



Doctrine of Salvation

Conversion, Faith, and Repentance¹

Explanation and Scriptural Basis

- In previous lessons, we've learned how God himself (through the human preaching of the Word) issues the gospel call to us and, by the work of the Holy Spirit, regenerates us, imparting new spiritual life within.
- Reminder: Order of Salvation (Ordo Salutis; not experiential temporal sequence, but logical order):
 - Election & Predestination
 - Regeneration
 - Effectual Calling
 - Conversion (Repentance & Faith)
 - Justification
 - Adoption
 - Sanctification
 - Glorification
- **Definition of conversion (faith and repentance):** Conversion is our willing response to the gospel call, in which we sincerely repent of sins and place our trust (faith) in Christ for salvation. The term conversion itself means "turning"—here it represents a spiritual turn, a turning *from sin* and *to Christ*.
- The turning from sin is called *repentance*, and the trusting in Christ is called *faith*. Neither repentance nor faith can occur without the other, and they must occur together when true conversion takes place.

True Saving Faith Includes Knowledge, Approval, and Personal Trust

- **Knowledge alone is not enough.**
 - Personal saving faith, in the way Scripture understands it, involves more than mere knowledge.
 - *It is necessary that we must have some knowledge of who Christ is and what he has done.*

¹ Wayne Grudem, *Bible Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999). Much of this lesson outline contains content directly quoted or adapted from chapter 21 of Grudem.

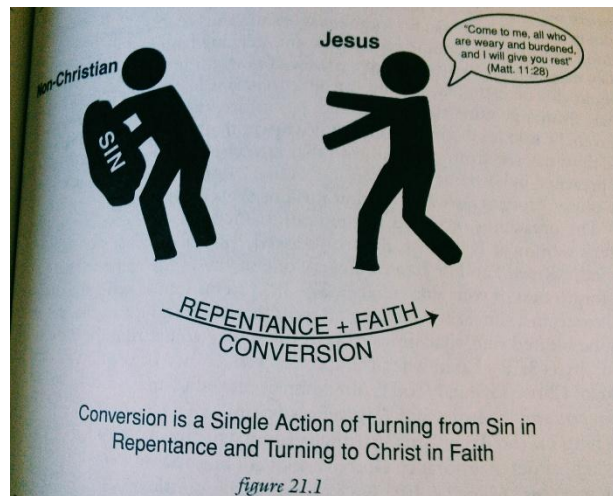
- **Romans 10:14** ¹⁴ *How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard And how are they to hear without someone preaching?*
- But knowledge about the *facts* of Jesus' life, death and resurrection is not enough, for people can know facts but rebel against them or dislike them.
 - **Romans 1:32** *Though they know God's righteous decree that those who practice such things deserve to die, they not only do them but give approval to those who practice them.*
 - **James 2:19** *You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder!*
- **Knowledge and approval are not enough.**
 - Moreover, merely knowing the facts and *approving* of them or *agreeing* that they are true is not enough.
 - **John 3:2** *This man came to Jesus by night and said to him, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God, for no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with him."*
 - Nicodemus had evaluated the facts of the situation, including Jesus' teaching and his remarkable miracles, and had drawn a correct conclusion from those facts: Jesus was a teacher come from God.
 - But this alone did not mean that Nicodemus had saving faith, for he still had to put his trust in Christ for salvation; he still had to "believe in him."
 - **Acts 26:27-28** *King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets? I know that you believe."* ²⁸ *And Agrippa said to Paul, "In a short time would you persuade me to be a Christian?"*
- **One must decide to depend on Jesus to save him/her personally.**
 - In addition to knowledge of the facts of the gospel and approval of those facts, in order to be saved, one must decide to depend on Jesus to save him/her.
 - In doing this, one moves from being an interested observer of the facts of salvation and the teachings of the Bible to being someone who enters into a new relationship with Jesus Christ as a living person.
 - We may therefore define saving faith in the following way: *Saving faith is trust in Jesus Christ as a living person for forgiveness of sins and eternal life with God.*
 - This definition emphasizes that saving faith is not just a belief in facts but *personal trust in Jesus* to save me.

