

## FOUNDATIONS: What Christians Should Believe

29 August 2012

*SALVATION: How God Makes Rebels His Children*

Part 10

**Context:** In our ongoing study through our church's confession of faith,<sup>1</sup> we are currently discussing the doctrine of salvation.<sup>2</sup> Thus far we have learned what it means to be saved, how salvation is wholly of grace, how salvation is only and always mediated through Jesus Christ, and how the gift of salvation purchased by Jesus is received by simple faith alone. In tonight's study, we will consider what repentance is and how it is an essential ingredient in saving faith.

***Salvation:** We believe that the salvation of sinners is divinely initiated and wholly of grace through the mediatorial offices of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, Who, by appointment of the Father, voluntarily took upon Himself our nature, yet without sin, and honored the divine law by His obedience, thus qualifying Himself to be our Savior; that by the shedding of His blood in His death He fully satisfied the just demands of a holy and righteous God regarding sin; that His sacrifice consisted not in setting us an example by his death as a martyr, but was a voluntary substitution of Himself in the sinner's place, the Just dying for the unjust, Christ bearing our sins in His own body on the tree; that having risen from the dead He is now enthroned in Heaven; He is in every way qualified to be a suitable, compassionate and all-sufficient Savior. We believe that faith in Jesus Christ is the only condition of salvation. Repentance is a change of mind and purpose toward God prompted by the Holy Spirit and is an integral part of saving faith.*

**Bible Reading:** 1 Thessalonians 1

### **Discussion:**

- I. What is the most significant truth about our salvation that has stood out to you from this series so far? Why?
- II. Select a phrase from our confession of faith above and define it. How should it apply to our lives?
- III. Define saving faith in terms a child or someone with no church experience could understand.

### **Study:**

- I. While most people still recognize that repentance is a concept important to Christians, definitions of repentance vary widely. Discuss the following statements on repentance and how they differ:
  - A. "Repentance means feeling really sorry for something bad you've done. It's basically a synonym for feeling guilty."
  - B. "Repentance is another name for doing penance, or inflicting punishment upon yourself to pay for the wrongs you've done."
  - C. "Repentance is something entirely unrelated to saving faith. I might repent when I'm 5 years old, but not believe on Jesus until I'm 85 years old."
  - D. "Repentance is something limited to the Old Testament. The New Testament gospel of grace has no place for repentance."
  - E. In this lesson, we will see how none of these statements are entirely correct. Gospel-repentance is something quite different.

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<sup>1</sup> For a complete copy of our church's confession of faith, visit our website ([www.trinitybaptistmuncie.org](http://www.trinitybaptistmuncie.org)) and look under the "We Believe" category. We will attempt to put all the previous notes from this series on the church website in the not too distant future.

<sup>2</sup> If you would like to go deeper in the study of the doctrine of salvation, we recommend the following resources: For an introductory study, see *What is the Gospel?* by Greg Gilbert (Wheaton: Crossway, 2010); for a more intermediate consideration, consider *The Truth of the Cross* by RC Sproul (Lake Mary, FL: Reformation Trust, 2007); for a challenging yet rewarding study, check out *Redemption Accomplished and Applied* by John Murray (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1955).

## II. Repentance as a major theme in Scripture:

- A. The noun “repentance” and verb “repent” are used 105 times in our English Bibles.<sup>3</sup> If synonyms for and examples of repentance (examples that do not use the word; e.g., the Prodigal Son) are included, the total times this concept occurs in Scripture is in the hundreds.
- B. Repentance is consistently emphasized in the proclamation of the gospel:
1. Old Testament gospel invitations were invitations to repent:  
Ezekiel 18:30-32 – Repent and turn from all your transgressions, lest iniquity be your ruin. Cast away from you all the transgressions that you have committed, and make yourselves a new heart and a new spirit! Why will you die, O house of Israel? For I have no pleasure in the death of anyone, declares the Lord God; so turn, and live.”<sup>4</sup>
  2. John the Baptist’s gospel invitations were invitations to repent:  
Matthew 3:1-2 – In those days John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”
  3. Jesus’ gospel invitations were invitations to repent:  
Mark 1:14-15 – Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the gospel of God, and saying, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.”
  4. The Apostle Peter’s gospel invitations were invitations to repent:  
Acts 3:19 – Repent therefore, and turn back, that your sins may be blotted out.
  5. The Apostle Paul’s gospel invitations were invitations to repent:  
Acts 17:30 – The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent.
- C. Suffice it to say, repentance is a major theme in scripture, a theme we misunderstand to our own hurt. What then does it mean to repent?

