



Ordo Salutis (Order of Salvation)

Lesson 3: Conversion

Key Verse: Mark 1:14–15

Now after John had been taken into custody, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of God, and saying, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.”

Introduction

As we have seen in the last two lessons, God, from before the foundation of the world, chose whom He would save (Eph. 1:4). All those whom God has elected will be regenerated by the work of the Holy Spirit, imparting spiritual life to the dead sinner (also referred to as “born again”) by means of the gospel call. Because the sinner is born again by the work of God, he will respond to the gospel call by repenting of sins and placing his faith in Christ for salvation. This response is called conversion. In true conversion, there is always a turning *from* sin (repentance) and a simultaneous turning *to* God in Christ (faith).¹ Anthony Hoekema defines conversion as “the conscious act of a regenerated person in which he or she turns to God in repentance and faith. It involves a twofold turning: away from sin and toward the service of God.”² Repentance and faith are simply two sides of the same coin, or two different aspects (occurring simultaneously) of the one event of conversion in the believer’s life. Theologian Louis Berkhof states, “the two cannot be separated; they are simply complementary parts of the same process.”³ The instances in the New Testament in which they are named together (Mark 1:15; Acts 19:4, 20:21; Heb. 6:1), repentance is named first. Therefore, we will look at repentance first and then faith.

Repentance

Repentance is something that occurs at a specific point in time, namely the time of conversion. It is not equivalent to a demonstration of change in a person’s pattern of life. Repentance begins with the sinner’s humble acknowledgement of his sin and need for forgiveness. It produces before God a great mourning over sin, sorrow, and even shame and humiliation in the heart (Luke 18:13). This disgust over sin leads the sinner to renounce his wickedness and decisively turn away from a life of sin. This repenting involves more than sorrow for sin and more than just an intellectual change. It involves a change in the entire person, and his outlook on life. Hoekema states, “You could say that it [repentance] means a change of thinking, feeling, and willing.”⁴ As he turns away from sin, he turns to trust in Christ, receiving the forgiveness of his sins and a restored relationship with his Creator. From that point forward, he desires to live in obedience to God’s will, being empowered by the Holy Spirit to do so. The evidence of his inward repentance is then manifested in his external deeds (Eph. 2:10). Wayne Grudem defines repentance as “a heartfelt sorrow for sin, a renouncing of it, and a sincere commitment to forsake it and walk in obedience to Christ.”⁵

¹ John MacArthur and Richard Mayhue, gen. eds. *Biblical Doctrines: A Systematic Summary of Bible Truth* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2017), 591.

² Anthony A Hoekema, *Saved by Grace* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1989), 113.

³ Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 4th ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1941), 487.

⁴ *Saved by Grace*, 125.

⁵ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 713.

Genuine repentance involves the mind, the heart, and the will. Intellectually, it begins with a recognition of sin and acknowledgment of the sinner breaking God’s law. Therefore, the sinner has fallen short of God’s glory and is guilty before Him. Emotionally, repentance is marked by a sincere sorrow, remorse, and even mourning over one’s sin (cf. Matt. 5:4). Finally, repentance involves a change in direction. This is a transformation of the will. This is characterized by forsaking evil thoughts (Isa. 55:7), turning from wickedness and practicing justice and righteousness (Ezek. 33:19), and turning from wicked ways (Jonah 3:10; cf. 2 Chron. 7:14). Genuine repentance will result in a change of behavior. However, it is important to note that the behavior change itself is not repentance. The call to repentance is not a call to clean up one’s life to fit oneself for salvation. That would turn repentance into a work of merit and would undermine the gospel of grace. Repentance is a gift from God (Acts 5:31; 11:18; 2 Tim. 2:25). Repentance is something that occurs in the heart and involves the whole person in a decision to turn from sin.⁶

Repentance in the Old Testament⁷

The two words in the Old Testament for repentance are *nakham* and *shub*. *Nakham* means to be sorry, to be moved to pity, or to repent of wrongdoings.⁸ It is used to describe sorrow for sin (Jud. 21:6, 15; Job 42:6; Jer. 8:6; 31:19).

The most common Old Testament word for “repentance” is the word *shub*. The basic meaning of this word is “to turn” or “to return.” In the *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* it states, “For better than any other verb it [*shub*] combines in itself the two requisites of repentance: to turn from evil and to turn to the good.”⁹ *Shub* describes biblical repentance as turning from sin, transgression, and iniquity. It signifies forsaking the path of wickedness and changing one’s actions; turning from the plans of an evil heart. This repentance is not only turning *away* from sin, but also a turning *to* God (Isa. 9:13; Hosea 5:4). This repentance is not merely an external activity, but it comes from the heart (Deut. 30:2; Jer. 3:10; Joel 2:12–13).

Key Verses:

1. 1 Kings 8:35–36. What is Solomon saying about Israel’s response to their sin?

2. Isaiah 55:7. What is to be the response of the wicked? _____

3. Isaiah 59:20. Who will the Redeemer come to? _____

4. Jeremiah 8:6. What is God’s conclusion of the people of Jerusalem? _____

5. Jeremiah 18:11–12. What was Jeremiah to tell Judah? _____

6. Jeremiah 35:15. What did God send the prophets to do? _____

⁶ Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 713.

