

Perverting The Gospel Of Christ by Telling Someone to “Turn From Your Sins And Receive Jesus Christ Into Your Life”

First of all, note God’s clear declaration of the fact that faith, and faith alone, is His requirement for justification in His sight.

²¹ But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets;

²² Even the righteousness of God *which is* by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe: for there is no difference:

²³ For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God;

²⁴ Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus:

²⁵ Whom God hath set forth *to be* a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God;

²⁶ To declare, *I say*, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus.

²⁷ Where is boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? of works? Nay: but by the law of faith. (Romans 3:21-27)

⁴ Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt.

⁵ But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness. (Romans 4:4-5)

⁸ For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: *it is* the gift of God:

⁹ Not of works, lest any man should boast. (Ephesians 2:8-9)

As these verses (along with upwards of 150 others) clearly state, God’s requirement for justification unto eternal life; for salvation from the debt and penalty of one’s sins; is the sole issue of placing one’s faith in the Lord Jesus Christ as Savior.

Faith by nature is non-meritorious and excludes the issue of one’s works. Faith in someone is the issue of placing your trust, confidence, or reliance in that person and not in

yourself. Believing in someone is the issue of being fully persuaded regarding the sufficiency of that person’s merits and strength, and depending upon him and his merits instead of yourself and your own merits.

Therefore in believing in someone, you trust that person and depend upon him and his doings for what you need, and you don’t offer any efforts of your own. Hence, having faith in someone by its very nature excludes one’s own works in any manner or form. Faith places full confidence and dependence upon the works of another for you.

Wherefore, when God declares in the gospel of Christ that He is “the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus,” this is what He is talking about. “Believing in Jesus” is the issue of placing your complete trust, confidence, or dependence upon Jesus Christ and His redemptive work on the cross for your salvation, and not trusting in any works you can do. It is the issue of having “faith in his blood.” That is, having complete confidence and dependence upon the merits of Christ’s shed blood to provide for and effect your salvation. It is the issue of being fully persuaded that when He died for you as your substitute Redeemer He did all the work necessary to accomplish your salvation. This is what “believing in Jesus” means. This is what faith in the Lord Jesus Christ as one’s Savior means.

Unfortunately, though, this issue of faith in Jesus Christ as God’s sole requirement for salvation all too often is not made plain and clear. Rather, it is muddled up by terminology and phraseology that not only does not accurately convey what faith in Christ is, but that actually perverts the issue and turns faith into works.

The following example falls into this category. By using such an expression God’s requirement for salvation is misstated, and “another gospel” is preached instead of the gospel of justification by grace through faith without works.

“TURN FROM YOUR SINS AND RECEIVE JESUS CHRIST INTO YOUR LIFE” — This is a very common distortion of God’s requirement. Like so many other perversions of “the gospel of Christ,” it takes an issue that God only urges upon ones whom He has already justified and sanctified, and makes it a requirement for becoming justified in His sight.

Turning from one’s sins is something that God urges us as Christians to do. In Romans 6 God teaches us how that when He justified us He also sanctified us by baptizing us

into Christ’s death, burial, and resurrection. In so doing, He gave us a sanctified position “in Christ” whereby we are “dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord.” As such we are no longer “servants of sin” with sin’s mastership reigning over us. But “in Christ” we are “servants of righteousness” and have our “fruit unto holiness.” Therefore, being so sanctified we are urged to turn from sin, and “not let sin reign in our mortal bodies, that we should obey it in the lusts thereof.” We are urged to live consistent with who we are “in Christ” and to not “yield our members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin: but yield ourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and our members as instruments of righteousness unto God.”

It is, therefore, only a justified and sanctified Christian who can turn from sin, and even has any God-given capacity to do so. An unsaved man has no capacity to do this, no matter how strong his desire may be. It isn’t until God justifies him and sanctifies him that he is “created in Christ Jesus unto good works” and puts off “the former conversation” of “the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts.” It isn’t until God justifies and sanctifies a person that he puts on “the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness.”

Foolishly, therefore, this expression tells an unsaved person to do something that he has absolutely no capacity to do. And it tells him that he has to do it if he wants to be saved.

