

Repentance

Chapter 19

We All Need to Repent

- What is sin? What effects do our sins have on us?

Faith in Jesus Christ naturally leads to repentance. There has been the need for repentance in the world from the time of Adam to the present day. The Lord instructed Adam, “Wherefore teach it unto your children, that all men, everywhere, must repent, or they can in nowise inherit the kingdom of God, for no unclean thing can dwell there, or dwell in his presence” (Moses 6:57).

We come to earth for the purpose of growing and progressing. This is a lifelong process. During this time we all sin (see Romans 3:23). We all have need to repent. Sometimes we sin because of ignorance, sometimes because of our weaknesses, and sometimes because of willful disobedience. In the Bible we read that “there is not a just man upon earth, that doeth good, and sinneth not” (Ecclesiastes 7:20) and that “if we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us” (1 John 1:8).

What is sin? James said, “To him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin” (James 4:17). John described sin as “all unrighteousness” (1 John 5:17) and “the transgression of the law” (1 John 3:4).

That is why the Lord said, “All men, everywhere, must repent” (Moses 6:57). Except for Jesus Christ, who lived a perfect life, everyone who has lived upon the earth has sinned. Our Heavenly Father in His great love has provided us this opportunity to repent of our sins.



Becoming Free from Our Sins through Repentance

- What is repentance?

Repentance is the way provided for us to become free from our sins and receive forgiveness for them. Sins slow our spiritual progression and can even stop it. Repentance makes it possible for us to grow and develop spiritually again.

The privilege of repenting is made possible through the Atonement of Jesus Christ. In a way we do not fully understand, Jesus paid for our sins. President Joseph Fielding Smith said of this:

“I have suffered pain, you have suffered pain, and sometimes it has been quite severe; but I cannot comprehend pain . . . that would cause the blood, like sweat, to come out upon the body. It was something terrible, something terrific. . . .

“. . . There was *no man ever born into this world that could have stood under the weight of the load that was upon the Son of God, when he was carrying my sins and yours* and making it possible that we might escape from our sins” (*Doctrines of Salvation*, sel. Bruce R. McConkie, 3 vols. [1954–56], 1:130–31; italics in original).

Repentance sometimes requires great courage, much strength, many tears, unceasing prayers, and untiring efforts to live the commandments of the Lord.

Principles of Repentance

- What are the principles of repentance?

President Spencer W. Kimball declared: “There is *no royal road to repentance*, no privileged path to forgiveness. Every man must follow the same course whether he be rich or poor, educated or untrained, tall or short, prince or pauper, king or commoner” (*Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Spencer W. Kimball* [2006], 38; italics in original).

For teachers: Writing a list can generate interest and help learners focus their attention. As you discuss the principles of repentance with class members or family members, you may want to ask someone to write the principles on the board or on a large piece of paper.

We Must Recognize Our Sins

To repent, we must admit to ourselves that we have sinned. If we do not admit this, we cannot repent.

Alma counseled his son Corianton, who had been unfaithful in his missionary calling and had committed serious sins: “Let your sins trouble you, with that trouble which shall bring you down unto repentance. . . . Do not endeavor to excuse yourself in the least point” (Alma 42:29–30). The scriptures advise us further not to justify our sinful practices (see Luke 16:15–16).

We cannot hide any act of our lives from ourselves or from the Lord.

We Must Feel Sorrow for Our Sins

In addition to recognizing our sins, we must feel sincere sorrow for what we have done. We must feel that our sins are terrible. We must want to unload and abandon them. The scriptures tell us, “All those who humble themselves before God, and desire to be baptized, and come forth with broken hearts and contrite spirits, and . . . have truly repented of all their sins . . . shall be received by baptism into his church” (D&C 20:37).

- Study 2 Corinthians 7:9–10 and Mormon 2:10–14. In what ways do you think “godly sorrow” is different from expressions of regret?

We Must Forsake Our Sins

Our sincere sorrow should lead us to forsake (stop) our sins. If we have stolen something, we will steal no more. If we have lied, we will lie no more. If we have committed adultery, we will stop. The Lord revealed to the Prophet Joseph Smith, “By this ye may know if a man repenteth of his sins—behold, he will confess them and forsake them” (D&C 58:43).

We Must Confess Our Sins

Confessing our sins is very important. The Lord has commanded us to confess our sins. Confession relieves a heavy burden from the sinner. The Lord has promised, “I, the Lord, forgive sins, and am merciful unto those who confess their sins with humble hearts” (D&C 61:2).

