



[2 Corinthians 7:9-11](#)

(9) And so I rejoice—not because you were caused to sorrow, but because you sorrowed unto repentance; for you sorrowed in a godly manner, so that you were not injured by us in any way. (10) For sorrow unto repentance before God works out salvation not to be repented of; but the sorrow of the world works out death. (11) For see how this very thing—your personal sorrow before God—brought about such earnestness in you! And, *what* a defense, and *what* indignation, and fear, and vehement desire, and zeal, and vengeance! In every way you have proved yourselves to be pure in the matter.

A Faithful Version

There is nothing difficult to understand about what *repent* means. It simply means "to change one's mind." In biblical usage, it implies changing one's mind in relation to [God](#) and His way of life. [Repentance](#), though, is invariably preceded by something else, usually a deeply felt sense of concern, arising from guilt that one has done wrong. It can also be fear for one's life or reputation, or it may be sorrow over the horrible mess one has created.

We must understand that concern, unease, guilt, fear, or sorrow is not repentance. However, these feelings can *lead* to repentance, the change of mind that contains the resolve never to repeat whatever made us feel uncomfortable about our relationship with God.

Paul had, in effect, chewed them out in a previous letter, and it set off a chain of reactions: It produced the sorrow that leads to repentance, the change of mind in relation to God. That, in turn, produced a change of conduct because they set their wills never to allow their unrighteousness to be the cause of breaking their relationship with Him again. If a person changes his mind in relation to God rather than merely because of the pain that his conduct caused himself and others, it opens the door to making real change in attitude and conduct.

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A number of factors always work to keep us from admitting responsibility for the destructive conditions surrounding us. First, sometimes we simply do not "get" it! It sometimes takes a while to understand that, by our own conduct, we are shooting ourselves in the foot and hurting our loved ones besides. In human nature, the tendency always exists to blame others before ourselves.

Second, sometimes we are so unfeeling, so unconcerned, and so self-centered that we just do not care! This attitude is dangerously destructive—in fact, biblically suicidal. This attitude is similar to what occurs to people in the grip of a drug, whether it is alcohol, a chemical like heroin, cocaine, or the nicotine in a cigarette.

The third reason is more subtle and difficult to grasp, and it resides at the foundation of a great deal of our failure to repent and change. Because of our tendency to think we are nothing, we cannot seem to get it through our minds that what we do matters! Are we not only one of billions of people on earth? Or, are we not only an insignificant member of community, family, club, or church?

It is a careless but nonetheless strong inclination to believe that nothing we do has any effect whatever on the improvement of life for anybody else. Do we realize that almost everybody else also carelessly feels the same way? Thus, the whole family or nation continues its violent, heartbreaking, pell-mell rush into the pit and on to oblivion!

The same beliefs confronted Amos as he preached to the people of Israel more than seven hundred years before Christ was born. They also confronted Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and all the other prophets, as well as [Jesus](#) and the apostles! Isaiah lamented with all his heart, "Lord, who has believed our report?" ([Isaiah 53:1](#)). They are the ministry's challenge to this very day.

It is also where our relationship with God becomes so vital to the quality of our lives. We cannot afford to let ourselves be lulled into thinking that our attitudes and our conduct do not matter—that they do not contribute to the disaster that is [this world](#).

The drought that the Charlotte area endured in the past provides an interesting illustration in this regard. In 2001, voluntary water-use restrictions were imposed, producing a 23 percent water savings. In 2007, in the second-worst drought in Charlotte history, mandatory restrictions produced 30 percent savings, a modest seven-point increase. Why was a higher percentage of water not saved during a far more serious drought?

Measurements reveal that 50 percent of the water drawn from Charlotte's reservoirs

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goes to home consumption. The reason for the modest increase, then, largely comes down to the attitude in each individual's human nature that says, "What I do doesn't matter."

But to the Christian, it *does* matter! Why? Because watching our response to governments and circumstances that God has established is, in an overall sense, what He is judging most closely. In each of His regenerated children, He wants to see whether we really do perceive Him to be sovereign over His creation and will submit to Him by [faith](#). He wants to see whether we will look to Him beyond the human government He ultimately installed; beyond what everybody else is doing; beyond our cynicism, distrust, and skepticism; and beyond our feelings of being of no consequence.

— John W. Ritenbaugh

To learn more, see:

[**Unity and Personal Responsibility**](#)

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