

## *“Faith, Repentance, Fellowship, and Forgiveness”*

Prepared by Patrick J. Griffiths © - [pastorpat@waukeshabile.org](mailto:pastorpat@waukeshabile.org)

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Read Mark 5:25-34

This passage, and those surrounding it, has challenged me to continue thinking of the interplay between faith, repentance, fellowship, and forgiveness. Personally, I desire to make each of these elements containable and connected. I want them “to fit” into a way of thinking that is understandable, tamable, and perhaps controllable. I want to be in control of what each of these elements look like. Yet it is impossible to fit the proverbial square peg into the round hole without doing damage to both the peg and the hole. Unfortunately, what I want and what is biblical are not always the same. You might wonder how the passages in Mark 4:35-6:6 evoke such thinking? Faith is “huge” in all of the stories noted in Mark’s gospel. Repentance is never stated, only assumed. As a consequence of faith, God works mighty miracles. In the absence of faith, established boundaries are honored and God chooses not to work. Much is assumed throughout. As I have meditated on these things I have tried to honor the biblical text without forcing many of my theological presuppositions into the text (i.e., “exegesis good, eisegesis bad”). Initially, if my ramblings appear disjointed and unconnected, please dismiss it and forgive me. However, there is a chance that it might jar you into greater clarity in these areas and thus I press ahead with my delineations.

In an attempt to clarify these ideas in my own thinking, I will begin by defining each element.

### Faith/Repentance

Faith and repentance are inseparably linked. I think we would err if we tried to define the one in the absence of the other. Faith can be clarified by its synonyms: belief, trust, and rest. Faith is never neutral. It does not exist in a vacuum. Faith always has an object that is believed. It rests in something or someone. In our context, biblical faith has as its object God whether it is His person, word, or work. Here again, we would err if we separated too sharply His word and work from His person. His word is God verbalized, and His work is God visualized. Biblical faith has God as its object. Faith believes God, it trusts God, and it rests in God.

Repentance is the flip side of biblical faith. Repentance, at its essence, turns from non-reliance to reliance. It goes from unbelief to belief, from non-trust or distrust to trust, and from *rebelling against God* to *resting in God*. My failure to believe or my lack of faith (the two are the same) is repented of when I trust Him in explicit situations that call for faith.

It is difficult to draw too clean of a line between one’s rebellion and one’s resting. The interplay between the two is separated by a fuzzy line. In His people, one’s rebellion has rest and one’s rest has rebellion. There are tinges of either one in each expression. So what I might desire to be clean, absolute, dogmatic, and thus definable is often blurred and hazy. None-the-less, I am called to believe and to walk by faith and repentance is implicit in the act of faith. No one has biblical faith that does not have biblical repentance, and no one has biblical repentance that does not have biblical faith. Let us now consider the ideas of fellowship and forgiveness.

*Continued on the other side...*

## Fellowship/Forgiveness

*Fellowship with God* presupposes *forgiveness from God*. Like faith and repentance, these two elements are inseparably linked. Although forgiveness is causal and fellowship is consequential, neither one can exist in the absence of the other. My fellowship with God is based on and sourced in my forgiveness from God. One's view of forgiveness will greatly color one's view of fellowship. If my forgiveness from God is conditional, no matter what that condition is, then my fellowship with God will be conditional. If I believe His forgiveness of me is cross-centered, unconditional, inclusive, and absolute, then the fellowship I enjoy because of this is cross-centered, unconditional, inclusive, and absolute. I am not concerned as to whether or not I "feel" in fellowship no more than I am concerned as to whether or not I "feel" victorious or like a conqueror or justified, reconciled, or redeemed. However, that "issue" can be discussed separately from this short article.

How does all of this relate to the topic at hand? First, everyone everywhere at all times has faith and repentance. *The issue is not one of capacity, but rather kind*. Everyone everywhere at all times has the capacity for faith and repentance and, in fact, exercises these two elements daily. The capacity to trust, rest, believe, have faith is always present and is always exercised. It is the kind of faith and repentance that is the issue. Biblical faith and repentance has as its object and outcome a movement from the world, the flesh, and the devil, and toward God.

I believe God acts on me in such a way that my faith and repentance has God as the object and outcome. *His image in me guarantees the capacity for faith and repentance. His action on me guarantees the kind of faith and repentance.*

In the area of justification (i.e. salvation), biblical faith and repentance have as their object God and the person and work of Jesus Christ. The outcome of such action on my part receives forgiveness from God and places me in fellowship with God. There is nothing I can now do to undo what God has done.

In the area of sanctification (i.e. the Christian walk), it is my faith/repentance that continues to appropriate what is true concerning my forgiveness and my fellowship. The elements of faith and repentance are always under-girding the entire Christian life. There is never a time when a Christian is without faith or repentance. There are times when my experience of faith and repentance is weak and less palatable, thus my enjoyment of my position of forgiveness and fellowship is weak. During those periods I must live by faith and not by feelings or I will exist on shifting shorelines and sinking ships. It is my ongoing prayer that you and I will live by faith and repentance in the all sufficiency of Jesus Christ and that we will enjoy the unabated feeling of His forgiveness and fellowship in our Christian walk. May we never tire in our pursuit of His joy.