

Quotes on Repentance as a Change of Mind, Part 2

In Part 1 (GraceNotes no. 92) we cited historical sources on the meaning of repentance starting in the first century. We will see here that for two thousand years experts have overwhelmingly agreed that repentance is an inner change, a change of heart or mind. As with Part 1, the information below is selected from an article by Jonathan Perrault. You can find his article with more complete quotes and bibliography in the Grace Research Room at GraceLife.org or at the author's web site FreeGraceFreeSpeech.blogspot.com. The selections and sources below are abbreviated to save space.

Brooke Foss Westcott (1825-1901) in *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, on Hebrews 6:1: “Repentance from dead works’ expresses that complete change of mind—of spiritual attitude—which leads the believer to abandon these works [as a way of salvation] and seek some other support for life.”

Dwight L. Moody (1837-1899) in *The Gospel Awakening*: “Repentance is a change of mind.”

B. H. Carroll (1843-1914) in *An Interpretation of the English Bible*, vol. 10: “We may, therefore, give as the one invariable definition of New Testament repentance that it is a change of mind, from which it is evident that its domain is limited. It is necessarily internal, not external.”

C. I. Scofield (1843-1921) in *The Scofield Reference Bible* (1967) on Acts 17:30: “Repentance is the translation of a Greek verb *metanoēō*, meaning to have another mind, to change the mind, and is used in the N.T. to indicate a change of mind in respect to sin, God, and self.”

Richard Francis Weymouth (1822-1902), in *Weymouth New Testament* on Matthew 3:2: “repent or ‘change your minds’” and in Matt. 3:8: ‘Therefore let your lives prove your change of heart’ and in Luke 3:8 ‘Live lives which shall prove your change of heart.’ This is the proper order, first change your minds and hearts (repent), and then as a result of your repentance, ‘let your lives prove your change of heart.’”

James M. Gray (1851-1935) in *Bible Problems Explained*: “Repentance means a ‘change of mind,’ and the moment one takes Jesus by faith to be his personal Savior, that moment he has experienced and manifested that change of mind. I am now speaking, of course, of the initial act of salvation.”

A.T. Robertson (1863-1934) in *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, on 2 Corinthians 7:9: “Certainly the word for repentance [*metanoia*] is more than a mere ‘after-thought.’ It is a ‘change of mind’ that leads to and is shown by a change of life, ‘fruits worthy of repentance’ (Luke 3:8).”

G. Campbell Morgan (1863-1945) in *The Westminster Pulpit*, vol. 6: “The other word [*metanoia*] means very simply and very literally to change the mind... The repentance that Christ preached, and His Apostles preached, the repentance which is demanded of every man is always indicated by the use of the word that means a change of mind.”

H. A. Ironside (1876-1951) in *Except Ye Repent* (1937): “But here it seems necessary to say that it is the Greek word, *μετάνοια*, *metanoia*, which is translated ‘repentance’ in our English Bibles, and literally means a change of mind. This is not simply the acceptance of new ideas in place of old notions. But it actually implies a complete reversal of one’s inward attitude.”

William R. Newell (1868-1956) in *Hebrews Verse-By-Verse* (1947) on Hebrews 6:1: “The very first gospel announcement to the Hebrews would be something entirely new—repentance, an entire change of mind, as to ‘works’ securing salvation...”

William Pettingill (1866-1950) in *Bible Questions Answered*: “Strictly speaking, the word repentance means a ‘change of mind.’”

Lewis Sperry Chafer (1871-1952) in *Systematic Theology*, vol. 3 (1947): “The word *metanoia* is in every instance translated repentance. The word means a change of mind.”

Julius R. Mantey (1890-1981) in “*Repentance and Conversion*,” *Christianity Today* (March 2, 1962): “*Metanoēō* (*metanoia*, noun) is regularly used to express the requisite state of mind necessary for the forgiveness of sin. It means to think differently or to have a different attitude toward sin and God, etc.”

J. Dwight Pentecost (1915-2014) in *Things Which Become Sound Doctrine* (1965): “From the Word of God we discover that the word translated ‘repent’ means ‘a change of mind.’ It means, literally, ‘a turning about’; not so much a physical turning about as a mental turning around, a change of course, a change of direction, a change of attitude.”