- Much more is involved in salvation than simply forgiveness of sins and eternal life, but someone who initially comes to Christ seldom realizes the blessings of salvation that will come.
 - The main thing for which a believer comes to Christ is the removal their sin and guilt and enter into a genuine relationship with God that will last forever.
- This definition emphasizes *personal trust* in Christ, not just belief in facts about Christ. Because saving faith in Scripture involves this personal trust, *trust* is often a better word to use in contemporary culture than merely the words *faith* or *belief*.
 - The reason is that we can “believe” something to be true with no personal commitment or dependence involved in it.
 - The word *faith* on the other hand, is sometimes used today to refer to an almost irrational commitment to something in spite of strong evidence to the contrary, a sort of irrational decision to believe something that we are quite sure is not true. But Christianity is a certainly a rational faith!
 - The word *trust* is closer to the biblical idea, since we are familiar with trusting persons in everyday life. The more we come to know a person, and the more we see in that person a pattern of life that warrants trust, the more we find ourselves able to place trust in him to do what he promises, or to act in ways on which we can rely.
 - If biblically defined, we can use *trust*, *faith*, and *belief* interchangeably to underscore this robust understanding of what it means to come to faith in Jesus.
- The fuller sense of personal trust is indicated in several passages of Scripture in which initial saving faith is spoken of in very personal terms. See John 1:12; John 3:16; John 6:37, 7:37; Matt 11:28–30.
 - **John 1:12** *But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God...*
 - **John 6:37** *All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out.*
 - **Matthew 11:28-30** *Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. ²⁹Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”*
- **Summary:** When a person comes to trust in Christ, all three elements must be present: knowledge, approval, and personal trust.

Faith and Repentance Must Come Together

- **Definition of repentance:** *Repentance is a heartfelt sorrow for sin, a renouncing of it, and a sincere commitment to forsake it and walk in obedience to Christ.*
 - This definition indicates that repentance is something that can occur at a specific point in time.
 - Repentance, like faith, is an intellectual *understanding* (that sin is wrong), an emotional *approval* of the teachings of Scripture regarding sin (a sorrow for sin and a hatred of it), and a *personal decision* to turn from it (a renouncing of sin and a decision of the will to forsake it and lead a life of obedience to Christ instead).
- **Caution:** We cannot say that someone has to actually live that changed life over a period of time before repentance can be genuine, or else repentance would be turned into a kind of obedience that would merit salvation for ourselves.
 - Of course, genuine repentance will result in a changed life. In fact, a truly repentant person will begin at once to live a changed life, and we can call that changed life the fruit of repentance.
 - **Galatians 5:22-23** *But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.*
 - Repentance is something that occurs in the heart and involves the whole person in a decision to turn from sin.
- **Note:** Mere sorrow for one's actions, or even deep remorse over one's actions, does not constitute genuine repentance unless it is accompanied by a sincere decision to forsake sin that is being committed against God.
 - Genuine repentance involves a deep sense that the worst thing about one's sin is that it has offended a holy God.
 - **2 Corinthians 7:9-11** ⁹*As it is, I rejoice, not because you were grieved, but because you were grieved into repenting. For you felt a godly grief, so that you suffered no loss through us. ¹⁰For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret, whereas worldly grief produces death. ¹¹For see what earnestness this godly grief has produced in you, but also what eagerness to clear yourselves, what indignation, what fear, what longing, what zeal, what punishment! At every point you have proved yourselves innocent in the matter.*
 - Godly grief is just one factor that leads to genuine repentance.
- 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 first turns from sin and next trusts in Christ, or first trusts in Christ and then turns 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.
- The fact that repentance and faith are simply two different sides of the same coin, or two different aspects of the one event of conversion, may be seen in the picture below:



