

CONVERSION - REPENTANCE

INTRODUCTION

- Having discussed the work of God in salvation, we now turn to man's responsibility in salvation
- We have explained how God issues the gospel call (through the preaching of the Word) and, by the work of the Holy Spirit, regenerates us, imparting spiritual life within
- We now consider our response to the gospel call which brings about conversion
- "Regeneration is inseparable from its effects and one of the effects is faith. Without regeneration it is morally and spiritually impossible for a person to believe in Christ, but when a person is regenerated it is morally and spiritually impossible for that person not to believe...Regeneration is the renewing of the heart and mind, and the renewed heart and mind must act according to their nature."¹
- In other words, the very first act of the regenerated sinner's renewed nature is a conscious decision to repent of sin and believe in Christ for salvation



- Remember the tension: God's sovereignty vs. man's responsibility
- Man must respond to the Gospel in order to be saved!
- Regeneration is the act of God alone...but faith and repentance are not the act of God...it is not God who repents of sin and believes in Christ for salvation...it is the sinner
- It is by God's grace that a person is able to repent of their sin and believe in Christ...but repentance and faith are activities on the part of the person and of him alone
- What exactly a person must "do" to be saved is very important as there are many terms used today to refer how a person becomes a Christian, many of which have no biblical foundation
- Examples: make a decision for Christ...ask Jesus into your heart...accept Jesus as your Savior...pray the sinner's prayer...rededicate your life to Christ...make Christ Lord of your life
- "The Western church has subtly changed the thrust of the gospel. Instead of exhorting sinners to repent, evangelicalism in our society asks the unsaved to 'accept Christ.' That makes sinners sovereign and puts Christ at their disposal. In effect it puts Christ on trial and hands the judge's robes and gave to the inquirer – precisely opposite of what should be. Ironically, people who *ought* to be concerned about whether Christ

¹ John Murray, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied*, 106.

will accept them are being told by Christians that it is the sinner's prerogative to 'accept Christ.' This modified gospel depicts conversion as a 'decision for Christ' rather than a life-transforming change of heart involving genuine faith, repentance, surrender, and rebirth unto newness of life."²

- In order to not muddy the waters, it is imperative that we use biblical terminology to describe how it is that a sinner comes to faith in Christ
- We must define conversion as Scripture defines it
- Definition: "Conversion is our willing response to the Gospel call, in which we sincerely repent of sins and place our trust in Christ for salvation"³
- The term "conversion" implies a change, a turning around, an about face from sin to God that involves:
 - A turning from sin in repentance
 - A turning to Christ in faith
- This act of conversion involves a complete transformation and a fundamental change of the whole life as the word implies
- The result is a completely new outlook and objective in life

Mark 4:12 ~ so that WHILE SEEING, THEY MAY SEE AND NOT PERCEIVE, AND WHILE HEARING, THEY MAY HEAR AND NOT UNDERSTAND, OTHERWISE THEY MIGHT RETURN AND BE FORGIVEN."

Luke 1:16 ~ And he will turn many of the sons of Israel back to the Lord their God.

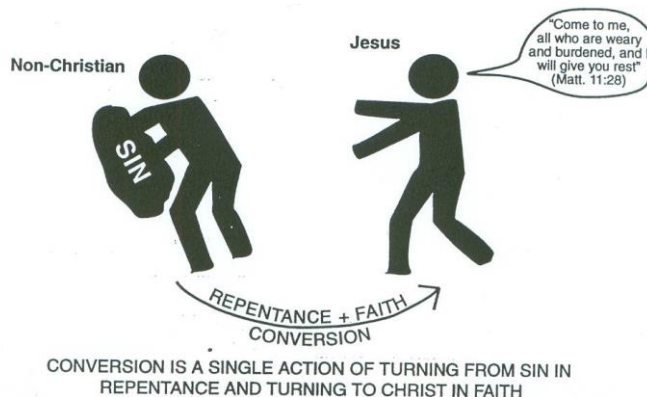
Acts 15:19 ~ Therefore it is my judgment that we do not trouble those who are turning to God from among the Gentiles,

2 Corinthians 3:16 ~ but whenever a person turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away.

1 Thessalonians 1:9 ~ For they themselves report about us what kind of a reception we had with you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve a living and true God,

James 5:19-20 ~ My brethren, if any among you strays from the truth and one turns him back, 20 let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins.

