

Philemon

Reconciliation and Forgiveness



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Repentance

Evaluating your understanding of biblical repentance

The Bible consistently emphasizes repentance throughout the Old and New Testaments. Repentance involves a transformative change of mind, purpose, and direction, not merely feeling sorrow for one's actions. This means turning away from sin and toward God, recognizing that life cannot be found apart from Him. This change, fueled by the Holy Spirit, leads to obedience to God's commands.

Key scriptural references highlight different aspects of repentance:

Old Testament. Several Old Testament passages call for turning away from wicked ways, confessing and forsaking sins, and returning to the Lord for forgiveness and healing. Examples include:

- 2 Chronicles 7:14
- Ezekiel 18:30-31
- Isaiah 55:7
- Proverbs 28:13
- Jeremiah 15:19
- Psalm 51:17 describes a "broken and contrite heart" as a sacrifice God will not despise.

New Testament. The New Testament connects repentance with the coming of the kingdom of heaven and believing in the gospel.

- seen in Matthew 4:17 and Mark 1:15.
- Luke 5:32, Luke 13:3, 5, Luke emphasizes Jesus calling sinners to repentance and the warning that without it, one will perish .
- The apostles proclaimed repentance and forgiveness of sins in Jesus' name (Luke 24:46-47, Acts 2:38).
- Acts highlights that God grants repentance (Acts 11:18) and commands all people everywhere to repent (Acts 17:30).

- Paul's message included turning to God and demonstrating repentance through deeds (Acts 26:20).
- God's kindness leads to repentance (Romans 2:4), and godly sorrow produces repentance leading to salvation (2 Corinthians 7:10).
- 2 Peter 3:9 states that God is patient, wanting everyone to come to repentance.
- Revelation calls for repentance from fallen ways (Revelation 2:5).
- 1 John emphasizes confessing sins for forgiveness and cleansing (1 John 1:9) and the link between a transformed life and being a child of God (1 John 3:4-10).

These verses show that repentance is a necessary response to the gospel. It leads to the forgiveness of sins, a renewed relationship with God, and a changed life that reflects His glory.

By engaging with the following questions and reflecting on the relevant scriptures, a clearer understanding of what true repentance entails can be gained, and one's life can be aligned more closely with God's Word. To evaluate your understanding of true repentance according to God's Word, ask yourself the following questions:

1. Do you understand what repentance truly means biblically?

- Does one equate repentance solely with feeling sorry for their sins, or do they grasp the deeper meaning of a change of mind, purpose, and direction?
- Can one articulate the difference between sorrow that leads to repentance and worldly sorrow that leads to death, based on 2 Corinthians 7:10?
- Does one see repentance as a one-time event or an ongoing lifestyle of turning from sin and towards God?

2. What is the role of the Holy Spirit?

- Does one recognize the Holy Spirit's role in convicting them of sin and enabling them to repent, or do they believe it's something they can accomplish on their own?
- Does one rely on the Holy Spirit to guide them into all truth and illuminate their understanding of God's Word in relation to sin and righteousness?

3. What are the characteristics of genuine repentance?

- Does one demonstrate humility, acknowledge their unworthiness before God, and confess their sins without making excuses?
- Does one actively seek to make amends for the harm their sins have caused?

- Does one accept the consequences of their actions, even when they are painful, as evidence of a truly changed heart?
- Is one's repentance marked by a change in behavior, reflecting a desire to walk in obedience to God's commands?
- Is one growing in qualities like joy, gratitude, peace, and selflessness, which are described in the Bible as fruits of true repentance?

4. What does true repentance lead to?

- Does one strive to live a life that honors God and reflects His holiness, motivated by a love for Him rather than a fear of punishment?
- Does one experience the liberation from guilt and the new start that comes with genuine repentance and God's forgiveness?
- Are they confident in the promise of eternal life that accompanies repentance and faith in Jesus Christ?

What is the difference between remorse and repentance?

Remorse and repentance are often confused, but the Bible makes a clear distinction between these two responses to sin.

