

Understanding Repentance and Salvation

Why do we need repentance?

The reason why we need repentance is because the Bible clearly states that mankind fell into sin since the fall of man at creation. The Bible says in Romans 3:23; “For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God;”

How sin entered the world

There were two important events that took place prior to the fall of man. One of them was the creation of the universe. God created the world and all within it, and He called it good ([Genesis 1:1–31](#)). The other event was when Satan rebelled against God in heaven and was cast out. The story of creation and the fall can be found in [Genesis 1–3](#).

Mankind was [created in God’s image](#) and was designed to live a life of fellowship with Him. God fashioned Adam, the first man, from the earth: “then the LORD God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature” ([Genesis 2:7](#)). He placed Adam “... in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it” ([Genesis 2:15](#)) and told Adam he could eat from any tree in the garden except for one—the tree of the knowledge of good and evil at the center of the garden. The consequence for doing so would be to surely die ([Genesis 2:16–17](#)). After the creation of Adam, God said that it was not good for man to be alone, so He created the first woman, Eve, from Adam’s rib ([Genesis 2:18–25](#)). God blessed them, told them to “be fruitful and multiply” and gave them dominion over the earth ([Genesis 1:28](#)).

In [Genesis 3](#), a new character, the serpent, is introduced. The serpent was described as: “more crafty than any other beast of the field that the LORD God had made” ([Genesis 3:1](#)), and he was Satan in disguise. Satan had already been thrown down from heaven because of his rebellion towards God ([Luke 10:18](#)). The serpent spoke with Eve and hinted that God was withholding from Adam and Eve by not letting them eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil; he told her that if they ate the fruit from the tree that they would become like God ([Genesis 3:1–5](#)). Eve ate the fruit from the tree and then gave some to Adam and he ate it, as well ([Genesis 3:6](#)). At this moment, known as the fall of mankind, sin entered the world ([Romans 5:12](#)).

Understanding sin

Sin is disobedience to God’s commandments, either by doing what is forbidden or failing to do what is required. Mark 7:20-23, Galatians 5:19-26). In the Bible, sin is a serious evil that disrupts our relationship with God (Matthew 5:29-30, Mark 9:42-48, Romans 8:7-8, Romans 6:23).

Sin is the act of disobedience and rebellion against God. The introduction of sin into the world by Adam and Eve caused the earth and all its inhabitants to be under sin’s curse ([Genesis 3:14–19](#)). Sin brought God’s judgment on mankind, which has the punishment of

eternal death: “For the wages of sin is death” ([Romans 6:23](#)). However, God made a way by which humans could find a pardon for sin.

Adam and Eve’s eating of the fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil caused them to realize their nakedness and experience shame for the first time. In the garden of Eden, God killed an animal and used the skins to create a covering for Adam and Eve’s nakedness ([Genesis 3:21](#)). This act served as a picture of the ultimate redemption to come when Jesus, the Perfect Lamb, was slain as the sacrifice for mankind’s sins ([John 1:29](#); [Revelation 13:8](#)).

After the fall of man, God drove Adam and Eve out of the garden of Eden and placed the cherubim as guard of the garden to ensure that they were never able to return ([Genesis 3:23–24](#)). Ever since, humanity has encountered pain, suffering, and toil in every aspect of their lives—from the struggle of providing for a family and finding a home to experiencing pain in childbirth. It is all a result of the curse God brought on the earth after the fall of man. This event is referred to as the fall of man because the curse that Adam’s sin brought on the world did not just apply to him but to every human being who has ever and will ever live. Even in the depths of Adam’s despair over having forever compromised his unhindered fellowship with God, man’s original purpose, God promised that He would bring redemption through the seed of the woman ([Genesis 3:15](#)). God fulfilled that promise by sending Jesus Christ on the earth to redeem mankind ([John 3:16](#)).

Frequently Asked Questions includes;

- 1) Is it true that “Once You Are Saved, You Remain Always Saved?”
- 2) What Can Cause Someone To Lose Salvation?
- 3) Can We Be Saved Without Good Works?

