

Repent! What does that mean to you?
2008 Grace Conference
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I. This word continues to sharply divide Bible believers all around the world!
How many different meanings do you think are ascribed to repent?

Take a moment and write down your simplest definition for repent in the space provided:

It is likely your definition is correct in view of the many options available!
[Show the definitions and sources on screen.](#)

Chart 1:

A Comparison of modern meanings: Repent or repentance by definition:

1. **S:** (n) **repentance, penitence, penance** (**remorse for your past conduct**)
<http://wordnet.princeton.edu>
2. **The condition of being penitent; a feeling of regret or remorse for doing wrong or sinning**
en.wiktionary.org/wiki/repentance
3. **A turning with sorrow from a past course or action**
www.innvista.com/culture/religion/diction.htm
4. **Feeling regret for sins committed and asking for forgiveness.**
www.saburchill.com/history/hist003.html
5. **Repentance is complete remorse and sorrow for one's sins, which are the transgression of the holy laws and commandments of God, whether in the letter or the spirit of the law.**
www.biblestudy.org/beginner/basic-bible-teachings.html
6. **Turning back to God, redirecting one's life towards God**
www.request.org.uk/main/churches/glossary.htm
7. **To be sorry for the sins that you have committed.**
re-xs.ucsm.ac.uk/cupboard/exam/examsupp/dloads/cp/cp35.htm
8. **Merriam-Webster: re-pen-tance – noun;**
The action or process of repenting especially for misdeeds or moral shortcomings - Date: 14th century
synonyms see [penitence](#)
<http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/repenting>
9. **Repent- verb**
Etymology:
Middle English, from Anglo-French *repentir*, from **Medieval Latin** *repenitēre*, from Latin *re-* + Late Latin *poenitēre* to feel regret, alteration of Latin *paenitēre* — more at [penitent](#) Date: 14th century

Intransitive verb

1: to turn from sin and dedicate oneself to the amendment of one's life

2 a: to feel regret or contrition b: to change one's mind

Transitive verb

1: to cause to feel regret or contrition

2: to feel sorrow, regret, or contrition for

<http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/repenting>

10. Penitent;

Etymology:

Middle English, from **Middle French & Latin**; Middle French *penitent*, from Latin *paenitent-*, *paenitens*, from present participle of *paenitēre* to cause regret, feel regret, perhaps from *paene* almost Date: 14th century

Function: adjective

Feeling or expressing humble or regretful pain or sorrow for sins or offenses

Function: noun

1: a person who repents of sin

2 : a person under church censure but admitted to penance or reconciliation especially under the direction of a confessor

<http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary>

Did you find a definition that affirmed your answer? **Maybe not all of you found one!**

Why are there so many unresolved theological debates about this word today?

We are saying the same word, but having different meanings!

Have you wondered why there are so many varying meanings for one word?

What is very interesting to note at this point is how the original manuscript words translated 'repent' do not mirror the meanings we just read!

[The original texts for OT and NT do not use the word 'repent']

II. Let's look at a brief history and theology use of the word repentance that may make it clearer for you! **[Credit Robert Wilken for his major work on the history and use of repent]**

Old Testament- Hebrew usage of 'repent' – shu'b

¹JER 15:6 "You who have forsaken Me," declares the \Lord\, "You keep going backward. So I will stretch out My hand against you and destroy you; I am tired of relenting! JER 15:7 "And I will winnow them with a winnowing fork At the gates of the land; I will bereave {them} of children, I will destroy My people; **They did not repent of their ways.**

7725 - **shub** :a primary, primitive root;: to turn back, return:**136 Translations- used for repent- max. 13 times; Return (263),**

¹ "All Scripture taken from the NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE®, Copyright © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995 by The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission."¹

Classic Greek²- The Pre-Christian Meaning of *Metanoia*

In Classical Greek *metanoia* meant changing one's mind about someone or something.

