his father, “and there wasted his substance on riotous living.” Sin cost him more than he was willing to pay and things got difficult, “and when he had spent all, there arose a mighty famine in the land; and he began to be in want.” Yet, in true repentance the son had a moment of divine conviction which only the Holy Spirit could perform when the scriptures say “he came to himself.” God is the one that issues repentance as the sinner prays for a repentant spirit. The scriptures declare God’s part in this process, “Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life (Acts 11:18).” Those using penance never reach this point of desperation where the Lord convicts them of sin in such a way that there is the change of heart, mind and will. True repentance is observed as the prodigal, “came to himself.” The son had a flash of his sinfulness and God’s holiness as Isaiah did when he cried “I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips (Isaiah 6:5).”

Next, the prodigal remembers the goodness and mercy of the father by asking, “how many hired servants of my father’s have bread enough to spare, and I perish with hunger.” The repentant are drawn to repentance by the goodness of God’s longsuffering while those with penance secretly love the pleasure sin gives for a season. So we find the prodigal having a change of heart, “he came to himself”, now he makes a determination to leave sin, “I will arise and go to my father.” Thomas Watson said it well, “There must be no hesitation, no consulting with flesh and blood, had I best leave my sin or no? But as Ephraim, What have I to do any more with idols? (Hos. 14:8).” Then he cautions,

“But this resolution must be built upon the strength of Christ more than our own. It must be a humble resolution. As David, when he went against Goliath put off his presumptuous confidence as well as his armor – I come to thee in the name of the Lord (1 Sam. 17:45) – so we must go out against our Goliath-lusts in the strength of Christ. It is
usual for a person to join another in the bond with him. So, being conscious of our own inability to leave sin, let us get Christ to be bound with us and engage his strength for the mortifying of corruption.”

Lastly, the prodigal labors in faith. The repentant realize they have sinned against a Holy God. “I will say unto him, Father I have sinned against heaven and before thee.” Repentance can even include emotional appeal although humility is what God desires most. The prodigal said “I am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants.” Penance realizes offense to self more than the Lord of Glory, while repentance focuses on offense done to God and seeking the position of humility. Accordingly, we see the end of the prodigal’s faith, “And he arose, and came to his father.” It would have been less risky to go somewhere else where he would not have had to face the shame of his sins, yet he had no other place in faith to return.

Yes, faith breeds union with Christ, and there can be no separation from sin till there be union with Christ. The eye of faith looks on mercy and that thaws the heart. Faith carries us to Christ’s blood, and that blood mollifies. Faith persuades of the love of God, and that love sets us a-weeping. The best part of the story is the response of the father.

But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him…But the father said to his servants, bring forth the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet: and bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it; and let us eat and be merry: For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found. And they began to be merry.”

Repentance brings peace, mercy and joy while penance brings death, bondage, slavery and misery. Hence we see in the story of the prodigal an example of Psalms 126:5-6 “They that sow in tears shall reap in joy. He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing in his sheaves with him.”

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19 Ibid., 122.
Now that we know what remorse, repentance and penance are and have discovered some of the differences between penance and repentance, all this knowledge does not help a godly walk unless we apply this to our lives. Therefore, in the next couple of pages we will seek to apply repentance to the life of the new convert and the believer.

For someone coming to Christ initially for salvation, repentance is a must. Many try to separate repentance from salvation. To do such is a grave error. The New Testament clearly indicates that repentance is needed for genuine conversion. Acts 2:38 Peter says “Repent, and be baptized…for the remission of sins. Jesus said in Luke 13:3 “…Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish. Jesus said in Matthew 4:17 “Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” On the other hand, some try to emphasize repentance too much thus pushing on the potential new convert concepts of penance. “We cannot say that someone has to actually live that changed life over a period of time before repentance can be genuine, or else repentance would be turned into a kind of obedience that we could do to merit salvation for ourselves.”

So the question might be asked “How do I stress repentance in evangelism when it seems that it could leave the nonbeliever astray into trusting in good works as part of salvation?”

Foundationally, we must understand that faith in Christ’s sacrificial death, burial and resurrection and repentance are two concepts not divorced from each other when it comes to genuine salvation. Hebrews 6:1 says faith in Christ and repentance goes together, “not laying the foundation of repentance from dead works, and of faith toward God.” Acts 20:21 says “Testifying both to the Jews, and also to the Greeks, repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ.” The apostles and brethren at Jerusalem declared in Acts 11:18, “Forasmuch then as God gave them the life gift as he did unto us, who believed on the Lord

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Jesus Christ; what was I, that I could withstand God? When they heard these things, they held their peace, and glorified God, saying, Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life.”

However in other scriptures we see belief, faith or trust (all meaning the same thing) in Christ emphasized for salvation. Take for instance Philip witnessing to the Ethiopian eunuch. The eunuch said, “See, here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized? And Philip said, If thou believest with all thine heart thou mayest.” Here we read nothing of the word “repentance.” What about John 17:20 where Jesus says “Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word.” How come Jesus doesn’t talk of repentance here? Where is the talk of repentance in the next couple of scriptures when the subject of salvation is broached? Acts 13:39 says “And by him all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses.” Acts 16:30-31, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved? And they said, believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house.” Romans 3:22, “Even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe.” Romans 10:9, “That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved.”

