

Unbelievers Must Repent At Their Conversion

Many years ago for a short period of time, I was deceived by certain American books which taught the easy believism “gospel” which suggests unbelievers can be saved by just believing in Jesus as Saviour without receiving Him as Lord and without repenting of their known sins. I witnessed to two of my deeply loved relatives and led them to make “decisions” for Christ that were false conversions on the basis of such easy believism. My relatives showed no change in their lives and did not even start going to church, but were falsely led by me to believe they were saved. I learnt a great lesson from my foolishness.

Acts 17:30 records Paul told the pagan Athenians God now commands *every* person in *every* nation to repent: ***“Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent.”*** Paul did not here say repentance was only for people who were already believers or just for Jews who were under the Law of Moses. He said repentance was for every person, this including all unbelievers, believers, Jews and non-Jews. The Athenians were familiar with the Greek word “metanoeo” meaning “repent” which Paul used here. But as pagans, they did not previously understand the meaning according to its Biblical description. Note Paul did not amend the Gospel by leaving out teaching on repentance when speaking to them.

In Acts 20:21, Paul said he preached repentance to Jews and pagan Greeks: ***“Testifying to Jews, and also to Greeks, repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ.”*** In Luke 15:1-10, especially verses 7 and 10, Jesus speaks of spiritually lost sinners repenting. Luke 15:7 records Jesus’ words: ***“I say to you that likewise there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine just persons who need no repentance.”***

Matthew 9:13, Mark 6:12, Luke 5:32, Acts 2:38-39, 3:19-20, 11:18, 26:18-20, Romans 2:4-6, 2 Peter 3:9, Revelation 9:21, 16:9 and 16:11 also prove God expects unbelievers to repent. Mark 6:12 records all the twelve Apostles preached that unbelievers must repent. In Luke 24:46-47, Jesus said that He wanted repentance and forgiveness of sin preached in *all nations* after He rose from the dead: ***“Then He said to them, ‘Thus it is written, and thus it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day, and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.’”***

One false view suggests Jesus only wanted repentance to be preached to unbelievers among the Jews but not to unbelievers from other nations. This view claims Jesus wanted unbelievers in other nations to believe at conversion but not necessarily repent. But verses such as Luke 24:46-47, Acts 11:18, 17:30, 20:21, 26:18-20, Revelation 9:21, 16:9 and 16:11 show how wrong this is.

In the Books of Romans and Galatians, Paul emphasises we are justified by faith. The only verse in these two Books which uses the word ***“repentance”*** in relation to unbelievers in Romans 2:4. On the basis of these facts, do not believe the ridiculous idea that as Paul matured, he changed his Gospel to urge a type of “faith” response which did not require any accompanying repentance. But note in various verses in Romans and Galatians, Paul refers to

the concept of repentance by using different Greek words and/or expressions than the words “metanoia” and “metanoeo” (see Romans 6:1-2, 6:14-22 and Galatians 5:19-21).

Also note Paul probably wrote the Books of Romans and Galatians *before* he spoke the words recorded in Acts 26:15-20 about the type of Gospel he preached all throughout his ministry. Acts 26:15-20 records: ***“So I said, ‘Who are You, Lord?’ And He said, ‘I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. But rise and stand on your feet; for I have appeared to you for this purpose, to make you a minister and a witness both of the things which you have seen and of the things which I will yet reveal to you. I will deliver you from the Jewish people, as well as from the Gentiles, to whom I now send you, to open their eyes and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who are sanctified by faith in Me.’ Therefore, King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision, but declared first to those in Damascus and in Jerusalem, and throughout all the region of Judea, and then to the Gentiles, that they should repent, turn to God, and do works befitting repentance.”***

Here in Acts 26:15-20, Paul reveals he always preached repentance as a normal accompanying characteristic of conversion. So it is wrong to suggest the Books of Romans and Galatians are evidence of a changed Gospel emphasis by Paul.

To Paul, faith and repentance were so closely associated, he could emphasise only one in one context and still not be preaching a different Gospel. This is similar to how in Acts 2:38-39 and 3:19-20, Peter connected repentance with conversion and did not include a mention of faith, and then in 1 Peter 1:5, 1:9, 1:21 and 2 Peter 1:1 he linked faith to salvation without mentioning anything about repentance.