"Thucydides used the term when writing about the response of the Athenian council to a revolt. The council decided that all of the men of the city of Mytilene were to be put to death--not merely those who participated in the revolt. However, on "the next day a *change of heart* came over them."⁶² The Athenian council changed its mind. It decided that only those who participated in the rebellion should be put to death."

New Testament Greek²

Basic Sense: Change of Mind

"The pre-Christian meaning of *metanoia* as a change of mind is its basic NT sense as well.

"This can readily be seen in Heb 12:17 which reads: "For you know that afterward, when he wanted to inherit a blessing, he [Esau] was rejected, for he found no place for *metanoia*, though he sought it diligently with tears." What was it that Esau could not find? It was not a turning from sinful behavior. It was not penance. What he could not find was *a way to change his father's mind*. The matter was settled. No matter how much he pleaded, he couldn't change Isaac's mind."

"All NT uses include the sense of a change of mind present. However, if the context clearly indicates what one is changing his mind about, it could be that a more polished English translation can be found. For instance, if one is to change his mind about his sinful deeds, the term repentance conveys that thought nicely."

There are four specialized types of uses of *metanoia* in the NT:

1. A Synonym for Eternal Salvation

"In a few passages *metanoia* is used via metonymy as a synonym for eternal salvation. These cases involve a metonymy of cause for the effect. The cause is a change of mind about Christ and His Gospel. The effect is eternal salvation. Thus when we read in 2 Pet 3:9, "The Lord is . . . not willing that any should perish but that all should come to *metanoia*," the idea is the same as 1 Tim 2:4, "[God] desires all men to be saved."

Luke 5:32 illustrates this same usage: "I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners, *to metanoia*." That is, Jesus is affirming that He didn't come to call those who think that they are righteous, but those who know themselves to be sinners, to salvation. *Metanoia* is used as a synonym for eternal salvation."

2. A Change of Mind Regarding Sinful Behavior =Repentance

On some occasions *metanoia* is used in contexts where the change of mind in view is clearly indicated as having to do with one's sinful practices. For example, in Luke 17:3-4 Jesus taught the disciples that they were to forgive all who sinned against them if they came and indicated that they had changed their minds regarding their sin. In this case and others like it "repentance" would be a good translation choice. We are to forgive anyone who sins against us and then repents.

² REPENTANCE AND SALVATION; Part 3: New Testament, Repentance: Lexical Considerations, ROBERT N. WILKIN
<http://www.faithalone.org/journal/1989ii/Wilkin.html>

It is important to note, as shall be brought out further in future articles, that eternal salvation is never conditioned upon changing one's mind about (i.e., repenting concerning) his sinful practices.

3. A Change of Mind Regarding Self and Christ

"Many NT passages use *metanoia* in contexts where what one is to change his mind about is himself and Christ. For example, in Acts 2:38, after having indicted his Jewish audience for crucifying their Messiah and in response to their question "What shall we do?" Peter called them to change their minds about Jesus Christ. They had rejected Him. Now they could accept Him. They were to believe that He is the Messiah, the Christ, the Savior of the world. Such a mindset includes a recognition that one is a sinner in need of the Savior. Self-righteousness is clearly antithetical to faith (cf. Luke 18:9-14). In this use *metanoia* occurs as a virtual synonym for *pistis* (faith). {The Gospel of John}"

4. A Change of Mind Regarding Idols and God

"In one passage the object of *metanoia* is stated as idols and God (Acts 17:29-31). Paul told the Athenian philosophers that God raised Jesus Christ from the dead and that He would be coming back to earth as Judge. He told his listeners that in order to escape eternal condemnation they had to change their minds about their idols and about God and the Man whom He had sent and would send again. They had to transfer their faith from their idols to God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ"

The Pre-Reformation View³

"Salvation is wrought, they thought, certainly by divine pardon but on the ground of **repentance [self-amendment before God]**,⁴ not apparently on the ground of the death of Christ alone."