So how do we reconcile this? Proper Hermeneutics mandates that we interpret scripture with scripture. Therefore, it must be understood that faith, belief, or trust in Christ’s sacrificial death, burial and resurrection are tied directly to repentance. Therefore, we cannot have one without the other. Repentance is a changing of the heart, mind and will resulting in action. For a sinner to turn from the penance of trusting in his own good works for salvation and thereby realizing the filthiness of any righteousness he could do to justify himself in God’s eyes, he is experiencing repentance. As a result he is not only admitting that Christ is his savior, but also his
Lord. Trusting in Christ as Savior is the belief or faith part of salvation while He being Lord over the new convert’s life is repentance. Wayne Grudem gives an excellent explanation of this,

Scripture puts repentance and faith together as different aspects of the one act of coming to Christ for salvation. It is not that a person first turns from sin and next trusts in Christ, or first trusts in Christ and then turns from sin, but rather that both occur at the same time. When we turn to Christ for salvation from our sins, we are simultaneously turning away from the sins that we are asking Christ to save us from. If that were not true out turning to Christ for salvation from sin could hardly be a genuine turning to him or trusting in him. The fact that repentance and faith are simply two different sides of the same coin, or two different aspects of the one event of conversion. The person who genuinely turns to Christ for salvation must at the same time release the sin to which he or she has been clinging and turn away from sin in order to turn to Christ. Therefore it is clearly contrary to the New Testament evidence to speak about the possibility of having true saving faith without having any repentance for sin. It is also contrary to the New Testament to speak about the possibility of someone accepting Christ “as Savior” but not “as Lord,” if that means simply depending on him for salvation but not committing oneself to forsake sin and to be obedient to Christ from that point on.”

In my own personal salvation I had little knowledge of what repentance was at the point I asked Christ as my savior. The teaching in my church was “you’re a sinner condemned to hell and you should believe on Jesus Christ as your sin substitute and you will be saved.” Although the word repentance was not used, I was told I was a sinner deserving of judgment. I was not told specifically, “turn from your sinful ways, thoughts, habits, etc.” However, I understood that being a believer meant more than a prayer. Resonating within I knew that trusting Christ as Savior meant I belonged to him and belonging to Him meant obedience to him. What did I experience? Repentance and faith. You cannot have either one without the other in evangelism.

Faith and Repentance are as important in the life of the saint as for the new believer. Faith and repentance are attitudes of the heart that are to be cultivated as the processes of sanctification carries the believer through life. Any reading of the New Testament will quickly identify the presence of sinful habits and thoughts still to be a struggle. Although believers are positionally are forgiven for sins past, present and future, practically they are still prone to sin.

This is evident from Matthew 6:12 “And forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors.” This shows that believers will still sin on planet earth and that these same believers must come to the Lord in repentance for practical or relational forgiveness. The rules of repentance still apply to seasoned saints as they do to new converts. Anytime forgiveness for sins is sought, the believer must have faith in God’s ability to forgive, cleanse, and empowerment to have victory over returning to that sin. While at the same time repentance would naturally attach itself to faith by a changed heart, mind and will that results in a change of action. Consider this quote from John Murray,

“Christ’s blood is the laver of initial cleansing but it is also the fountain to which the believer must continuously repair. It is at the cross of Christ that repentance has its beginning; it is at the cross of Christ that is must continue to pour out its heart in the tears of confession and contrition.”

Clearly repentance is more than something that takes place initially at conversion, but is to continue at all times as life is constantly being radically reoriented towards a life with God. Hebrews 6:6 speaks of the ability for believers to backslide into sin. However, the same repentance and faith that saved them is the same faith and repentance that restores them “If they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame.”

Of course, faith or trust in God is still a part of repentance in the life of the believer. Only God can bring it about. “If God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth (2 Tim. 2:25).” Trust in God’s power and provision provides the platform wherewith a believer can practice a life of repentance. The presence of indwelling sin and the need for repentance is evident in the messages to the church at Ephesus. To the Ephesian church Christ

says “Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent (Rev 2:5).” The same faith and repentance that saved the believers at Ephesus is the same faith and repentance to be practiced in their daily lives as they seek to be in Christ’s image instead of the world’s.

In fact, repentance is to be brought about in community as believers love one another. The deception of sin and its pleasure can easily hinder believers from repentance. So God established the local church and its body of believers to give accountability to each other when repentance of sin is ignored. For instance, Paul points out the sins of the Corinthian believers who have not repented. “And lest, when I come again, my God will humble me among you, and that I shall bewail many which have sinned already and have not repented of the uncleanness and fornication and lasciviousness which they have committed.” All believers are responsible to evangelize with repentance; they are also responsible to each other to disciple with repentance. Galatians 6:1-2 says “Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such a one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted. Bear ye one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.”

Sometimes believers sin against each other and rebuke leading to repentance must take place. Luke 17:3 says “Take heed to yourselves: if thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him; and if he repent forgive him.” So, we see that believers can sin against each other and thus when the offended confronts the offender and he repent, fellowship is restored to each other and to the Lord. The result is joy and peace.

In my own life repentance is fleshed out as God empowers me to put off the unrighteous ways and replace them with righteous habits. Yet, the key is the “empowering” of God. I know that Christ gives me the power to not yield to sin. Romans 6:14 says, “For sin shall not have dominion over you.” After studying the topic of penance in relation to repentance it’s easy to see
how often we repent with a self-willed determination instead of through faith and trust in the promise of God’s empowerment to resist sin. This self-willed determination leads to a self-focus that is more concerned about what sin is doing to me personally then what it has done to the crucified Christ. Therefore, it behooves me to take a good evaluation of my own life to see if repentance in my life is deeper than the outward actions of replacing sinful ways. The difference between penance and repentance can be understood in light of Jesus’ rebuke of the Pharisees for their outward penance, while they lacked inward repentance. Matthew 23:25-26 says, “Who unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For ye make clean the outside of the cup and of the platter, but within they are full of extortion and excess. Thou blind Pharisee, cleanse first that which is within the cup and platter, that the outside of them may be clean also.”
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