## III. A biblical definition of repentance:

- A. A helpful way to define biblical words is by carefully noting what other words are used in parallel. In the following verses, what terms are used in parallel with the terms repent or repentance (perhaps underline parallel words and phrases)?
1. 1 Kings 8:46-48 – ...if they turn their heart in the land to which they have been carried captive, and repent and plead with you in the land of their captors, saying, ‘We have sinned and have acted perversely and wickedly,’ if they repent with all their mind and with all their heart in the land of their enemies, who carried them captive...
  2. Psalm 78:34 – When he killed them, they sought him; they repented and sought God earnestly.
  3. Ezekiel 14:6 – Thus says the Lord GOD: Repent and turn away from your idols, and turn away your faces from all your abominations.
  4. Matthew 12:41 – The men of Nineveh will rise up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and behold, something greater than Jonah is here.

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<sup>3</sup> Obviously various English translations will differ somewhat on this point. This figure is taken from a concordance search in the King James Version.

<sup>4</sup> Scripture quotations are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version, copyright © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

5. Luke 17:3-4 – If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him, and if he sins against you seven times in the day, and turns to you seven times, saying, ‘I repent,’ you must forgive him.
  6. Acts 11:17-18 – 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."
  7. Acts 26:20 – [I, (i.e., Paul)] declared first to those in Damascus, then in Jerusalem and throughout all the region of Judea, and also to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, performing deeds in keeping with their repentance.
  8. 2 Peter 3:9 – The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.
- B. Based on the way the terms repent and repentance are used in the above passages, how might we define this concept? What might be some synonyms for repentance?
- C. Skim over the above verses again:
1. What negative behavior does repentance imply?
  2. Where in a person does true repentance occur?
  3. In what does repentance result?
- D. Below are a few theological definitions of repentance based on a summary of the way the term is used throughout the entire Bible. What do they have in common? How do they compare with the definition of repentance we proposed?
1. "Repentance is a heartfelt sorrow for sin, a renouncing of it, and a sincere commitment to forsake it and walk in obedience to Christ."<sup>5</sup>
  2. "This saving repentance is an evangelical grace, whereby a person, being by the Holy Spirit made sensible of the manifold evils of his sin, doth, by faith in Christ, humble himself for it, with godly sorrow, detestation of it, and self-aborrancy; praying for pardon and strength of grace, with a purpose and endeavor by supplies of the Spirit, to walk before God unto all well-pleasing in all things."<sup>6</sup>
  3. Repentance is turning from all idols (false religions, false ways to heaven, self-reliance, self-centeredness, money, pleasure, etc.) and embracing Christ as Lord and Savior.

#### IV. How does repentance relate to saving faith?

1. In our last lesson, we learned that man is saved by *faith alone*. Without any good works or deservedness whatsoever, if a person simply receives the salvation Jesus purchased with simple faith, that person is instantaneously and eternally saved. Faith is not an act meriting salvation but a reception of a free gift.
2. In light of this, some might wonder, how does saving faith relate to repentance? By saying we are saved by faith alone, are we thereby denying the Bible's teaching on the need to repent? Are faith and repentance the two things necessary to be saved? Is repentance some sort of work we are adding to the gospel of grace?
3. Carefully consider the following verses and try to discern the relationship of faith and repentance:

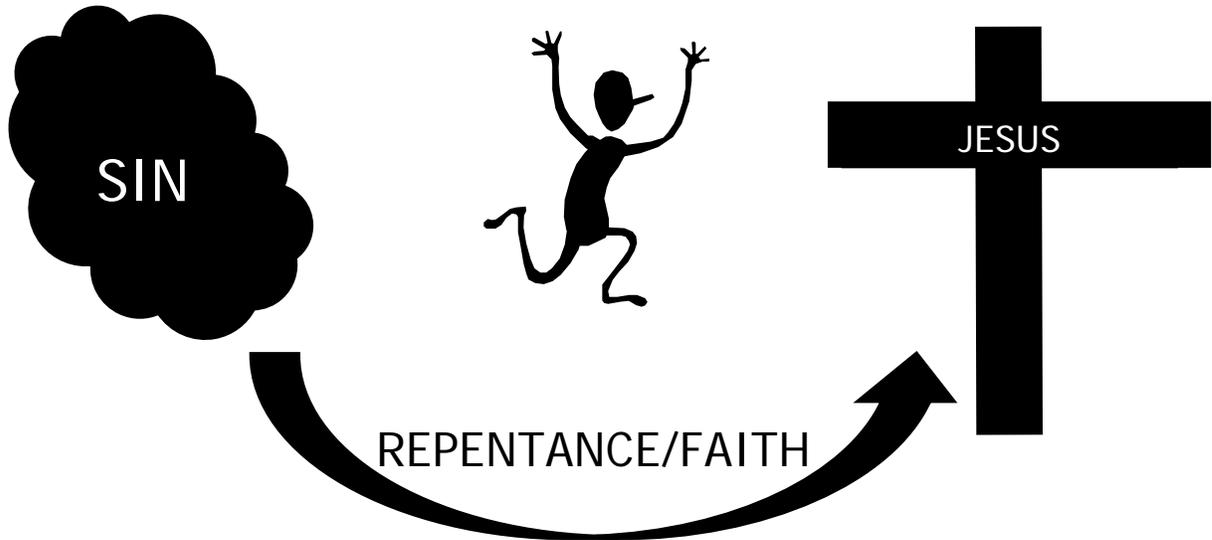
<sup>5</sup> Grudem, Wayne. *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, Zondervan: 1994), 713.