Repentance Defined as Contrition, Confession, and Performing Prescribed Acts of Penance

"**The apostolic fathers taught** that in order to retain salvation from eternal judgment one had to feel sorry for and confess his post-baptismal sins to a priest and then do whatever acts of penance were prescribed by the priest."¹¹

The Latin Fathers translated, or rather mistranslated, the NT words *metanoeo* and *metanoia* to reflect their theological bias. They translated those terms as *poenitentiam agite* and *poenitentia*, "**to do acts of penance**" and "**acts of penance,**" respectively.¹²

Those mis-translations unfortunately became part **of the Old Latin and then the Latin Vulgate versions of the Bible.** It was not until the Reformation that those translations were given a serious and widespread challenge.⁴

³ Wilkins; Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society, Autumn 1988 -- Volume 1:1; <http://www.faithalone.org/journal/1988ii/wilkin.html>

³ See Thomas E. Torrance, *The Doctrine of Grace in the Apostolic Fathers* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1959).

⁴ ¹² See William Douglas Chamberlain, *The Meaning of Repentance* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1943), 27-28; Edgar R. Smothers, "The New Testament Concept of Metanoia," *Classical Bulletin* 10 (1933): 7-8; Aloys Herman Dirksen, *The New Testament Concept of Metanoia* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America, 1932), 66-67; and John Cecil Anderson, "Repentance in the Greek New Testament (Th.D. dissertation, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1959), 14ff

Wilkins; Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society, Autumn 1988 -- Volume 1:1 <http://www.faithalone.org/journal/1988ii/wilkin.html>

Reformation Views

Repentance (*Metanoia*) Defined as a Change of Mind

"In contrast to the Church's definition of *metanoia* as involving contrition, confession, and the performance of acts of penance, Calvin and Luther concluded that it retained its classical sense of "a change of mind."⁵²¹

"Salvific repentance according to Calvin and Luther was a change of mind whereby one recognized his own sinfulness and need of forgiveness and then turned in faith to God to provide that forgiveness in Christ."²²

"In essence, then, Luther and Calvin viewed salvific repentance as an essential part of saving faith."

Summary

"The Reformation introduced a new view of salvific repentance. Calvin taught that all sins were forgiven at the point of conversion, that -penance was unnecessary for the forgiveness of post-baptismal sins, and that the NT term *metanoia* referred to a change of mind whereby one recognizes his sinfulness and need of forgiveness in Christ."

Post-Reformation Views

The post-Reformation period has **seen the continuation** of the previously held views and the emergence of new ones.

1. Contrition, Confession, and Performing Acts of Penance

[Note- All of our first 10 examples followed this application of meaning!]

"The Roman view of salvific repentance has continued from the Reformation until the present. The views of Calvin and Luther have continued as well."

"However, their views have in some cases been modified so that today **there are basically three Protestant views of salvific repentance.**"²³

²³However, each of these views has two forms. Thus, as we shall soon see, in actuality there are six Protestant views of salvific repentance. It should be noted as well that all of these views teach that salvific repentance must be combined with faith in Jesus Christ for a person to gain salvation from eternal judgment.

2. Turning Away from Sin

"Those holding to this view consider salvific repentance to be **the actual turning away from one's sins** and not merely a willingness or intention to do so."²⁴

They would tell an alcoholic, for example, that in order to become a Christian he would first have to stop getting drunk."

²⁴See, for example, James Montgomery Boice, *Christ's Call to Discipleship* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1986), 105-114; James Graham, "Repentance," *Evangelical Quarterly* 25 (1953): 233; George Peters, "The Meaning of Conversion," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 120 (1963):236, 239; Rudolph Schnackenburg, *The Moral Teaching of the New Testament* (Freiburg: Herder and Herder, 1965), 25-33; Charles Scobie, *John the Baptist* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1964), 80, 112, 148; A. H. Strong, *Systematic Theology*

⁵ Wilkins; Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society, Autumn 1988 -- Volume 1:1;<http://www.faithalone.org/journal/1988ii/wilkin.html>

²¹See Luther, *Luther's Works*, Vol. 48, *Letters* (May 30, 1518 Letter to John von Staupitz), 65-70; Calvin, *Institutes*, 3. 3. 1-16; and Dirksen, *Metanoia*, 79-80 and "Metanoite," *The Bible Today* 19 (1965): 1262, 1266.

