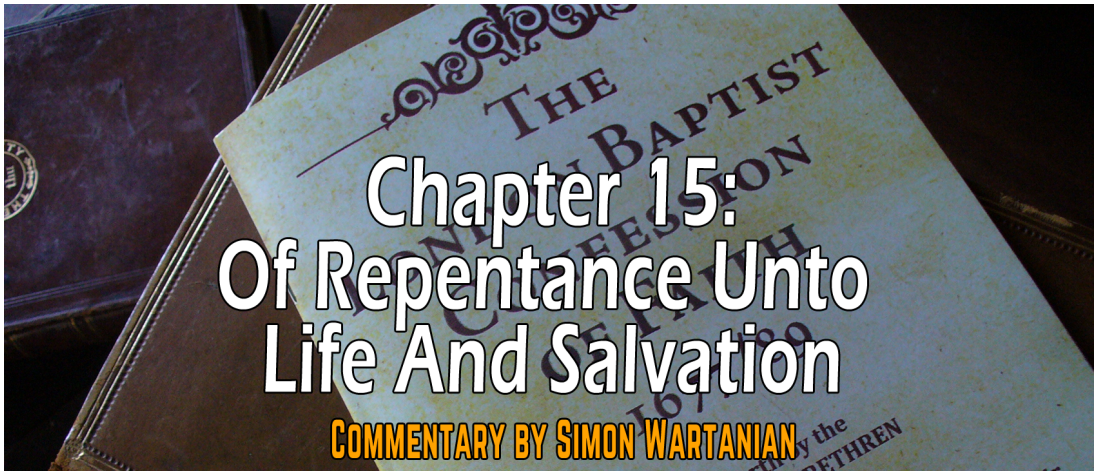
1689 Baptist Confession Chapter 15: Of Repentance Unto Life and Salvation - Commentary

Published: Thursday 5th of March 2015 18:55 by Simon Wartanian
URL:
https://www.thecalvinist.net/post/1689-Baptist-Confession-Chapter-15:-Of-Repentance-Unto-Life-And-Salvation-Commentary



Chapter 15: Of Repentance Unto Life and Salvation

In this chapter, we will consider what repentance actually is. Is repentance a gift? Do we repent only when we become Christians? Does repentance always accompany faith? Is repentance necessary for salvation?

I find the division of the paragraphs a bit unhelpful. The Confession speaks of those who are aged repenting unto life (par. 1), Christians repenting of their sins (par. 2) and defines what repentance actually is in paragraph 3. It seems to me that it would have been more natural to begin by defining what repentance actually is and then proceeding with what are now paragraphs 1 and 2. Therefore, I will begin here by giving a definition of what repentance is and then I will try to defend that definition biblically in paragraph 3. Wayne Grudem says that:

> Repentance is a heartfelt sorrow for sin, a renouncing of it, and a sincere commitment to forsake it and walk in obedience to Christ.[1]

Thus, repentance is not only a sorrow for our sins against God, it is not only us being sorry for doing what we did, but it the commitment to forsake our sins and instead obey Christ the Lord. But more on this in paragraph 3.

That the Baptist Confession depends and copies from the Savoy Declaration of 1658 can very clearly be seen especially in this chapter, which is wholly different in the Westminster, but almost identical in the Savoy. See the comparison **here**.

§1 God in their effectual calling giveth them repentance unto life

1. Such of the elect as are converted at riper years, having sometime lived in the **state of nature**, **1** and therein served divers lusts and pleasures, **God in their effectual calling giveth them repentance unto life.** **2**
    1. Titus 3:2-5[2]
    2. 2 Chron. 33:10-20; Acts 9:1-19; 16:29-30

The Confession begins by noting that some **of the elect…are converted at riper years.** This means that they have **sometime lived in the state of nature** and **therein served divers lusts and pleasures** (e.g. Saul in Acts 9; the Philippian jailer in Acts 16:29-30; Zacchaeus in Luke 19:1-10). The nature of their repentance may be different than those who have not been given so much time to live in the state of nature and sin. In other words, not everyone has to have a

radical conversion or repentance. But everyone is to repent of their sins and turn to God. It is God Who **giveth them repentance unto life**. Repentance, like faith (chapters **11:1**; **14:1**), is a gift of God and the work of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of the elect.