- When true conversion occurs, there is always a turning from sin (repentance) and turning to God in Christ (faith)...one cannot occur without the other
- Thus, faith and repentance are both necessary for true conversion...they are two sides of the same coin



² John MacArthur, *Faith Works: The Gospel According to the Apostles*, 74.

³ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 709.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 714.

- “Returning to Paul’s illustration of spiritual awakening aids us in understanding conversion. As God shines the light of regeneration into the sinner’s heart, he opens man’s spiritual eyes so that he can see the bankruptcy of sin and the worthiness of Christ (Acts 26:18; 2 Cor. 4:6), who is perfectly suited to forgive our sins and provide the righteousness we need for eternal life. Finally furnished with the ability to perceive reality as it is, the newborn soul necessarily and immediately turns away in revulsion from sin and eagerly runs to embrace Christ. That turning from sin and unbelief is repentance, and the eager embrace of Christ as Savior from sin and as Lord over one’s life is faith. Together, repentance and faith make up the single act of conversion.”⁵
- Thus, neither repentance nor faith come first...they occur together and simultaneously...the two cannot be separated
- “Scripture puts repentance and faith together as different aspects of the one act of coming to Christ for salvation. It is not that a person turns from sin and next trust in Christ, or first trusts in Christ and then away from sin, but rather that both occur at the same time. When we turn to Christ for salvation from our sins, we are simultaneously turning away from the sins that we are asking Christ to save us from. If that were not true our turning to Christ for salvation from sin could hardly be a genuine turning to him or trusting in him.”⁶
- “The question has been discussed: which is prior faith or repentance? It is an unnecessary question and the insistence that one is prior to the other futile. There is no priority. The faith that is unto salvation is a penitent faith and the repentance that is unto life is a believing repentance.”⁷
- “It should be apparent that repentance and faith are intimately related and even inseparable from one another. They are truly two sides of the same coin. In the first place, their connection follows a simple logic: it is impossible for someone to turn away from something without turning toward something else. Conversely, one cannot turn toward something without turning away from whatever was previously occupying his attention. Further, it is impossible to look in two different directions at the same time. But the inseparability of repentance and faith is also a theological necessity. It is inconceivable that one who finally perceives sin and Christ as they actually are should pursue Christ without forsaking sin or should forsake sin without embracing Christ. Remember that regeneration is a spiritual heart transplant—a radical renewal of man’s tastes, desires, and affections. To such a renewed heart, the beauty of Christ’s glory is irresistibly compelling, and it outshines the false glories of sin just as the brilliance of the noonday sun renders the stars invisible. To suggest that one might embrace Christ without also decisively purposing to repudiate sin is to suggest that sin is more objectively desirable to the regenerated heart than Christ is. On the contrary, to the newly awakened sinner, Christ is an inestimably valuable treasure, and to gain him, one delightfully forsakes everything (Matt. 13:44–46; Phil. 3:8). Thus, the faith that saves is a repentant faith, just as the repentance that saves is a believing repentance.”⁸
- Although they are simultaneous actions, repentance is usually listed before faith, indicating its logical priority in conversion

Mark 1:15 ~ and saying, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.”

Acts 19:4 ~ Paul said, “John baptized with the baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in Him who was coming after him, that is, in Jesus.”

Acts 20:21 ~ solemnly testifying to both Jews and Greeks of repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.

Hebrews 6:1 ~ Therefore leaving the elementary teaching about the Christ, let us press on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God,

⁵ John MacArthur and Richard Mayhue, *Biblical Doctrine: A Systematic Summary of Bible Truth*, 590.

⁶ Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 713.

⁷ Murray, *Redemption Accomplished*, 113.

⁸ MacArthur and Mayhue, *Biblical Doctrine*, 590.

THE REQUIREMENT OF REPENTANCE

What is Repentance?

