

Which Repentance?

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Preamble

Hi, I am John from Willows, and thank you for joining me for today's devotion on this Tuesday, the 20th of October, 2026. A PDF with the full text and some study resources is available at our web site, willows.org.za.

Introduction

A great deal of today's devotion is based on part of Dr. Thomas Constable's notes to the Gospel of Matthew. Long since retired, Dr. Constable still updates his notes, and they are available for free download from the web site <https://soniclight.com>. As with all such things, his notes are no substitute to reading The Bible, but they can help greatly to provide insights and I heartily recommend taking a look, along with my usual caveats, which you can find in the PDF of this devotion.

Before we continue, however, a quick prayer.

*Thank You, Father God, that You have given us Your Word, and that Your Word is available to us in a language that we understand. Please help us today, Lord, to learn more about what You say to us in Your Word.
Amen.*

Devotion

There are two major English translations of The Bible which I use: the ESV and the NIV. I must admit: I feel for Bible translators — what to call their translation? For how long will the New International Version be "new"? And for how long will the English Standard Version be in standard English? For that matter, is 'standard' English that spoken in England, or that spoken by the greatest number of people in the world? I'll leave those thoughts here, but mentioned them because they give a backdrop to today's devotion, titled "Which Repentance?".

As Christians, we know that the concept of repentance is absolutely core to our faith. As a word, however, "repent" is no longer in common use outside of faith communities. It appeared in English in the late 1200s as the Middle English word *repenten*, from the French *repentir*. The reason I mention this is that our concept of repentance has been shaped by its use in the King James Version of The Bible, commonly known as the KJV. There are two Greek verbs which are both translated as *repent* in the KJV. The one is *metamelomai*, which usually describes an active change, and the other is *metanoeō*, which usually describes a contemplative change.

Dr. Constable puts it this way:

... when we read "repent" or "repentance" in our English Bibles, we have to ask ourselves whether a change of behavior is in view primarily or a change of mind. Historically, the Roman Catholic Church has favored an active interpretation of the nature of repentance, whereas Protestants have favored a contemplative interpretation. Generally speaking, Catholic teachers emphasize that repentance involves a change of behavior, while Protestant teachers emphasize that it involves a change of thinking essentially. One interpretation stresses the need for a sense of sorrow, and the other stresses the need for a sense of awareness.¹

Reading this one could be excused for thinking that these two Greek words occur with similar frequency, but that's not the case. In preparing for this devotion I looked at all the New Testament verses in the NIV and in the ESV where the word *repent* is used, and compared that to the King James Version. Now while that exercise itself is not particularly exciting, what I discovered is very interesting, and shows the importance of using up-to-date translations of The Bible, since language changes over time. For an obvious example, while Shakespeare's plays and poetry address universal topics, most English speaking people today have a really difficult time understanding what he wrote — as you may recall from your own school days!

I discovered that *metamelomai* occurs a total of only six times in the New Testament (in five verses), and while the KJV uses *repent* for each of those occurrences, the NIV uses it once, and the ESV not at all. You see, while the original Greek has obviously not changed, English has moved on since the 1600s when the KJV was produced, and that is why *repent* is no longer used in all of those verses in modern translations. The situation is different for *metanoēō*, which is translated consistently as the various forms of *repent* in both the ESV and the NIV.

So, what *is* repentance, then? Well, repentance as per *metanoēō* is actually a change of mind, but not in a capricious sense — in other words, it is a serious commitment to the point of changing your entire world-view. It is something seldom done and never lightly, because changing something so fundamental has repercussions. The more fundamental the change, the greater and further-reaching the repercussions.

Constable highlights three stages to such repentance, namely consideration, conviction, and conversion. Let's briefly look at these in turn.

Consideration

This is thinking seriously about the truth, and could also be called a stage of searching. In this stage you would typically move from believing (based on what other people said) that Jesus was this great teacher — sort of like Gandhi on steroids — to actually reading the Gospels to see what He said about Himself. Then when you discover the claims He made about Himself and you realise that you have a choice to make, you don't just gloss over the challenges, but meet them head-on. Typical insights are that attending a church is not going to make you right with God. You also start wondering about whether your understanding of life and morality fit in with what Jesus says.