It is sometimes said in connection with exposing this misstatement of God’s requirement that “Sin is the reason for why we need to be saved, and a person must face up to their sins and do something about them.” It is perfectly true that sin is the reason for why people need to be saved. All men are sinners and unrighteous in God’s sight. Also it is perfectly true that a person must face up to the issue of their sinfulness in God’s sight. However, it is not true that a person must do something about their sins. Instead it is God Himself that has done something about a person’s sins. That’s what the good news of the gospel is all about. As “the gospel of Christ” declares, God has set forth His Son Jesus Christ as a propitiation for our sins. God declares the good news that He has taken care of the sin issue Himself through Christ’s redemptive work. The issue in the gospel isn’t ‘you do something about sinning and God will save you.’ The issue is ‘you’re a sinner who can’t stop sinning, or make up for them, but Christ has paid the debt and pen-

alty for your sins Himself; and God will forgive you your sins and justify you in His sight, if you'll trust in Christ as your Savior.' The issue isn't 'turn from your sins,' but rather the issue is that a person needs to recognize himself as hopelessly lost in his sins, that he can't turn from them at all, and that his only hope of salvation is in "the redemption that is in Christ Jesus."

It is also commonly said that God tells men to repent and believe the gospel. Repentance, it is said, means to turn from sin; to change the direction of your life from doing evil to doing good. Therefore, it is not only correct to tell a person to turn from his sin, it is necessary that he do so.

Now it is perfectly true that repentance is spoken of in the gospel. However, 'repent' does not mean to turn from sin, or to change the direction of one's life from doing evil things to doing good things. Such things as these can be the fruit of repentance in certain contexts, but to repent itself does not mean anything that has to do with a work, or a matter of one's conduct.

To repent simply means to change one's mind about something; to change one's thinking from one thing to another. God Himself is spoken of a number of times in the Scriptures as repenting. But God by no means turned from his sin. Such a definition of repentance certainly will not fit with God, yet He is spoken of as repenting. What this ought to indicate is that the definition is wrong, and to define repentance as turning from sin is both erroneous and will produce a misunderstanding of verses and passages in which it is used. And this is just what has happened when repentance is used in connection with the gospel.

As the context of every verse clearly shows in which the word "repent" or "repentance" occurs, the need to change one's thinking is in view. In some of the contexts the "fruits of repentance" are also spoken of. But the "fruits of repentance" and "repentance" itself are not the same thing. A change of mind about something can often lead to changes in things that one does. But the changes in activity are not repentance themselves. Instead, they are clearly described as the "fruits of repentance" in those contexts.

Now in the context of "the gospel of Christ," to repent means to change one's thinking about how one stands in God's sight, or how one thinks he can be saved. As Romans 1:18ff sets forth, by nature men entertain erroneous thoughts both about themselves and God. By nature men think that they are not that bad, or that God wants them to work for

their salvation. By nature men think that Satan's "lie" regarding the acceptability of human righteousness is right. Repentance is therefore necessary in view of what the gospel says. The gospel declares that men are sinners and not righteous at all; not even possessing any commendable relative righteousness with others. When men hear this they need to change their minds about themselves and not think that they really aren't that bad off.

In like manner, the gospel declares that men's works are nothing but "dead works" in God's sight. They are nothing but "filthy rags" and "dung" to Him. When men hear this they need to change their minds about their works and realize that they are worthless things when it comes to salvation. As such, therefore, the gospel speaks of "repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ." The gospel tells men to change their minds in view of what God says about them, and not think that they aren't guilty and helpless sinners. Then in so doing the gospel tells men to place their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. He died for them to pay for everything that is wrong with them, and their only hope of salvation is in His redemptive work on the cross.

This, once again, is what repentance and the gospel is all about. Repentance works naturally with faith in Christ. For a person believing the gospel changes his mind about himself and any idea of being saved by his works in any manner or form, and he fully depends upon the redemptive work of Christ on the cross for his salvation. However, the false definition of turning from one's sins, or changing one's conduct from evil to good, makes the work of a changed behavior a requirement for salvation, and perverts "the gospel of Christ."

Have you believed in the Lord Jesus Christ as your all-sufficient Savior? Or have you been depending upon some works that you yourself are doing, or have done, to make you acceptable to God? If you have not honestly believed in Jesus Christ as your all-sufficient Savior, why not do so right now and let God forgive you all of your sins and justify you unto eternal life. — K. R. Blades

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*A Perversion of
The Gospel of Christ*

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