

## OF REPENTANCE AND FAITH

By Ron Harvey

### INTRODUCTION

We have stressed hard in recent weeks that salvation is a work of God. It was a work of God when he chose a people for his name before the foundation of the world. It was a work of God when Jesus came as a redeemer and he performed the work of redemption for his people. And it is the work of God when the Holy Spirit applies that redemption to the hearts of his people.

And it would be a misstatement to say that man cooperates in this great work of salvation. We resist that error by maintaining always that salvation is an exclusive work of God and he gets all the glory. And if I am saved, God gets all the credit because he saved me by his mighty work.

And the great pit that we seek always to avoid is that pit that swallows up the masses – that pit which so many stumble into. It is the pit that gathers in all those who profess that they are saved in any way by their own works.

Do you believe that you are saved because you are a pretty good person? If you interviewed the masses on the streets many, if not most, would say they are going to heaven. And many of those would say they are going to heaven because they, after all, are pretty good. And they have fallen in that great pit of darkness and deception thinking somehow they will get to heaven on their own merits.

Do you believe that you are saved because there was some inherent goodness in you which enabled you to believe? Many churchgoers attach some merit to their faith, as though it was their faith which was the efficient cause of their salvation. And they have fallen in that great pit of self-righteousness, supposing that their faith has replaced the need for an all-sufficient Savior.

But we maintain that salvation is a work of God from beginning to end.

*Not of works lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.*

Eph. 2:9, 10

But now we come to these great fundamentals of the Christian religion – those two great graces that appear in all those whom God has saved. And we are talking about the graces of repentance and faith. I say graces because they are gifts.

Listen to the Scriptures in Ephesians 2:8,

*For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God.*

Ephesians 2:8

Whatever it is that God requires of us to be saved, he gives to us. Does he require faith of us? Then he gives it. Does he require repentance of us? Then he gives it. And because God gives it, Paul can say, *For by grace are ye saved.*

Now with the understanding that repentance and faith are generated in us by the power of the Holy Spirit and they are saving gifts to the elect of God, let us now consider these two great requirements of salvation – repentance and faith.

And we declare first of all, that,

I. Repentance and Faith are sacred duties required of all sinners everywhere.

*Repent ye, and believe the gospel.*

Mark 1:15

And there you have the universal duty of all sinners.

If you are a comfortable sinner living in Bartlett or Germantown or Memphis Tennessee and God has comforted you with a fine home and groceries every week and utilities to make life easy and cars and music and entertainment and free time, nevertheless, God's Holy Word requires you to repent and believe and if you do not repent and if you do not believe in the Lord Jesus Christ then all your comforts will one day vanish and you will languish with all other sinners in hell. For all sinners everywhere must repent and believe.

If you are a very uncomfortable sinner living in poverty and ignorance in Ethiopia or in the jungles of Africa or in any remote parts of the world and you have not been comforted with many of the fine things in this life, nevertheless, God requires that you repent and believe and if you do not repent and believe then you are destined for an even more uncomfortable place where sinners will pay for sins.

You see, it doesn't matter about your station in life. It doesn't matter whether you are sophisticated or unsophisticated, whether you are worldly wise or naïve, intellectually gifted or challenged, whether you are church-ed or un-church-ed, elect of God or not, it is the duty of every sinner everywhere to repent and to believe.

**Example: John the Baptist told the multitude that came to be baptized of him,**

*O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bring forth fruits worthy of repentance.*

**And what did they say,**

*Abraham is our father.*

**You see, they said, "We don't need repentance, we are Abraham's children. We are Israel. We are God's chosen nation."**

**And John said, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."**

Now, you should know that sinners do not like to repent. They prefer any other option to repentance, because they love their sins and they don't care for Jesus. And they would rather try to get to heaven by their own helpless deeds than to repent.

But God requires repentance. And he requires it of every single sinner.

Paul told the Athenians in Greece,

*But now, God commandeth all men every where to repent.*  
Acts 17:30

And not only does God require repentance, but,

God requires faith. But men prefer to trust themselves rather than to trust God. Faith does not come natural to sinners.

