

Does repentance help a Believer's faith? **A series on genuine repentance: part 4**

Is there a connection between genuine repentance and the faith of a Christian? Essential to this study is a clear understanding of the biblical meaning of "faith" and "repentance."

The Greek term for "faith" is "pistis" which means "a trustful human response to God's self revelation via His words or actions" (for a more detailed study see: What is the concept of "faith" in the New Testament?).

It is the subjective response to the objective truth about God; faith is not a feeling or emotion nor is it devoid of it.

The Greek term for "repentance" is "metanoēō" which means "to change one's mind." The term places an emphasis on the thought or the will of a person, and involves a "change of mind" at both a moral and spiritual level regarding sin and God. Included as well is a sense of penance or a humbling of oneself.

The Bible introduces certain disciples as having faith, a trusting belief that Jesus was the Messiah: Peter (Matt 16:15-17) and his brother Andrew (John 1:40-42), Philip (John 1:43-45) and Nathanael (John 1:45-49). Many believe Nathanael is Bartholomew, brother of Philip, on the list of disciples (Matt 10:2-4; Mark 3:16-19; Luke 6:13-16; Acts 1:13).

Old Testament Believers (before the crucifixion of Christ), had a genuine faith in God which enabled them to recognize Jesus as the Messiah (see the article "What does it mean 'God draws'?").

Yet while these disciples have faith, on several occasions, Jesus rebukes them for having "little faith" (Matt 6:30; 8:26; 14:31; 16:8; 17:20; Luke 12:28). While there is no record of any repentance, the disciples learn new facts about the Messiah that wasn't in the Old Testament, and in each of these occurrences, Jesus confronts their preconceptions.

The disciples had to change their mind that Jesus had authority over nature:

And they came to Him and woke Him, saying, "save us, Lord; we are perishing!" He said to them, "Why are you afraid, **you men of little faith**?" Then He got up and rebuked the winds and the sea, and it became perfectly calm. The men were amazed, and said, "What kind of a man is this, that even the winds and sea obey Him?" (Matt 8:25-27)

But seeing the wind, he became frightened, and beginning to sink, he cried out, "Lord, save me!" Immediately Jesus stretched out His hand and took hold of him, and said to him, "**You of little faith**, why did you doubt?" When they got into the boat, the wind stopped. And those who were in the boat worshipped Him, saying, "You are certainly God's Son!" (Matt 14:30-33)

The disciples had to change their mind that for those who are His people and pursue the kingdom of God, Jesus will meet their physical needs:

"For this reason I say to you, do not be worried about your life, as to what you will eat or what you will drink; nor for your body, as to what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air, that they do not sow, nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not worth much more than they? And who of you by being worried can add a single hour to his life? And why are you worried about clothing? Observe how the lilies of the field grow; they do not toil nor do they spin, yet I say to you that not even Solomon in all his glory clothed himself like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the furnace, will He not much more clothe you? **You of little faith!** Do not worry then, saying, 'What will we eat?' or 'What will we drink?' or 'What will we wear for clothing?' For the Gentiles eagerly seek all these things; for your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. (Matt 6:25-33)

Does repentance help a Believer's faith?
A series on genuine repentance: part 4 (page 2)

And the disciples came to the other side of the sea, but they had forgotten to bring any bread. And Jesus said to them, "Watch out and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees." They began to discuss this among themselves, saying, "He said that because we did not bring any bread." But Jesus, aware of this, said, "**You men of little faith**, why do you discuss among yourselves that you have no bread? Do you not yet understand or remember the five loaves of the five thousand, and how many baskets full you picked up? Or the seven loaves of the four thousand, and how many large baskets full you picked up? How is it that you do not understand that I did not speak to you concerning bread? But beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees." (Matt 16:5-11)

And He said to His disciples, "For this reason I say to you, do not worry about your life, as to what you will eat; nor for your body, as to what you will put on. For life is more than food, and the body more than clothing. Consider the ravens, for they neither sow nor reap; they have no storeroom nor barn, and yet God feeds them; how much more valuable you are than the birds! And which of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life's span? If then you cannot do even a very little thing, why do you worry about other matters? Consider the lilies, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin; but I tell you, not even Solomon in all his glory clothed himself like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass in the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the furnace, how much more will He clothe you? **You men of little faith!** And do not seek what you will eat and what you will drink, and do not keep worrying. For all these things the nations of the world eagerly seek; but your Father knows that you need these things. But seek His kingdom, and these things will be added to you. (Luke 12:22-31)

The disciples had to change their mind that the power of Jesus was not under the command of human beings, but rather through the humble seeking of the Lord's direction.

Then the disciples came to Jesus privately and said, "Why could we not drive it out?" And He said to them, "Because of the littleness of your faith; for truly I say to you, if you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move; and nothing will be impossible to you. [But this kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting.]" (Matt 17:19-21; John 14:12-14)

As He pointed out the "littleness of their faith," Jesus indicated to the disciples that their trust in Him was limited by their preconceptions of the Messiah; their presuppositions prevented them from understanding what they saw and trusted of Jesus.

As the disciples learned to trust more on their new appraisal of facts about Jesus, their faith grew. Presumably, when confronted by Jesus, they repented, because they continued to serve Him.

This process of sanctification could perhaps be seen more explicitly in the disciple Thomas (called Didymus) who was the brother of Matthew the tax collector.

While the Bible does not state whether Thomas believed that Jesus was the Messiah, Jesus appointed him as an apostle (Luke 6:15), a representative of Him, with the authority to drive out demons (Mark 3:18) and cure illnesses (Matt 10:3).

While he was known for his doubt, he was courageously loyal to Jesus (John 11:16; 14:5).

So it was likely that Thomas was a believer of Jesus being the Messiah until he witnessed His death and crucifixion. Because the Old Testament prophets do not speak of the Messiah's resurrection, the disciples could not understand Jesus' prophecy of His resurrection (Mark 9:31-32; 10:32-34), and most, if not all, expected a reigning Messiah (Luke 24:18-21).

Does repentance help a Believer's faith?
A series on genuine repentance: part 4 (page 3)

Thomas (called Didymus) is best known for his doubt of the resurrection of Jesus (John 20:24-28). When confronted by the resurrected Christ to physically place his hands where His wounds were, Thomas realized that Jesus was indeed alive and was God. Thomas had a change of mind: Jesus was both Lord and God. Thomas is the first disciple to be recorded as attributing Jesus two titles of deity, Lord and God.

Throughout the New Testament, the disciples were repentant about the reality of the truth. They saw, felt and heard the real existence of Jesus Christ as well as the nature of sin and the reality about themselves; they had to change their minds about reality and the truth.

Progressively becoming more Christ like is the essence of sanctification (2 Cor 3:18). For Christians today, the means of sanctification is the Bible (Matt 4:4; John 8:31-32; 15:3-4; 17:14-17), the Holy Spirit (John 14:16-17) and a community of Believers (1 Cor 12:13; Eph 4:4-12).

Through these means, a Christian learns more about the objective facts about God and His moral standard which, in turn, teaches one about sin and about themselves and how one may grow in faith and holiness.

References:

1. Gaebelein FE, ed., *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, vol. 10, Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, (1976).
2. Brand C, Draper C and England A, eds., *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, Nashville: Holman Bible Publishers, (1998)
3. Walvoord JF and Zuck RB, eds., *Bible Knowledge Commentary*, Wheaton: Victor Books, (1985).
4. Swindoll CR and Zuck RB, eds., *Understanding Christian Theology*, Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, (2003).
5. Keener CS, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament*, Downer's Grove: InterVarsity Press, (1993).