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### Salvation results from a Change of Mind—Not Change of Life

#### David DeWitt

MacArthur says, “The idea that genuine repentance could result in anything but a change of life, is completely foreign to Scripture.” Well, the Corinthians were dividing up the church into groups following different leaders, allowing adultery to go unchecked, and letting people get drunk at the Lord’s Supper. But, before Paul reprimanded them for all that, he called them *those who have been sanctified in Christ Jesus, saints by calling, with all who in every place call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, their Lord and ours* (1 Corinthians 1:2). It sounds like they were just as saved as all other believers, without much of that “change of life” MacArthur is talking about.

The New Testament word translated repentance is *metanōia* (*metanoia*). The meaning of the word is simple, clear, and obvious. **It only means to change your mind or change your understanding.**

- Meta (meta) = *change*, as in the metamorphosis of a butterfly
- Noeo (noew) = the Greek word for *mind* or *understanding*

It means to turn around in your understanding of something. It’s not “merely a casual change of thinking.” It means to leave one way of thinking and turn to another way. It’s a mental about-face. It means I am here, so I’m no longer there. I came here from there. This has been the main cause of Christian persecution all through the centuries. Faith in Jesus Christ cannot just be added to whatever else you believe. You cannot just add Jesus to your other gods. Christianity is a change of mind away from idolatry, pantheism, atheism, or whatever you believed or didn’t believe, to receiving Jesus Christ as your personal Savior.

But not so with the English word “repentance.” The “New Oxford American Dictionary” defines the word “repent,” to “express sincere regret or remorse about one’s wrongdoing or sin.” That’s not *metanōia* (*metanoia*). MacArthur admits the word means “to have another mind.” But then he ignores that completely and goes back to using the English “regret or remorse” definition of the word “repentance,” calling it “hatred of and penitence for sin.”

Actually, Greek has a word for “regret” or “remorse,” used in the sense of “hatred of and penitence for sin.” It’s *metamelōmai* (*metamelomai*), and it means “to feel regret as the result of what one has done” (“Louw and Nida Lexicon”).

- **Matthew 27:3** *Then when Judas, who had betrayed Him, saw that He had been condemned, he felt remorse (KJV repented himself) (metamelomai), and returned the thirty pieces of silver...*

When Peter reported about the conversion of Cornelius and his friends in Caesarea, they said,

- **Acts 11:18** *Well then, God has granted to the Gentiles also the repentance (metanoia) that leads to life. There was no regret or remorse in this repentance. Actually, the report about Cornelius before his repentance that leads to life, stated he was a devout man and one who feared God with all his household and gave many alms to the Jewish people and prayed to God continually (Acts 10:2). There is simply no mention at all of any regret or remorse for wrongdoing in his metanōia (metanoia) repentance.*

But didn’t Paul talk about feelings of regret and remorse? Yes, he did. It’s connected to things like being filled with the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 5:19), examining yourself (2 Corinthians 13:5), not grieving the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 4:30), and confessing your sins (1 John 1:8-10). But it is not embodied in, or tied to, the word *metanōia* (*metanoia*), which only means a change of mind.

Ryrie gives an excellent perspective.

Is repentance a condition for receiving eternal life? Yes, if it is repentance or changing one’s mind about Jesus Christ. No, if it means to be sorry for sin or even to resolve to turn from sin, for those things *will not save* [Charles C. Ryrie, “So Great a Salvation,” pp. 92-99, italics emphasis his].

People are often sorry and resolve to turn from sin, for example, in things like AA and drug rehab groups. But it does not get anybody saved. **Nobody can be saved by remorse, regret, or a resolve to turn from sin.**