⁷ Adapted from *Biblical Doctrines*.

⁸ *Saved by Grace*, 123.

⁹ Victor P. Hamilton, “*šub*,” in *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, ed. R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer Jr., and Bruce K. Waltke (Chicago: Moody Press, 1980), 2:909.

7. Ezekiel 18:21. How does Ezekiel describe the man who lives? _____

8. Hosea 5:4. What does this verse say about Israel's sin? _____

Repentance in the New Testament

In the New Testament the Greek word *metamelomai* represents the emotional aspect of repentance and describes “regret” (2 Cor. 7:8–11) and “remorse” (Matt. 21:32; 27:3) for evil conduct. Another Greek word is *epistrephō* (*epi* meaning “toward”; *strephō* meaning “to turn”). This word has the same general concept of “turning” as the Hebrew word *shub*. It describes a change in direction in one’s life—turning from sin and idolatry to serve the living and true God (Acts 14:15; 1 Thess. 1:9; cf. Acts 3:26; 26:18; James 5:20).

The most common New Testament Greek verb for repentance is *metanoeō*, the noun being *metanoia*. This is the common rendering of *nakham* in the Septuagint (LXX). William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich (BDAG, a Greek lexicon) defines *metanoia* as “to change one’s mind; repentance, turning about, conversion . . . Mostly of the positive side of repentance, as the beginning of a new relationship with God.”¹⁰ *Metanoia* therefore means not just a turning away from evil deeds, but also a turning in a new direction.¹¹

Key Verses:

1. Matthew 27:3. What was Judas’ response? _____

2. Mark 1:4. What did John the Baptist preach? _____

3. Mark 1:14–15. What did Jesus preach? _____
4. Acts 11:18. What did God grant to the Gentiles? _____
5. Acts 14:15. What was Paul’s response to idolatry at Lystra? _____

6. 1 Thessalonians 1:9. What did the Thessalonians do? _____
7. Hebrews 6:1. What are the foundational truths of the Christian life? _____

Faith

Whereas repentance is often seen as the negative aspect of conversion—a turning away from sin—faith can be seen as the positive aspect—the turning to God and trusting in the person and work of Christ for forgiveness, righteousness, and eternal life.

¹⁰ Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, ed. Frederick W. Danker, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), Accordance, 641.

¹¹ *Saved by Grace*, 125.

True saving faith includes three basic elements: knowledge, approval, and personal trust. First, for a person to have saving faith, it is necessary to have some knowledge of the person and work of Christ. The secular world defines faith as something that takes over a person when they do not have sufficient knowledge. You will often hear this expressed in the phrase “blind faith.” However, a person who has saving faith does not have blind faith, but has knowledge about God, sin, and the person and work of Christ (Rom. 10:14). True saving faith is based upon the knowledge of divinely revealed truth (Rom. 6:8–9; Gal. 2:16) and is the foundation of biblical faith.

Second, while knowledge is necessary for saving faith, it is not sufficient. It is possible for someone to know the truth about Jesus without ever embracing those truths or believing in Him. The demons know facts about God (James 2:19). In Romans 1:32, Paul says, “and although they *know* the ordinance of God, that those who practice such things are worthy of death, they not only do the same, but also give hearty approval to those who practice them” (Italics added). Along with knowledge must be approval. This approval is a full embrace of the truths that have been revealed. It is being convinced of the truths about God that are revealed in His Word (2 Tim. 1:12).

Third, in addition to knowledge and approval of God’s revealed truth, one must have personal trust in Christ for salvation. This is the will’s utter reliance on Christ for salvation. John Murray says, “Faith is knowledge passing into conviction, and it is conviction passing into confidence. Faith cannot stop short of self-commitment to Christ, a transference of reliance upon ourselves and all human resources to reliance upon Christ alone for salvation.”¹² Saving faith moves beyond facts *about* Christ and arrives at trusting *in* Christ. Grudem states, “Saving faith is trust in Jesus Christ as a living person for forgiveness of sins and for eternal life with God.”¹³

Key Verses:

1. Acts 26:26–27. What did Paul know about King Agrippa? _____

2. John 1:12. How does John describe the children of God? _____

3. Romans 10:17. How does faith come to a believer? _____
4. Philippians 3:8–9. How was Paul’s faith displayed? _____

5. Ephesians 2:8–9. What does Paul tell us about faith? _____

John MacArthur states, “Furnished with the ability to perceive reality as it is, the newborn soul necessarily and immediately turns away in revulsion from sin and eagerly runs to embrace Christ. That turning from sin and unbelief is repentance, and the eager embrace of Christ as Savior from sin and as Lord over one’s life is faith. Together, repentance and faith make up the single act of conversion.”¹⁴

Application

1. Have you been converted? If so, are you telling others how they can be converted?

¹² John Murray, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied* (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans: 1955) 117.

¹³ Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 710.

¹⁴ *Biblical Doctrines*, 590.