

## Principles of Repentance/Questions to Ask

**Purpose:** This is a tool for pastors, church leaders and biblical counselors to understand the biblical term repentance and for discerning if true repentance has taken place. Practical questions that flow out of the biblical thinking are provided for both the leader and counselee.

**These principles are based upon:** Prov. 28:13; Psalm 51; Matt. 3:8; Luke 3:8; Acts 26:20; 2 Cor. 7: 9-11; Eph. 5: 5-14.

**General characteristics of repentance:** There is evidence. Scripture says there is fruit in keeping with repentance. Repentance is not just a change of thinking or even behavior. The word repentance is a “change of mind” and mind falls into the category of the heart biblically. Therefore, there is a change of intentions, attitudes, and desires. These are evidences of the Spirit’s work in a person’s life (John 16:7-8).

### Evidences from Psalm 51

*Brokenness* (Psalm 51:17)—“deep sorrow”... a “killing anguish in that region which is so vital as to be the very source of life” (Spurgeon, *The Treasury of David*). “Broken, afflicted, distressed” (Shavar, *Analytical Hebrew and Chaldee Lexicon*).

*Contrite heart* (Psalm 51:17)—“lowly” (Keil and Delitzsch, *Commentary of the Old Testament*). “...To be tender, of the heart”, “timid”, “soft” (Rakak, *Analytical Hebrew and Chaldee Lexicon*). Is this person tender or hard?

*Humility*—Is there defensiveness? Is the person teachable? Is the person open to hearing truth? The opposite would be barriers being put up, self-protection and unteachable. Is the person willing to confess even embarrassing things? David acknowledge his sin in Psalm 51:1-3. He called his sin what it really was—rebellion (transgression) and perversion (iniquity).

“...His impenetrable hardness softened, his haughty vainglorying brought low,--in fine, when he is himself become as nothing, and when God is everything to him” (Keil and Delitzsch, *Commentary of the Old Testament*).

### Paul gives a number of characteristics and distinguishes between feeling bad over sin and being broken (2 Corinthians 7:11).

*Earnestness*—What sincere actions show that you have removed yourself from the sin? What are you doing to demonstrate your sincere desire to rebuild trust? What are you doing to rebuild broken relationships? How have you demonstrated an awareness of your tendencies?

*Vindication of yourselves*—What are you doing that would show you are approaching life differently?

*Indignation*—What are you feeling about your sin? Is the person angry about how he or she has sinned or angry that others are trying to get him to deal with it?

*Fear*— What do you fear? (A repentant heart does not want to repeat this, “I fear falling again.” “I fear sinning against my Lord again.”). You should sense that the person is more on guard against his or her sin.

*Longing*—What are you doing that shows a deep longing to rebuild relationships? What are you yearning for in relationship to the Lord?

*Zeal*—you should sense a passion to pursue what is good and pure. There should not be a zeal to defend personal rights (see brokenness and contrite heart above). Is there a zealousness to kill the sin? How has the individual demonstrated both desires to and action that kill the sin (radical amputation; see Col. 3:5)?

*Avenging of wrong*—You should sense, “I’ll do whatever it takes to make this right.” “I’ll bear whatever the consequences are.” An example would be, “I’m willing to go to jail if necessary.” “I’ll make a public confession if necessary.” This is not about doing “Protestant penance” meaning, “I have to pay for my own sin.”

*In everything you demonstrated yourselves innocent*—there is “fruit in keeping with repentance.”

**Repentance show itself in a change of heart.** The heart is the mind, will, emotions, that all reflect desires.

*Mind* (notitia)

What are you thinking about your sin? What goes through your mind regularly about your sin? What do you dwell on related to your sin? Is the person rationalizing or excusing his or her behavior and attitudes? You could ask, “Why did you engage in this?” to see if excuses are made.

How have you grown in awareness of your propensities?

*Will* (fiducia)

What decisions have you made related to this sin? What actions have you taken? What practical decisions have you made to show your sincerity in killing this sin? For example, “I got rid of my phone.” Or, “I have taken firm action to cut off the relationship.”

*Emotions* (assensus)

What is the greatest emotion you are experiencing in your life right now related to your sin?

What are you angry about? The person should be angry that his/her sinful desires have hurt the Lord and others (the two great commandments). This is not, “I can’t believe I

did that!” That’s pride. Righteous anger would say, “I am appalled at how I have hurt the Lord and others and I now am realizing the depth of my depravity.”

“This verse provides a look at how genuine repentance will manifest itself in one’s attitudes. Diligence. Better translated, “earnestness” or “eagerness.” It is the initial reaction of true repentance to eagerly and aggressively pursue righteousness. This is an attitude that ends indifference to sin and complacency about evil and deception. What clearing of yourselves. A desire to clear one’s name of the stigma that accompanies sin. The repentant sinner restore the trust and confidence of others by making his genuine repentance known. Indignation. Often associated with righteous indignation and holy anger. Repentance leads to anger over one’s sin and displeasure and holy anger. Repentance leads to anger over one’s sin and displeasure at the shame it has brought on the Lord’s name and His people. Fear. This is reverence toward God, who is the One most offended by sin. Repentance leads to a healthy fear of the One who chastens and judges sin. Vehement desire. This could be translated “yearning”, or “a longing for,” and refers to the desire of the repentant sinner to restore the relationship with the one who has sinned again. Zeal. This refers to loving someone of something so much that one hates anyone or anything that harms the object of this love . vindication. This could be translated “avenging of wrong,” and refers to the desire to see justice done. The repentant sinner no longer tries to protect himself; he wants to see the sin avenged no matter what it might cost him. To be clear in this matter. The essence of repentance is an aggressive pursuit of holiness, which was characteristic of the Corinthians. The Gr. Word for “clear” mean “pure” or “holy”. They demonstrated the integrity of their repentance by their purity.”<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> MacArthur, John. *The MacArthur Study Bible: New King James Version*. Nashville: Word Bibles, 1997. 1775. Print.