

Salvation Belongs to the Lord (Conversion Part 2 – Repentance)

Under the topic of conversion, last week we considered the topic faith, particularly faith that saves. We saw that faith is our faith. But, it is gifted to us and flows out of regeneration. And the faith God gives always believes in Jesus. This week, we will consider another essential element of salvation: repentance. Faith that saves is always a repentant faith. The very first message Jesus preached began with “*repent and believe in the gospel*” (Mark 1:15). At the end of Peter’s first sermon in Acts 2 the people said, “*What shall we do?*” He said, “*Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins . . .*” Brothers and sisters, if anyone will be saved, if anyone will be converted, there must be repentance. Just as no one is saved without faith, no one is saved without repentance. I have 3 questions about repentance?

1. Where does repentance come from? This may seem like a strange question because, like faith, repentance is ours. In other words, WE are commanded to repent. Repentance is NOT something that God does for us. Nevertheless, if repentance is necessary for salvation and salvation is a gift, we must conclude that repentance is also a gift from God. In Acts 5:31, speaking of Jesus, Peter proclaims: “**God exalted him at his right hand as Leader and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins**” (Acts 5:31). In Acts 11:17-18, speaking of the Holy Spirit coming to the Gentiles, Peter says, “**If then God gave the same gift to them as he gave to us when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could stand in God’s way?**” **When they heard these things they fell silent. And they glorified God, saying, “Then to the Gentiles also God has granted repentance that leads to life.”** In 2 Tim. 2:25, speaking of the ungodly with whom we share, saying that “**God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth . . .**”

I think we must see this truth as we consider FAITH. Faith is God’s gracious gift that unites us to Christ. And as we’ve seen saving faith is always repentant. You cannot have “belief” without “repentance” if you are to be saved. They go together. They are two sides of the same coin. But, if we want to be more specific, I think it is biblical to say that repentance flows down to us from faith. Let’s think about this for a moment. FAITH is the greatest of all God’s gracious gifts. Why? Because it is through faith that we are saved. FAITH unites us to Christ, by which we are saved. In Christ, our sins are forgiven! By faith, we believe the gospel of Christ. By faith we understand what the Scriptures say about the birth, life, death, burial, resurrection, ascension, etc. of Christ. By FAITH we believe these things. As regards salvation, the Bible does not describe us as being saved through the means of “repentance” but through “faith,” though no one is saved without repentance. Therefore, I believe the Bible teaches that faith is the chief of all graces. And from faith flows all the other graces of salvation, starting with repentance.

Think of faith as a fountain that never stops flowing with beautiful water. And this water is not only filled with hydrogen and oxygen, but it also includes essential minerals such as calcium, magnesium, and potassium. And all of these good things flow down from this fountain for those

who drink. In the same kind of way, FAITH is the fountain of water. And this water is also filled with the beautiful graces of God that are necessary for life. And one of these graces is repentance. You see, we can't separate the essential elements and minerals found in water. Likewise, we cannot separate repentance from faith, though it flows from faith. Brothers and sisters, when God saves you, He gives you ALL the graces. You are now the fountain of faith, the fountain that continues to produce the grace of repentance. Other graces follow as well . . . LOVE, HOPE, PEACE, TRUTH, HUMILITY, RIGHTEOUSNESS, etc. This is why Peter can say that **"His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence . . ."** (2 Pet. 1:3). Today, if you are "saved," if you are "being saved," this means, by faith YOU are the fountain through the power of God by the Holy Spirit. And All these gifts of grace come to you through the person and work of Jesus Christ.

(We will come back and apply this at the end.) Now, let's move to our 2nd question as we try and define this grace of repentance.

2. What is repentance? For the next few minutes, I want to try and define repentance. As I studied this week, I looked at many definitions of repentance, some long and some short. And though they are worded differently, they all contain the same concepts. To repent means to turn from sin to God. Picture walking in one direction and then turning around to walk in the opposite direction. And this includes not just the body walking in one direction, but the entire person, heart, mind, and will. This is why repentance comes under the umbrella of conversion. This is what we see when a person is converted.

I like John Murray's explanation in his book *Redemption Accomplished and Applied*. He says that repentance involves the heart and the mind. In other words, in conversion, which flows from the power of regeneration, a person's mind and heart change. And this change concerns God, ourselves, sin, and righteousness. Let me take these in order:

i. Repentance involves a change of mind and heart toward God. I will use my own conversion as an example. In college when I started attending church, reading the Bible, talking to Christians, I started to see God in a different light. And one particular night, after reading the Book of Revelation and understanding the simple truth that God sent his Son to die for my sins, I was deeply moved in my mind and my heart toward God. I saw him as creator. I saw him as Lord. I saw him as good. I saw him as gracious. Etc. And the next morning as I attended church, it was as someone removed the black out glasses from my eyes and I saw God differently. I think of Paul's words to the Thessalonians after seeing their good works and their faith, he says I know the gospel has come to you in power. Why? He says, because **"you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God . . ."** (1 Thess. 1:9).

