
Chapter 4 Repent and Believe

When people heard the Gospel at Pentecost, they asked what they should do. Peter called them to repent, identify publicly with Jesus in baptism, and receive God's promise (Acts 2:37-41). Throughout Acts, the apostolic message calls people to repentance toward God and faith toward Jesus Christ (Acts 17:30-31; 20:21).

Repentance Is a Turn

Repentance includes a change of mind, but it is more than exchanging one opinion for another. It is a change of mind and heart that turns a person from sin, idols, and self-rule toward God (Isaiah 55:6-7; Acts 3:19; 1 Thessalonians 1:9-10). Genuine repentance produces fruit in keeping with repentance, though that fruit does not purchase forgiveness (Matthew 3:8; Acts 26:20).

Repentance is not the same as regret. Judas felt remorse, but his sorrow did not lead him back to Christ in trusting obedience (Matthew 27:3-5). Godly sorrow produces repentance, while worldly sorrow remains centered on loss, shame, or consequences (2 Corinthians 7:9-10).

Repentance may include sorrow, confession, and making wrongs right where possible, but these responses are the fruit of repentance rather than payment for forgiveness (Luke 19:1-10; 2 Corinthians 7:10-11). A person who has harmed someone should not use “grace” to avoid responsibility. At the same time, no amount of sorrow or restitution can replace Christ’s saving work (Ephesians 1:7; Titus 3:4-7).

Consider the difference between being sorry that sin was exposed and being ready to turn from it. Both people may cry. Both may fear consequences. Only one agrees with God about the sin and turns toward obedience. Repentance reaches the mind, affections, and will: we recognize God’s verdict as true, grieve that we have sinned against Him, and surrender the right to keep ruling ourselves (Psalm 51:3-4; Luke 15:17-20). The depth of repentance is measured by its direction, not by the volume of emotion.

Faith Is Trust in Christ

Saving faith includes knowing the Gospel, agreeing that it is true, and personally relying on Jesus Christ (John 3:16-18; Romans 10:9-13). Faith is not positive thinking, confidence in ourselves, or a force

that controls outcomes. Its value rests in its object: Jesus Christ (Galatians 2:16; 2 Timothy 1:12).

Biblical faith is alive and therefore begins to produce obedience (James 2:14-26). Works do not make faith worthy or earn salvation, but a settled refusal to obey exposes an empty profession (Matthew 7:21-23; Titus 1:16). We are justified by faith apart from works, and the faith that receives grace leads into the good works God prepared (Romans 3:28; Ephesians 2:8-10).

The strength of faith is not measured by how confident we feel. Weak faith resting on a strong Savior is better than great confidence placed in a false promise. The father who cried, "Lord, I believe; help my unbelief!" brought his need to Jesus rather than pretending certainty (Mark 9:24). Saving faith looks away from self and rests on Christ's identity, work, and promise (John 6:35-40; 2 Timothy 1:12).

Saving faith also engages the whole person. The mind hears and understands the Gospel. The heart recognizes Christ as worthy of trust. The will entrusts the person to Him. Knowing facts without relying on Christ is not saving faith, but neither is a sincere feeling detached from the

truth about Jesus. Biblical faith receives the true Christ revealed in the true Gospel (John 20:30-31; Romans 10:9-17).

Repentance and Faith Belong Together

Repentance and faith describe one turning from two directions: turning from sin and turning to Christ (Acts 20:21; 1 Thessalonians 1:9-10). We must not make repentance a work that cleans us up before we come to Jesus. We come honestly, abandoning our claim to self-rule and trusting His mercy (Luke 18:9-14; Titus 3:3-7).

A Decision Begins a Life of Discipleship

A person truly comes to Christ at a definite point of repentance and faith, but the New Testament never treats that beginning as permission to remain unchanged. Jesus commands the church to make disciples and teach them to obey (Matthew 28:19-20). New birth begins new life; it does not instantly produce maturity (1 Peter 2:2; 2 Peter 3:18).

This guards against two errors. One error keeps asking sincere believers to be saved again because they are still growing. The other counts a raised hand, repeated prayer, or emotional moment as

sufficient even when a person rejects Christ's lordship. We are saved by grace through faith, not by our progress, yet saving grace trains us to renounce ungodliness and live under Christ's rule (Ephesians 2:8-10; Titus 2:11-14).²

Confession and the Sinner's Prayer

Scripture teaches believers to confess Jesus as Lord and call upon Him for salvation (Romans 10:9-13). A prayer can express genuine repentance and faith, but no arrangement of words saves by itself. The tax collector's brief cry for mercy was received because he humbled himself before God, while religious words offered in pride did not justify the Pharisee (Luke 18:9-14). Christ saves those who come to Him; a formula is not a spiritual spell (John 6:37; Acts 16:30-31).