<sup>6</sup> *The Philadelphia Baptist Confession of Faith*, 1742, Chapter 15:3.

- a. Acts 20:20-21 – I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and teaching you in public and from house to house, testifying both to Jews and to Greeks of repentance toward God and of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.
  - b. Hebrews 6:1 – Therefore let us leave the elementary doctrine of Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God.
4. Note the following parallel verses and discern how faith and repentance are used as synonyms:
- a. 2 Peter 3:9 || John 3:16 – Which is essential to not perishing, repentance or faith?
    - i. 2 Peter 3:9 – The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.
    - ii. John 3:16 – For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.
  - b. Luke 24:46-47 || Acts 10:43 – Which results in forgiveness, repentance or faith?
    - i. Luke 24:46-47 – [Jesus] said to them, “Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem.”
    - ii. Acts 10:43 – To him all the prophets bear witness that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.
  - c. 2 Corinthians 7:10 || 2 Timothy 3:15 – Does repentance result in salvation or does faith result in salvation?
    - i. 2 Corinthians 7:10 – For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret, whereas worldly grief produces death.
    - ii. 2 Timothy 3:15 - From childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.
5. As should be obvious from this survey, repentance and saving faith are biblical synonyms. To repent unto salvation is to believe on the Lord Jesus and to believe on the Lord Jesus means repenting from your sins. In coming to Christ, faith and repentance are not two different experiences but two different sides of the same coin. Consequently, it might be helpful if we spoke more frequently of being saved by “repentant faith” or “believing repentance”. Explaining this idea, theologian Wayne Grudem writes:
- “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. 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.”<sup>7</sup>
6. The interconnectedness of saving faith and repentance might be illustrated by the following diagram:

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid, 713. Emphasis original.



V. A few concluding miscellaneous thoughts on repentance:

1. Repentance unto salvation is a gift the Holy Spirit produces in our hearts in response to the hearing of the gospel. Or, to use the terminology of our confession of faith, "Repentance is a change of mind and purpose toward God *prompted by the Holy Spirit.*"
  - a. Acts 11:18 – To the Gentiles also God has granted repentance that leads to life.
  - b. 2 Timothy 2:25 – God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth.
2. Biblical repentance begins in the mind, when we come to understand how we have disobeyed God's commandments (1 Kings 8:48, Romans 12:1-2). The Holy Spirit uses this realization to produce conviction in our hearts (John 16:8), which results in a turning of our wills and eventually a transformation of our behavior. The whole person is ultimately affected by true repentance, which is why the New Testament often speaks of the "fruits of repentance" (e.g., Acts 26:20).
3. Repentance should characterize the whole of the Christian life (e.g., Revelation 2:5). While we are eternally saved the moment we trust Christ, Christians will continue to sin until they see Jesus. Consequently, we should repent and turn from sin every time it occurs.
4. Repentance should characterize our interactions with one another. When we sin against another person, our duty is to repent immediately and seek their forgiveness (Matthew 5:23-24). Likewise, if another person sins against us, repents, and seeks our forgiveness, we are obligated to forgive them without delay (Luke 17:3-4).

**Conclusion:**

- I. How did this lesson help you come to understand repentance in a more biblical way?
- II. Why is it important to rightly define biblical repentance? What might happen if we wrongly define repentance?
- III. Is it permissible to explain the gospel without using the term repent? Is it permissible to explain the gospel without using the term believe? Explain.
- IV. Do faith and repentance remain a continuing part of the Christian life after salvation? Does this mean we must be saved every time we sin? Explain.

- V. Did you feel a sincere sorrow for sin when you first came to Christ? Can you describe what that felt like? Did it lead you to a genuine commitment to fight sin? How long was it before you noticed a change in your pattern of behavior?
- VI. If true repentance includes a sorrow for sin, how can we avoid the emotionalism that causes Christians to constantly doubt, "Maybe my repentance wasn't sincere because I wasn't sorry enough?"
- VII. What one point from this lesson most stood out to you and why?