

Repentance: What It Is and Why It Matters

Acts 2:38 Then Peter said to them, "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins..."

1. Observations of "REPENT" as Used in Acts 2:38

- By itself, the verse can be interpreted different ways.
- Some interpretations conflict with other passages of Scripture.
- No verse stands alone. It must align with the rest of Scripture.
- Whatever repent means, it cannot go against the rest of Scripture.

2. REPENTANCE: Why Is It Important?

- "Repent" is a term used in the Bible, inspired by God.
- To understand the term and how it is used to avoid error.
- If needed for salvation, then we need to preach this clearly.
- If not required for salvation, we need to understand why it is not.

3. REPENTANCE: The Terms – Verb and Noun

- REPENT (verb) – *metanoēō* (μετανοέω) – to think after; to change one's mind (34x in 32 verses)
- REPENTANCE (noun) – *metanoia* (μετάνοια) – later knowledge; after-thought; change of mind (22x in 22 verses)

4. How Are the Terms Used in the New Testament?

a. Regarding salvation,

- Repent and repentance are terms used closely with believe / belief.
- Believing in something IS a change of mind – from/to something.

b. These terms are used together with believe or belief only four times, and none require a different meaning apart from belief.

Mk 1:15 and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel."

Acts 19:4 Then Paul said, "John indeed baptized with a baptism of repentance, saying to the people that they should believe on Him who would come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus."

Acts 20:21 "testifying to Jews, and also to Greeks, repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ.

Heb 6:1 Therefore, leaving the discussion of the elementary principles of Christ, let us go on to perfection, not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God,

c. Repent most often is not qualified (no "repent of your sins").

5. How Are the Terms "Repent" and "Repentance" Used in Acts?

a. Several interchangeable terms are used in Acts 2

³⁸ Then Peter said to them, "Repent...for the remission of sins..."

⁴⁰ And... he...exhorted them, saying, "Be saved from this perverse generation."

⁴¹ Then those who gladly received his word were baptized...

⁴² And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship...

⁴⁴ Now all who **believed** were together, and had all things in common

b. Acts only uses the term "repent" or "repentance" a total of 9x

2:38 Repent, and let every one of you ... (1 of 2 commands)

3:19 "Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, (2 of 2)

11:18 When they heard these things they became silent; and they glorified God, saying, "Then God has also granted to the Gentiles repentance to life."

17:30 "Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent,

19:4 Then Paul said, "John indeed baptized with a baptism of repentance, saying to the people that they should believe on Him who would come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus."

20:21 "testifying to Jews, and also to Greeks, repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ. (cf. 5:31 | 13:24 | 26:20)

6. How Are Forms of "Believe" Used in Place of Repent in Acts? (52x)

a. Believe (verb) is used in Acts 37 Times

5:14 And believers were increasingly added to the Lord...

13:39 "and by Him everyone who believes is justified from all things from which you could not be justified by the law of Moses.

b. Belief (noun) is used in Acts 15 Times

6:7 Then the word of God spread, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were obedient to the faith.

20:21 "testifying to Jews, and also to Greeks, repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ.

7. How Are the Terms Used in the Greater Context of Scripture?

a. What did Jesus clearly say about what saves?

Jn 3:18 "He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. (3:36; 6:47; 8:24)

b. Those responding in Acts are called "believers," not "repenters."

Acts 2:44 Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common,
Acts 5:14 And believers were increasingly added to the Lord, multitudes of both men and women,

c. Peter uses "believe" in place of "repent" in other places in Acts:

10:43 "To Him all the prophets witness that, through His name, whoever believes in Him will receive remission of sins." (cp. 2:38; cf. 11:17)

d. In Acts, repent is used with Paul 4x; believe is used 34x.

16:31 So they said, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household."

e. The NT uses "believe" & "belief" as the primary terms (not "repent"):

- Repent (verb) 34x; Repentance (noun) 22x (56x total)
- Believe (verb) 241x; Belief/faith (noun) 243x (484x total)

Summary Statements on Repent & Repentance:

1. **Repent means “to change one’s mind.”** Though changing one’s mind will often lead to a change in behavior or direction, the meaning of the term “repent” itself does not include either of those ideas.
2. **When “repent” is used, it is used almost always in place of “believe.”** Only 4 passages exist where “believe” or “belief (faith)” are used together with “repent” or “repentance.” None of these passages requires repentance to be something beyond a changing of one’s mind from believing something else to believing in what God has revealed. The more common term used for the Gospel presentation is “believe.”
3. **Repenting is not a separate step from believing.** Repenting happens when someone believes. “Repent” emphasizes the change of belief FROM something TO something, new whereas BELIEVE just focuses on what is being believed, and assumes that one changes his mind to do so.
4. **The Acts 2:38 combination of commands occurs nowhere else in Scripture.** It must, therefore, mean something that the rest of Scripture already teaches. Repent, here, is commanding listeners to change their minds by believing what they are being told. (They do, and they are then called “believers” in 2:44.)
5. **Peter uses the term “believe” often in Acts in place of “repent.”** If they are not interchangeable synonyms, they are, at least inseparably linked.
6. Whatever “repent” means, it cannot contradict **the overwhelming number of passages** that speak of salvation as coming through believing as the single “step” or requirement for salvation.
7. Whatever “repent” means, it has to relate and not contradict **very clear passages** that speak of salvation through belief/faith alone. Jesus says in John 3:18 that believe on Him is THE deciding factor, so repentance must have something to do with belief in order to align with such Scripture. Paul’s message to the Philippian jailer contains simply the command to “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ” and nothing more, so repentance must fit in that command.
8. **We cannot expand the meaning of repentance** to mean something beyond what Scripture says or how it is used in Scripture.
9. **We must use the term “repent” Scripturally.** Nowhere, for example, are unbelievers commanded to “repent of their sins” for salvation, a phrase used often in conjunction with evangelism today by many. It is true that our mind must be changed to believe what God says about our sins and sinfulness – we are indeed sinners who have sinned and deserve God’s justice and wrath. Belief in a Savior assumes belief in the need for one.

NOTE: The Book of Revelation **does** use the word “repent” in conjunction with bad actions in four places. These include “repent of their deeds” (Rev 2:22), “repent of the works of their hands...” (Rev 9:20), “repent of their murders or their sorceries or their sexual immorality or their thefts,” (Rev 9:21), “repent of their deeds,” (Rev 16:11), but none seem to be in a context of evangelism. Rather, one is calling some in a local church to repent (2:22), and the others seem to just illustrate the hard-heartedness of unbelievers in the Tribulation period (9:20-21; 16:11).