Another good example is found in Acts 17. After seeing the how religious the people are, worshipping all kinds of gods, even having inscription to the "unknown God," Paul then proceeds to tell them about true God. And after telling them about the true God, what does he

say, “**Repent**” from these beliefs and turn to the living God. In this regard, what does repentance look like? It says, “*God, I have not viewed you in the right way. I have not known you as you reveal yourself in both nature and Scripture. I have lived my life believing lies and partial truths about you. I have not known you. I have not represented you to the world in the right way. And in this way, I am an idolater in my mind and in my heart. But, now I turn from worshipping idols to the true and living God.*” This is a mind and a heart of repentance toward God.

ii. Repentance involves a change of mind and heart toward ourselves. I think this is pretty simple. A repentant person begins to see him/herself differently. A repentant person says, “God is the creator, not me. Life is not about ME. It is about God. This world is not MY world, it is God’s world. God is in control, not ME. I think of Life is not about MY plans, MY desires, MY wishes, MY aspirations.” I think of the words of Jesus in Luke 14:26: “**If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple.**” If you are repentant and you really think about it, you are willing to say to God, “*whatever you ask me to do, this I will do.*”

iii. Repentance involves a change of mind and heart towards sin. This truth may come to our minds first when we think of repentance. After all, what are we saved from? We are saved from sin . . . which leads to death . . . which is ultimately separation from God in hell forever. A repentant person begins to see his/her sin for what it is. And there is a great desire to run away from sin, to leave sin, to get rid of sin. When a new Christian sees a holy God, and by faith sees the great offer of salvation in Christ, he/she begins to see hate his sin. (Speak to my own experience to my first months after becoming a Christian.)

Turn with me to Isaiah 6 for good example of repentance. Look at vv. 1-5: “**In the year that King Uzziah died I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and the train of his robe filled the temple. Above him stood the seraphim. Each had six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. And one called to another and said: “Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!” And the foundations of the thresholds shook at the voice of him who called, and the house was filled with smoke. And I said: “Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!”**”

iv. Repentance involves a change of mind and heart towards righteousness. This is where the Gospel comes into play. A repentant person says, “I am undone. I cannot be saved. I cannot produce the righteousness needed to be saved.” Look back to Is. 6:6-7: “**Then one of the seraphim flew to me, having in his hand a burning coal that he had taken with tongs from the altar. And he touched my mouth and said: “Behold, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away, and your sin atoned for.”** Here we see the seraphim take a burning coal from the altar and touch Isaiah’s lips. And when this happens, what happens? His guilt is taken away and his sin is covered. Here we see a picture of the cross of Christ where the righteousness

of God is displayed in judgment. And by faith, for those who look to Christ in repentance, find the righteousness of God. Look with me to Phil. 3:5-9: When Paul considers his own righteousness he says, I was **“circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless. But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith . . .”** At the end of the day, if you are repentant, you will know and say, “Christ died for my sins . . . He is my righteousness . . . I am justified in the eyes of God.

Let me also briefly that the change of mind and heart toward righteousness is more than just knowing that Christ is your righteousness. There is also a constant desire to live in a righteous way. Repentance says, *“I have no righteousness of my own.”* And, repentance says, *“I want to grow in righteousness.”* This understanding includes both justification and sanctification.

3. What does repentance look like in the life of a Christian? Let me give a few applications.

For the Christian, repentance is constant. It is ongoing. As God’s grace continues as a fountain in our lives, so a heart of repentance always flows from this fountain. If you have experienced true repentance, if your mind and heart are changed toward God, toward yourself, toward sin, and toward righteousness, what I have described is a daily, weekly, monthly, yearly experience. Repentance is not a one-time experience. It flows from faith in Christ . . . always!

I like the way Paul describes the Christian in Rom. 6 by saying, **“What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it? Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin . . .”** (vv. 1-6).

Our example of godliness is Christ. This means we don’t compare ourselves to the world when they get some things right. In our minds and in our hearts, we really want to be like Christ, not the world. This includes what we watch, what we listen to, what we wear, how we treat one another. This is the posture of repentance.

A truly repentant person is always ready and willing to forgive (repeat). Eph. 4:32 says, **“Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.”**