In this paragraph, the Confession is speaking about the repentance of those who have lived manifestly wicked lives. The words of Dr. Waldron here are especially helpful:

> The Confession makes this distinction out of a desire to distinguish repentance as a **crisis experience** from repentance as an **ordinary** grace. All believers are marked by the ordinary grace, but not all believers will know, or need to know, repentance as a crisis experience.
>
> In this chapter two types of such a crisis experience are mentioned. The Confession first refers to 'such of the elect as are converted at riper years having sometime lived in the state of nature'. Scriptural examples of this are Manasseh, Paul and the Philippian jailor. Secondly, it refers to 'believers [who]...fall into great sins and provocations'. The scriptural examples here are David and Peter.[3]

We simply think of Saul of Tarsus and his dramatic conversion on the road to Damascus. In the sight of the religious Jews, his way of life was blameless (Phil. 3:4-6). But in the sight of God, he was a wicked man who was persecuting *Him* (Acts 9:4). As a persecutor of the Church, it was understandable that the saints had difficulty in believing that the wicked persecutor has been saved and now is a saint. His wicked life was turned upside down by God and he saw that his righteousness through the law was worthless. When the Lord saved him, He gave him "repentance unto life"; a beautiful phrase coming from Acts 11:18 which means that repentance is necessary, and in fact, it leads to true life in Christ.

The paragraph does not mean that only those who are "at riper years" and are manifestly wicked are granted repentance, rather the point is, if these people are called by God, anyone and everyone should repent and turn to God. As Dr. Waldron also notes, this paragraph is written against those who would say that only if you had a dramatic experience of repentance, you are saved. There is no question that the Philippian jailer and Paul had a dramatic experience, but countless millions have not had a dramatic experience, yet they have repented, been saved and walked since then in a life characterized by repentance from sin. Jeremy Walker explains the sense of this paragraph:

> The first paragraph does not mean that only old sinners who have lived for many years in gross or scandalous sins (such as those indicated in Titus 3.3) need to repent, nor that you need to be a gross sinner in order to be sorry for sin; all people are sinners by nature and by deed, and all need to repent of their sins...The first [paragraph] deals with men and women who have spent many years of their life dead in trespasses and sins (sometimes terrible and vile sins) before being converted. Examples include: Manasseh, the king of Judah who even went so far as to sacrifice his children to idols, but who repented and believed after God took him into exile (2 Chronicles 33.1-20); the apostle Paul, the violently arrogant blasphemer who persecuted the church of Jesus Christ until the risen Lord confronted him on the road to Damascus, saving him as a pattern of divine patience and mercy (Acts 9.1-9; 1 Timothy 1.12-16); and, the Philippian jailer, who was about to commit suicide at the prospect of his prisoners having escaped, but was prevented from doing so by Paul, who preached to him salvation in Christ, after which he believed, rejoicing (Acts 16.25-34).[4]

Notice also that the Confession connects repentance with effectual calling (**chapter 11**). When God calls us, He not only **gives us faith**, but He also grants repentance which accompanies that faith (2 Tim. 2:25; c.f. Acts 20:21). This happens at conversion when God transfers us from the kingdom of darkness to the Kingdom of Christ. He grants us faith and repentance and cleanses us from all unrighteousness. The Reformed understanding of the *Ordo Salutis* (Order of Salvation) is:

1. **Election** (chapter 3)
2. **Effectual Calling** (chapter 10)
3. **Regeneration** (chapter 11)
4. Conversion (chapter 14 **Of Saving Faith** and chapter 15, the current one on repentance)
5. **Justification** (chapter 11)
6. **Adoption** (chapter 12)
7. **Sanctification** (chapter 13)
8. **Perseverance** (chapter 14)
9. Glorification

See this helpful picture by Tim Challies.

It is important to note that here we are speaking of the *logical* order of salvation and not how we experience salvation. In chapter 11, I argued for "**Regeneration Precedes Faith**". From our experience, the new birth and faith in the Lord Jesus happened at the same time. So, when we speak of the *Ordo Salutis*, we do not mean the order in *time,* but *logically*. This has to do more with causation and which one is dependent on the other. Repentance is in stage four. Repentance and faith together constitute conversion and they describe what conversion consists in. There would not be a conversion if there was no regeneration. There would be no regeneration if there was no effectual calling. There would be no effectual calling if there was no sovereign election in eternity past. One is dependent upon the other and springs forth from the other.

---

§2 God has mercifully provided that believers so sinning and falling be renewed through repentance unto salvation

2. Whereas there is none that doth good and sinneth not, **1** and the best of men may, through the power and deceitfulness of their corruption dwelling in them, with the prevalency of temptation, **fall into great sins** and provocations; **2** God hath, in the **covenant of grace**, mercifully provided that believers so sinning and falling be **renewed through repentance unto salvation.** **3**
    1. Ps. 130:3; 143:2; Prov. 20:9; Eccl. 7:20
    2. 2 Sam. 11:1-27; Luke 22:54-62
    3. Jer. 32:40; Luke 22:31-32; 1 John 1:9

There is **none that doth good and sinneth not**; everyone sins (Ps. 130:3). This is the sad reality of fallen man and even of redeemed man. Even Christians, **through the power and deceitfulness of their corruption dwelling in them…fall into great sins** (David's adultery in 2 Sam. 11). Those who underestimate the power of sin will certainly fall into it. Sin is powerful and deceiving and it calls us back to itself because it wants us to be its slaves again. But this is the good news when we fall into sin: **God hath, in the covenant of grace, mercifully provided that believers so sinning and falling be renewed through repentance unto salvation** (Jer. 32:40; 1 John 1:8-9). We are not saved again, but we are renewed and are back in a harmonious relationship with God. The promise of 1 John 1:9 is very dear to me: "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." What a gracious and an amazing God we serve. He saved us from all kinds of corruptions and sins, forgiving it completely and keeps to forgive and renew us!