Remorse:

- **Definition:** Remorse is a feeling of deep regret or anguish over one's actions, often focused on the negative consequences of sin rather than the sin itself. It can be a powerful emotion but doesn't necessarily lead to a change in behavior or a turning to God.
- **Motivation:** Worldly sorrow, described in 2 Corinthians 7:10, fuels remorse. This sorrow is rooted in self-pity, regret, and the fear of consequences, rather than a genuine grief over having offended God.
- **Outcome:** Remorse can lead to despair, frustration, and a continued cycle of sin. It can be a fleeting emotion that doesn't produce lasting transformation.
- **Examples:** Judas Iscariot experienced remorse after betraying Jesus, returning the money and expressing his guilt, but ultimately taking his own life out of despair instead of repenting and seeking forgiveness. Esau wept bitterly after losing his birthright but didn't truly change his heart.

Repentance

- **Definition:** Repentance (Greek: metanoia) signifies a radical change of mind and

purpose, a turning away from sin and toward God. It involves acknowledging one's wrongdoing, confessing it to God, and seeking His forgiveness through Jesus Christ.

- **Motivation:** Godly sorrow (2 Corinthians 7:10) is the driving force behind repentance. This sorrow stems from a realization that sin offends God and grieves the Holy Spirit. It is accompanied by a genuine desire to change and please God.
- **Outcome:** True repentance leads to salvation, forgiveness, and a transformed life. It involves a consistent effort to live in obedience to God's commands and bear fruit worthy of repentance.
- **Examples:** The Apostle Paul, a former persecutor of Christians, provides a profound example of repentance. After a dramatic encounter with Jesus, he turned from his former life and dedicated himself to serving Christ. King David, after his sin with Bathsheba, expressed deep sorrow and confessed his transgressions to God, demonstrating a truly repentant heart.

In essence, remorse is about feeling bad for what you've done or that you have been caught, while repentance is about being sorry enough to stop doing it and turn towards God. True repentance, driven by godly sorrow and empowered by the Holy Spirit, leads to a transformed life and lasting freedom from the bondage of sin.

Forgiveness

Evaluating understanding of forgiveness based on the Word of God

To assess your understanding of forgiveness in light of the Bible, consider these points and how your actions and beliefs align with them:

Understanding biblical forgiveness:

- Biblical forgiveness is not about glossing over the hurt, excusing the wrongdoing, or justifying the pain inflicted upon you. It stands tall in the face of injustice, demanding recognition of the wrong!
- It doesn't always lead to mending broken relationships or rebuilding trust. Both hearts must be open, and sometimes, safety must take precedence over reconciliation.
- It's not about wiping the slate clean or forgetting the offense; it's about choosing to rise above it, refusing to let it define you, or hold you captive in resentment!
- Embracing forgiveness means shedding the chains of bitterness, vengeance, and the unquenchable thirst for revenge – liberating yourself from the bonds of anger!
- It's about releasing the offender from their debt against you, mirroring how God graciously cancels the staggering debt of our sins when He forgives us!

Reflecting God's forgiveness:

- As undeserving recipients of God's boundless grace and forgiveness through Jesus Christ, we are called to extend that same grace to others. This is not just a suggestion; it's a powerful command, according to Colossians 3:13!
- Contemplate the depths of God's mercy towards you and let it ignite a passionate fire within you to extend that same forgiveness to others, no

matter how difficult!

- Clinging to unforgiveness can poison your relationship with God, blocking the flow of His blessings. Matthew 6:14-15 reveals the profound, reciprocal nature of forgiveness — choose wisely!

Seeking reconciliation where possible:

- While forgiveness stands on its own, it often dances hand-in-hand with a passionate desire for reconciliation!
- If the offender humbly repents and seeks your forgiveness, be prepared to extend it with an open heart, and actively explore avenues to rebuild the shattered trust!
- Remember, reconciliation takes two! Establishing healthy boundaries after forgiveness isn't a sign of weakness; it's wisdom, especially in scenarios fraught with harm or abuse!

Relying on God for strength and guidance:

- Forgiving others, particularly for deep-seated wounds, is a daunting and unnatural journey.
- Cry out in prayer for divine strength and wise guidance from the Holy Spirit to empower you on this path of forgiveness. Embrace the fact that forgiveness is often a journey requiring relentless efforts and dependence on God's unwavering strength!
- Trust in God's supreme sovereignty and infinite wisdom, believing that He will undeniably bring justice and healing in His perfect timing, even when it feels out of reach!