The key question in the consideration stage is: "What if God's message is true, and what does that mean for me?"

¹ See Constable, p. 25.

Conviction

Once you've considered these matters carefully, you either reject them and carry on pretty much as you were before, or you recognise your personal need — not only that you have not lived according to God's standards, but also that your own 'righteousness' is as filthy rags in God's eyes.

It does not lead to hopelessness because along with the insight that your relationship with God and your way of life needs to change, is the understanding that God has made a way and that those claims Jesus made are true.

Conversion

This is the logical response to conviction arising from consideration. It is far more than mere intellectual assent about the Truth, as it revolves around a *relationship* with God. That requires to turn from rebellion to submission, from self-reliance to reliance on God, from pride and independence to humility and child-like dependence on God, and from wrong to what is right.

This is the step where your mind is *changed*. Your entire world-view becomes different and you become a different person.

Conclusion

When you have repented in this way, your life cannot but reflect it, and so your behaviour will change. It is often said, and worth repeating: a changed life is the *evidence* of repentance, repentance is not the result of a changed life.

We should see all nine aspects of the fruit of The Spirit as listed in Galatians. Read Galatians 5:16–24 — all Christians should display all of them. Gifts are a different matter, and are given as The Spirit decides, but we are all to display the entire fruit of The Spirit.

Let us pray.

Dear Lord, I pray that You will use this devotion to help those who need to consider the Truth to do so, and then to move through conviction to the conversion of true repentance which You desire for us all. Give us the strength we need, Lord, to live as You would have us do, as we submit our lives to Your Will.

Amen.

Specific Sources

Constable, Thomas L., Dr. Constable's Notes on Matthew, 2026 Edition.
<https://soniclight.com/tcon/notes/pdf/matthew.pdf>, accessed 2026-03-26.

<https://www.etymonline.com/word/repent>, accessed 2026-10-19

<https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/repent>, accessed 2026-10-19

General Bible Resources

[Most of the original language information (including Strong's concordance) is via the Bible Hub site.]

This list is alive in that I update it as I go along — I just don't update all the instances of it, so see my latest devotion has the then-current one. At some point I'll probably put it on the web somewhere and update that, but for now this is it. Also note that I don't check each link for its continued existence... .

There are some points in these resources where you (and I) may think differently. Just don't throw the baby out with the bath water — consider what is said, read widely in The Word, and pray to God that He would keep you from heresy as you continue in your study of His Word. Though I find the following resources useful in many ways, *each* has its points where at the very least I go, 'Mmm. Not so sure about that. I need to look into that more deeply.'

<https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Genesis+1%3A1&version=ESVUK> is a brilliant collection of Bible translations. I tend to use the ESV-UK version: a solid translation in English.

<https://biblehub.com> is an enormous collection of resources. They have commentaries, concordances, Bible dictionaries, and more. Unless otherwise specified, this is where I get the information on the original languages. They have of late been encouraging people not to use ad blockers.

<https://www.blueletterbible.org/> packages of the same resources as biblehub.com, but has a completely different approach. They are also (currently) free.

<https://www.stepbible.org/> is an incredible resource if you want to look at the original language. When you use it on a PC and you hover over certain links you get more information without having to click.

<https://www.thebibleunpacked.net> is a rather unusual set of resources. At its core is a free book exploring core concepts of Christianity, but the book is available in seven editions. The smallest is just four 'pages' (each the size of a credit card) while the largest is 2,424 pages of A4 material. The two main areas are 'What to Know' and 'What to Do', which is an excellent balance. You can get an overview of the structure and topics at <https://www.thebibleunpacked.net/whats-inside>.

<https://www.preceptaustin.org/> is an enormous resource of commentaries by Dr. Bruce Hurt, a medical doctor. His work includes copious references, easing further study.

<https://soniclight.com/constable/> is the official site of the Bible commentary of theologian Dr. Thomas Constable, where that material is freely available.

<https://www.gotquestions.org> intends to provide answers to common questions about The Bible. While there is a core doctrinal point (predestination) on which I differ, there are many insightful answers.

These should be sufficient to get you going, but a word of warning: many 'fringe' sites (and some sects) go to great lengths to make their public / introductory material seem completely main-stream, so you really need to be on your guard.