

Does Repentance Precede Faith?

In God's great plan of salvation, does repentance come before faith? Oftentimes, when offering the invitation of Christ to the lost, preachers urge their hearers to *repent and believe*. Can we repent before we believe? What does the Bible say?

First, the Bible teaches, "So belief *comes* of hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ (Rom 10:17)." God's order is hearing and believing. Repentance cannot precede faith, because without faith, one has no reason to repent. It is through the preached word that we learn of our lost condition and that we must turn away from the practice of sin (Luke 24:47; Rom. 1:16). How can we repent of our sins unless we first learn of them and believe the word that we hear. "How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in him whom they have not heard (Rom 10:14)?"

Second, Peter showed in Acts 15:7 that repentance does not precede faith. Peter said that God selected him to preach to the Gentiles "that by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel, and believe." They did not hear and repent; they heard and believed. Only in believing, did they have a basis for repentance.

Third, Acts 2 shows that repentance does not precede faith in the plan that God inspired. This example reveals clearly what God requires of lost people. Acts 2 includes the first gospel sermon preached in the name of the resurrected Christ. Verse 14 records that the apostles stood up and started preaching. In verse 37, many in the audience said, "Brethren, what shall we do?" In verse 38, Peter told them, "Repent ye, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ unto the remission of your sins; and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." The people, in Acts 2, believed the words of Peter and asked for further instruction. Peter told them to repent, thus showing that they believed before they repented.

Fourth, in the conversion of the jailor at Philippi in Acts 16:30-34, faith preceded repentance. In verse 30 the jailor asked, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" They answered, "Believe on the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved." As a result, "They spoke the word of the Lord unto him." Upon hearing this word, he believed it and obeyed it in verse 33: "And he . . . washed their stripes; and was baptized, he and all his, immediately."

God commands us to hear (Rom 10:17), believe (John 8:24), repent (Acts 17:30), confess (Rom. 1:10), and be baptized (Acts 22:16).