Letting go of bitterness and resentment:

- Acknowledge the profound pain you've endured, but choose to refuse the bitterness and resentment that threaten to take root in your heart!
- Remember the crippling effects of unforgiveness on your own spirit — choose to release those heavy, negative emotions, surrendering them to God's caring embrace.

By examining these aspects and aligning your thoughts, feelings, and actions with

the principles of forgiveness in the Bible, you can evaluate the depth and authenticity of your understanding. Forgiveness is a process, and God is faithful to help you grow in this area as you seek to honor Him and experience the freedom and peace that come from embracing His forgiveness and extending it to others.

Examples of true Forgiveness in God's Word:

1. Joseph and his brothers (Genesis 37-50)

- Joseph's brothers, consumed by jealousy, sell him into slavery, inflicting immense suffering.
- Despite years of separation and hardship, Joseph rises to a position of power in Egypt.
- When his brothers, facing famine, come to Egypt, Joseph reveals his identity and chooses forgiveness instead of revenge.
- Joseph assures them that God used their evil intent for a greater good - saving lives during the famine.
- This story beautifully illustrates the power of forgiveness, reconciliation, and the divine orchestration of events for a larger purpose.

2. David and Saul (1 Samuel 24 and 26)

- King Saul, consumed by jealousy, relentlessly pursues David to kill him.
- David, despite having the opportunity to kill Saul twice, chooses to spare his life.
- David explains that he respects Saul as the Lord's anointed king and trusts God to determine when he will ascend the throne.
- David confronts Saul, demonstrating his loyalty and lack of ill intent.
- David's actions highlight the importance of respecting authority, trusting God's timing, and demonstrating mercy even when facing injustice.

3. The parable of the prodigal son (Luke 15:11-32)

- A younger son demands his inheritance and squanders it in wasteful living.
- When the son returns, repentant and seeking to be a hired servant, his father welcomes him with open arms, symbolizing God's unconditional love and forgiveness.
- This parable emphasizes the joy that accompanies repentance and the

depth of God's redemptive love.

4. Jesus' forgiveness of those who crucified him (Luke 23:34)

- As Jesus hangs on the cross, enduring immense suffering, he prays, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing".
- This powerful act of forgiveness extends to all humanity, emphasizing the importance of forgiveness in the Christian faith and setting the ultimate example for believers.

5. Stephen's forgiveness of his persecutors (Acts 7:54-60)

- As Stephen is being stoned to death for his faith, he mirrors Jesus' example by praying, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them".
- Stephen's forgiveness demonstrates the transformative power of God's grace and sets an example of how to respond to persecution with compassion.

These examples showcase the depth and breadth of forgiveness in the Bible, reminding believers of God's mercy and calling them to extend the same grace to others.

Superficial Forgiveness

According to God's Word, **superficial forgiveness** refers to a kind of forgiveness that doesn't originate from a deep place of the heart. It's essentially **forgiveness that lacks true depth and remains on a surface level**.

Here's how this contrasts with genuine biblical forgiveness:

1. Lack of genuine heart-change

- Superficial forgiveness might involve saying "I forgive you" or trying to move past anger or hurt, but it does not address underlying bitterness or resentment.
- True biblical forgiveness stems from a transformed heart, enabling individuals to release bitterness and move forward.

2. Incomplete resolution

- Superficial forgiveness might involve avoiding the person or situation, but

it does not lead to true reconciliation or resolution.

- Genuine forgiveness, as portrayed in the Bible, aims for full restoration and reconciliation where possible.

3. Conditional vs. unconditional forgiveness (in a sense)

- Some argue that God's forgiveness is conditional on repentance. Likewise, Christians should forgive those who repent. Superficial forgiveness may appear unconditional but could be a way of avoiding confronting sin and its impact.
- However, some scholars argue that Christians are called to a disposition of forgiveness, even when the offender remains unrepentant, leaving the final judgment to God. This highlights the complex nature of forgiveness and the role of repentance in specific situations.

