

Conversion (Faith and Repentance)

1. Review of past months topics and intro to today's topic
 - 1.1. We have been looking at the doctrine of the application of redemption - how the objective work of Christ becomes ours subjectively.
 - 1.2. In chapter 32 we have looked at election and reprobation - how God has sovereignly chosen some for salvation, while others are destined for destruction.
 - 1.3. In chapter 33 we looked at the Gospel call. This refers to the universal call of the message of the Gospel which is to be proclaimed to all. This call speaks the truth of the Gospel to all, but human can not respond to this call apart from the work of the Spirit, which is known as the effectual call. The Gospel call goes to all, but the effectual call only goes to God's chosen to enable them to respond to the Gospel call.
 - 1.4. In chapter 34 we looked at regeneration. This is the act of God that causes us to be born again, raised to spiritual life from death.
 - 1.5. We have noted then that in a sense these things are not the application of redemption since they are still part of God's objective work - they are something done for us and to us rather than something we ourselves are part of in any way. However, they are included here because their focus is making Christ's work effective for His people.
 - 1.6. Today we will look at how the work of Christ is subjectively experienced by us. From the human side, how does one become a believer? How does one appropriate what Christ has done for His people?
2. Conversion
 - 2.1. Definition - "Conversion is our willing response to the Gospel call, in which we sincerely repent of sins and place our trust in Christ for salvation." (Grudem, 709)
 - 2.2. Biblical uses
 - 2.2.1. Acts 15:3 - The church sent them on their way, and as they traveled through Phoenicia and Samaria, they told **how the Gentiles had been converted**. This news made all the brothers very glad.
 - 2.2.2. This is the only real use of "conversion" in the NT. Other times (Romans 16:5; 1 Corinthians 16:15) the phrase "firstfruits" or some similar term is used.
 - 2.2.3. However, the idea of conversion - repenting of sin and believing in Christ and the Gospel is used.
 - 2.2.3.1. Mark 1:14-15 - After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. ¹⁵ "The time has come," he said. "The kingdom of God is near. **Repent and believe the good news!**"
 - 2.2.3.2. Matthew 21:31-32 - "Which of the two did what his father wanted?" "The first," they answered. Jesus said to them, "I tell you the truth, the tax collectors and the prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God ahead of you. ³² For John came to you to show you the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes did. And even after you saw this, **you did not repent and believe him.**"
 - 2.2.3.3. Acts 20:21 - "I have declared to both Jews and Greeks that **they must turn to God in repentance and have faith in our Lord Jesus.**"

- 2.2.3.4. Acts 19:4 - Paul said, "John's baptism was a baptism of **repentance**. He told the people to **believe** in the one coming after him, that is, in Jesus."
- 2.2.4. This means that it is fine to speak of conversion - consisting of repentance and faith - as how one appropriates the work of Christ subjectively.

3. Repentance

- 3.1. NOTE: Grudem begins with faith, even though his own definition and our experience would have repentance first. Since it is logically prior to faith, we will begin with repentance and move on to faith.
- 3.2. Definition - "Repentance is a heartfelt sorrow for sin, a renouncing of it, and a sincere commitment to forsake it and walk in obedience to Christ." (Grudem, 713)
- 3.3. Repent comes from a Greek word (μετανοέω) that means "to change one's mind." It refers to a change of mind regarding something, which leads to a corresponding change in action.
 - 3.3.1. Repentance does not just mean that one "feels sorry" for sin, nor that one is simply afraid of something. Biblically, repentance refers to a real change where one truly sees sin for what it really is and desires for God to help them turn from sin. We see this from examples like Esau, the Pharisees, and Judas, where there was real remorse or fear, but not real repentance.
 - 3.3.1.1. 2 Corinthians 7:8-10 - Even if I caused you sorrow by my letter, I do not regret it. Though I did regret it--I see that my letter hurt you, but only for a little while--⁹ yet now I am happy, not because you were made sorry, but because **your sorrow led you to repentance**. For you became sorrowful as God intended and so were not harmed in any way by us. ¹⁰ **Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death.**
 - 3.3.1.2. Matthew 27:3-5 - When Judas, who had betrayed him, saw that Jesus was condemned, he was seized with remorse and returned the thirty silver coins to the chief priests and the elders. ⁴ "I have sinned," he said, "for I have betrayed innocent blood." "What is that to us?" they replied. "That's your responsibility." ⁵ So Judas threw the money into the temple and left. Then he went away and hanged himself.
 - 3.3.1.3. Hebrews 12:17 - Afterward, as you know, when he wanted to inherit this blessing, he was rejected. He could bring about no change of mind, though he sought the blessing with tears.
 - 3.3.1.4. Matthew 3:7-9 - But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to where he was baptizing, he said to them: "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? ⁸ Produce fruit in keeping with repentance. ⁹ And do not think you can say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham.

