

What's the Difference Between Feeling Sorry and Repenting?

[Hosea 7](#)

Hosea, Day 16

*when I would heal Israel,
the iniquity of Ephraim is revealed,
and the evil deeds of Samaria,*

*But they do not consider
that I remember all their evil.
Now their deeds surround them;
they are before my face.*

*For with hearts like an oven they approach their intrigue;
all night their anger smolders;
in the morning it blazes like a flaming fire.*

*Woe to them, for they have strayed from me!
Destruction to them, for they have rebelled against me!
I would redeem them,
but they speak lies against me.
They do not cry to me from the heart,
but they wail upon their beds;
for grain and wine they gash themselves;
they rebel against me.
Although I trained and strengthened their arms,
yet they devise evil against me.
They return, but not upward;
they are like a treacherous bow;
their princes shall fall by the sword
because of the insolence of their tongue.
This shall be their derision in the land of Egypt.*

- selected verses from Hosea 7

"You're not sorry. You're just sorry you got caught!"

I don't know how many times my parents had to say this to me when I was growing up. One thing I do know now, which I would have vehemently denied as a child: They were almost always right.

In Hosea 7, God is saying something very similar to Israel. It's evident that Israel is very upset about the consequences of their sin and the discipline God has sent them. They are described as crying, wailing, and being angry. But despite the intense negative emotions, Israel is clearly not repentant. So, what's the difference? How is repentance different from being sorry or angry?

Well, we need to know the answer to this question because God calls us to repent, and we are tempted to make the same mistake I made so often as a child: Thinking that being upset or angry over the unwelcome consequences of our sin is the same thing as actually repenting of our sin.

From Hosea 7, we can identify three key differences between being sorry and repenting:

1. Repentance takes seriously the reality that God sees and remembers our sins, that our sins are before His face. In verse 2, God says of Israel:

*But they do not consider
that I remember all their evil.
Now their deeds surround them;
they are before my face.*

For all of their emotional distress, Israel denied the root cause of their problems and ignored the reality of their sin before the Lord. Repentance does not deny or minimize the reality of our sin and its ugliness before the face of God.

2. Smoldering anger and tearful sorrow are not repentance. We should be angry at our sin, but very often, if we're honest, we're just angry that we're suffering, and we feel our suffering is unjust. So, in such cases, all the tears and intense emotions in the world don't mean anything because they're misdirected. They may even be directed at God: "Where is God? How could He let this happen to us?"

3. Repentance speaks the truth about God and resolves to obey God. It does not lie about God and plan evil against God. This may seem obvious, but our hearts are very deceitful, and we can often fool ourselves into believing wrong things about God, things directly contrary to His word. If our thoughts about God are wrong, then our actions toward God are bound to be wrong, too. We need to make sure that our thinking about God is coming from the Bible and not from our own emotions or our culture.

The good news in Hosea 7 is that God is ready and willing to forgive and heal His people. That's what makes their stubborn lack of repentance so frustrating. God would heal and God would forgive all their sins, if only they would turn to Him. So, let's not follow their poor example, but let's heed the voice of the Lord. Let's hate our sin itself and not its unwelcome consequences. Let's accept the discipline of the Lord and confess our sin to Him, that He may heal and He may forgive.