4. Neglecting the example of Christ

- Superficial forgiveness might not reflect the depth of forgiveness and love that Christ demonstrated.
- True biblical forgiveness aims to mirror God's grace and mercy, reflecting the love shown through Christ's sacrifice.

In essence, superficial forgiveness falls short of the transformative and restorative power of genuine biblical forgiveness. It fails to address deep wounds and may hinder true healing and reconciliation in relationships.

Scriptural examples of superficial or false forgiveness in the Bible

While the Bible provides abundant examples of genuine forgiveness, it also highlights instances and warnings against a superficial or false understanding and practice of forgiveness. These examples often demonstrate that true forgiveness is not simply a verbal declaration but involves a deeper transformation and genuine repentance.

Scriptural Examples of Superficial

1. Saul's "repentance" (1 Samuel 15)

- After disobeying God's command to destroy the Amalekites completely, King Saul offers a superficial apology to Samuel, claiming he feared the people and obeyed their voices rather than God's.
- His subsequent actions demonstrate a lack of true heart change and continued disobedience, highlighting a superficial acknowledgment of his sin without genuine repentance.
- God rejects Saul as king due to his continued disobedience and lack of true repentance.

2. David's relationship with Absalom (2 Samuel 14)

- David's approach to Absalom's sin, after Absalom murders his half-brother Amnon, is a complex example of attempting to reconcile without fully dealing with the underlying sin and consequences.
- Initially, David isolates Absalom and later allows him to return to Jerusalem but refuses to see him.
- While David's desire for reconciliation may have been genuine, his actions in ignoring Absalom's sin and the consequences that followed demonstrate a form of superficial forgiveness that ultimately leads to further heartache and rebellion from Absalom.

3. The Unforgiving Servant (Matthew 18:23-35)

- Jesus tells a parable about a servant who is forgiven a massive debt by his master but then refuses to forgive a much smaller debt owed to him by a fellow servant.
- This parable illustrates the danger of a superficial understanding of forgiveness and warns against failing to extend the same mercy and grace that one has received from God to others.
- The unforgiving servant's actions reveal that his initial forgiveness was not rooted in a transformed heart but was a temporary reprieve without a true change of attitude.

4. Warnings against hypocrisy and "false repentance" (2 Corinthians 7:8-11)

- Paul distinguishes between **godly sorrow**, which leads to repentance and salvation, and **worldly sorrow**, which produces death.

- Worldly sorrow might involve expressing remorse for consequences rather than the sin itself, exhibiting a superficial form of repentance without genuine heart change.
- This passage highlights the importance of genuine repentance that flows from a changed heart and is a prerequisite for true forgiveness.

These examples demonstrate that genuine forgiveness involves a deep heart change, acknowledging sin, seeking true repentance, and extending grace and mercy as demonstrated by God. Superficial forgiveness, on the other hand, falls short of these biblical standards and can lead to continued brokenness in relationships

Reconciliation

The Bible passionately unveils reconciliation as a fundamental theme, illustrating the profound restoration of humanity's bond with God while fervently mending the fragile relationships between individuals.

Here's a breakdown of what God's Word says about reconciliation:

1. Reconciliation between God and humanity

- **Humanity's alienation from God through sin:** The Bible teaches that human sin broke the perfect relationship between God and humanity, leading to estrangement and hostility.
- **God's initiative to reconcile:** God, in His love and mercy, took the initiative to reconcile humanity back to Himself.
- **Christ's sacrificial death as the means:** God, through the sacrifice of His Son, Jesus Christ, on the cross, made peace and provided the means for reconciliation.
- **Not counting sins against us:** God in Christ was reconciling the world to Himself, not counting people's sins against them.
- **Resulting in salvation and new life:** Through this reconciliation, people are brought back into relationship with God, receiving salvation and the opportunity to live a new life in Christ.