3.3.2. True repentance is a turning from sin and a turning to God. It does not mean that one will never sin again, but it does mean that one's basic orientation toward sin is now different. Judas, and Esau had sorrow because of the bad consequences that their sin had produced in their lives, while the Pharisees were acting repentant to receive the approval of others and to appear religious and righteous. Yet, none of these had changed in their basic orientation toward sin and as they had not truly repented.

3.4. Repentance is a consistent part of the biblical call to turn from sin and turn to Christ.

3.4.1. Matthew 3:1-2 - In those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the Desert of Judea² and saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near."

3.4.2. Matthew 4:17 - From that time on Jesus began to preach, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near."

3.4.3. Acts 2:38 - 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."

3.4.4. Acts 3:19 - Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord,

3.4.5. Acts 26:20 - First to those in Damascus, then to those in Jerusalem and in all Judea, and to the Gentiles also, I preached that they should repent and turn to God and prove their repentance by their deeds.

4. Faith

4.1. Definition - Grudem does not give a precise definition for faith, but he does list several key components. In particular the three classic components of faith he mentions are knowledge, consent, and trust.

4.1.1. Knowledge

4.1.1.1. Faith is built upon knowledge. One can not trust or believe in what is not known. Thus, for one to have faith in Christ, the basic elements of the Gospel must be known. Apart from a basic understanding of the facts of the Gospel, there can be no biblical faith.

4.1.1.1.1. Romans 10:14-15 - How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? **And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard?** And how can they hear without someone preaching to them?¹⁵ And how can they preach unless they are sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!"

4.1.1.1.2. Romans 16:25-26 - Now to him who is able to establish you by my gospel and the proclamation of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery hidden for long ages past,²⁶ **but now revealed and made known through the prophetic writings by the command of the eternal God, so that all nations might believe and obey him--**

- 4.1.1.1.3. John 20:30-31 - Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book.
³¹ **But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God,** and that by believing you may have life in his name.
- 4.1.1.2. The modern notion that faith and knowledge are not only not related but are actually in opposition is false and has nothing to do with biblical faith. Faith is NOT believing against reason, or “blind faith” against what you know. It is not “believing what you know is not true.” This modern rationalistic definition is utterly false and must be rejected. Faith is not against knowledge; on the contrary knowledge is an essential component of faith.
- 4.1.1.3. NOTE: This also means that some modern “Christian” notions of faith, such as faith is going against sense knowledge and believing in the spirit realm are false. Sometimes these teachers will speak of two types of faith - human faith built upon mental knowledge and the senses, and the “God kind of faith” that operates in spite of these things. The Scripture NEVER makes a dichotomy like this. There is only faith and unbelief, and faith is built upon knowledge of God and His Word, a knowledge that is grasped by the mind and confirmed by the physical senses that God gave us and that we will have in eternity. This other notion is pagan and Platonic - not Christian.
- 4.1.2. Assent
 - 4.1.2.1. True faith does not stop at knowledge but moves on to assent. It recognizes not only the facts presented, but also their truth. It is not enough to accurately know what God says - one must believe that it is true.
 - 4.1.2.2. An example is that many unbelievers know the basic elements of the Gospel. They can accurately explain what Christians believe - they have knowledge. However, they do not give assent that these claims are true. They do not give assent.
- 4.1.3. Personal trust - choice of the will
 - 4.1.3.1. The final essential component of faith is personal trust in the facts known and assented to. It is a choosing of the will to entrust oneself to God and His promises. It knows that the facts are not only true, but that they are true for me, and embraces God, His Word, His commands, and His promises.
 - 4.1.3.2. It is possible for one to have knowledge, and even possibly to give assent that things are true, and still not have biblical faith. This appears to be the position of Satan and demons, and also of some unregenerate humans. All of the verses below (and others could be added) show at least knowledge of God and His ways, and some of them also seem to even show assent that God’s claims and ways are true, yet there is no faith - because there is no personal trust.

