

Repentance – The Missing Link

Many Christians say that leading a holy, repentant life is not necessary for salvation and others say that a person only has to believe. By this they mean that if someone just believes, just knows, that Jesus died for their sins then they are saved and that is that. In this article, I would like to look at what it means to believe and what Jesus meant when He said, *“unless you repent, you too will all perish”* (Luke 13:3).

Believing (Faith)

James 2:19 shows that believing for salvation is more than just understanding or knowing about something. It says, *“You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that - and shudder.”* James tells us that the demons believe in God but their knowledge isn't doing them any good so believing for salvation is more than just having head knowledge like the demons.

John 3:16 says, *“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.”* In this verse, the word believe has a deeper meaning than simply knowing about something. Strong's dictionary tells us that believing means to have faith in someone and to commit to and entrust our spiritual well being to them. In 2 Tim. 1:12 Paul said, *“I know whom I have believed, and am convinced that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him for that day.”* Paul was committed to and trusted in Jesus for his spiritual well being and he believed that Jesus was able to guard it until the judgment. Also, Jude 1:24 tells us that Jesus *“is able to keep you from falling”* so we can see that to believe in Jesus for our salvation is to commit our ways to Him and to trust that He is able to keep us spiritually strong so that we don't fall.

Confessing and repenting

Repentance is described as a change of mind but if we say we have changed our mind about sin, yet haven't turned away from our sinful lifestyle, then we are hypocrites and have not truly repented. For example, if I slapped you in the face, said sorry, then slapped you again, said sorry again, slapped you again etc., it would not take long for you to see through my hypocrisy and refuse to accept my apology. In the same way, God will not forgive anyone who comes to Him without a truly repentant heart.

For a non-believer to receive forgiveness and be saved he must repent of his sins. Acts 3:19 says, *“Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out”* As already said, to repent means to change our mind about something so to be saved a person must change their mind about their sinful lifestyle and turn away from it. Many people say that once we are saved there is no need to repent any more, however, in Luke 13:3 the word repent is present tense so Jesus is really saying, *“unless you repent [and continue to repent], you too will all perish.”* So, to be saved, we must turn from sin and continue that way otherwise Jesus said that we will perish.

The purpose of this article is to show that repentance is the missing link in the salvation of many believers. Many in the churches are not saved even though they know the Bible very well and believe in Jesus. They only believe like the demons believe and are not committed to living a holy life by following the Lord's commands. If a believer does not confess and repent of any sin he may commit then that sin will remain unforgiven. Whenever we sin, we must confess to receive forgiveness and this is made clear by the word 'if' in 1 John 1:9 which says, *“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.”* If we don't confess then we won't be forgiven. In this verse, confessing our sins is more than just admitting we have sinned. When we confess a sin, if we have no intention of turning from that sin then the Lord, who sees our heart, will not forgive us. True confession of sin naturally includes repentance. If we simply admit our guilt without having the intention or desire to stop sinning then we are being hypocritical and God will not forgive us. God will only forgive if our heart is right - Isa 66:2 says, *“This is the one I esteem: he who is humble and contrite [remorseful and repentant] in spirit, and trembles at my word.”* God does not esteem hypocrites.

Is repentance the missing link in your walk with God? Does sin have power over you? It is God's promise that confession will bring more than just forgiveness. The promise in 1 John 1:9 is that God will not only forgive you but He will also purify you from all unrighteousness. Jesus verifies this truth in John 8:34-36 where He says, "*I tell you the truth, everyone who sins is a slave to sin. Now a slave has no permanent place in the family, but a son belongs to it forever. So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.*" In these verses Jesus is saying that He can free you from slavery to sin so that you will no longer be a temporary slave in the family, but a son forever.

Finally, sin and repentance are rarely preached today; it is as though they have become dirty words. It seems that the vast majority of preachers avoid the subjects for fear of emptying their church and losing their income. However, this does not alter the fact that sin separates us from God as Isa. 59:2 tells us, "*But your iniquities have separated you from your God; your sins have hidden his face from you, so that he will not hear.*" Repentance brings down the barrier of separation to link us back up with God and without it there can be no relationship with Jesus, hence no salvation.

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