²²See Calvin, *Institutes*, 3. 3. 5, 18; 3. 4. 1-39; and Luther, *Luther's Works*, vol.48, *Letters*, 66-67.

(Philadelphia: Judson Press, 1912), 832-35; and Eugene La Verdere, "The Need for Salvation: A New Testament Perspective," *Chicago Studies* 21 (1982): 234.

3. A Willingness or Resolution to Stop Sinning

"Others argue that one needs to be *willing* to turn from his sins.²⁵

They would tell an alcoholic that in order to become a Christian he would first have to be willing to stop getting drunk. They would stop short of saying that he actually had to stop drinking before he could be saved."

²⁵See, for example, William Barclay, *Great Themes of the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1979), 72-73; Lewis Bookwalter, *Repentance* (Dayton, OH: United Brethren Publishing House, 1902), 30, 43, 53-55; William Douglas Chamberlain, *The Meaning of Repentance* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1943), 47, 143-44, 216, 222-23; Daniel Fuller, *Gospel and Law: Contrast or Continuum?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 151-52; Kenneth Gentry, "The Great Option: A Study of the Lordship Controversy," *Baptist Reformation Review* 5 (1976): 57-62, 77; Billy Graham, *The Meaning of Repentance* (Minneapolis: The Billy Graham Evangelistic Association, 1967), 5-11; George Ladd, *The Gospel of the Kingdom* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1959), 95-106; Howard Marshall, *Kept by the Power of God* (London: Epworth Press, 1969), 37-38; J. I. Packer, *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1961), 70-73; Kazimierz Romaniuk, "Repentez-vous, car le Royaume des Cieux est tout proche (Matt. iv. 17 par.)," *New Testament Studies* 12 (1966): 264; Robert Shank, *Life in the Son* (Springfield, MO: Wescott Publishers, 1960), 324; Bob Stokes, *Repentance, Revival, and the Holy Spirit* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1975), 10-16, 24; John R. W. Stott, *Basic Christianity* (London: InterVarsity Fellowship, 1958), 111-32, and "Must Christ be Lord to be Savior?," *Eternity* 10 (1959): 15, 17; Lehman Strauss, *Repentance* (Findley, OH: Dunham Publishing Co., 1959), 13-19; and Effie Freeman Thompson, *METANOEO and METAMELEI in Greek Literature Until 100 A. D., Including a Discussion of Their Cognates and of Their Hebrew Equivalents* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1908), 24-25.

"People holding to these [last two] views might stress to varying degrees the need to be sorry about one's sins and to commit oneself to the Lordship of Jesus Christ."

4. A Change of Thinking

"Some Protestants suggest that salvific repentance does not involve turning from ones sins or even the willingness to do so. Rather, they argue that salvific repentance is a change of mind whereby a person recognizes his sinfulness and need of salvation and sees Jesus Christ as the sinless Substitute who died on the cross for his sins.²⁶ **They thus understand NT metanoia in its classical sense.**" **[Wilkin's conclusion]**

"They would tell an alcoholic that he had to recognize his sinfulness and need of salvation and place his faith solely in Jesus Christ in order to be saved from eternal condemnation. They would avoid giving the impression that the individual had to change his lifestyle or be willing to do so in order to obtain salvation from eternal condemnation."

<http://www.faithalone.org/journal/1988ii/wilkin.html>

Wilkins; *Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society*, Autumn 1988 -- Volume 1:1

III. What do we do when words have taken on subjective interpretations?

Postmodern thinking encourages subjective interpretation of all things.

In religion:

Ex: Karl Barth- "fideist approach to theology brought a rise in subjectivity"

“Fideism is the view that religious belief relies primarily on faith or special revelation, rather than rational inference or observation (see natural theology). The word *fideism* comes from *fides*, the Latin word for faith, and literally means faith-ism.”¹¹⁶

Ex: in arenas outside of scientific method: creation- must be taken by faith, yet there is evidence that can support it. But there has to be a basis for faith!