We must confess all our sins to the Lord. In addition, we must confess serious sins—such as adultery, fornication, homosexual relations, spouse or child abuse, and the sale or use of illegal drugs—which might affect our standing in the Church, to the proper priesthood authority. If we have sinned against another person, we should confess to the person we have injured. Some less serious sins involve no one but ourselves and the Lord. These may be confessed privately to the Lord.

We Must Make Restitution

Part of repentance is to make restitution. This means that as much as possible we must make right any wrong that we have done. For example, a thief should give back what he has stolen. A liar should make the truth known. A gossip who has slandered the character of a person should work to restore the good name of the person he has harmed. As we do these things, God will not mention our sins to us when we are judged (see Ezekiel 33:15–16).

We Must Forgive Others

A vital part of repentance is to forgive those who have sinned against us. The Lord will not forgive us unless our hearts are fully cleansed of all hate, bitterness, and bad feelings against other people (see 3 Nephi 13:14–15). “Wherefore, I say unto you, that ye ought to forgive one another; for he that forgiveth not his brother his trespasses standeth condemned before the Lord; for there remaineth in him the greater sin” (D&C 64:9).

We Must Keep the Commandments of God

To make our repentance complete we must keep the commandments of the Lord (see D&C 1:32). We are not fully repentant if we do not pay tithes or keep the Sabbath day holy or obey the Word of Wisdom. We are not repentant if we do not sustain the authorities of the Church and do not love the Lord and our fellowmen. If we do not pray and are unkind to others, we are surely not repentant. When we repent, our life changes.

President Kimball said: “First, one repents. Having gained that ground he then must live the commandments of the Lord to retain

his vantage point. This is necessary to secure complete forgiveness” (*Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Spencer W. Kimball*, 43).

- How do the teachings in this section differ from the false idea that repentance is the performance of a list of simple steps or routine actions?

How Repentance Helps Us

- In what ways does repentance help us?

As we repent, the Atonement of Jesus Christ becomes fully effective in our lives, and the Lord forgives our sins. We become free from the bondage of our sins, and we find joy.

Alma recounted his experience of repenting from his sinful past:

“My soul was harrowed up [troubled] to the greatest degree and racked with all my sins.

“Yea, I did remember all my sins and iniquities, for which I was tormented with the pains of hell; yea, I saw that I had rebelled against my God, and that I had not kept his holy commandments.

“. . . So great had been my iniquities, that the very thought of coming into the presence of my God did rack my soul with inexpressible horror.

“. . . It came to pass that as I was . . . harrowed up by the memory of my many sins, behold, I remembered also to have heard my father prophesy . . . concerning the coming of one Jesus Christ, a Son of God, to atone for the sins of the world.

“Now, as my mind caught hold upon this thought, I cried within my heart: O Jesus, thou Son of God, have mercy on me. . . .

“And now, behold, when I thought this, I could remember my pains no more. . . .

“And oh, what joy, and what marvelous light I did behold; yea, my soul was filled with joy as exceeding as was my pain!

“. . . There can be nothing so exquisite and sweet as was my joy” (*Alma 36:12–14, 17–21*).

- How did repentance and forgiveness bring Alma joy?
-

The Dangers of Procrastinating Our Repentance

- What are some possible consequences of procrastinating our repentance?

The prophets have declared that “this life is the time for men to prepare to meet God” (Alma 34:32). We should repent now, every day. When we get up in the morning, we should examine ourselves to see whether the Spirit of God is with us. At night before we go to sleep, we should review our acts and words of the day and ask the Lord to help us recognize the things for which we need to repent. By repenting every day and having the Lord forgive our sins, we will experience the daily process of becoming perfect. As with Alma, our happiness and joy can be sweet and exquisite.

Additional Scriptures

- Matthew 9:10–13; Luke 13:3; Ezekiel 18:30 (repent or perish)
- Alma 7:21 (no unclean thing can dwell in God’s presence)
- 2 Corinthians 7:9–10 (godly sorrow)
- Mosiah 4:10–12 (steps to repentance)
- Isaiah 1:18; Mosiah 26:28–32 (repentance brings forgiveness)
- D&C 58:42 (sins remembered no more)
- 2 Nephi 9:23 (repentance necessary to salvation)
- 2 Nephi 2:21 (repent while in the flesh)
- D&C 19:15–20 (the Lord has commanded us to repent so we will not have to suffer as He did)