

# Repentance

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The primary mission of the earthly ministry of Jesus Christ was to sacrifice himself in order to make human reconciliation with God possible. The modern day Christian process of forgiveness should focus entirely on the Atonement of Christ, despite the differences in how this is accomplished among various religious sects.

## Sin is a Reality during Our Mortality

During our time on earth, where we are expected to progress and grow in mortality, we are likely to sin. Sin comes about because of our weaknesses, our disobedience, and sometimes through ignorance. John describes sin as “all unrighteousness” (1 John 5:17). Sin hampers our spiritual progress. Knowing this, God set a path by which we could be forgiven of our sins—this path is repentance, made possible through the Atonement of Jesus Christ.

## The Evolution of the Repentance Process

The process of repentance has been in place since the first man and woman were on earth. Adam was instructed by the Lord on the subject of repentance: “Wherefore teach it unto your children, that all men, everywhere, must repent, or they can in nowise inherit the kingdom of God, for no unclean thing can dwell there, or dwell in his presence” (Moses 6:57).

Before the time of Christ the Jews were instructed to sacrifice specific animals in a specific way in order to receive absolution from specific sins. In the ultimate act of

love, God gave up his only begotten son in payment for the sins of all mankind. This great Atonement for all sin brings forgiveness to the children of God, through repentance, and allows the repentant to get back on a spiritual track.

True repentance puts a person into a state of humility and godly sorrow, requiring the repentant to possess particular spiritual strength to adequately carry out the full process. The prelude to and process of repentance may be accompanied by tears, fervent prayers, and a feeling of sorrow. The prophet Spencer W. Kimball said: “There is no royal road to repentance, no privileged path to forgiveness. Every man must follow the same course whether he be rich or poor, educated or untrained, tall or short, prince or pauper, king or commoner. ... There is only one way. It is a long road spiked with thorns and briars and pitfalls and problems (The Miracle of Forgiveness, Spencer W. Kimball, Deseret Book, 1999).

## The Process of Repentance and the Seven Steps

While minor sins may require confession to the Lord alone, there are more serious sins that require confession to an ecclesiastical leader. Each individual must exercise their own moral agency in deciding what is serious and what is not, and to fully utilize the companionship of the Holy Ghost given to all baptized members of the Lord’s Church. Such a practice personalizes the repentance process and encourages prayer and communion with our Heavenly Father in the pursuit of forgiveness. There are seven key steps in the process of true repentance:

1. First, we must recognize the sin that was committed.
2. Second, we must feel sorrow for having committed the sin, recognizing the transgression against the Lord and the pain that accompanies such a transgression.
3. Third, we must forsake that sin and commit in our hearts to refrain from engaging in that sin again.

4. Forth, we must confess our sin to the Lord (and to an ecclesiastical leader if the sin is serious). If the sin has affected another person, confession must be made to that person as well. For less serious sins, private acknowledgement to the Lord is the most appropriate path of confession.

5. Fifth, we must make restitution as appropriate and necessary. This means doing all we can to make right that which was wrong as a consequence of the sin. For instance, stolen goods should be returned to the victim and gossip should be rectified with all of the individuals involved.

6. Sixth, we must forgive others so that the Lord will forgive us. The process of our forgiving others allows us to be cleansed of the negative feelings and characteristics that can be harbored when we fail to forgive others.

7. Seventh, we must pledge and do all we can to keep the commandments of God.

Through these seven steps of repentance, we are able to fully take advantage of the forgiving and the enabling aspects of the Atonement of Jesus Christ. We are able to enjoy the freedom that comes from being clean from sin, and more fully feel joy in our lives.

### Conclusion

Repentance should be regularly discussed among Christian congregations and their leaders. Repentance can be likened to a banking system for Christians. Repentance is the method of withdraw for forgiveness that we make from the bank of the infinite Atonement made possible by the sacrificial deposit of Jesus Christ. Through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ each of God's children has a bank account with an infinite amount of forgiveness. Access to these merciful funds can only be done through sincere repentance, where one can withdraw the wonderful gift of forgiveness through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Christians are encouraged to make repentance a regular part of their daily lives. In our personal prayers and thoughts we are able to recall our actions and identify those specific actions that are out of harmony with the gospel of Jesus Christ. There will be sins of commission

(things we did that we should not have done) and sins of omission (things we should have done but did not). By identifying both of these types of sins in our lives, and repenting of those sins, we can bring to our souls the sweet solace of forgiveness and joy that only the Atonement of Christ can bring.

While the process of repentance is important to each Christian, the doctrine of repentance must maintain a relentless focus on Jesus Christ and his Atonement as the key to forgiveness.

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