Paragraph 1 dealt with unbelievers turning to Christ, now paragraph 2 deals with Christians turning *back* to Christ after sin and restoring their relationship to their merciful Savior.

Forgiveness

Christians can testify that they sin daily and seek God's forgiveness for known and unknown sins daily. But sometimes we fall into greater sins. It is a greater sin to commit adultery in actuality, than in the heart, obviously. Both are a sin, but one is greater than the other. It is a greater sin to murder someone than to merely hate someone. It is possible for Christians to fall into the "greater" sins. There have been believers who have committed adultery, been involved in sexual immorality, stolen, cheated and done other things which God has forbidden. They have fallen into sin, but they have not fallen beyond recovery…if they truly were believers! This is the test of true believers: a true believer will always be brought back to repentance by God. It may take days, months or years, but the Shepherd will not lose any of His sheep and will seek them out one by one.

We may sometimes think too highly of ourselves and our ability to overcome sin, and also think too lowly of the remaining corruption in us and the fallen world around us. With such a mindset we leave ourselves open to Satan's attacks. We may think "no, not me" and "I will not fall into *that* sin", but we forget about the "power and deceitfulness of [our] corruption dwelling in [us]" which makes it all the more easy for us to fall into sin. God would be just and holy if He were to abandon us the moment we sin again after being in Christ and leave us in our sin, yet as our Father and the faithful covenant God, He will not leave or forsake us even in the midst of our sin.

The great gospel promise is that not only are all our sins punished in Christ—past, present, and future, but also that we should seek forgiveness from God and man every day and may experience forgiveness every day. 1 John 1:9 is crucial in this discussion.

1 John 1:7-9 But **if we walk in the light**, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the **blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin.** 8 If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. 9 **If we confess our sins**, he is **faithful and just** to forgive us our sins and to **cleanse** us from all unrighteousness.

This is a passage and a promise that I cherish, knowing myself to be a great sinner and Christ the Lord my great Savior. In this passage, we are commanded to walk in the light and have our life patterned after Jesus' own perfect life. But then John, knowing the nature of man, reminds us that it is an impossible task to seek to walk like Jesus and not sin in our present state. Therefore, he refutes those who would seek to say that it is possible for Christians to be sinless by saying that the truth is not in them, i.e., they are not Christians. In other words, those who claim that they are sinless are not Christians!

Rather than hiding our sin and saying that we have no sin, we should all the more confess our sins to God. When we confess our sins we should also seek to flee from it. We seek to turn our backs upon our sin. We repent of it. It is not enough to merely say that "I'm sorry for my sin", but committing the same sin the next moment or the next day without feeling guilt and sorrow about offending God and breaking His holy law. In the confession of our sins should also be the commitment to repent of our sins—to turn away from our sins. We do not merely say the words, but also seek to walk in a way as not to fall into sin. We seek to hate our sin and stand fast in the spiritual war to resist and overcome sin. If we fail, then we go to the Lord and confess our sin and seek again, by His grace, to overcome our sin and have the victory over our remaining corruptions as much as possible in this life.

The phrase "faithful and just" is amazing. God is faithful because He is our Father and He seeks to bring us to salvation and to a harmonious relationship with Him. He is the covenant God who has committed Himself to His subjects. But He is also just, but how can this be? Proverbs 17:5 says "He who justifies the wicked and he who condemns the righteous are both alike an abomination to the LORD", how can God justify me and cleanse me of my sin and not be an abomination to Himself?! The answer is: the Lord Jesus Christ. God does not forgive us by overlooking our sins, He forgives us because our sins have been forgiven in Christ who took them upon Himself on the cross (2 Cor. 5:21). Our sins have been dealt with 2000 years ago, but we experience that forgiveness which was obtained for us on the cross through daily confession of sin. God is just because He punished Jesus Christ who was the Substitute who bore our sins upon Himself. He punished Someone who "became sin" and God is therefore perfectly just. The glory of the gospel is the fact that God brought salvation to His people through His judgment upon His Son. Jesus Christ was crushed so that we would not be crushed (Isa. 53:10-11). God is just to forgive us because Christ the Sacrifice was offered in our stead and God, having already dealt with our sins on the cross is now shown to be just to forgive us and cleanse us based on that sacrifice. See more in chapter **8:4** on the **Penal Substitutionary Atonement**.