Most Christians believe we are justified and saved by faith alone, but good works are the necessary result and evidence of that salvation. In contrast, there is a modern doctrine, popularized by some evangelists and organizations, that believing Jesus Christ is the Son of God and our Savior is all that is required for salvation, and we can never lose that salvation. However, the overall weight of Biblical evidence points to the conclusion that a person who goes on willfully sinning has either intentionally abandoned his or her faith or never sincerely made a faith commitment in the first place. True faith involves a commitment to trust God and to do our best to live according to His commandments:

If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sins is left, but only a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God. Anyone who rejected the law of Moses died without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. How much more severely do you think a man deserves to be punished who has trampled the blood of the Son of God under foot, who has treated as an unholy thing the blood of the covenant that sanctified him, and who has insulted the Spirit of grace? For we know him who said, “It is mine to avenge; I will repay,” and again, “The Lord will judge his people.” It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. (NIV, Hebrews 10:26-31)

Cling tightly to your faith in Christ, and always keep your conscience clear. For some people have deliberately violated their consciences; as a result, their faith has been shipwrecked. (NLT, 1 Timothy 1:19)

The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.

The Bible says, “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires. Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other”. (NIV, Galatians 5:19-26)

Will God Forgive My Terrible Sins?

Sin is disobedience to God’s commandments, either by doing what is forbidden or failing to do what is required. The good news is that, no matter how serious the sin, God is always seeking us out and is willing to forgive and forget our sins and give us a fresh start. As long as we live, it is never too late to ask for forgiveness and make a new start! However, two things are required as conditions of forgiveness: sincere repentance (turning away from sin) and forgiveness of other people who may sin against us.

What About the “Unpardonable” Sin of Blasphemy Against the Holy Spirit?

Jesus said blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is an unpardonable sin:

I tell you the truth, all the sins and blasphemies of men will be forgiven them. But whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will never be forgiven; he is guilty of an eternal sin. (NIV, Mark 3:28-29)

The nature of this sin has been the subject of much debate. In context, Jesus was referring to the sin of the teachers of the law (Mark 3:22-30) who said Jesus was possessed by demons and had an evil spirit. The total spiritual blindness of those who mistook the work of Jesus for the work of Satan put them beyond hope of repentance, faith and forgiveness.

Many people worry about committing the unpardonable sin accidentally or in a moment of weakness, but most Bible experts say there is no need for such worry. It is not that any sin is beyond the power of God’s grace. The sin of the teachers of the law was not forgiven because their own stubborn perversion of the truth and hardness of heart prevented them from repenting. Those people who are concerned enough to worry about their sins are not in danger of committing an unpardonable sin.

Frequently Asked Questions

- What do I have to do for God to forgive my sins?
- Do I have to make restitution or correct the wrong I did to be forgiven?

- Do I have to forgive someone who does not repent and ask for forgiveness?
- How many times must I forgive someone?
- Will I go to hell if I committed the unpardonable sin of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit in a moment of weakness?
- Will God forgive me if I can't stop sinning?
- Why do I still feel guilty after asking for forgiveness?
- Is it apostasy if I stopped believing in God and Christ at one time, and will God forgive me?
- Do I have to forgive and forget other people's sins?
- Will God forgive me for backsliding, or is that apostasy?
- What is the unpardonable or unforgivable sin?
- Do we have to confess our sins to other people?

God Forgives And Forgets

The good news is that, no matter how serious the sin, God is always seeking us out and is willing to forgive and forget our sins and give us a fresh start. As long as we live, it is never too late to ask for forgiveness and make a new start!

So Jesus used this illustration: "If you had one hundred sheep, and one of them strayed away and was lost in the wilderness, wouldn't you leave the ninety-nine others to go and search for the lost one until you found it? And then you would joyfully carry it home on your shoulders. When you arrived, you would call together your friends and neighbors to rejoice with you because your lost sheep was found. In the same way, heaven will be happier over one lost sinner who returns to God than over ninety-nine others who are righteous and haven't strayed away! (NLT, Luke 15:3-7)

When we have sinned, we can ask God for forgiveness, as in the Lord's Prayer: and forgive us our sins, just as we have forgiven those who have sinned against us. (TLB, Matthew 6:12)

Related verses: Psalms 25:7, Psalms 32:1-2, Isaiah 43:25, Matthew 1:21, Matthew 18:12-14, Matthew 26:28, Luke 15:11-32, Acts 10:43, Acts 13:38, Romans 4:7-8, Hebrews 10:17.

Conditions of Forgiveness

Although God is always ready and willing to forgive us, He requires two things of us as conditions of forgiveness: repentance and forgiveness of others. Depending on the circumstances, confession and restitution may also be needed.

What is true repentance?

True repentance means a sincere resolve to turn away from sin and toward God.

