



The Bible says that all we need to be saved is "repent and believe." So why do we have to try to quit sinning, and why do we have to do things like read our Bibles and pray daily and worship every week?

Great Question!

"Repent and believe" was Jesus' first and main message in his ministry. It is also the main message of the apostles after Jesus had ascended. But the whole problem that lies behind the question above is that we have generally attached the wrong meanings to the word "repent" and "believe."

When we hear the word "repent," we tend to think it means "to say I'm sorry for my sins." But the word means a whole lot more than just "I'm sorry" (which can be rattled off quite easily without really meaning it). In the Old Testament, the word "repent" means to "turn around" - to turn away from your sin and turn to God. It means being sorry AND wanting to change your actions. It means you want to walk away from a certain sin, not ever seeing it again, not ever doing it again. In the New Testament the word "repent" means "to have a change of mind/heart." Not just "I'm sorry," but "I'm sorry. I want to change."

So the idea of wanting to quit sinning is built-into the word "repent."

We also tend to define incorrectly what it means "to believe in" Jesus. We tend to equate "believing in" with "knowing something is true." But "believing in" Jesus is a whole lot more than merely knowing some truths about him. The New Testament is filled with examples of demons (evil spirits) who *know* that Jesus is the son of God; and *know* that Jesus is the one God chose to save humanity from our sin; and *know* that Jesus died to pay for humanities sin; and *know* that Jesus rose from the grave proving that he has power over death and evil. But will they be saved by their knowledge of Jesus? Of course not. But why? Because "knowing" and "believing" are not the same.

The 7-8th grade confirmation students gave me some great examples of what it people do when they "believe in" something: They said, "You *do* what you believe in," or "You *buy it*," or "You *play it*," or "You *practice it*," and "You *talk about it*," "You *tell others about it*," "You *try to convince your friends about it*." Exactly.

In short "to believe in" something means "to be so convinced that it is the best thing for you that you *want to do something about it*."

Thus "to believe in Jesus," means you are so convinced that he is the best thing for you that you *want to* read more about him every day; you *want to* spend time talking to him in prayer every day; you *want to* worship him every chance you can; you *want to* quit doing those things that he tells you are not good for you.

But Satan has succeeded in changing the definitions on us, so that what we naturally "*want to*" do, suddenly changes into something we think we "*have to*" do. And what happens when we think we "have to" do something? Our human nature kicks in and we don't want to do it - just because we think we "have to."

So, when it comes to getting rid of our sin, reading God's Word and praying daily, going to Bible study and worship weekly, and using our talents in the church, etc... we need to change this "have to" attitude back into the natural response of "want to." And maybe the best way to do that is simply take time to remember all the things Jesus has done for you - and promises to continue to do. (See the "Give Your Spiritual Life A Lift" article). "Have to" will once again become "want to."

Thanks for asking,
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