David and Peter

Two great men and friends of God are recorded in the Bible to have fallen into great sin. David, the man after God's heart (Acts 13:22), committed adultery and murdered the husband of the woman. Peter, the one who claimed to be willing to die for his Master (Luke 22:33), denied that he knew Him three times (Luke 22:34). These are tragic and sad stories. We can't help but mourn and pray that we will not fall into situations like this. But the Confession reminds us that in the Covenant of Grace (i.e., the New Covenant) there is always provision for the forgiveness of sins. Both David and Peter were true believers, they fell and were restored unto repentance.

David wrote an amazing prayer and a song of confession which is often used by believers for the confession of their sins. In Psalm 51 David prays to God to forgive his sins and create in him a clean heart so that he would not sin and do things which are displeasing to his God. We should not miss the fact that God did discipline David for his sin. The son born of adultery died as a punishment for David's sin (1 Sam. 12). Nonetheless, he was cleansed and restored to the joy of God's salvation.

In the case of Peter, the Lord Jesus foretold his certain repentance when He told him about his fall. The Lord Jesus told Peter that He has prayed for him and uses that as the basis of Peter's restoration (Luke 22:31-32). The Lord personally restores Peter in John 21:15-19 by making him confess his love for his Lord three times instead of his previous denial of his Lord three times.

These examples should be a lesson for us. If Peter and David can fall, who were great and holy saints of God, then this means that any Christian, when letting their guard down, can fall into great sins like them. Let us see these stories as tragic accounts of the remaining corruptions of sin in us, but also as lessons of God's great love for us and forgiveness of our sins. We should never let our guard down. We should always be prepared to fight against sin and not underestimate it and thus fall into it and dishonor the name of Christ. But if we do, let us not be unbelieving and faithless as to think that we will never be accepted and forgiven by God. But let us approach the throne of grace to receive that which our sins do not merit, but is ours solely based upon Christ work, and restore our relationship with God standing on the promise of His Word that He has both forgiven and cleansed us from our sins.

§3 Repentance – Definition and Case for its Necessity

3. This saving repentance is an evangelical grace, **1** whereby a person, being **by the Holy Spirit made sensible of the manifold evils of his sin,** **2** doth, by faith in Christ, **3** **humble himself for it with godly sorrow, detestation** of it, and **self-abhorrency**, **praying for pardon** and **strength of grace**, **4** with a purpose and endeavour, by supplies of the Spirit, to **walk before God unto all well-pleasing in all things.** **5**
    1. Acts 5:31; 11:18; 2 Tim. 2:25
    2. Ps. 51:1-6; 130:1-3; Luke 15:17-20; Acts 2:37-38
    3. Ps. 130:4; Matt. 27:3-5; Mark 1:15
    4. Ezek. 16:60-63; 36:31-32; Zech. 12:10; Matt. 21:29; Acts 15:19; 20:21; 26:20; 2 Cor. 7:10-11; 1 Thess. 1:9
    5. Prov. 28:13; Ezek. 36:25; 18:30-31; Ps. 119:59, 104, 128; Matt. 3:8; Luke 3:8; Acts 26:20; 1 Thess. 1:9

Now we finally come to the concrete definition of what repentance is. First of all, it is a **saving repentance**. In other words, through it, coupled with faith, we are saved from the punishment of our sins. Second, it is **an evangelical grace**. In other words, it has to do with the gospel and gospel-obedience and it is a **grace** (Acts 5:31; 11:18; 2 Tim. 2:25). This means that it is God Who gives it to us as a *gift* as paragraph 1 said. Now we come to learn what this **saving repentance** consists of. This repentance comes when we, **by the Holy Spirit** are **made sensible of the manifold evils of** our **sin**. This conviction of sin by the Holy Spirit coupled with **faith in Christ**, moves us to **godly sorrow**, **detestation** of sin, and **self-abhorrency** (2 Cor. 7:10-11; Ezek. 16:60-63; 36:31-32). There are two kinds of griefs which 2 Corinthians 7:10 talks about. There is a grief which leads to life and the other to death. The grief/sorrow spoken of here is meant to lead us to salvation and not to death, as *worldly grief and repentance* do. By repentance, we come to the **detestation** of our sins and even of looking at ourselves with disgust for doing those things (**self-abhorrency**). Thereby, we are moved to pray **for pardon and strength of grace** and **endeavour** (Matt. 3:8; Luke 3:8; Acts 26:20), by the grace and **supplies of the Spirit, to walk before God unto all well-pleasing in all things** (Ezek. 36:27; Heb. 13:20-21). We turn away from sin and turn unto God. We do not turn away from sin and then turn to nothing. But we turn away from sin unto righteousness and try to obey God in all things and live unto His glory.