From that time on Jesus began to preach, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near." (NIV, Matthew 4:17)

True repentance involves sorrow for acts of sin and leads to a fundamental change in attitude. We are all sinners in our own ways (Romans 3:23, 1 John 1:8), and we may fail time and again in our attempt to avoid sin. God is always willing for us to start over and make another attempt. However, if we ask for forgiveness with the intention of sinning again, we have not really repented.

Related verses: Matthew 3:2, Matthew 4:17, Mark 1:15, Mark 6:12, Luke 3:3, Luke 5:31-32, Luke 13:3-5, Luke 24:47, Acts 2:38, Acts 3:19, Acts 8:22, Acts 17:30-31, Acts 20:21, 2 Corinthians 7:10.

About forgiveness of others

Jesus said we must be willing to forgive people who sin against us:

If you forgive those who sin against you, your heavenly Father will forgive you. But if you refuse to forgive others, your Father will not forgive your sins. (NLT, Matthew 6:14-15)

Forgiving another person means pardoning the offender and ceasing to feel resentment or hold a grudge. We are not able to completely forget what happened, but we must let go of the anger and resentment and seek reconciliation with the other person.

There should be no limit to our willingness to forgive others (Matthew 18:21-22). We should have a forgiving spirit whenever someone has committed an offense against us (Mark 11:25). Some people believe there is no obligation to forgive unless the offender repents, but that condition is mentioned in only one of the many passages on this topic (Luke 17:3-4). Continued anger and holding a grudge are always wrong (Matthew 5:21-24). Holding a grudge turns a person bitter and blocks the love of God.

Forgiving others does not mean we are required to remain in an abusive or exploitive situation. Neither does it deny the right of governments to punish offenders. Jesus and other New Testament leaders supported the authority of civil governments (Matthew 22:15-22, Romans 13:1-7).

Related verses: Matthew 6:12, 18:23-35, 5:43-47, Luke 6:37, Ephesians 4:32, Colossians 3:13

Process of Forgiveness

Nearly all Christians agree that repentance and forgiveness of others are key elements of forgiveness, and that forgiveness comes from God. However, there are some doctrinal differences about the process of forgiveness.

Forgiving Oneself

Many people find they still feel guilty and unworthy, even after completing the steps required for God's forgiveness. However, there is no need to feel that way; the Bible assures us that God does not hold our forgiven sins against us (Luke 15:7, 1 Corinthians 6:9-11, Hebrews 10:15-22). Of course, some sins against other people cannot be undone, and that is reason

enough for extra resolve not to repeat the sin. However, there is no need to keep hating oneself. Instead, we can view it as a learning experience and an incentive to do good in the future instead of evil.

Please study further other relevant passages including Matthew 7:21-23, 10:22, 25:31-46, Luke 10:25-37, John 14:21-23, John 15:6, Romans 2:6-10, Galatians 6:8-9, Ephesians 5:5-6, 1 Timothy 1:18-20, 2 Timothy 2:12, Hebrews 6:4-6, James 2:14-24, and 2 Peter 2:20-21.

Whom should I Confess of sins to

As part of repentance, we should confess our sins to God, and also to other people when appropriate (Matthew 3:1-6, Matthew 18:15-18, Luke 15:21, Acts 19:18, James 5:16-17, 1 John 1:8-9). There is an old saying that “confession is good for the soul,” and humbling oneself with a public confession or confession to another person can be an important step toward true repentance and healing a relationship.

However, some Christian counselors warn that we must use wisdom in deciding when and how to confess secret sins. We must consider how the other person will react and whether good or evil will result. For example, confessing a romantic infatuation to a jealous spouse could lead to the greater evils of divorce and emotional damage to the children.

Restitution

The Old Testament had specific rules about restitution when one person sinned against another (Exodus 22:1-15, Leviticus 6:1-7).

The New Testament does not specifically state that making restitution, making amends or otherwise correcting the wrong done are requirements for forgiveness. However, doing what is possible to correct the wrong done could be an important part of sincere repentance (Luke 19:2-10).

Excuses and Rationalization of sin

It is tempting to try to explain away our sins or blame others or blame the devil. We may rationalize that committing a sin is okay because some greater good or lesser evil will result. We may rationalize our greed and lack of compassion for others. We may use our own weaknesses as an excuse for not trying harder. We may convince ourselves that a sin does not matter as long as no one knows about it. We may argue that revenge is justified to punish an offender. We may rationalize our sinful actions by inventing false motives to justify them. We may rationalize that a half truth is not an actual lie.