John Walvoord (1910-2002) in *The Revelation of Jesus Christ* (1966): “The second aspect of his exhortation [in Revelation 2:5] is embodied in the word repent (Gr., *metanoeson*, meaning ‘to change the mind’).”

J. Vernon McGee (1904-1988) in *Thru the Bible Commentary Series*, Second Corinthians, vol. 5 (1983) on 2 Corinthians 7:10: “Here we find God’s definition of repentance—real repentance. Repentance is a change of mind. As far as I can tell, the only repentance God asks of the lost is in the word believe. Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ! What happens when one believes? There is a change of mind.”

Charles Ryrie (1925-2016) in *Balancing the Christian Life* (1969): “The word repent means, of course, to change one’s mind about something.”

Louis Berkhof (1873-1957) in *Systematic Theology* (1939): “According to Scripture, repentance is wholly an inward act and should not be confounded with a change of life that proceeds from it. Confession of sin and reparation of wrongs are fruits of repentance.”

G. Michael Cocoris in *Evangelism: A Biblical Approach* (1984): “Repentance is basically a change of mind. [*Metanoēō*], the Greek word translated ‘repent,’ is a compound made up of two definite Greek words. The first is *meta*, ‘after,’ and the second is *noēma*, ‘mind.’ Thus, the two together mean ‘afterthought,’ or ‘change of mind.’ The word describes an inward change of thinking or attitude.”

R. T. Kendall in *Once Saved, Always Saved* (1985): “As we said earlier, repentance is the translation of the Greek word *metanoia*, which means ‘change of mind.’”

Roy B. Zuck (1932-2013) in *Kindred Spirit*, a publication of Dallas Theological Seminary (Summer 1989): “The Greek word for repentance (*metanoia*) means to change one’s mind.”

Robert P. Lightner (1931-2018) in *Sin, the Savior, and Salvation* (1991): “The word repentance means a change of mind... Evangelicals, (for the most part) agree no one can be saved who does not change his mind about himself and his need, his sin which separates him from God, and about Christ as the only Savior.”

J. Hampton Keathley, III in *ABCs for Christian Growth*, 5th ed., (1966): “*Metanoia*, the primary word, without question, means ‘a change of mind.’ It refers to the thinking of people who thought one thing or made one decision and then, based on further evidence or input, changed their minds. So, the basic sense is ‘a change of mind.’ This is its meaning and use outside the New Testament and in the New Testament.” (Emphasis his.)

R. Larry Moyer in *Free and Clear* (1997): “From the above study of the concept of repentance in the Old and New Testaments... Repentance clearly means to change the mind... When used in a soteriological context, ‘repentance’ means to change your mind about whatever is keeping you from trusting Christ and trust Him alone to save you.” (Italics his)

The Theological Wordbook, eds. Wendell G. Johnston, Charles R. Swindoll, Roy B. Zuck, (2000): “The primary New Testament word for repentance is *metanoia*, ‘to change one’s mind.’”

Ron Rhodes in *Christianity According to the Bible* (2006): “The biblical word translated repent literally means ‘a change of mind toward something or someone.’”

Charles Stanley in *Handbook for Christian Living: Biblical Answers to Life’s Tough Questions* (2008): “What does repentance mean for the unbeliever? Repentance for those outside Christ means a change of mind. The unbeliever is to change his mind about what he believes concerning Jesus Christ.”

Conclusion

For twenty centuries, Bible experts consistently agree that the simple meaning of repentance is a change of mind or heart, an inner change. Many state that it should lead to an outward change but distinguish this from the inner change. After admitting that repentance is a change of mind, a few of those cited sometimes modify the word to include sorrow and/or turning from sins. But these adjustments are likely capitulations to theological biases not supported by the biblical evidence. All agree on the essential meaning of a change of mind as the starting point that is faithful to the clear biblical evidence. Rightly so, many of these cited think that repentance that relates to salvation reflects the change of mind that comes when one believes in Jesus Christ as Savior (see GraceNotes no. 22: “Repentance: What’s in a Word”). Such an understanding of repentance keeps salvation absolutely free by grace through faith.