Repentance Is An Evangelical Grace

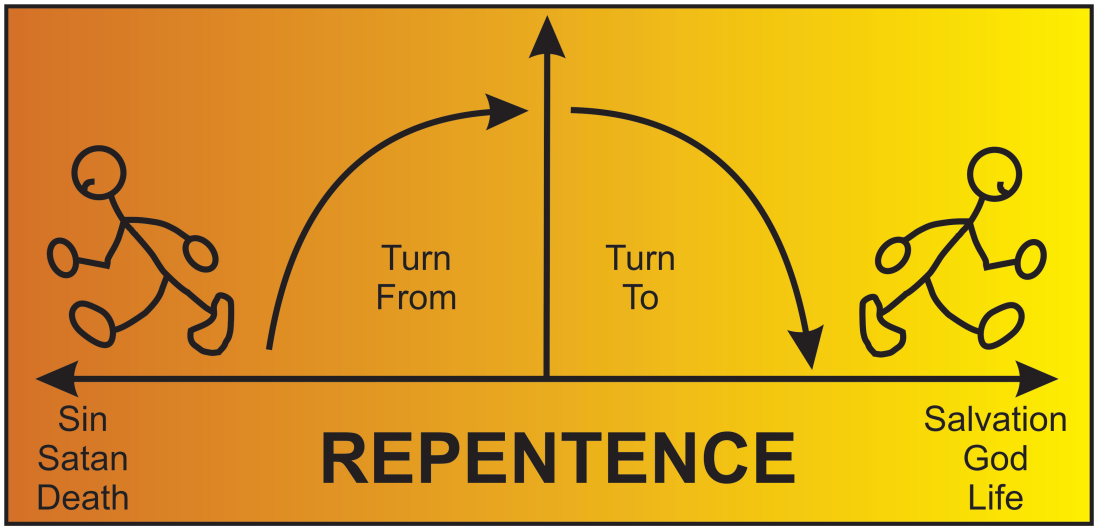
Repentance is a grace that pertains to the gospel, for that is what is meant by *evangelical* here. It is a gift given to us by God. God gives this evangelical gift to all the elect whom He effectually calls. We remind ourselves of what repentance was:

> Repentance is a heartfelt sorrow for sin, a renouncing of it, and a sincere commitment to forsake it and walk in obedience to Christ.[1]

True and godly repentance includes sorrow for the sins committed, a commitment to hate our sin and fight against temptation and walk in the way of Christ. We see in Grudem's definition of repentance two things, the first one is *turning away from* sin and the second *turning toward* obedience. The word for repent in the New Testament, μετανοέω (*metanoeo*, G3340) means "to change one's mind for better, heartily to amend with abhorrence of one's past sins"[5]. We have to change our minds and our focus off of sin and steer it toward God and holiness. As to the words used for repentance, this author explains:

> The Greek words for repentance in the New Testament are primarily *metanoeo* (34 times) and *metanoia* (22 times). These words have the meaning of "changing one's mind." Another word-group that refers to repentance is *strepho* and *epistrepho* which has the meaning "to turn" and "to turn about" (both are usually translated as "convert" or "be converted"). *Metamelomai*, meaning "to become concerned about afterwards" is also used with regard to repentance. These word-groups convey the idea of a person going one direction, having a change of mind, turning, and going the opposite direction.[6]

The message of repentance is how both John the Baptist and the Lord Jesus start their ministry with (Matt. 3:2; 4:7). Both call the people to turn back to God and prepare themselves for the Kingdom. Repentance forms an important part of the Lord Jesus's ministry that He starts His ministry with the message of both repentance and faith for he says "repent and believe in the gospel" (Mark 1:15). Thereby He means that people should turn away from sin and turn toward God and believe the good news He is now preaching. The following picture clearly represents the two aspects of true repentance:



That repentance is indeed a grace and a gift from God may be seen in **2 Timothy 2:25** where Paul says that "God may perhaps **grant** them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth". Repentance is thus something that is dependent on and given by God. It is not something that we simply make ourselves do. It does not originate with us, as is the case with faith also. We are given faith and repentance by God and we exercise His gifts. God does not believe and repent for us, but we do believe and repent. Notice also that Paul says that God "may perhaps" grant repentance which leads the opponents of the gospel to the truth. Thereby, Paul makes their salvation (which is referred to by "knowledge of the truth") totally dependent on "perhaps" God willing to grant them repentance. According to John Calvin, God granting repentance gives us hope and confidence:

> Since the conversion of a man is in the hand of God, who knows whether they who today appear to be unteachable shall be suddenly changed by the power of God, into other men? Thus, whoever shall consider that repentance is the gift and work of God, will cherish more earnest hope, and, encouraged by this confidence, will bestow more toil and exertion for the instruction of rebels. We should view it thus, that our duty is, to be employed in sowing and watering, and, while we do this, we must look for the increase from God. (1Co 3:6.) Our labors and exertions are thus of no advantage in themselves; and yet, through the grace of God, they are not fruitless.[7]

