

Conversion and the Christian Life

~ Repentance and Faith ~

Summary: [\(top\)](#)

True repentance consists of three main constituents: regret for past sin, a realisation of the nature of sin (i.e., that it is bad), leading to a hatred of it, and a sincere commitment to leave the ways of this world and follow the way of Christ.

True faith similarly consists of three main constituents: an understanding or knowledge of the basic truth of Jesus and His saving work, an approval and acceptance of this basic truth, and an application of the knowledge of this truth in personal and sincere trust.

Faith and repentance must sincerely combine in an individual, in order that he or she may find genuine conversion to Christ. Once converted to Christ, the act of repentance and the personal trust must continue in the individual for the rest of their life.

Introduction: [\(top\)](#)

In this study it seems most natural to introduce the issues of faith and repentance as they would come upon an individual in reality, that is: faith and repentance in conversion - the point at which an individual accepts Christ as their Lord and Saviour; and faith and repentance in the continuing Christian life.

Therefore, first repentance and faith will be discussed and defined, then commented on in connection with conversion, and then in connection with the continued Christian life.

The Biblical Teaching:

Repentance: [\(top\)](#)

True repentance consists of three main constituents:

- **A genuine regret for past sin:** "Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation" (2 Cor. 7:10a)
- **A realisation of the nature of sin (i.e., that it is bad), leading to a hatred of it:** "On hearing this, Jesus said to them, 'It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners.'" (Mark 2:17)
- **A sincere commitment to leave the ways of this world and follow the way of Christ:** "Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord" (Acts 3:19)

So repentance is understanding that sin is wrong, disapproving of it, and a deciding to leave it and instead follow the way of Jesus. In 2 Corinthians, Paul writes: "Godly sorrow brings

repentance that leads to salvation" (7:10a), and we see that the sorrow is over a realisation of past wrong, which led to repentance and thus leads to salvation.

Faith: [\(top\)](#)

True faith similarly consists of three main constituents:

- **An understanding or knowledge of the basic truth of Jesus and His saving work:** "how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard?" (Rom. 10:14b)
- **An approval and acceptance of this basic truth:** This is seen in an example [James](#) uses in [his letter](#), where he points out that 'even demons believe that there is one God' (2:19), but obviously they do not approve of God's way for they do not follow it. Similarly, it is pointless for someone to know the Gospel of God and ignore it. Put simply, the individual must know something to be true and *believe* it to be true - they must not ignore the truth in front of them.
- **An application of the knowledge of this truth in personal and sincere trust:** "Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord" (Acts 3:19) Berkhof notes that this personal trust is "the crowning element of faith", and continues: "Faith is not merely a matter of the intellect, nor of the intellect and emotions combined; it is also a matter of the will, determining the direction of the soul"[1](#).

So faith is more than just a belief in facts, it is more than an acceptance and approval as truth of facts, it is reliance on facts. In the Christian case - the case of the Bible - it is understanding the basic truths of Jesus, approving them and personally and sincerely entrusting your life to these facts. It is a reliance on the work of Jesus as the only way of salvation.

Repentance and Faith in Conversion: [\(top\)](#)

When the authors of the various Books of the Bible discuss conversion, it is not uncommon for only faith to be mentioned, or only repentance. For example:

- "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." (John 3:16)
- "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith - and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God - not by works, so that no one can boast." (Ephesians 2:8-9)
- "In those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the Desert of Judea and saying, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near.'" (Matt. 3:1-2)
- "Peter replied, "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 2:38)

It can easily be assumed that in these cases, the authors listed only one of the two factors as they rightly associated one with the other; for turning away from sin is turning towards Christ, and turning towards Christ is turning away from sin.

In any case, faith and repentance are listed in conjunction as necessary for salvation: "I have declared to both Jews and Greeks that they must turn to God in repentance and have faith in our Lord Jesus" (Acts 20:21), and [the Apostle Paul](#), known for preaching salvation by faith (e.g., Eph. 2:8-9, Rom. 5:1) also taught that repentance leads to salvation (e.g., 2 Cor. 7:10).

So we see that faith and repentance (in no particular order) must sincerely combine in an individual, in order that he or she may find genuine conversion to Christ.

Repentance and Faith in the Christian Life: [\(top\)](#)

Once converted to Christ, the act of repentance and the personal trust must continue in the individual for the rest of their life. The believer will struggle with sin until they reach Heaven and so must continuously acknowledge and ask forgiveness for sins, must know that sin is wrong and to be turned away from, and must be striving to live God's way. Likewise, the act of trusting Christ as Saviour must be continuous: knowing the truth of Christ's saving work, believing and approving of this saving work as *the right way*, and evidencing this belief with personal trust in Jesus for salvation.

Even though it is naturally assumed that these would form a continuing part of the Christian life, it is also taught in the following passages:

- The "Lord's Prayer", which Jesus tells us to pray regularly, includes asking forgiveness for our sins ([Matt. 6:12](#))
- Paul mentions that he lives by faith in the Son of God ([Gal. 2:20](#)) and that "these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love" ([1 Cor. 13:13](#)).

Conclusion: [\(top\)](#)

So we see that both faith and repentance are necessary for true conversion, and are also necessary for the continued Christian life.

Related Links

- [The Atonement](#) (the work Jesus did to save us)
- [Predestination](#) (election to be saved)
- [Justification](#) (God views us as righteous)
- [Adoption](#) (becoming children of God)
- [Sanctification](#) (becoming more like God)
- [Glorification](#) (receiving 'resurrection bodies')
- [The Final Judgement](#)

1 [Berkhof, Systematic Theology, p.505](#) ([jump back to text](#))