Common excuses include, “Everyone else is doing it,” “It’s not technically illegal,” “He did it to me,” “No one will know,” “The ends justify the means,” “It’s for a good cause,” “It wasn’t my fault,” “I couldn’t help it,” “There are worse things,” “They are just as bad,” “He had it coming,” “I deserve it,” “It worked out for the best,” “I don’t have the abilities or money that other people have,” “I have my rights,” “It’s for his own good,” “They’ve got more than I do,” “It’s a bad law,” “It’s a stupid rule,” “I am what I am,” “It’s never been a problem before,”

“What they don’t know won’t hurt them,” “It’s too hard,” “Nobody cares,” “Nobody will miss it,” “It doesn’t hurt anybody,” “God made me this way,” and many others.

However, all excuses and rationalizations are nothing more than self-deception. God knows our actions and our true motives, and He will not be fooled. Even other people will usually see through our attempts at deception and perceive our true motives. We must take full responsibility for our motives and actions. True repentance is not possible when we try to rationalize our sins or make excuses (Genesis 3:9-13, 4:7, Exodus 32:21-24, Matthew 23:25-27, 25:24-30, Luke 14:16-24, 16:10-15, 20:46-47, John 9:40-41, 1 Corinthians 4:3-5, Hebrews 4:12-13, 1 John 1:8-10).

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Related verses: Matthew 12:31-32; Luke 12:10.

What Is Apostasy

Apostasy is a deliberate abandonment of faith. Several New Testament passages (Hebrews 6:4-6, 10:26, 2 Peter 2:20-21) seem to say that someone who has fallen away from Christian faith has no chance to repent and come back. These passages have been interpreted many different ways, and it is fair to say that no one is really sure of their original intent.

In their original context, these were warnings, in the strongest possible terms, to the first century Christians not to abandon their new faith because of persecution or false teachings. Thus, the authors may have used some hyperbole (exaggeration) to emphasize the point. [Jesus also sometimes used hyperbole for emphasis (Matthew 7:3-5, Mark 10:25).]

If these verses really mean that a person who has fallen away has no chance to repent, that would seem to contradict many other New Testament teachings about God's mercy and constant willingness to forgive. These verses are probably *not* directed at people who have doubts or who lose their faith and come back later. It is the person who deliberately, permanently and hard-heartedly rejects faith who will never repent, and thus can never be forgiven.

The Catholic Doctrine

Jesus had the power to forgive sins (Matthew 9:2, Luke 5:20). Jesus granted that authority also to His apostles (Matthew 16:18-19, Matthew 18:18, John 20:22-23). In Catholic doctrine, that authority is now vested in the Church through the bishops as successors of the apostles. The Church exercises that authority to forgive sins, through its bishops and priests, in the sacrament of Reconciliation (also known as confession or the sacrament of Penance). A sinner confesses his or her sins to the priest who assigns a penance (often some prayers to recite) and grants forgiveness and reconciliation with the Church "in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit." The sacrament of Reconciliation is practiced in Catholic and Orthodox churches, although some other Christian churches also have rites of individual confession.

The Protestant Doctrine

Severe penances, such as fasts, pilgrimages and floggings, were often imposed in early Church history. In the Middle Ages, the Roman Church fell into the corrupt practice of selling "indulgences" to reduce the severity of such penances in exchange for monetary contributions to the Church. This was a major factor leading to the Protestant Reformation in the 16th century. Protestants rejected the Roman Catholic Church's sacrament of Penance, its claims of apostolic succession, and its authority to mediate forgiveness of sins (1 Timothy 2:5). Authority on doctrine was placed in "Scripture alone" rather than in the Church. For most Protestants, the Church is instrumental in bringing people to repentance through the ministry of the Word and allowing Holy Spirit to convict people of their sins. It is important to understand however though that the forgiveness of sins comes directly from God and NOT from man.

Important Definitions / Glossary

Faith and Grace are the two most confused words among Christians.

The following two definitions are from *Nelson's Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1986. The corresponding Greek words from the original Bible manuscripts are shown in brackets with definitions from *Strong's Greek/Hebrew Dictionary* (electronic database), Tristar Publishing, 1989 and Vine's Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words, Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1985.

FAITH – A belief in or confident attitude toward God, involving commitment to His will for one's life. [Greek *pistis* (PIS tis) – trust, firm conviction, obedience, commitment]

GRACE – Favor or kindness shown without regard to the worth or merit of the one who receives it and in spite of what that same person deserves. Grace is one of the key attributes of God. [Greek *charis* (KHAR eece) – graciousness, of manner or act]