

DEFINITION OF REPENTANCE

Repentance is a decisive change wrought by the Holy Spirit in the life of a sinner by which he/she realizes the wickedness and odiousness of his/her sin as an offense against the goodness and justice of God; experiences deep sorrow over having thereby offended and grieved God; and turns away from sin to seek God's forgiveness, cleansing, and deliverance from sin.

Judas Iscariot is not an example of true repentance. He realized that he had done wrong and that the consequences of his wrongdoing were very serious; he felt such deep remorse and regret at his act of wrongdoing that he felt he could not continue to live with his emotional pain; and he confessed his wrongdoing and returned the price of his betrayal to those with whom he had conspired. Yet he did not repent of his sin: did not recognize his act as an offense against God, did not experience godly sorrow for having offended and grieved God, and did not turn from his sin to seek God's forgiveness, cleansing, and deliverance from his sin.

An interesting question arises in the response of the Ninevites to the preaching of Jonah. Was theirs an example of genuine repentance? In Jonah 3 we discover that the people believed in God (verse 5); that the King proclaimed a fast (verse 7), decreed that everyone be clothed in sackcloth and sit in the ashes (verses 6, 8), turn from his wicked way and his violence (verse 8), and call on God earnestly to deliver them from the predicted destruction (verses 4, 9); and that when God saw that they turned from their wicked way, He relented concerning the destruction (verse 10). Did the Ninevites recognize their wrongdoing as sin against God? Did they experience sorrow over having grieved and offended God? Did they turn from their sin to seek God's forgiveness, cleansing, and deliverance from their sin? Or were they concerned only with averting the consequences of their sin? Is there such a thing as an external, non-saving repentance as distinguished from an internal, saving repentance?