- 4.1.3.2.1. James 2:19 - You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that--and shudder.
- 4.1.3.2.2. Mark 1:24 - "What do you want with us, Jesus of Nazareth? **Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are--the Holy One of God!"**
- 4.1.3.2.3. Luke 4:41 - **Moreover, demons came out of many people, shouting, "You are the Son of God!"** But he rebuked them and would not allow them to speak, because **they knew he was the Christ.**
- 4.1.3.2.4. Matthew 8:29 - "What do you want with us, **Son of God?" they shouted. "Have you come here to torture us before the appointed time?"**
- 4.1.3.2.5. Romans 1:19-20 - **since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them.** ²⁰ For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities--his eternal power and divine nature--**have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse.**
- 4.1.3.2.6. Romans 1:32 - Although they know God's righteous decree that those who do such things deserve death, they not only continue to do these very things but also approve of those who practice them.
- 4.1.3.2.7. This would also lie at the heart of James discussion in James 2:14-26. The people in view claim to have faith, and they apparently have the basic facts of the Gospel and give assent that they are true. Yet, James says "such faith" (James 2:14) can not save them. It is like the demons who have the facts, assent they are true, but refuse to embrace God but rather continue to cling to their own sin and autonomy. People who have "such faith" have not truly embraced Christ and are still lost in their sin. "Such faith" is a dead faith, that does not justify and does not produce the fruit of faith - works.

5. The Lordship salvation controversy

- 5.1. In recent years there was a controversy over whether one could accept Jesus as Savior, but not as Lord. The basic question was whether the Gospel message necessarily includes repentance and a faith that produces works, or if it merely says "believe" without calling for repentance or a belief that will actively pursue Christ.
- 5.2. The key books in the controversy were John MacArthur's "The Gospel According to Jesus" which argued for the Gospel including both repentance and faith and Zane Hodges' "Absolutely Free" and Charles Ryrie's "So Great A Salvation" which argued that the Gospel and salvation do NOT include repentance as part of the message or as a necessary condition, and that faith should but does not always produce fruit.
- 5.3. MacArthur's basic position is clearly the correct one biblically. This is apparent for several reasons:

- 5.3.1. As noted above, the Scriptures consistently call for both repentance and faith as essential parts of a true conversion to Christ. (See the Scriptures under “conversion” and “repentance” sections above.
- 5.3.2. The Scriptures also clearly indicate that true faith produces works. This is most clearly seen in James 2:14-26, but in others Scriptures as well.
- 5.3.2.1. Romans 1:5 - Through him and for his name's sake, we received grace and apostleship to call people from among all the Gentiles to **the obedience that comes from faith.**
- 5.3.2.2. Romans 16:25-26 - Now to him who is able to establish you by **my gospel and the proclamation of Jesus Christ**, according to the revelation of the mystery hidden for long ages past, ²⁶ but now revealed and made known through the prophetic writings by the command of the eternal God, **so that all nations might believe and obey him--**
- 5.3.2.3. Hebrews 5:8-9 - Although he was a son, he learned obedience from what he suffered ⁹ and, once made perfect, **he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him**
- 5.3.2.4. 1 Peter 1:2 - who have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through the sanctifying work of the Spirit, **for obedience to Jesus Christ and sprinkling by his blood:** Grace and peace be yours in abundance.
- 5.3.2.5. 2 Timothy 2:19 - Nevertheless, God's solid foundation stands firm, sealed with this inscription: **"The Lord knows those who are his," and, "Everyone who confesses the name of the Lord must turn away from wickedness."**
- 5.3.3. The Scriptures clearly indicate that those who make a profession of Christ with the mouth but who do not truly forsake sin and embrace Him are still in their sin and will not inherit the kingdom of God.
- 5.3.3.1. Matthew 7:21-23 - "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. ²² Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?' ²³ Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!'
- 5.3.3.2. Titus 1:16 - They claim to know God, but by their actions they deny him. They are detestable, disobedient and unfit for doing anything good.
- 5.3.3.3. James 1:22 - Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says.
- 5.3.3.4. 1 Corinthians 6:9-11 - **Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God?** Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders ¹⁰ nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. ¹¹ **And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.**