- The word “repentance” (*metanoia*) means “to undergo a change of one’s mind”...it means changing one’s mind so that one’s views, values, goals, and ways are changed and one’s whole life is lived differently
- “Repentance is a heartfelt sorrow for sin, a renouncing of it, and a sincere commitment to forsake it and walk in obedience to Christ.”⁹
- This does not refer to a minor change of opinion, but rather a change of the entire direction of one’s life
- It involves a radical turning from sin and to Christ
- The change is radical, both inwardly and outwardly...the mind and judgment, will and affections, behavior and life-style, motives and purposes, are all involved
- Repenting means starting to live a new life...a complete 180-degree turnaround
- Repentance involves: 1) A knowledge that sin is wrong; 2) A strong conviction that sin should be rejected; 3) A decision to renounce sin and lead a life of obedience instead
- “[B]iblical repentance is not a mere change of thinking, though it does involve an intellectual acknowledgment of sin and a change of attitude toward it. Neither is it merely shame or sorrow for sin, although genuine repentance always involves an element of remorse. True biblical repentance is also a redirection of the human will, a purposeful decision to forsake all unrighteousness and pursue righteousness instead. Thus, genuine repentance involves the mind, the heart, and the will.”¹⁰
- Repentance involves **the mind** (intellectual) in that it recognizes the heinousness of sin and affirms that we are sinners who have broken God’s law
- It involves an intellectual assent that we stand guilty before a holy God

Psalm 51:3-4 ~ For I know my transgressions, And my sin is ever before me. 4 Against You, You only, I have sinned And done what is evil in Your sight, So that You are justified when You speak And blameless when You judge.

- Repentance involves **the heart** (emotional) in that it is marked by a mourning over sin
- It manifests itself in a genuinely brokenhearted mourning over personal sin
- “[W]hile sorrow should not be equated strictly with repentance, it is a necessary component of it and is often a powerful impulse to genuinely turning away from sin...true repentance will always include at least some element of contrition—not sorrow for getting caught, nor sadness because of the consequences, but a spirit broken by the sense of having sinned against God and a longing to be restored to fellowship with him.”¹¹
- “While we carry the fire of sin about us, we must carry the water of tears to quench it.”¹²

Psalm 34:18 ~ The LORD is near to the brokenhearted And saves those who are crushed in spirit.

Psalm 51:17 ~ The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; A broken and a contrite heart, O God, You will not despise.

Matthew 5:4 ~ Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.

- Repentance involves **the will (volitional)** in that it results in a determination to abandon stubborn disobedience and surrender the will to Christ

⁹ Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 713.

¹⁰ MacArthur and Mayhue, *Biblical Doctrine*, 593.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 593-594.

¹² Thomas Watson

- This is always reflected in a change of behavior...however, the call to repentance is not a call to clean up one's life
- Rather, a transformed life is the evidence that genuine repentance has taken place

Isaiah 1:16-17 ~ Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean; Remove the evil of your deeds from My sight. Cease to do evil, 17 Learn to do good; Seek justice, Reprove the ruthless, Defend the orphan, Plead for the widow.

Luke 3:8 ~ Therefore bear fruits in keeping with repentance, and do not say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham for our father'

Acts 26:20 ~ but kept declaring both to those of Damascus first, and also at Jerusalem and then throughout all the region of Judea, and even to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, performing deeds appropriate to repentance.

- "True repentance is a turning from sin out of choice; forced reformation neither is sincere nor will last. The man leaves his sin, not for the inferior motives only of danger to himself by it, but from the higher motives, namely, because it is offensive to God, dishonors his Son, grieve his Spirit, transgresses his law, and defaces his image. If your turning from sin proceeds not from these motives, God will never regard it as acceptable in his sight. It is done for self, not for God; and God will never be the reward of that work whereof he is not the end."¹³
- The message of repentance corresponds to the constant summons of the Old Testament prophets to Israel to return to the God from whom they had strayed

Jeremiah 23:22 ~ But if they had stood in My council, Then they would have announced My words to My people, And would have turned them back from their evil way And from the evil of their deeds

Zechariah 1:3-6 ~ Therefore say to them, 'Thus says the LORD of hosts, "Return to Me," declares the LORD of hosts, "that I may return to you," says the LORD of hosts. "Do not be like your fathers, to whom the former prophets proclaimed, saying, "Thus says the LORD of hosts, "Return now from your evil ways and from your evil deeds." ' But they did not listen or give heed to Me," declares the LORD. "Your fathers, where are they? And the prophets, do they live forever? "But did not My words and My statutes, which I commanded My servants the prophets, overtake your fathers? Then they repented and said, 'As the LORD of hosts purposed to do to us in accordance with our ways and our deeds, so He has dealt with us.' ' ' ' "

- The call to repent was the first and fundamental summons in the preaching of John the Baptist

Matthew 3:2, 7-9 ~ **Repent**, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand...But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming for baptism, he said to them, "You brood of vipers, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Therefore bear fruit in keeping with **repentance**; and do not suppose that you can say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham for our father'; for I say to you that from these stones God is able to raise up children to Abraham

- The call to repent was also central to the ministry of Christ

Matthew 4:17 ~ From that time Jesus began to preach and say, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."

