

Fundamentals, Study 15: Repentance (2 Cor 7:8-12)

by BS Poh

o Saving faith will be accompanied by genuine repentance from sin.

1. To be saved from sin, and eternal punishment by God, a person must respond to the call of the gospel (i.e. the message of salvation in Christ). This response consists of two aspects, viz. *repentance* and *faith* which, together, is known as *conversion*. There can be no saving faith without repentance, and there can be no saving repentance without faith in Christ.¹ These are the two sides of the same coin. That is why repentance must be preached, and not just faith in Christ. Just as saving faith is a gift of God, saving repentance is also a gift of God.² (1. Tit 3:2-5; Acts 20:21; 2. Acts 11:18; 2 Tim 2:25)

2. What exactly is *repentance* that leads to salvation? It consists of three elements: (i) a *knowledge* of one's own guilt and sin against God; (ii) a *conviction* of one's filthiness and inability to save oneself; and (iii) a *decision* to turn from the life of sin to trust and obey the Lord Jesus Christ. As with faith, the total personality is involved - the mind, the affection (or heart), and the will.³ In faith, the focus is upon Christ. In repentance, the focus is upon the sinner. Conversion takes place when the person turns from himself to trust and follow Christ. (3. Rom 3:20; Psalm 51:17; Acts 26:18; Rom 6:17)

3. As a general rule, the greater is the sense of guilt and shame in the sinner, the clearer will be his turning to trust in Christ and the greater will be his love for Him.⁴ Saving repentance, however, must be distinguished from *worldly sorrow*. A person may feel strong remorse and attempt to make up for his wrongs, but if there is no change in his person, and no trust in Christ, it is not a repentance that saves.⁵ In genuine repentance, the conviction of guilt and shame might be short or prolonged, leading to prayer for pardon and desire to live a life pleasing to God.⁶ A person born and raised under the sound of the gospel might not have as sharp a change, or as dramatic a conversion, but change there will be. One who has passed over the peak of the mountain, as it were, would know it even if the mountain is not a steep one. (4. Ezek 36:31; Luke 5:8; 1 Tim 1:15; 5. 2 Cor. 7:10; Matt 27:3-5; Luke 18:23; 6. Acts 9:9, 17-19; 26:18; Psalm 119:6, 128)

4. The best of Christians may fall into great sins because of the power and deceitfulness of indwelling corruption, and of the temptations around them. God has mercifully provided, in the covenant of grace, for their restoration when they fall, through repentance.⁷ They will need to seek pardon from God and cleansing by the blood of Christ, for all their sins. Repentance is therefore to be continued throughout life, and not just at the beginning of the Christian life. God will never allow any of His children to be lost. That is another reason why repentance must be constantly preached, and not just faith in Christ. (7. 1 John 1:8-9; Heb 12:7-11; Rom 6:23)

5. The *Roman Catholic* view of repentance is that the sinner must confess his sins to a priest and do penance, i.e. some prescribed acts of punishment upon himself. The teaching of the Bible is that we confess our sins to God, and to those whom we have offended. We repair the wrong done to the

persons as best as we can, and trust in Christ our High Priest for our forgiveness by God.⁸ The *Arminian* view of repentance and faith is that these are acts arising from the sinner's own ability which cause God to save him. The will of the person is regarded as free and not bound by sin. The teaching of the Bible, however, is that our will is in bondage to sin. The Holy Spirit must transform us before we can live right before God.⁹ (8. Psalm 51:4; 1 John 1:9; James 5:16; Luke 19:8; Heb. 2:17; 9. John 6:44; Eph 2:8-9; 2 Tim 2:25)

= Repent, and believe on the Lord Jesus Christ to be saved!

Review Questions

1. What must a sinner do to be saved?
2. Name the two aspects of *conversion*.
3. Why must *repentance* be preached, and not just *faith* in Christ?
4. State the three elements of *repentance*.
5. What is similar about repentance and faith?
6. What is different between *repentance* and *faith*?
7. What is generally true about guilt and shame in a person who is saved?
8. How is *worldly sorrow* different from *saving repentance*?
9. Give another reason why *repentance* must be constantly preached.
10. Name the two wrong views on *repentance*.

Assignment/Discussion

In the Great Commission of Matthew 28:18-20, we are commanded to “make disciples of all the nations”. How does this relate to repentance and faith?

Memory Passage (1 John 1:8-9)

8 If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. 9 If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

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