1. Postmodernist thinking affords the choice to claim truth in a context other than objectivity, which allows for a concept held by an individual to be true, sacred, and exempt or self-standing apart from rational judgment.
2. People can hold to a subjective meaning of a word simply because it is an integral part of their faith- something which they believe to be sacred. Any challenge to alter that view even through an objective, reasoning processes is likely to be met with distrust and hostility.
3. All of us are controlled by our core beliefs to some extent. We can be subjectively biased to receive things only through our safe grid! It really is a part of human nature- we are more like Capt. Kirk than his side-kick- Spock!

“The Truth Project”- example: Touchdown or out of bounds?

IV. How can grace bring us back together? Some Scripture guided goals for a gracious response: Grace is an important doctrine, but it is more than a doctrine, it is also a way of living that pleases God!

⁷COL 2:6 **As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, {so} walk in Him**, COL 2:7 having been firmly rooted {and now} being built up in Him and established in your faith, just as you were instructed, {and} overflowing with gratitude. COL 2:8 See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ.

How do we live with those who consider us anathema for disagreeing with their positions?

GAL 1:8 But even though we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to that which we have preached to you, **let him be accursed**. GAL 1:9 As we have said before, so I say again now, if any man is preaching to you a gospel contrary to that which you received, **let him be accursed**.

We can appeal to the Word as our authority, with humility and gentleness.

1CO 13:4 Love is patient, love is kind, {and} is not jealous; love does not brag {and} is not arrogant, 1CO 13:5 does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong {suffered,} 1CO 13:6 does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth;

COL 3:12 And so, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on **a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience;**

Grace would not seek to provoke, but would patiently seek the truth!

⁶ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fideism>

⁷ “All Scripture taken from the NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE®, Copyright © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995 by The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission.”⁷

2TI 2:23 But **refuse foolish and ignorant speculations**, knowing that **they produce quarrels**. 2TI 2:24 And the Lord's bond-servant must not be quarrelsome, but be kind to all, able to teach, patient when wronged, 2TI 2:25 with gentleness correcting those who are in opposition, if perhaps **God may grant them repentance** leading to the knowledge of the truth,

We can seek to explain Scripture without a **polemic goal!**

EPH 4:14 As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves, and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming; EPH 4:15 but **speaking the truth in love**, we are to grow up in all {aspects} into Him, who is the head, {even} Christ,

We can teach texts without using a loaded English word such as 'repent', but, in its place, use the best original and biblical word!

1. **"A Synonym for Eternal Salvation"**
2. **"A Change of Mind Regarding Sinful Behavior"**
3. **"A Change of Mind Regarding Self and Christ"**
4. **"A Change of Mind Regarding Idols and God"**

Grace would seek to love those who disagree or even hate me for my position!

LUK 6:27 "But I say to you who hear, love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, LUK 6:35 "But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High; for He Himself is kind to ungrateful and evil {men.}

But, grace would also mark those who continue to be divisive and leave them to themselves!

ROM 16:16 Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the churches of Christ greet you. ROM 16:17 Now I urge you, brethren, **keep your eye on those who cause dissensions** and hindrances contrary to the teaching which you learned, **and turn away from them**

1TI 6:3 If anyone advocates a different doctrine, and does not agree with sound words, those of our Lord Jesus Christ, and with the doctrine conforming to godliness, 1TI 6:4 he is conceited {and} understands nothing; but he has a morbid interest in **controversial questions and disputes about words**, out of which arise **envy, strife, abusive language, evil suspicions,**

TIT 3:9 **But shun foolish controversies and genealogies and strife and disputes about the Law; for they are unprofitable and worthless.** TIT 3:10 **Reject a factious man after a first and second warning,** TIT 3:11 knowing that such a man is perverted and is sinning, being self-condemned.

Resources foot noted on page, with referred footnotes included.

Quotes and purple text are direct quotes from other authors.

Blue highlighted words are for presenter's emphasis.