**Example:** Even one of Jesus' disciples, Thomas, said of Jesus, "Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe."

And there you have the testimony of virtually the whole company of sinners. "Except I see . . . I will not believe.

And so, the masses of sinners march defiantly to hell because they are sinners and because they do not repent and they do not believe.

Paul said, "If thou shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved."

Romans 10:9

There are wonderful benefits for those who repent and believe, but there are terrors beyond comprehension for those who refuse.

Now we have seen that repentance and faith are sacred duties required of all men. But now, let's consider the nature of repentance and faith. And we will see that,

II. Repentance and faith are inseparable graces.

**Example:** Now I have a coin in my pocket and on one side it has a head and the other side we call tails. And both sides are part of the same coin. And the one side never leaves the other behind. If you decide to throw heads away, then you also throw tails away. You might say, I don't think I like the heads side of this coin. And if you throw it in the lake, you throw tails in as well. If you decide not to repent, you also reject faith, because repentance and faith are just two sides of the same coin. If you hold repentance in your hand, then you also hold faith in your hand. And if you have faith, then you have repentance. But if you do not have repentance in your hand, then you do not have faith in

**your hand.**

A. Repentance is a change of mind about Jesus or a turning away from your former hatred of him.

**Example: This is well illustrated in Acts 2:22, 23, 38**

**Example: This is well illustrated in Acts 3:14, 15, 19**

**Example: Acts 20:21; A change of mind as to God.**

**Example: Picture on one side of you is hatred and rejection of Jesus. And on the other side is love and faith in Jesus. And if you change your mind about your hatred of Jesus, you turn away from that side. And when you turn away, you find that you have turned toward love and faith in Jesus. When you repent from your hating him, then you find that you love Him. When you repent from your unbelief, then you find that you believe.**

And so, you see that repentance is a turning away. It is a change of mind. And specifically, it is a changing of the mind about the only thing in the universe that matters and that is Jesus Christ. He is the central figure of the redemptive story and your destiny depends on your opinion of Him.

When any sinner is in his sins, there is a certain repulsion to Christ. With some people it is an active, open and bitter hatred – like those who spat upon him and wagged their tongues at him and scourged him. They enjoyed every stripe they put on his back.

And then there are those sinners who hold Jesus in very low esteem. And they think he is foolishness. And when they stumble in the dark and stub their toe, instead of yelling a curse word, they scream, “Jesus Christ.” And their hatred of Jesus is played out day by day in open defiance of his commands.

And then there are those sinners who merely hate Jesus by quietly ignoring him. They go about their sinning in a quiet way giving no thought to him and they have no care for him whatsoever.

But there comes a time when some sinners change their minds about Jesus. And they realize that Jesus is the Son of God and he is the Savior of the world. And they change their minds about Him. And this is repentance when sinners change their minds about Jesus. Also,

B. Repentance is a change of mind about sin or a turning away from sin.

Sinners naturally love their sins. And John says they love darkness because their deeds are evil. And Paul puts it this way,

*Wherein in times past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the*

*prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience. Among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others.*

Eph. 2:2-3

And the picture of sinners is not a pretty picture.

But God does something spectacular for his sheep. He makes them alive! (Eph.2:5)

And when he makes them alive, a miraculous thing happens. They repent and they believe.

Whereas they used to walk after the course of this world, but when they are made alive, they turn away from the former life and turn to a new life.

One of the great marks of a regenerate person is that he has an awareness of his own sinfulness and he has a godly sorrow for sin. And this is in stark contrast to the unregenerate man who barely has a consciousness of sin and revels in it. But the regenerate man is very conscious of sins and he has a mind that suddenly hates sin and prefers holiness.