Other New Testament verses insisting unbelievers must repent

There are numerous other New Testament verses which refer to the need of repentance among unbelievers. In Romans 2:4-6, Paul was speaking to unbelievers when he said they must repent to avoid God’s righteous anger: ***“Or do you despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance? But in accordance with your hardness and your impenitent heart you are treasuring up for yourself wrath in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgement of God, who will render to each one according to his deeds.”***

Hebrews 6:1 shows one of the most elementary teachings every person (including unbelievers) has to learn is repentance from actions associated with spiritual death: ***“Therefore, leaving the discussion of the elementary principles of Christ, let us go on to perfection, not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God.”***

In 2 Peter 3:7 and 9, Peter states: ***“But the heavens and the earth which now exist are kept in store by the same word, reserved for fire until the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men...The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.”***

Revelation 9:20-21 refers to unbelievers not repenting from specific sins: ***“But the rest of mankind, who were not killed by these plagues, did not repent of the works of their hands, that they should not worship demons, and idols of gold, silver, brass, stone and wood, which***

can neither see nor hear nor walk; and they did not repent of their murders or their sexual immorality or their thefts.”

Revelation 16:10-11 speaks of a similar lack of repentance by unbelievers from various sins: “***...And they blasphemed the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores, and did not repent of their deeds.”***

In Matthew 18:8-9 and Mark 9:43-45, Christ associated eternal life with ridding ourselves of the causes of our sins. Matthew 18:8-9 says: “***If your hand or foot causes you to sin, cut it off and cast it from you. It is better for you to enter life lame or maimed, rather than having two hands or two feet, to be cast into the everlasting fire. And if your eye causes you to sin pluck it out and cast it from you. It is better for you to enter into life with one eye, rather than having two eyes, to be cast into hell fire.***” Jesus is not here demanding permanent sinless perfection in this life or works of Law. Instead, He is insisting on how important it is to have a radically changed heart attitude to the causes of our sins.

The myth of pure grace conversions versus repentance conversions

One unbiblical myth which easy believism preachers spread to try to support their watered-down false gospel is the idea there are two types of conversions: pure grace conversions and repentance conversions. In pure grace conversions, new believers at the point of conversion supposedly do not repent of and turn from their known sins. But in repentance conversions, new believers at the point of conversion repent and turn from their known sins.

The above myth is the invention of church leaders who want numbers in the churches at any cost so they can appear to others to be successful leaders. The above myth is also readily followed by religious hypocrites who want God’s blessings but continue to love their sins and wickedness more than Him. Also sadly many sincere Christian leaders with basically godly hearts have been deceived into following these unbiblical ideas.

The New Testament teaches that all conversions to Christ involve God’s pure grace, heart repentance and heart turning from known sins. Pure grace conversions include repentance and turning from known sins.

We are not saved and justified by a perfect type of repentance

True repentance will not make us perfect after our conversion. Assuming Romans 7:14-24 refers to believers, these verses show all of us as believers will commit known sin whenever we are not relying on Christ properly. Also, James 3:2 teaches that we as believers will knowingly and unknowingly commit sin with our tongues in many ways.

Also, after conversion we will still have hidden sin in our lives. In future years, God will reveal to us many areas of self-reliance, lack of faith and specific sin that we were unaware of when we were converted. Hidden sin refers to anything in our lives which we are unaware of involving disobedience to God’s Biblical commands or which is contrary to the perfect character of Jesus Christ. God does not expect people experiencing conversion to repent of hidden sin except in a *general* sense. This means they must have a heart attitude of being willing to repent of any sin in future after they become aware of it.

We are *not saved* by a conversion involving *perfect repentance* from sin. I am defining perfect repentance from sin here in the sense of having changed heart attitudes to every known

and hidden sin in our lives. We are saved by *God's perfect grace through Christ*. But to suggest conversion does not include changed heart attitudes to known sins is totally unbiblical.

As believers, we are not saved and justified on the basis of whether we have perfectly repented of all our known and unknown sins. As stated above, we can only repent of our hidden sins in a general sense. We cannot specifically repent of these hidden sins.

Also, if we were saved and justified only on the basis of whether we had perfectly repented and turned in our hearts from all our known sins, this means we would continually each day change from being saved and justified to being unsaved and condemned and vice versa. In other words, every time we committed one known sin, we would become unsaved and eternally condemned until we repented of it. For example, the moment I committed a sin of acting unlovingly to someone in any way, I would immediately lose my salvation until I repented of it. Such a view of repentance would be worse than the legalistic Catholic Council of Trent teaching on mortal sin.¹

But note if believers do not repent of their known sins, this can lead to them being hardened by sin and turning from their faith, resulting in the loss of their salvation and justification (see Hebrews 3:12-14).²

Even though we do not have to have a perfect repentance in order to be saved and justified, our repentance must be *real* and *sincere*. An insincere empty repentance is what accompanies a dead, insincere non-saving faith. We do not need to have a perfect faith in order to receive salvation and justification. But some poor types of faith are dead, non-justifying and non-saving (see James 2:14-26).³ Those people who do not have a real and sincere repentance in their hearts at conversion, will also have a non-saving dead faith.