- It is therefore clearly contrary to the NT evidence to speak about the possibility of having true saving faith without having any repentance of sin.
 - It is also contrary to the NT to speak about the possibility of someone accepting Christ “as Savior” but not “as Lord,” if that means simply depending on him for salvation but not committing oneself to forsake sin and to be obedient to Christ from that point on.
 - When Jesus invites sinners, “Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest,” he immediately adds, “Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me” (Matt 11:28–29).
 - To come to him includes taking his yoke upon us, being subject to his direction and guidance, learning from him and being obedient to him.
 - If we are unwilling to make such a commitment, then we have not truly placed our trust in him.
 - **Isaiah 55:6-7** “Seek the Lord while he may be found; call upon him while he is near; 7 let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; let him return to the Lord, that he may have compassion on him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.
 - Sometimes faith alone is named as the thing necessary for coming to Christ for salvation (see John 3:16; Acts 16:31; Rom 10:9; Eph 2:8–9). These are familiar passages, and we emphasize them often when explaining the gospel to others.

- However, in other passages *only repentance* is named, for it is simply assumed that true repentance will also involve faith in Christ for forgiveness of sin.
- The NT authors understood so well that genuine repentance and genuine faith had to go together that they often simply mentioned repentance alone with the understanding that faith would also be included, because turning *from* sins in a genuine way is impossible apart from a genuine turning to God.
 - **Luke 24:46-47** *and said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, ⁴⁷ and that repentance for the forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem.*
 - **Acts 2:37-38** *Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?" ³⁸ And Peter said to them, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.*
 - **Acts 3:19** *Repent therefore, and turn back, that your sins may be blotted out...*
 - **Romans 2:4** *Or do you presume on the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance?*
- **Practical Note:** What should we make of the common practice of asking people to *pray* to receive Christ as their personal Savior and Lord?
 - Since personal faith in Christ must involve an actual decision of the will, it is often very helpful to *express* that decision in spoken words, and this could very naturally take the form of a prayer to Christ in which we tell him of our sorrow for sin, our commitment to forsake it, and our decision actually to put our trust in him.
 - Such a spoken prayer does not in itself save us, but the attitude of the heart that it represents does constitute true conversion, and the decision to speak that prayer can often be the point at which a person truly comes to faith in Christ.
 - **Romans 10:9** *...If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.*

Both Faith and Repentance Continue Throughout Life

- Although we have been considering initial faith and repentance as the two aspects of conversion at the beginning of the Christian life, it is important to realize that faith and repentance are not confined to the beginning of the Christian life.
 - They are attitudes of heart that continue throughout our lives as Christians. See Matt 6:12; Rev 3:19; cf. 2 Cor 7:10.
 - With regard to faith:
 - In one sense, faith will never end. Paul tells us, “*So faith, hope, and love abide; but the greatest of these is love*” (1 Cor 13:13). He certainly means that they abide for all eternity: if faith is trusting God to provide all our needs, then this attitude will never cease, not even in the age to come. See also Gal 2:20.
 - In another sense, faith as defined in Hebrews 11:1 will end, for we will no longer need to actively trust in future promises when we enter into their fulfilled realities.
 - **Hebrews 11:1** *Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.*
- *Initial* saving faith and *initial* repentance occur only once in our lives, and when they occur they constitute true conversion. The heart attitudes of repentance and faith only *begin* at conversion

Questions for Personal Application

- Have you come to trust Christ personally, or are you still at a point of intellectual knowledge or emotional approval of the facts of salvation without having personally put your trust in Christ? If you have not put your trust in Christ yet, what do you think is making you hesitate?
- If your knowledge about God has increased through these lessons, has your faith in God increased along with that knowledge? Why or why not? If not, what can you do to encourage your faith to grow more than it has?
- Have you ever truly repented of sin, or did you not understand the importance of repentance as the other side of the same coin of faith? Do you think it is possible for someone genuinely to trust in Christ for forgiveness of sins without also sincerely repenting for sins?



Access these and other Equip Class notes at:

parksidebc.org/Equip