Now we have seen that repentance is a change of mind about Jesus and a change of mind about sin. But, we should also note that repentance is also apparent in the affections. This is not just mental gymnastics, but the whole man is bent in a different direction. And so,

C. Repentance is a turning of the affections from worldly things to spiritual things.

Now before we are made alive, we know one thing and that is the world. And we walk after the course of this world and we love the world. And we love the things of the world. Listen to I John 2:15, 16

*Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world.*

I John 2:15, 16

The unregenerate are so consumed with the things of the world that they have no concern and virtually take no thought of spiritual things and no thought of their own spiritual condition. But the regenerate man has changed affections and he turns away from his love of the world. And when he turns away from the things of the world, he turns to spiritual things. And that is repentance.

We need to hurry on and take a look at the other side of this coin. We have been looking at the negative requirement of conversion and that is the turning away from certain things. But now, when we turn away, we turn to something. And that is the positive side of conversion. And

D. Faith is pictured in the Bible as the one great condition of salvation.

*Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved.*

Acts 16:31

*The just shall live by faith.*

Romans 1:16

*Abraham believed God and it was counted unto him for righteousness.*

Romans 4:3

*Even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ, unto all and upon all them that believe.*

Romans 3:22

Example: The Ethiopian eunuch asked if he might be baptized and Philip answered,

*If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest.*

Acts 8:37

This is the duty of all sinners everywhere and the Bible says,

*Without faith it is impossible to please God.*

Hebrews 11:6

1. True faith (saving faith) is more than a mere persuasion that something is true.

**Example: Sometimes I represent criminal defendants. And my client tells me his side of the story. And sometimes he may tell me that the police planted marijuana under his seat. And I have to make a judgment sometimes. And depending on the facts of the case and the credibility of the witnesses, I may come to the conclusion that I believe one side or the other. And I might say, "I believe my client is innocent, but I am not completely sure."**

But a mere persuasion that something is true is not saving faith. You may be persuaded that there is a true God or that Jesus was the Son of God who died for sinners. You may feel that the weight of the evidence falls in favor of the truth of the Scriptures. But saving faith is something more than mere persuasion.

2. True faith is more than mere intellectual assent.

**Example:** You may devote your life to the study of evolution and at the end of your study, based on the accumulation of facts, you may conclude that there is a God and he created this universe, but mere intellectual assent to the truth is not saving faith.

**Example:** The devils believe and tremble. (James 2:19) There are devils reserved in chains unto the end of the world who will tell you in a heartbeat that there is a God. (II Peter 2:4)

**Example:** Many believed on Jesus when they saw the miracles which he did, but Jesus did not commit himself unto them because he knew all men. (John 2:23, 24)

So, we see that mere intellectual assent is not saving faith.

3. True faith is a matter of the heart.

*For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness.*  
Romans 10:10

**Example:** Wouldn't Christianity be a cold religion if saving faith were just an intellectual exercise? We could all go to Bible school for four years until we achieved our Christianity degree and then we would be saved.

But saving faith is a certain conviction of the whole man – not only the intellect, but also the will and the affections. And saving faith is a warm exercise. It is not merely a cold, external adherence to a religious tenet, but it is an internal conviction as to the truth of the gospel and a hearty and loving reliance on the promises of God in Christ. This is saving faith.

Saving faith runs deep into the heart of man and it is an all out, life or death, adherence to the claims of the gospel. And many have given their lives for such a conviction. This is how deep it runs.

And I would ask each of you this morning, "Is your faith embedded deep in your heart such that it can never be dislodged? And this is important, because ,

4. True faith is not temporary faith.

There is a faith that will abide for a moment and then it is gone. And when it is gone, it shows itself to have been less than true faith.

*But he that received the seed into stony places, the same is he that heareth the word, and anon with joy receiveth it; Yet hath he not root in himself, but endureth for a while: for when tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the word, by and by he is offended.*

Matthew 13:20, 21

5. True faith is rooted in regeneration.

*He hath not root in himself.*

Matthew 13:20

True, saving faith, springs from a creative act of the Holy Spirit. Regeneration is the source of life and the source of faith. And if you are born again by the Spirit, then the seed of faith is planted in you and it will grow and manifest itself in greater faith and greater works.

