

# Gospel Repentance

*“But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss because of Christ. But, nay, rather I also count all things to be loss because of the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count [them to be] trash, that I might gain Christ and be found in Him; not having my own righteousness of Law, but through [the] faith of Christ, [having] the righteousness of God on faith” (Philippians 3:7-9).*

When God saves a sinner, amazing changes take place in that sinner that are the immediate and inevitable fruits of regeneration. These changes are gracious gifts from God. They make up what is called *conversion*.

One such amazing change is God’s giving the sinner the gift of faith. The sinner goes from believing in a false god, a false christ, and a false gospel to believing in the true God, the true Christ, and the true gospel. He is given specific knowledge of the holiness, justice, grace, and mercy of God as revealed in the person and work of Christ. The doctrine of the person and the work of Christ is the gospel; namely, it is the good news of salvation conditioned solely on the atoning blood and imputed righteousness of Jesus Christ, the God-Man Mediator. Upon conversion, the saved sinner believes the true gospel of salvation conditioned on the work of Christ alone and stops believing a false gospel of salvation conditioned on the work of the sinner. If he previously believed that Jesus was only a man, he now believes that Jesus was and is the God-Man Mediator. If he previously believed that it is the work of the sinner that makes the difference between salvation and damnation (as is the case of all who believe that Christ died for everyone without exception), he now believes that it is the work of Christ alone that makes the difference between salvation and damnation. What a great and God-glorifying change!

There is another amazing change that happens as an immediate and inevitable result of regeneration. It is inseparably connected with the first, and it, too, is a great and God-glorifying change. It is a change that happens to every saved sinner upon conversion. That change is God’s giving the sinner the gift of repentance. This initial repentance is called *evangelical repentance* or *gospel repentance* to distinguish it from the ongoing repentance in a believer’s life. Gospel repentance is a one-time occurrence that happens at conversion and is a permanent change.

Of what does this gospel repentance consist? It consists of a *renouncing*, an *eschewing*, a *casting off*, an *abhorring*, a *detesting*, a *turning away from* something and an *embracing*, a *loving*, a *cherishing*, a *dedicating*, a *devoting oneself*, a *committing oneself to* something else that is the antithesis to the thing abhorred. The thing that is turned away from is belief in a false god, a false christ, and a false gospel. The thing that is embraced is belief in the true God, the true Christ, and the true gospel. Note that gospel repentance is not merely stopping believing one thing and starting believing something else. It includes the *full renunciation* of the previous belief.

What does it mean to fully renounce one’s previous belief? It means to consider the previous belief as damnable, as abominable, as blasphemy. It includes the acknowledgment that while one believed a false gospel, he was dead in his sins, a hater of God, an open idolater, a producer of

dead works, evil deeds, and fruit unto death. If one says, "I know those things were wrong, but I was still saved back then," he shows that he has not been given the gift of gospel repentance.

A prime example of true gospel repentance is the apostle Paul. In the Scripture passage above, Paul showed that he counted his former self-righteous religion as loss. He made no claims of having continued in his former religion for a time after regeneration; in fact, he made it clear that he counted himself unregenerate when he believed this false gospel. In the verses before, he said that he was a zealous, moral, religious man; in fact, he said that he was *blameless* according to righteousness in Law! Yet he counted all of his zeal, all of his morality, and all of his religion as nothing more than dung to be thrown on the dung heap. This shows that Paul had truly repented upon conversion.

Why did Paul count himself lost when he was in this false religion? It was because of the excellency of the *knowledge* of Christ Jesus his Lord. When God saved him, God gave him the *knowledge* that his salvation was conditioned on the atoning blood and imputed righteousness of Christ alone, Paul's works totally excluded. And when God gave him that *knowledge*, he counted his former religion as nothing but self-righteous dung, because he recognized that in his former religion, he believed in salvation conditioned on the sinner.

