

Faith & Repentance: *Two Sides of the Same Coin*

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Teaching Position of Pastor-Teacher Paul B. Phair

In recent years there has been a debate between the “Savior Only” position and “Lordship-Salvation” position. Pastor Phair & Oakwood’s gospel emphasis lies between the extremes of these two positions as they are often stereotyped. Salvation is by grace alone and there is nothing any person must or can do that will merit it (Eph 2:8-9). We must not expect non-Christians to reform their lives so they can then be worthy of receiving salvation. Progressive life transformation follows conversion, it does not precede it.

However repentance is a part of the gospel message. “... Jesus went to Galilee to preach God's Good News. ‘At last the time has come!’ he announced. ‘The Kingdom of God is near! Turn from your sins and believe this Good News!’” (Mark 1:14-15). The kingdom of God involves yielding allegiance to the King! Repenting means that we are sorry that we have rebelled against God’s rule through disobedience to His commands. We ask for forgiveness and desire to begin to follow His leadership.

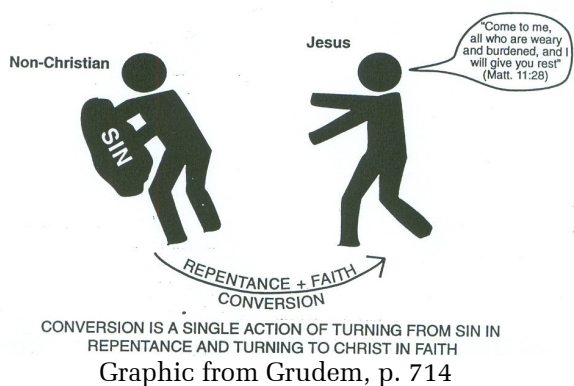
The apostle Paul, who was a champion of the gospel of grace summarizes his preaching ministry in Acts 20:21-27(NLT) with the following words: [21] “I have had one message for Jews and Gentiles alike -- the necessity of turning from sin and turning to God

(repentance), and of faith in our Lord Jesus. [24] But my life is worth nothing unless I use it for doing the work assigned me by the Lord Jesus—the work of telling others the Good News about God's wonderful kindness and love. (the gospel of God’s grace) [25] “And now I know that none of you to whom I have preached the Kingdom will ever see me again. [26] Let me say plainly that I have been faithful. No one's damnation can be blamed on me, [27] for I didn't shrink from declaring all that God wants for you.” (See also Isaiah 55:6-7).

Non-Christians do not reform their lives and then put their trust in Christ; repentance and faith are combined together like two sides of one coin. They cannot be separated; they are two different aspects of the one event of conversion in which a person comes to Christ for salvation. As Grudem states, “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.”¹

Roy Zuck, a Dallas Seminary professor (who is generally associated with the *Savior Only* position) also affirms that

repentance is included in believing. “Genuine faith includes repentance, and genuine repentance includes faith. ... Repentance is turning *from* sin, while faith is turning *to* Christ, as Lewis Chafer has noted, “promotes a change in the course being pursued.”²



It is true that the Bible sometimes only describes the element of faith as the quality necessary for salvation (see John 3:16; Acts 16:31; Rm 10:9; Eph 2:8-9, et al.) However there are many other passages where *only repentance* is named. Why do some texts only use repentance and others only use faith? As stated earlier, the biblical authors rightly presumed that repentance was always combined with faith, and that faith was always combined with repentance. “...Turning *from* sins in a genuine way is impossible apart from a genuine turning *to* God.”³

The preaching recorded in the book of Acts shows the same pattern. After Peter’s sermon at Pentecost, the crowd asked, “Brethren, what shall we do?” Peter replied, “*Repent*, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins” (Acts 2:37-38). In his second sermon

Peter spoke to his hearers in a similar way, saying, “*Repent* therefore, and turn again, that your sins may be blotted out, that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord” (Acts 3:19). Later, when the apostles were on trial before the Sanhedrin, Peter spoke of Christ saying, “God exalted him at his right hand as Leader and Savior, to give *repentance* to Israel and forgiveness of sins: (Acts 5:31). And when Paul was preaching on the Areopagus in Athens to an assembly of Greek philosophers, he said, “The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now *he commands all men everywhere to repent*” (Acts 17:30). He also says in his epistles, “Do you not know that god’s kindness is meant to lead you to repentance?” (Rom. 2:4), and he speaks of “a *repentance* that leads to salvation” (2 Cor. 7:10).⁴

Conversion has two elements: Repentance which is turning from sin, and faith which is turning toward Christ (John 1:12; 5:40). The phrase, “salvation by grace through faith” means that a person is saved by Christ through faith. Faith is the instrument that Christ gives to us to believe in Him (Eph 2:8-9; Gal 2:16). A person is not saved by works: living a good life, going to church, etc. One is not saved by the act of faith (believing, going forward, praying a prayer of invitation). A person is saved by Christ’s power, His grace given to us. J.I. Packer describes faith as an “appropriating instrument...to receive the free gift of God’s righteousness in Christ.”⁵

Faith has three aspects to it: the mind, heart and the will.

- The *mind* (knowledge) is the *intellectual* side of faith (Rom. 10:17; 10:9; 1 Thess. 4:14). It is the understanding of the truth.
- The *heart*, or *emotional* element, refers to the conviction that the knowledge one has about Christ is indeed true and applies to one's spiritual needs (Matt. 21:32; John 2:22; Rom. 10:16; Gal 3:6).
- The *wil*, or *volition*- trust element, is the determination of the will to obey the truth. The individual transfers all reliance from himself for pardon to Christ (John 3:15; Rom. 9:33). This aspect moves one from an intellectual faith (James 2:19).⁶

Repentance is the result of God's work in a person's heart. Repentance leading to life is a gift of God. In Psalm 80:3, 7, 19, the psalmist is praying for God to

restore or turn them so that they may be saved (see also Acts 5:31; 11:18; 2 Tim 2:25). 2 Cor. 7:10 speaks of a repentance that turns from sin to salvation. Repentance means a change of mind, but it has three elements:

1. the *intellectual* knowledge of sin: a change of view, recognizing sin as involving personal guilt (Rom. 3:19-20; 2 Tim. 2:25);
2. the *emotional* element: a change of feeling, a godly sorrow (Ps. 51:3, 8, 12, 17; 2 Cor. 7:9-10), and
3. A *volitional* element: a change of purpose, a turning away from sin to God (Mt. 3:7-8; Jer. 25:5; Acts 2:38; 8:22; Rom. 2:4; Heb 12:17). One is not saved by repentance, but by faith. Berkhof says, "true repentance never exists except in conjunction with faith, while on the other hand, wherever there is true faith, there is also real repentance."⁷

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¹ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, chapter 35.

² Roy B. Zuck, *Kindred Spirit* (a Dallas Seminary publication), Summer, 1989.

³ Grudem, p. 716.

⁴ Grudem, p. 716

⁵ Wesley A. Gornall, EFCA Ordination document, 1-06

⁶ Gornall

⁷ Gornall