- Repentance was part of Jesus' summary of the gospel that was to be taken to the world

Luke 24:46-47 ~ and He said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Christ would suffer and rise again from the dead the third day, and that repentance for forgiveness of sins would be proclaimed in His name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem

- This was the message of the apostles

Mark 6:12 ~ They went out and preached that *men* should repent.

Acts 2:38 ~ Repent and let each one of you be baptized.

¹³ Thomas Boston, *The Necessity of Repentance*

Acts 3:19-21 ~ Therefore repent and return, so that your sins may be wiped away, in order that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord; 20 and that He may send Jesus, the Christ appointed for you, 21 whom heaven must receive until the period of restoration of all things about which God spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets from ancient time.

Acts 17:30 ~ Therefore having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is now declaring to men that all people everywhere should repent,

Acts 20:21 ~ solemnly testifying to both Jews and Greeks of repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.

Acts 26:20 ~ declaring... that they should repent and turn to God, performing deeds appropriate to repentance.

1 Thessalonians 1:9 ~ how you turned to God from idols to serve a living and true God.

- Repentance is also what the glorified Christ preached to five of the seven churches in Asia

Revelation 2:5 ~ Therefore remember from where you have fallen, and repent and do the deeds you did at first; or else I am coming to you and will remove your lampstand out of its place—unless you repent

Revelation 2:16 ~ Therefore repent; or else I am coming to you quickly, and I will make war against them with the sword of My mouth

Revelation 2:22 ~ ‘Behold, I will throw her on a bed *of sickness*, and those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation, unless they repent of her deeds

- Thus, repentance is a fruit of regeneration
- “In summary, then, the Scriptures teach that repentance begins with the sinner’s humble acknowledgment of his sin and need for forgiveness. Understanding the offensiveness of his sin before God produces great mourning, sorrow, and even shame and humiliation. His disgust with himself and his unrighteousness leads him to repudiate his wickedness and to decisively turn away from a life of sin. As he turns from his former way of life, he turns to trust and serve the God who is worthy of all worship. In Christ he finds forgiveness and is restored to fellowship with his Creator. Finally, he does not regard that forgiveness as the final step but lovingly, from the heart, purposes to live in obedience to the revealed will of God, empowered by the work of the Holy Spirit. The evidence of his inward repentance is thus manifested in his external deeds.”¹⁴

There is a Difference Between Repentance and Remorse

- Mere sorrow over sin does not constitute genuine repentance unless a forsaking of sin accompanies it
- Scripture distinguishes between a worldly sorrow and a godly sorrow

2 Corinthians 7:10 ~ For the sorrow that is according to the will of God produces a repentance without regret, leading to salvation, but the sorrow of the world produces death.

- Judas would be an example of someone who had remorse over their sin but not repentance (contra Peter)

Matthew 27:3-5 ~ he felt remorse and returned the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders, saying, “I have sinned by betraying innocent blood.” 5 And he threw the pieces of silver into the temple sanctuary and departed; and he went away and hanged himself.

- Judas regretted his actions in that he felt bad about the consequences
- But he did not see his sin...or admit wrong...nor was he humbled by his actions

¹⁴ MacArthur and Mayhue, *Biblical Doctrine*, 595.

- Esau also wept over the consequences of his sin but did not truly repent

Hebrews 12:17 ~ For you know that even afterwards, when he desired to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no place for repentance, though he sought for it with tears

- True repentance is accompanied by a godly sorrow...a contrite, real, convicting repentance over sin
- In fact, true repentance cannot occur apart from such a genuine sorrow over sin