In Romans 7:5, Paul said, "*For when we were in the flesh, the passions of sin were working in our members through the law for the bearing of fruit unto death.*" Paul recognized that when he was lost, he was in the flesh and was bringing forth fruit unto death. He said that the passions of sin were working in his members through the law. Paul was not talking about his old party days when he was engaging in all kinds of immorality. Remember, Paul said that he was *blameless* according to righteousness in Law. Instead, the passions of sin were working in his members through his *law-keeping*! Paul was talking about his life of *religion, dedication, and morality*! He counted it as bringing forth fruit unto death. He *recognized* it to be so and *renounced* it. His law-keeping was nothing more than a false religion in which he thought that his law-keeping recommended him to God, just like the Pharisees of Jesus's time who thought they were qualified for heaven based on their law-keeping and despised others who were not as "holy" as they were. But Romans 10:2 shows that those who have a zeal for God but not according to *knowledge* are lost. A person can exceed all others in zeal, but if he does not have *knowledge*, all of his zeal is just religious dung. What was this *knowledge* that these zealous religionists were missing? Romans 10:3 gives us the answer. They were missing the knowledge of the *righteousness of God*. This *righteousness of God* is revealed in the gospel (Romans 1:17). It is a *knowledge* that God is just and justifier as shown in Christ's propitiation and redemption (Romans 3:21-26). And without such *knowledge*, one is automatically going about to establish a righteousness of his own and is not submitted to the righteousness of God (Romans 10:3). If one is ignorant of the righteousness of God through the redeeming work of Christ, he must think that it is something within himself that is the righteousness that God requires. If one does not believe that the work of Christ alone is what makes the difference between salvation and damnation, he must believe that it is something in himself that makes the difference.

Paul, and every other Christian, recognize that when they were ignorant of the righteousness of God revealed in the gospel, ignorant of the fact that the work of Christ alone ensures the salvation of all whom He represented, they believed in a self-righteous system of works. They have renounced this damnable heresy and believe that they were lost when they believed this damnable heresy. They have embraced the true gospel of salvation conditioned on the work of Christ alone.

There are many people who say that they agree with us in our belief of the gospel of salvation conditioned on the atoning blood and imputed righteousness of Jesus Christ alone. They say that they agree with our belief in the efficacious, vicarious, substitutionary death of Jesus Christ. They say they agree with us in our belief in the doctrines of grace. They even go so far as to say that universal atonement is a heresy that opposes the glory of God. Yet most of these people are dead in their sins. How can this be? For most, it is a matter of *repentance*.

These are the ones who will say that they believed in universal atonement for a time after God regenerated them. They will say that they still held to Arminianism after they were converted and gradually saw the truths of the gospel of salvation conditioned on the atoning blood and imputed righteousness of Christ alone. By saying such things, they show that they have not been given the gift of gospel repentance. They are yet dead in their sins. They do not believe that their former religion was a false religion; instead they believe that their former religion was true Christianity with a few inconsistencies. They do not believe that they were God-haters and idolaters, bringing forth dead works, evil deeds, and fruit unto death. They are not brothers with Paul, who counted his former religion as loss because of the excellency of the knowledge of Christ; in fact, they have no idea what the knowledge of Christ is that every believer is given upon conversion.

How do these people justify their belief that they were regenerate when they were in this religion? For many it was their zeal, their morality, and some religious experience. They might talk about a great change from immorality to morality, from unconcern to zeal, from hating religion to loving to attend church services and reading the Bible. These are the very things that Paul called trash. The zeal, morality, and religion of one who believes in salvation conditioned on the sinner is nothing but a stench in the nostrils of God. And those who have truly been given gospel repentance recognize this and recognize that they were God-haters when they believed such blasphemy.

Have you been given gospel repentance? If you used to believe in universal atonement, do you now believe that you were a God-hater who believed in salvation conditioned on the sinner? Or do you continue to hold on to your beloved religion of works by saying you were saved in such dung?

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