One neglected aspect of confessing Jesus as Lord

One version of easy believism claims that people can be saved on the basis of Romans 10:9-10 by merely believing He is their Saviour and just saying He is their Lord even if they have no intention of repenting of known sin. But 2 Timothy 2:19 shows the type of confessing Jesus as Lord that God requires is one which is accompanied by departing from known wickedness or iniquity: ***“Nevertheless the solid foundation of God stands, having this seal... ‘Let everyone who names the name of Christ depart from iniquity.’”***

The departing from iniquity mentioned here includes the repentance or changed heart attitudes to sin which occurs at conversion and the resulting abandoning of sin in actions which is a fruit of repentance.

Paul wrote both 2 Timothy 2:19 and Romans 10:9-10. Therefore, for anyone to suggest someone can be converted on the basis of Romans 10:9-10 without having changed heart attitudes to sin is nonsense.

Jesus' Words in Matthew 7:21-23 makes it obvious an insincere confession of Jesus' Lordship will save no-one: ***“Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the***

¹ Refer to the section “Errors of the Council of Trent” in Chapter “Common errors about justification” for more details.

² Refer to Chapter “The normal fruits or results of regeneration” and Chapter “Security in Christ” for more details.

³ When referring to faith here as “non-justifying” and “non-saving”, I am not inferring faith merits our justification and salvation. The truth is faith receives justification and salvation as free gifts.

kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness.'"

An extremely poor argument

Some Bible teachers argue that because John does not link the Greek words for repentance to being saved in His Gospel of John and three letters, this means salvation has nothing to do with repentance. These Greek words are “metanoia” and “metanoeo”. Such an argument is very poor.

Note John does not record John the Baptist preached much about repentance. This is even though Matthew, Mark and Luke all mention this was one of the main features of the Baptist’s preaching (see Matthew 3:2, 3:8, Mark 1:4, Luke 3:3 and 3:8). This suggests the Apostle John referred to the concept of repentance in different words.

In 1 John 3:9-10 and 5:18, John spoke of the implied changed heart attitudes to sin and resulting forsaking of sin in actions associated with being born again without using the Greek words “metanoia” and “metanoeo”. For example, 1 John 3:9-10 says: ***“Whoever has been born of God does not sin, for His seed remains in him; and he cannot sin, because he has been born of God. In this the children of God and the children of the devil are manifest: Whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is he who does not love his brother.”***

Also, note the Apostle John did not use the word ***“gospel”*** in the Gospel of John and his three letters. But we would be fools to suggest John did not write about the Gospel of Jesus Christ. John used other Greek words to explain the same thing. For example, John often used the Greek words “marturea” which means “testimony, a bearing witness”⁴ and its associated verb “martureo” to refer to a relatively similar thing to what the Gospel is (see John 1:7-8, 1:15-18, 3:11-21, 5:39, 8:18, 19:35 and 1 John 5:6-13.)

Note also Jesus is never recorded in the New Testament as using the Greek word “charis” meaning “grace” in His teaching. But it would be ridiculous to suggest He did not teach much about grace. For example, the Parable of the Lost Sheep (see Matthew 18:10-14), the Parable of the Prodigal Son (see Luke 15:11-32) and the Parable of the Laborers (see Matthew 20:1-26) contain wonderful truths about God’s grace and Kingdom.

A cleverly concealed form of easy believism

After I have preached or taught about the Gospel of Jesus Christ and compared it to the heretical “gospel” of easy believism, I have had sincere believers and leaders say to me things like, “Well, I know Brother Situational Ethics and Evangelist Send Mesomemoney have been accused of preaching easy believism. But I heard them both mention the importance of repentance in conversion and of making Jesus our Lord. So I cannot see how it is justified saying these two leaders preach heretical easy believism.”

But note just mentioning the words “repentance” or “repent” while preaching the Gospel achieves nothing of value unless the preacher clearly explains what these words mean or

⁴ Vine, page 681.

the listeners have already had a revelation from God of what the words mean. If a preacher uses these two words and describes them as meaning just having a change of mind and will about God and Jesus Christ but not also about our known sins, this is just a cleverly concealed form of easy believism.