In **Acts 5:31** we read that Christ was exalted "to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins." From Acts 3:19, we see that the forgiveness of sins is dependent and connected with repentance and therefore, I understand Acts 5:31 to teach that Christ the Lord saves and forgives sins by giving repentance and faith (**which we here argued for as well**). Another text is **Acts 11:18** wherein the Jewish believers upon hearing about the work of God declare that "Then to the Gentiles also God has **granted repentance** that leads to life." This repentance that God gives His people is not because they deserve it. It is given to them by grace as a gift and it leads to life eternal—it leads to a life pleasing in the sight of God. This also proves the unity of Jew and Gentile in Christ in that they both are granted the same thing—repentance leading to life. Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown observe:

> To "*grant* repentance unto life"—that is, "such as issues in life" (compare 2Co 7:10, "repentance unto salvation")—is more than to be willing to pardon upon repentance [GROTIUS]. The case of Cornelius is so manifestly one of *grace* reigning in every stage of his religious history, that we can hardly doubt that this was just the feature of it which they meant here to express. *And this is the grace that reigns in every conversion.*[8]

Now let us look at the different aspects of repentance as described in the Confession.

Marks of True Repentance

What distinguishes true repentance from worldly repentance? The Confession answers with the following marks.

We Are Aware Of Our Sins

One of the ministries of the Holy Spirit in this world is to convict us of sin (John 16:8). That means that the Holy Spirit will show us our sins. He will make us uncomfortable with our sins. He will bring us to a realization that it is wrong and an offense to God. The Greek word ἐλέγχω (*elegcho,* G1651) means "to convict, refute, confute" and "to call to account, show one his fault, demand an explanation"[5]. The ministry of the Holy Spirit will make us aware of our sins and make us uncomfortable with it.

I've often thanked God for making me uncomfortable with my sin and putting sorrow in my heart for my sin. Because that means that He cares for me and loves me and wants to free me and make me abhor my sin. He not only does that, but He points me to the Lord Jesus Christ as the solution. For people are able to have worldly repentance and grief (2 Cor. 7:10; Matt. 27:3), but that is not the kind of repentance which is pleasing in the sight of God. Repentance pleasing in the sight of God is the repentance that turns *away from* sin *toward* God and embraces His beloved Son in faith. Worldly repentance and grief do not please God because the sinner is only sorry because he has hurt others or hurt themselves by their "mistakes," but is not grieved for violating the Law of God and does not turn and embrace Christ the Savior.

By Faith In Christ

Repentance pleasing to God is the repentance of the one who comes to God knowing that he deserves His just wrath and does not boast in his flesh, but comes solely on the basis of Christ's goodness and grace. We *humble ourselves.* We do not come to God claiming that we have sinned and now we by ourselves will not sin anymore or abhor our sin. Rather, we come to God knowing that we are helpless and plead only the blood of Christ which is able to cleanse us and restore us again. We come knowing that we in Christ have already conquered sin and that this battle with sin is only temporary and the victory is partial in this life. There is no true biblical repentance that is pleasing to God without faith in Jesus Christ. Any repentance which does not approach God through Jesus Christ is not pleasing to God, for Christ is the Only Way (John 14:6; 1 Tim. 2:5). True repentance comes from Jesus Christ and should lead to Jesus Christ. He is the One raised up to give repentance (Acts 5:31).

See below for the case that both faith and repentance are necessary.

Sorrow, Detestation, and Self-Abhorrence

When we understand that we have sinned against an infinitely holy Triune Being, we cannot be indifferent about it. The greatness of the sin is dependent upon the one against whom the sin is committed. All sins are ultimately committed against God (Ps. 51:4; Luke 15:21). When we come to repentance, there should be sorrow in our heart that we have sinned against the God Who has given us His Spirit that we may walk in His holy ways, but we have chosen rather go on sinning. There should be sorrow that we have offended the God Who sent His Son to set us free from sin and yet we have put ourselves back into slavery. We are sorry for our sins and we hate our sins. We pray that God may blot our sins from us and that we may never sin against our faithful and loving God ever again. As we fall into sin, our minds are directed toward the life hereafter where sin will have absolutely no residence in us. In Heaven, we will be perfect and sinless...oh what joy!

By repentance, we confess our guilt before God for the sins we have committed and there is often an aspect of self-abhorrence in us. This is understandable when we realize against Whom we have sinned. We have sinned against the God Who loved us from all eternity, chose us, sent His Son to pay the penalty for our sins and sent His Spirit in us so that we may have fellowship with Him. This is the God against Whom we have sinned. We have offended Him and when we, by faith in Jesus, realize Whom we have offended we are obviously disappointed with ourselves.

