

What Must I Do to Be Saved? (Part 1)

How does a person become a born-again child of God? What must one do to become saved? Join a church? Get baptized? Take communion? Be kind to the neighbors? Do unto others as they do unto you? Repent of sins?

The answer to every question, including the last one, is "No!" The Bible is clear that salvation is by grace, through faith alone, not of works.

For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast. Ephesians 2:8-9

Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost; Titus 3:5

The Philippian jailer cried out to Paul and Silas, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" Their answer: "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ." Curiously, Paul did not say, "repent of your sins." Nor did he say, "repent and believe." He simply said, "believe." Does this imply that repentance and belief are one and the same, so that Paul didn't need to mention repentance since he had mentioned belief?

In the next several articles we are going to study the biblical doctrines of belief and repentance. We will define the words and see how the concepts are used in the Scriptures. The objective will be to determine whether or not repentance is considered part of salvation. Does one need to simply believe, or believe and repent?

Facts About Repentance and Belief

Fact #1: The verb *repent* (Gr., *metanoeo*) and noun *repentance* (Gr., *metanoia*) are used a total of fifty-eight times in the New Testament.

Fact #2: The verb *believe* (Gr., *pisteuo*) is used two-hundred forty-eight times in the New Testament, more than four times than *repent*!

Clearly, *believe* is the more dominant word, and there is a reason for that, as we shall see.

Fact #3: The words *repent* and *repentance* are never used in the book of Galatians

Galatians is the key book in which Paul gives a defense of the gospel. In that epistle Paul many times makes the claim that justification is by faith, but he never mentions repentance.

Fact #4: The words *repent* and *repentance* (with respect to man) are used only

once in the book of Romans.

In the context where it is used (Rom. 2:4), Paul is not speaking of justification, per se, but rather, He is stating a general principle that God's forbearance and goodness lead men to repentance.

Fact #5: The words *repent* and *repentance* are never once used in all the gospel of John!

Yet the express, stated purpose of John's Gospel is evangelism.

But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name. John 20:31

Some have suggested that pointing out this fact is making an argument from silence. However, the following fact makes that a moot point.

Fact #6: John the apostle uses the word *repent/repented* twelve times in the book of Revelation, but never in reference to salvation from eternal condemnation.

The point is that John clearly knew and understood the doctrine of repentance, but did not see a connection between repentance and salvation, which is consistent with the other New Testament writers. The premise of this article and the ones to follow will be that repentance is not essential to eternal salvation, and that is why John omitted repentance from his gospel.

It is critical to understand the significance of the above facts. In the books of the Bible that mostly intensely deal with salvation, justification, and the gospel, the words *repent* and *repentance* (in any form) are never used, except for once, in a general sense in the book of Romans. Don't let these facts fly by you. There is a reason repentance is not mentioned as part of salvation in these books, and we shall see why as we go along.

How then are we saved?

It is important to let the Bible speak for itself.

John 1:12 But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name:

John 3:14-15 And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life.

John 3:16, 18 For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because

he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.

John 3:36 He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him.

John 5:24 Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life.

John 6:40, 47 And this is the will of him that sent me, that every one which seeth the Son, and believeth on him, may have everlasting life: and I will raise him up at the last day. Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me hath everlasting life.

John 11:25-26 Jesus said unto her, I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die. Believest thou this?

John 20:31 But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name.

Acts 16:31 Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.

Romans 3:22 Even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe.

Romans 4:3 For what saith the scripture? Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness.

Galatians 3:22 But the scripture hath concluded all under sin, that the promise by faith of Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe.

Belief, not Repentance

Dozens more could be listed. In fact, there are at least one hundred references in the New Testament, pointing to belief as the way one receives eternal life. Belief in what? In order to be saved from eternal condemnation, one must generally believe that Jesus is the Christ (i.e., the Messiah), the Son of God, and that He offers eternal life to all who come to Him in faith. More specifics will be provided in a moment, but the point to be made here is that salvation is not by repentance of sins, but by belief.

Notice that one does not become saved by praying or walking an aisle or asking Jesus into the heart, or crying out for help, or making a public profession in church. Nor is salvation by getting baptized or going to church or having religious beliefs or being a good person. All of these things are works. Salvation is not by doing; it is by believing! According to each of

the above verses, and many more that could be quoted, salvation is by believing, not by repenting of sins.

“Easy Believism”

Some of a more Calvinist persuasion, who would say salvation must include repenting of one’s sins, charge those who teach “faith alone” with promoting “easy believism.” It is intended as a pejorative term, accusing “faith alone” advocates of making salvation too easy. Without repentance, they say, one’s salvation is shallow, a mere profession. It is ironic that those who come from a reformation heritage and would claim the reformation mantra of sola fide (a Latin term, meaning “by faith alone”) actually require faith plus repentance for salvation. But faith plus repentance is the same as faith plus works, as will be demonstrated below.

Yes, believing is easy, but that is because no work is involved. That’s why the gospel is often referred to as “God’s simple plan of salvation.” But mere professions are not the result of teaching faith alone for salvation. They are the result of doctrinal error that is widely dispensed in churches, namely, incorrect teaching about belief. By the way many preachers articulate the gospel and invitations to receive Christ, they lead listeners into thinking salvation is obtained by walking an aisle or praying a prayer or giving public profession of gospel facts. That is wrong, it is deceptive, and it leads people to confusion and error. Nevertheless, the way to remedy this error is not by overreacting and including repentance as a requirement for salvation. Rather, it is to teach correctly about belief.

What is belief?

Belief is simply conviction of the facts that leads one to depend upon those facts. Many of a Calvinist ilk claim that an unsaved person is unable to exercise faith, because faith is a work, they say. Which, of course, begs a question. What about repentance? If belief is a work, then is not repentance also a work? Yes, Calvinists freely admit as much. To get around an unsaved person working for salvation (by repenting and exercising faith – which, they say, is impossible because man is totally depraved or, better, “totally unable”), Calvinism teaches that regeneration precedes repentance and faith. In other words, to those whom God has sovereignly chosen, He bestows new life, literally making them born again. Only after that happens, can one repent of sins and turn to God in faith, thereby becoming converted. Thus, one error leads to another.

But is faith a work? Not according to the Scriptures.

But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness. Romans 4:5

The Holy Spirit of God makes it very clear that faith, or belief, is not a work. If I believe the promises of God, that means I am convinced they are for me, and I am depending upon them. I can say I believe the promises, but if I never depend upon them, I really don’t believe. So a person can say they

are a Christian all they want, but if they have never depended on Christ's promise to save them from eternal condemnation, they are not truly saved. They may know about salvation, but if they don't depend upon Christ to save them, they are not saved!

Let's develop this a bit further. Believing in Jesus Christ for eternal life demands one know why they need eternal life. Suppose a man never heard the gospel before. He knows nothing about Jesus or eternal life or why he needs it. If he is going to believe – which means to depend on Jesus for eternal life – he must have a basis for belief. He needs to know who Jesus is and why he needs eternal life. That is where the Holy Spirit and a Christian witness come into the picture.

In Part 2 we will explore the ministry of the Holy Spirit in changing the minds of sinners.