2. Reconciliation between individuals

- **Reflecting God's example:** Since God has reconciled people to Himself, believers are called to be reconcilers in relationships with others.
- **The ministry of reconciliation:** Believers are entrusted with the message and the ministry of reconciliation, becoming ambassadors for Christ in the world.
- **Practical steps for mending relationships:** The Bible provides guidance for practical steps towards reconciliation with others, including:

- **Praying for wisdom and examining your heart:** Seeking God's guidance and addressing personal bitterness before approaching the other person.
- **Seeking to understand the other's perspective:** Approaching the situation with humility and empathy, striving to understand their viewpoint.
- **Going directly to the person (privately):** Addressing the issue with gentleness and honesty, using "I" statements rather than accusations.
- **Offering forgiveness freely:** Extending forgiveness, just as God has forgiven people.
- **Bringing in a third party if needed:** Seeking counsel from a trusted spiritual leader or mediator if the issue is not resolved privately.
- **Moving forward in love and humility:** Continuing to show kindness and grace, even if reconciliation is difficult.

3. Reconciliation and forgiveness: a crucial distinction

- While forgiveness is an essential part of reconciliation, they are not the same thing.
- **Forgiveness** involves releasing the debt and choosing to no longer hold the harm done against a person. It is an act that can be performed even if the other person is unrepentant or unwilling to reconcile.
- **Reconciliation**, on the other hand, involves restoring the relationship and requires repentance from the offender and a willingness from both parties to rebuild trust and re-establish a healthy connection.

God's Word reveals that reconciliation is a divine act of restoring broken relationships, both between God and humanity and between individuals. It is rooted in God's love and forgiveness, made possible through Christ's sacrifice, and believers are called to participate in this process by extending grace, forgiveness, and seeking peace in their relationships.

Scriptural examples of reconciliation between people in the Bible

The Bible provides several powerful illustrations of individuals reconciling broken relationships, demonstrating the principles of forgiveness, humility, and the desire for peace among believers.

1. Jacob and Esau (Genesis 33)

- After years of estrangement and hostility due to Jacob deceiving Esau and stealing his birthright, Jacob approaches Esau with gifts and humility, bowing down before him.
- Esau's response of running to meet Jacob, embracing and weeping with him, illustrates the transformative power of reconciliation and forgiveness.

2. Joseph and his brothers (Genesis 45, Genesis 50)

- Years after his brothers sold him into slavery, Joseph, now powerful in Egypt, reveals his identity and forgives them.
- Joseph's forgiveness is rooted in his understanding of God's sovereignty and His ability to use their evil actions for a greater good - preserving his family and the nation of Israel.
- This reconciliation moves beyond just forgiveness to the restoration of their family, as Joseph invites them to live in Egypt and share in his life there.

3. Paul and Philemon (Book of Philemon)

- Paul writes to Philemon, a wealthy Christian, urging him to forgive his runaway slave Onesimus, who had stolen from him and sought refuge with Paul in Rome.
- Paul appeals to Philemon to receive Onesimus not as a slave but as a brother in Christ, emphasizing the transformative power of the gospel to bridge social and hierarchical divides.
- Paul even offers to repay Onesimus' debts, demonstrating the lengths to which he would go to facilitate reconciliation and the power of love and forgiveness to heal fractured relationships.

4. Paul and Barnabas (Acts 15)

- Paul and Barnabas experience a "sharp disagreement" over whether to include John Mark on their second missionary journey, leading them to separate and form two missionary teams.
- While there is no record of their continuing in active ministry together, later mentions of Barnabas in Paul's letters suggest a reconciliation and a continued respect for their shared ministry.

- This example shows that disagreements, even sharp ones, don't necessarily have to lead to permanent separation or bitterness, and that God can use such situations to further His work.

5. David and Mephibosheth (2 Samuel 9)

- King David seeks out Mephibosheth, Jonathan's son and Saul's grandson, to show him kindness, recalling his covenant with Jonathan.
- Mephibosheth, expecting punishment, is met with David's grace, receiving restoration of Saul's land and a place at the king's table.
- This story beautifully reflects God's grace and reconciliation towards humanity, extending kindness and restoration despite past transgressions or potential threats.

These examples demonstrate the importance of reconciliation in the Bible, highlighting the need for forgiveness, humility, and the willingness to pursue peace, even in challenging circumstances. They serve as powerful reminders of the transforming power of God's grace to heal relationships and bring about unity.