According to 2 Corinthians 7:10, godly grief is "such sorrow as has respect to God, or is according to his will, or as leads the soul to him"[9]. It is furthermore distinguished from "worldly grief" which brings death instead of salvation. When the Prodigal Son came to his senses, he did not return to his father to be a son, but to be a servant (Luke 15:17-19) because he knew that he had offended his father greatly. Calvin beautifully explains godly and worldly sorrow:

> In the *first* place, in order to understand what is meant by this *clause according to God,* we must observe the contrast, for the *sorrow that is according to God* he contrasts with the *sorrow of the world.* Let us now take, also, the contrast between two kinds of joy. The *joy of the world* is, when men foolishly, and without the fear of the Lord, exult in vanity, that is, in the world, and, intoxicated with a transient felicity, look no higher than the earth. The *joy that is according to God* is, when men place all their happiness in God, and take satisfaction in His grace, and show this by contempt of the world, using earthly prosperity as if they used it not, and joyful in the midst of adversity. Accordingly, the *sorrow of the world* is, when men despond in *consequence* of earthly afflictions, and are overwhelmed with grief; while *sorrow according to God* is that which has an eye to God, while they reckon it the one misery — to have lost the favor of God; when, impressed with fear of His judgment, they mourn over their sins. This sorrow Paul makes the cause and origin of repentance. This is carefully to be observed, for unless the sinner be dissatisfied with himself, detest his manner of life,

> and be thoroughly grieved from an apprehension of sin, he will never betake himself to the Lord. On the other hand, it is impossible for a man to experience a sorrow of this kind, without its giving birth to a new heart. Hence repentance takes its rise in grief, for the reason that I have mentioned — because no one can return to the right way, but the man who hates sin; but where hatred of sin is, *there* is self-dissatisfaction and grief.[7]

J.C. Ryle beautifully explains this mark of true repentance:

> The heart of a penitent man is touched with deep remorse because of his past transgressions. He is cut to the heart to think that he should have lived so madly and so wickedly. He mourns over time wasted, over talents misspent, over God dishonored, over his own soul injured. The remembrance of these things is grievous to him. The burden of these things is sometimes almost intolerable.[10]

Praying For Pardon And Strength Of Grace

As we confess our sins to God we seek His forgiveness for the sins over which we have godly sorrow and with which we have offended His Holiness. We seek the forgiveness of God based solely upon the work of Christ. We do not seek the forgiveness of God based upon our promises of how "we will not do it again," but we seek His forgiveness by pointing God to the cross and what He did there for us. We also beg Him, knowing fully that He is able to withhold us from our sin. One of the things that I'm always thankful to God for is that God in His great love for me, has thankfully not left me all free in my sin. The words of God given to Abimelech are a mountain of comfort to me: "I know that you have done this in the integrity of your heart, and it was **I who kept you from sinning against me**" (Gen. 20:6). I know that God is daily keeping me from sinning against Him in various ways that I'm not aware of and that we often do not thank Him for it because of a high view of human nature, which is false. God is restraining all kinds of people from sinning in various ways for His own purposes as He is allowing various people to sin for His own purposes and glory.

As we seek the pardon of God, knowing full well that we have received it in Jesus Christ (1 John 1:8-2:2), we also pray that God may grant us victory against our sins. We pray that God may not lead us into temptation, but rather deliver us from the evil one and his wicked schemes (Matt. 6:13). Therefore, when we pray for the grace to overcome our sins and temptations, we are making a commitment to walk not in sin, but rather in the way of God. We turn our back against sin and follow God and His ways.

Walk As Pleasing Before God

It is one thing to have worldly repentance and grief where you are not sorry that you've offended the infinitely holy God and it is another to have sorrow for offending God, to turn away from your sin and turn toward God in faith through Christ. When we are sorry for our sins and detest our sin because it offends our gracious God. We cannot but have a commitment to abhor and stay away from our sins. We cannot just indifferently think, "yes, I hate my sin and have sorrow in my heart", but commit the same sin in the next moment or the next day without struggle and fighting against temptation. When we repent and turn toward God, we should perform deeds in keeping with our repentance. In Matthew 3:8, John the Baptist calls upon the people to "Bear fruit in keeping with repentance." Philip Schaff explains this passage with these words:

> 'Therefore,' *i.e.*, if you are really fleeing as you profess to be, then bring forth fruit (the singular is found in the original) **worthy of repentance** (or, *your* repentance). The fruit or result, worthy of repentance, implies a good tree to produce the fruit. The germ of the great gospel truth: 'Ye must be born again,' since natural birth, or descent from Abraham (Mat 3:9), did not insure the worthy fruit.[11]

In Luke 3:10-18, John the Baptist goes on to describe some fruits of repentance. The same message is given in Acts 26:20 by the apostle Paul. J.C. Ryle observes, "The life of a penitent man is altered. The course of his daily conduct is entirely changed. A new King reigns within his heart. He puts off the old man. What God commands he now desires to practice; and what God forbids he now desires to avoid. He strives in all ways to keep clear of sin, to fight with sin, to war with sin, to get the victory over sin."[10]