Repentance is a Necessary Condition for True Salvation

- It is necessary to emphasize repentance since there are many who simply avoid the topic today because it is an “offensive” message
- This is not what people want to hear today...so what has developed today in the church is a non-threatening message of inclusive salvation that eliminates all offenses...the idea seems to be: “if they think we are cool, they will think Jesus is cool, too”
- It seems as if we have lost a sense of the sinfulness of sin today...and when that happens, repentance is not stressed...it is no wonder that it is the missing ingredient in many Gospel presentations today
- When sin is called “sickness,” people think it requires therapy not repentance
- This is also important because there are some today who deny that repentance is necessary for conversion
- This issue came to a head in the 1990’s with the publication of the book *The Gospel According to Jesus* in which he argued that there can be no true saving faith without genuine repentance as well
- This debate became known as the Lordship/Non-Lordship salvation issue
- Those in the Non-Lordship camp (primarily dispensationalists) argued that repentance simply involves a change of mind about Jesus and that to require repentance is to actually add another requirement to “faith alone”
- In other words, to require belief in Christ’s Lordship in addition to the belief in Christ as Savior is tantamount to adding a work and confusing the simple gospel of faith alone with some action on the believers’ part
- Any addition to simple faith is seen as *another gospel* and dangerously close to salvation by work
- Such critics would thus define repentance to only mean a change of mind towards one’s previous view of Christ
- Zane Hodges summarizes this view: “Faith alone (not repentance and faith) is the sole condition for justification and eternal life...Though genuine repentance may precede salvation...it need not do so. And because it is not essential to the saving transaction as such, it is in no sense a condition for that transaction.”¹⁵
- Proponents often argue that the Gospel of John never once mentions repentance
- Those in the Lordship camp argue that God commands all persons to repent and believe the gospel
- Repentance here means to turn away from all known sin and from trusting in one’s good works
- One cannot truly believe unless he repents, and one cannot truly repent unless he believes...Repentance and faith are two sides of the same coin (but they are not synonymous terms)
- The biblical concept of repentance involves far more than merely a casual change of thinking...Biblically, a person who repents does not continue willfully in sin...repentance is a turning from sin, and it always results in changed behavior
- The idea that genuine repentance could result in anything but a change of life is completely foreign to Scripture

¹⁵ Zane Hodges, *Absolutely Free*, 144-146.

- Conclusion: From the previous texts, it becomes obvious that repentance is not optional but necessary for salvation!
- It is an essential element of conversion and is therefore an indispensable element of the gospel message
- Those who insist it is possible to be saved without repenting of sin are in direct contradiction to Scripture
- “It is entirely biblical for the church to make repentance the chief feature of its message to the unsaved world...Repentance is at the heart of the gospel call. Unless we are preaching repentance we are not preaching the gospel our Lord has charged us to preach. If we fail to call people to turn from their sins, we are not communicating the same gospel the apostles proclaimed.”¹⁶
- “I am deeply concerned as I watch what is happening in the church today. Biblical Christianity has lost its voice. The church is preaching a gospel designed to soothe rather than confront sinful individuals. Churches have turned to amusement and show business to try to win the world. Those methods may seem to draw crowds for a season. But they’re not God’s methods, and therefore they are destined to fail. In the meantime, the church is being infiltrated and corrupted by professing believers who have never repented, never turned from sin, and therefore, never really embraced Christ as Lord or Savior.”¹⁷

Repentance is a Gift from the Lord

- The Bible views repentance from two different, but complementary, angles: it is both the duty of man and the gift of God
- Man must indeed repent but they must be enabled by God to do so
- “Because of man’s hard-heartedness, divine enablements are necessary if there are to be proper human responses in the spiritual realm.”¹⁸

Acts 11:18 ~ When they heard this, they quieted down and glorified God, saying, “Well then, God has granted to the Gentiles also the repentance that leads to life.”

2 Timothy 2:24-25 ~ The Lord’s bond-servant must not be quarrelsome, but be kind to all, able to teach, patient when wronged, with gentleness correcting those who are in opposition, if perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth,

- That repentance is a gift from God, however, does not negate our responsibility to call people to it

REPENTANCE MUST BE ONGOING IN THE BELIEVER

Psalm 51

- “True faith is suffused with penitence. And just as faith is not only a momentary act but an abiding attitude of trust and confidence directed to the Saviour, so repentance results in constant contrition. The broken spirit and the contrite heart are abiding marks of the believing soul. As long as sin remains there must be consciousness of it and this conviction of our own sinfulness will constrain self-abhorrence, confession, and the plea of forgiveness and cleansing. Christ’s blood is the laver of initial cleansing but it is also the fountain to which the believer must continuously repair. It is at the cross of Christ that repentance has its beginning; it is at the cross of Christ that it must continue to pour out its heart in the tears of confession and contrition. The way of sanctification is the way of contrition for the sin of the past and the present.”¹⁹

¹⁶ MacArthur, *Faith Works*, 74.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 85.

¹⁸ George Zemek, *A Biblical Theology of the Doctrines of Sovereign Grace*, 191.

¹⁹ Murray, *Redemption Accomplished*, 117.