Nicodemus seemed to have it all, but Jesus told him, ye must be born again.

And so, true faith is rooted in regeneration. Although there may be many forms of counterfeit faith, there is only one true faith and it springs from a regenerate heart.

6. True faith is accompanied by works.

See James 2:14-17

7. True faith has as its object the saving work of Jesus Christ.

Saving faith is in the saving work of a person. And the sinner must put his trust in that person.

Now this is illustrated in the Scriptures when it uses figurative expressions to describe the activity of faith.

- a. The activity of faith is called a “looking unto Jesus.” (Hebrews 12:2)
- b. The activity of faith is called eating his flesh and drinking his blood. (John 6:53)
- c. The activity of faith is called coming to Jesus.

*Jesus said, Come unto me all ye that labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest. (Matthew 11:28)*

This is in stark contrast to mere religion which is some connection to a set of rules or tenets.

But Christianity is a connection to a saving person. And that connection is faith. It is Christ that saves, through the instrumentality of faith.

It is Christ that is the Savior, not our faith. The glory goes to Jesus and to him alone. When we get to heaven, we will not offer our faith as our Savior, but we will offer Jesus as our Savior.

We have confidence in Jesus. But we trust not in our confidence but in Jesus himself.

All we can do is lay our hope in his lap. And this is saving faith. It may be weak faith. It may be faltering faith at times. But thank God it is a weak faith in a strong Savior and a faltering faith in a never-faltering Savior.

You see, it is the object of our faith that saves us.

**Example: I put my garbage out every Monday night because I believe the Germantown sanitation department will pick it up on Tuesday morning. I have a good deal of faith in them because they very rarely fail. But on Tuesday morning it is not my faith that picks that garbage up, it is the sanitation workers.**

And in that last day when the souls of men are judged, it will not be my faith that saves my soul, but it will be the work of Christ. It will be his work of redemption.

It will be his life that will be counted on my behalf. They may ask me how I did in life. And I will be forced to admit – not so well. But, Jesus was perfect, and I am trusting in the perfection of his life.

It will be his blood that will pay the penalty instead of mine. They may ask me if I'm prepared to pay the penalty. And I will say, "No, I cannot pay such a price. But, I'm trusting in the full payment for sin that was paid by Him.

And when my body is lying in the earth and it is time to be reunited with my soul, they may ask me if I am capable of raising myself. And I will say, "No, but I am trusting in the One who raised himself from the grave."

And it will not be the power of my faith, but it will be the mighty power of the risen Lord who will raise my corruptible body and change it into incorruptible.

## FINAL THOUGHTS

1. It is the duty of all men everywhere to repent. All men are born into this world with a natural enmity against God. And they must turn away from that natural disposition against God. If you have ill feelings toward Christ, then you must repent. If you love the world more than Christ, then you must repent. If you love your sins, you must repent. And if you do not repent, then there is no hope for you.

2. It is the duty of all men everywhere to believe. All men are born into this world in a state of unbelief. And that must be changed. The paradox is that the unbeliever must believe. Though you have been a skeptic, you are commanded by a Holy God to believe. It is your duty to lay hold of Christ by a firm conviction, trusting him for all things and for the salvation of your very soul.

Now, you may say, “How can I repent when I have an unrepentant heart.” And, “How can I believe when I have a heart of unbelief.”

And that leads me to the next point,

3. Repentance and faith are the first and principle graces of regeneration.

Jesus said, “You must be born again.” God must change you and plant in you that new disposition – that new creation. And when he does, you will find that your heart will melt away with great sorrow for sin and you will find that you can and will repent and you can and will believe and you will cast your confidence in the saving work of Jesus.

And finally remember,

4. It is the work of God that does the saving from beginning to end. And it is his work that will save us. Though it is our duty to repent and believe, we trust not in the greatness of our repentance or the greatness of our faith, but we trust in the greatness of a Savior who will not fail us in the end.