- 5.3.3.5. Galatians 5:19-24 - The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; ²⁰ idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions ²¹ and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. **I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.** ²² But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. ²⁴ **Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires.**
- 5.3.4. To teach that one can take Jesus as Savior but refuse Him as Lord splits the offices of Christ. He is Prophet, Priest, and King. We can not merely take Him as Priest and refuse Him as Prophet and King.
- 5.3.5. To teach that a Christian can continually live in wholehearted embrace of sin while rejecting Christ's call to holiness is to ignore the nature of regeneration. We are born again, not just slightly improved. The "Jesus as Savior" only teaching undermines the drastic and miraculous nature of regeneration.
- 5.3.6. To teach that one can become a believer without any true repentance or attempt to truly turn from sin is to ignore the link between justification and sanctification. One can not be justified without also beginning the path of sanctification at the same time.
- 5.3.7. To teach that one can become a believer without any true repentance or attempt to truly turn from sin is to create two classes of Christians - the carnal and the spiritual. This is a gross misunderstanding of 1 Corinthians 3. Paul is not speaking of different classes of Christians, but noting that some of the Corinthians were not following the Spirit in their behavior, but rather their flesh. As we will see when we study the baptism of the Spirit, such teachings are not biblical. The divide is not between spiritual and carnal Christians, or Spirit filled and non-Spirit filled Christians, but between believers and unbelievers, the church and the world.
- 5.3.8. The Scripture states that the Gospel we proclaim must include the idea of turning from sin and turning to Christ, putting off the old man and putting on the new. One can not simply put Christ over the old man while continuing to truly embrace the old man.
- 5.3.8.1. Ephesians 4:17-24 - **So I tell you this, and insist on it in the Lord, that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their thinking.** ¹⁸ They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts. ¹⁹ Having lost all sensitivity, **they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, with a continual lust for more.** ²⁰ **You, however, did not come to know Christ that way.** ²¹ Surely you heard of him and were taught in him in accordance with the truth that is in Jesus. ²² **You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; ²³ to be made new in the attitude of your minds; ²⁴ and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.**

- 5.3.8.2. Colossians 3:5-10 - **Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature:** sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. ⁶ Because of these, the wrath of God is coming. ⁷ **You used to walk in these ways,** in the life you once lived. ⁸ **But now you must rid yourselves of all such things** as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips. ⁹ Do not lie to each other, since **you have taken off your old self with its practices** ¹⁰ **and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator.**
- 5.3.9. The basic confession of faith in Scripture is not “Jesus is Savior” but “Jesus is Lord.”
 - 5.3.9.1. Romans 10:9 - **That if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord,"** and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, **you will be saved.**
 - 5.3.9.2. Philippians 2:9-11 - Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, ¹⁰ **that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth,** ¹¹ **and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.**
 - 5.3.9.3. Colossians 2:6-7 - So then, **just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord,** continue to live in him, ⁷ rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness.
- 5.4. This is not works salvation, nor does it produce doubts about our salvation. We are not saved by works, but by Christ. Our faith is not in our works, but in Christ. When we doubt and struggle, we do not look to our works, but to Christ. Yet, the Christ to whom we look is Lord, and those who have truly been born again will have a foundational desire for Christ, to love and obey Him. If we are devoid of this desire, then we should test ourselves and see if we are in the faith (2 Corinthians 13:5).

6. The continuing nature of faith and repentance

- 6.1. Although we have mainly been discussing faith and repentance as how we appropriate Christ’s work to become believers, it is important to note that both repentance and faith continue throughout the Christian life. There is an initial repentance from sin and turning to God in faith through which we become believers, and this happens at a moment in time. However, our walk with Christ continues to be one of repentance and faith.
 - 6.1.1. Colossians 2:6 - So then, **just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in him...**
 - 6.1.2. Revelation 2:5 - Remember the height from which you have fallen! **Repent and do the things you did at first.** If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place.
 - 6.1.3. Revelation 3:19 - Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest, and repent.
 - 6.1.4. 2 Corinthians 7:9 - yet now I am happy, not because you were made sorry, but because **your sorrow led you to repentance.** For you became sorrowful as God intended and so were not harmed in any way by us.
 - 6.1.5. 1 John 1:8-9 - If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. ⁹ If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.

- 6.1.6. Galatians 2:20 - I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. **The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God**, who loved me and gave himself for me.
- 6.1.7. Ephesians 3:16-19 - I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, ¹⁷ **so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith**. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, ¹⁸ may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, ¹⁹ and to know this love that surpasses knowledge--that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.
- 6.1.8. 1 Corinthians 13:13 - **And now these three remain: faith**, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.
- 6.2. Growing in our repentance and faith
 - 6.2.1. We grow in these areas in the same way we initially responded to the Gospel. The Holy Spirit uses the Word of God to help us understand (knowledge), works on our minds to cause us to agree (assent), and transforms our will and emotions so that we forsake sin and error and embrace God and His truth (personal trust, putting off the old man and putting on the new).