

Surrendering to God with Genuine Repentance

Why do Christians who go to church on a regular basis, study the Scriptures, and read multiple Christian self-help books, still not find help for their problems? I have wondered this many times over the years. I have counseled many well-meaning Christians who ask me why they continue to struggle with emotional problems, sin habits, and unhealthy relationships in their marriage and family.



Unfortunately, many people fail to get past the surface problems they experience and address the root issues in their lives. Frankly, people often will not see the problem. If they do acknowledge their problem, they do not know how to help themselves. People rarely understand how victory can be found through the Word of God and the power of the Holy Spirit.

There are six important keys to finding resolution to our personal problems:

1. Acknowledging the problem (accepting the fact that I have a problem)
2. Genuine repentance (a willingness to turn from the problem)
3. Change of heart (Repentance and resolution must come from the heart, not the head. There must be more than just intellectual assent.)
4. Honesty toward God and others
5. Transparency (openness about my problems)
6. Application of Biblical principles in my life

Ways people fail to confront problems and sin in their lives

- **Denial:** conscious or subconscious refusal to face the truth (1 John 1:10)
- **Projection:** blaming others for one's problems (Luke 10:38)
- **Rationalization:** making excuses for poor behavior (Luke 18:10-14)
- **Condemnation:** feeling judged and hopeless to change one's behavior. (Rom. 8:1)

How God would have us respond to sin

Romans 6:12, 14—“*For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law but under grace. What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? Certainly not! Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one’s slaves whom you obey, whether of sin leading to death, or of obedience leading to righteousness?*”

God’s Design: Fellowship→ Confession→ Openness→ Honesty

- Acknowledging sinful behavior leads to fellowship with God and others.
- Denial can be a manifestation of pride in our lives, which leads to guilt and covering up that guilt with more sinful behaviors.
- Condemnation is also a destructive force in people confronting their problems. Many people do not understand the difference between *condemnation* and *conviction* and become paralyzed to change. Here is the difference:
 - **Condemnation** causes a person to feel shame, to withdraw and hide, to feel hopeless and fail to look to Christ. Satan uses condemnation and is called the accuser of the brethren in Revelation chapter 12.
 - **Conviction** is a work of the Holy Spirit to help us acknowledge our sin. Conviction as a work of the Holy Spirit brings us to Christ for confession of sin and brings hope. (John 16:8)

Mark 1:14, 15—“*Now after John was put in prison, Jesus came to Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, and saying, ‘The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. **Repent, and believe in the gospel.**’”*

What is repentance?

- Repentance is far more than a change in thinking or remorse.
- Repentance means to say yes to God and no to sin. (1 John 1:7-9)
- Repentance always leads to change of behavior. No true change comes without it.
- Repentance is a work of God in the human heart. (2 Timothy 2:24-26)
- Repentance comes about because of God’s goodness (Romans 2:4 – *leadeth* in the Grk. means “to bring”)

The Difference between True and False Repentance

2 Corinthians 7:11—“*Now I rejoice, not that you were made sorry, but that your sorrow led to repentance. For you were made sorry in a godly manner, that you might suffer loss from us in nothing. For godly sorrow produces repentance leading to salvation, not to be regretted; but the sorrow of the world produces death. For observe this very thing, that you sorrowed in a godly manner: What diligence it produced in you, what clearing of yourselves, what indignation, what fear, what vehement desire, what zeal, what vindication! In all things you proved yourselves to be clear in this matter.*” (NKJV)

Sorrow of the World Produces Death (Example: King Saul)

- It is unsanctified remorse and has no redemptive capability.
- People get angry and react in pride when caught in their sin.
- People are more concerned over the bad circumstances that come into their lives than over sinning against God.
“Does the person see his sin as an affront to a Holy God, or just remorse over his consequences?”—Jim Logan
- This kind of sorrow leads to shame, depression, self-pity, bitterness, hopelessness, and even thoughts of wanting to die.

Godly Sorrow Produces Life (Example: King David)

Example of Godly sorrow in the life of David (Read Psalm 51)

- David cried out for mercy. (v. 1)
- David acknowledged his self-will [iniquity]. (v. 2)
- David was intimately aware of his sin and took personal responsibility for his violating God’s laws. (v. 3)
- David acknowledged his sin was against a holy God. (v. 4)
- David clearly understood that God would deal with his sin. (v. 4b-6)
- David asked God to change his heart. (v. 10)
- David understood that God wanted to teach him the true meaning of a broken and contrite heart. (v. 17)

Conclusions regarding Godly sorrow

- Godly “sorrow” refers to sorrow that is according to the will of God and is produced by the Holy Spirit.
- True repentance cannot occur apart from a genuine sorrow over one’s sin.
- Genuine repentance belongs to the realm or sphere of salvation. Repentance proves a person’s salvation. Unbelievers repent of their sin initially when they are saved, and then as believers repent continuously to keep the joy and blessing of their relationship to God.

What does genuine repentance look like?

2 Corinthians 7:11—*“For observe this very thing, that you sorrowed in a godly manner: What diligence it produced in you, what clearing of yourselves, what indignation, what fear, what vehement desire, what zeal, what vindication! In all things you proved yourselves to be clear in this matter.”*

- **Diligence:** Eagerly and aggressively pursues righteousness. This attitude ends indifference to sin and complacency about evil.
- **What clearing of yourselves:** A desire to clear one’s name by doing whatever it takes to restore trust and confidence.
- **Indignation:** Righteous indignation and holy anger. Genuine repentance leads to anger over one’s sin and displeasure at the shame it has brought on the Lord’s name and His people.
- **Reverence (fear):** Healthy fear of God which leads to genuine repentance.
- **Vehement desire:** Can be translated “yearning” or “longing for” and refers to the desire of the repentant person to restore the relationship of the one they have sinned against.
- **Zeal:** This refers to loving someone or something so much that one hates anyone or anything that harms the object of his love.
- **Vindication:** “Avenging of wrong” refers to the desire to see justice done. The repentant person no longer tries to protect himself—he wants to see the sin avenged no matter what it would cost him.
- **To be clear in this matter:** The essence of repentance is an aggressive pursuit of holiness. The Greek word for *clear* means “pure” or “holy.” They demonstrated the integrity of their repentance by their purity.

Rev. Jeffrey Pokone, has been a Biblical counselor and Center Director with the Indiana Biblical Counseling Center since 1998. He counsels in the following areas; marriage, trauma and abuse, sexual addictions, spiritual conflicts, and relationships. Jeff has been married for over 30 years to his wife Suzette and has five adult children.