Q An Example Prayer

Lord Jesus, I know that I have sinned and cannot save myself. I believe You died for my sins and rose from the dead. I turn from my sin and place my trust in You. Please forgive me, make me new, and help me follow You as my Lord. Amen.

These words do not save merely because they are repeated. The prayer should express a heart that is humbled before the Lord, honestly turning from sin and trusting Christ. Salvation rests in Jesus and

His promise, not in the wording or length of the prayer (Psalm 51:17; Luke 18:13-14; Romans 10:9-13).

KNOW THE WORDS

WORD	PLAIN MEANING
Repentance	Turning in mind, heart, and direction from sin and self-rule toward God (Acts 3:19; 20:21).
Faith	Trusting and relying on Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior (John 3:16; Romans 10:9-13).
Confession	Openly agreeing with God's truth, including acknowledging Jesus as Lord and acknowledging our sins (Romans 10:9; 1 John 1:9).
Conversion	The turning to God expressed through repentance and faith (Acts 14:15; 1 Thessalonians 1:9).
Fruit	Visible attitudes and actions produced by genuine repentance and life with God (Matthew 3:8; Galatians 5:22-23).

THINK IT THROUGH

Q Must I Fix Myself Before Coming to Jesus?

No. Jesus calls sinners, not people who have already made themselves righteous (Mark 2:17). Repentance means coming into the light and turning to God, not becoming worthy before asking for mercy (John 3:19-21; Luke 18:13-14). God receives the one who comes to Christ (John 6:37).

Q What If I Do Not Feel Enough?

Strong emotion can accompany repentance, but salvation does not rest on achieving a certain intensity of feeling. The question is whether you are turning to Christ and trusting His promise (John 5:24; Acts 16:30-31). Feelings change; Christ's word remains true (Matthew 24:35).

Q Does One Decision Make a Mature Disciple?

No. A genuine decision to repent and believe is a real beginning, but maturity develops as a believer learns Christ's teaching, obeys it, remains in fellowship, receives correction, serves others, and perseveres (Acts 2:41-47; Ephesians 4:11-16). We must neither belittle the beginning nor confuse birth with growth.

The church should seek conversions and then help converts become steady followers of Jesus.

WATCH FOR COUNTERFEITS

Beware of “faith in faith”—the idea that certainty, visualization, declarations, or spoken words create reality. Biblical faith does not trust its own intensity. It trusts God and submits requests to His will (Mark 11:22; 1 John 5:14-15). Likewise, repentance is not public humiliation imposed by a controlling leader; it is a sincere turning to God that may include appropriate confession and restitution (Luke 19:8-10; James 5:16).

DECLARATION OF FAITH CONNECTION

This chapter supports these Church of God convictions:

- Repentance is commanded for all and necessary for forgiveness (Luke 24:46-47; Acts 17:30).
- Justification and regeneration come through faith in Jesus Christ (Romans 5:1; Titus 3:5-7).

PUT IT INTO PRACTICE

Read Luke 18:9-14. Write a short prayer to God that confesses your need, trusts Christ’s mercy, and submits your life to

Him. The prayer does not earn salvation; it gives words to repentance and faith (Romans 10:9-13).

TALK IT THROUGH

1. How is repentance different from regret?
2. Why is faith more than agreement with facts?
3. How do repentance and faith belong together?
4. What place can prayer have in conversion?
5. Why can neither strong feelings nor exact words provide assurance?

FIVE DAYS IN THE BIBLE

Day 1: Jesus Calls for a Response — Mark 1:14-20

Write the two responses Jesus commands and what the first disciples leave to follow Him.

Day 2: Two Prayers — Luke 18:9-14

Compare the two men's view of themselves and of God's mercy.

Day 3: Cut to the Heart — Acts 2:22-41

Trace the message, response, command, and result.

**Day 4: Turn to God — Acts 17:22-31;
20:17-21**

Write what repentance is based on and how Paul summarizes his message.

**Day 5: Believe and Confess — Romans
10:1-13**

Notice the difference between establishing our righteousness and receiving God's righteousness.