It is impossible to have a change of mind and will about God, Jesus Christ and the Gospel, without also having a change of mind and will about our known sins. God and Jesus Christ *hate sin* and are the *exact opposite to sin*. So if a person says, "I have changed my mind and will about God, Jesus Christ and the Gospel", but this person does not have a similar change in his heart about his known sins, the person has not experienced Biblical saving repentance. Instead the person has merely become religious.

Also, unless he later experiences true repentance in his heart, he will end up a religious hypocrite like thousands of others who have been deceived by easy believism.

Just because a person says, "I have received Jesus as Lord!", this means little unless this is accompanied by true repentance in his heart in relation to his known sins. In Matthew 7:21-23, Jesus warned such people: ***"Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!'"***

No matter how Biblical a preacher or teacher may be about other topics, if he or she preaches easy believism, the preacher is sinning greatly against God and his or her listeners.

The "gospel" which produces blatant hypocrites devoted to evil

Those churchgoers who believe that God does not require new converts to repent of and turn from their known sins in the hearts at the point of conversion are actually teaching that the unsaved can turn to Jesus Christ and be eternally saved while continually for years in their hearts being devoted to sins like:

- a) homosexuality
- b) paedophile sex abuse of children
- c) adultery or having sex before marriage
- d) serial rape
- e) bestiality
- f) committing murders and genocide
- g) human sacrifice
- h) cannibalism
- i) incestuous sexual relationships with their parents
- j) killing unwanted new-born babies
- k) Satanism
- l) witchcraft, levitation and putting spells and curses on others
- m) trying to contact the spirits of the dead
- n) worshipping Baal or other idols

The result of this false easy believism is the Church becomes full of evil blatant hypocrites who are devoted to forms of wickedness which God regards as utter abominations. Also the Church becomes exactly like the peoples of the northern kingdom of Israel and the southern kingdom of Judah whom God judged severely for trying to worship Him while still being devoted in their hearts to the above types of wickedness.

The unholy alliance between easy believism and situational ethics

Through out the 1900's, the preaching and teaching of the false gospel of easy believism merged with the demonic attitude to morals called situational ethics and with similar unbiblical ethical philosophies. Situational ethics is the philosophy that there is nothing which is absolutely right or wrong in all situations. For example, situational ethics teaches it is wrong to have sex outside of marriage in some situations but right in others. Situational ethics also insists that all moral rules including those in the Bible should be changed to suit the practical circumstances involved in each situation.

Easy believism and situational ethics are like two partners in crime who defend each other continually. They bolster each other through their *twisting* of verses of Scripture. In 2 Peter 3:16, Peter warned us of people who twist the Scriptures.

Easy believism and situational ethics have become so entrenched in many churches, that many imagine these are Biblical and God's will.

Using wicked situational ethics to defend easy believism

To try to defend their sinful preaching of the heretical easy believism "gospel", I have heard some preachers say, "When a person turns to Jesus Christ, God wants the person to begin to exercise faith and not to feel pressured to have to begin obeying a whole lot of rules." But note the following:

1. It is true God does not want new converts to begin obeying a whole lot of man-made religious rules and traditions (see Matthew 23:16-22, Mark 7:1-13, Colossians 2:8 and 1 Peter 1:18).
2. But He does want them to begin to obey His Biblical commands (see Matthew 28:20).
3. God's Biblical commands are *absolute rules*. They are not just God's "flexible guidelines" nor His "suggestions". The heretical founder of modern situational ethics Rev. Joseph Fletcher, the Episcopal theologian taught God's commands are only flexible guidelines which we can adjust to fit the situation. He spread the idea that God's commands are not absolute rules.
4. The only exceptions to God's commands are exceptions which He has recorded in His written Word. We have no God-given right to make our own exceptions to His commands just because of practical considerations or what we imagine is right or wrong.
5. Saving faith always leads to acts of obedience to God's commands (see James 2:14-26).

Bible Study Questions

1. Explain why each of the following verses proves unbelievers must repent when turning to Christ – Acts 17:30, 20:21, 26:15-20, Luke 15:7, 24:46-47, Romans 2:4-6, Hebrews 6:1 and Revelation 16:10-11.
2. What does 2 Timothy 2:19 teach us?
3. What does 1 John 3:9-10 teach us about the results of our being born-again?