Scriptural examples of people who refused reconciliation in the Bible

While the Bible emphasizes reconciliation, it also presents instances where individuals reject the opportunity for reconciliation, leading to further conflict, suffering, or a deepening of their separation from others or even from God.

Here are some examples of people who refused or failed to fully embrace reconciliation:

1. Cain (Genesis 4)

- After God rejects Cain's offering, Cain becomes angry.
- God warns him about the danger of sin and encourages him to do what is right.
- However, Cain ignores the warning and murders his brother Abel.
- This act of hatred and violence demonstrates Cain's refusal to heed God's warning and to reconcile with his brother.

2. Pharaoh (Exodus 7-14)

- Despite repeated pleas from Moses and Aaron, backed by miraculous signs and plagues, Pharaoh refuses to let the Israelites go.
- His refusal is rooted in his pride and stubbornness, as he perceives himself as a god and does not want to lose the Israelites as slave labor.
- God hardens Pharaoh's heart, but Pharaoh also hardened his own heart choosing to remain in opposition to God's will and suffering the consequences of his actions.
- Pharaoh's repeated refusal highlights a defiant stance against reconciliation with God and his people.

3. King Saul (1 Samuel 18-31)

- Saul's jealousy and paranoia towards David lead him to repeatedly seek David's life, despite David's continued loyalty and respect for Saul as the Lord's anointed.
- Even after instances where David spares Saul's life and demonstrates his innocence, Saul's bitterness and paranoia drive him to continue persecuting David.
- While there are moments of apparent reconciliation, these are short-lived, as Saul consistently returns to his vengeful pursuits.
- Saul's story underscores the destructive consequences of unchecked jealousy and a refusal to reconcile.

4. The Jews and Samaritans (John 4)

The historical and religious animosity between Jews and Samaritans is evident in the interaction between Jesus and the Samaritan woman at the well. Despite their shared Israelite heritage, the two groups had long been estranged due to ideological and ethno-religious differences.

- The Samaritan woman initially expresses surprise that Jesus, a Jew, would even speak to her.
- This highlights the existing refusal of reconciliation between the two groups, although Jesus himself demonstrates a willingness to bridge the gap.

These examples serve as cautionary tales, demonstrating the devastating consequences of refusing to reconcile and emphasizing the importance of forgiveness, humility, and seeking peace in relationships, both with God and with

others.

Refusing to Reconcile

Based on God's Word, people may refuse to reconcile for several reasons, often rooted in sin and its consequences.

- **Lack of genuine repentance:** Reconciliation requires the offending party to acknowledge their wrongdoing and demonstrate a willingness to change. If an individual is unwilling to confess their sin, accept responsibility, or show genuine sorrow for the harm they've caused, reconciliation is impossible.
- **Hardened heart:** When people continually resist the Holy Spirit's conviction, their hearts can become hardened. This can manifest as an unwillingness to admit fault, blaming others, or justifying their actions. A hardened heart creates a barrier, making reconciliation difficult, if not impossible.
- **Pride:** Pride is a significant barrier to reconciliation. Pride makes individuals unwilling to admit their mistakes or seek forgiveness, and it can prevent them from seeing the need for reconciliation. Proverbs 13:10 (NLT) states, "Pride is often the unseen force driving arguments and conflicts". Pride can lead to division and hinder the unity that God desires.
- **Fear and insecurity:** Fear of rejection, vulnerability, or further harm can prevent individuals from seeking reconciliation or being open to it when it's offered. Insecurity, driven by the enemy, can also hinder reconciliation, making people hesitant to engage in the process.
- **Lack of trust:** When significant trust has been broken, especially in cases of severe harm or betrayal, rebuilding trust can be a long and challenging process. Even with genuine repentance, the offended party may need time to see consistent change and rebuild trust before fully reconciling.
- **Unwillingness to forgive:** While reconciliation requires repentance from the offender, it also requires a willingness to forgive from the offended party. Unforgiveness can hinder a person's relationship with God and create a barrier to reconciliation.

In essence, these reasons highlight the impact of sin and its destructive consequences on relationships, preventing the healing and restoration that God desires.



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