Our deeds do not merit our salvation or our repentance, rather they manifest our salvation and repentance. For example, to the one who struggles with gossiping, repentance means being sorry for offending God by spreading rumors and secrets about someone and being sorry also for offending that person himself, maybe even going to confess your sin to them. Now, the works which will manifest your repentance are no longer spreading gossip, but rather restraining yourself from doing that. Rather than spreading falsehoods and rumors, seek to speak the truth in love and for the good of each other. We seek no longer to walk in sin, but walk in the ways of God and to please Him in all things. We seek to resist sin and to hate even the thought of sinning against Him. The repentance of the Thessalonians led to their devotion to the true God (1 Thess.

1:9-10). When we depart from slavery to sin, we are not left free to ourselves. Rather, we become slaves to righteousness (Rom. 6:18). To claim repentance without fruits is the same as claiming faith without works. It is dead and useless.

Catechism

The Particular Baptist Benjamin Keach's catechism, which is similar to the Westminster Shorter Catechism, answers "*Q. 94. What is repentance unto life?*" in this way:

> A. Repentance unto life is a saving grace, whereby a sinner, out of a true sense of his sin, and apprehension of the mercy of God in Christ, does, with grief and hatred of his sin, turn from it unto God, with full purpose of, and endeavor after, new obedience. (Acts 2:37; Joel 2:13; Jer. 31:18-19: 2 Cor. 7:10-11; Rom. 6:18)[12]

This is nothing less than what I have tried to prove above and similar to what the Confession says. First of all, repentance is a saving *grace.* It is not something that comes from us but rather given to us. Second, it is a grace that makes us aware of the true sense of our sin, i.e., that it is committed against an infinitely righteous and holy God, but at the same time, we know that we may find mercy and grace in the arms of Christ. Third, repentance involves a turning away from sin toward God and obedience.

Repentance and Faith: Interconnected And Necessary

I believe that the Bible teaches that there is no true faith without repentance, neither is there true repentance without faith in Christ. Therefore, I reject and abhor the views of those who would say that one can have Christ as their Savior, but doesn't need to have Christ as their Lord to be saved. They want to basically claim that if you ever believed that Christ died for your sins and you accepted Him, it doesn't matter what you do, you will be saved from God's wrath. You don't have to repent and amend your ways, but you simply have to put faith in Christ and accept Him. These groups also believe in what is called "once saved, always saved", which combined with their easy believism teaches that if one ever made a commitment to put their faith in Christ, even if they sin without repentance in the future, it doesn't matter, they're saved. They do not have to obey Christ as Lord of their life.

It is necessary to mention here that this is what a lot of non-Protestants see the doctrine of justification by faith alone leading to. They think that if we're justified apart from anything in us, then this would mean that even if we sin, it doesn't matter because it's all grace. That is a distortion of the doctrine, obviously. The Reformers and the Bible stress the command of obedience to the Lord and at the same time justification by faith alone through faith. We can only be Jesus' friends if we do what He says (John 15:14). James argues in his epistle that a faith that does not produce works, is not real faith, but a dead faith and it is useless (see James 2:14-26, see **my exposition of the text** when brought against Justification By Faith Alone). Those who advocate for salvation without repentance are advocating for what James is condemning, that is, a dead faith which is useless.

The Scriptural teaching is that both salvation and faith are required and are seen to be two sides of one coin. The Lord Jesus begins His ministry by calling on people to "repent and believe the gospel" (Mark 1:15). His message is thus characterized to be one of calling people to repentance and faith. The apostle Paul recounts his ministry among the Ephesians and says that he testified "both to Jews and to Greeks of repentance toward God and of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ" (Acts 20:21). We have no reason to assume that this preaching of repentance and faith was unique to the Ephesians, but we have every reason to believe that, if they are interconnected, the preaching of repentance and faith characterizes Paul's ministry. Standing in the Areopagus Paul says:

> Acts 17:30-31 The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he **commands all people everywhere to repent**, 31 because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead."

It is ridiculous to think that God requires people to turn away from their sins toward Him and righteousness, but doesn't require that they come through faith in Christ. So likewise it is ridiculous and unbiblical to think that one can have true faith without repentance. The response to Paul's message of calling them to repentance was that "some men joined him and **believed**" (Acts 17:34). Paul clearly called them to repentance and faith. **Faith and repentance describe conversion** and are the two sides of the same coin. Conversion is our response to the call of God through the gospel of Jesus Christ. We turn to God through faith in Christ and we commit ourselves to obeying Him, rather than sin. In Hebrews 6:1 the Holy Spirit says that "repentance from dead works and of faith toward God" is an "elementary doctrine of Christ". It is something basic to Christianity. It is Christianity 101. We repent of our evil deeds and put our faith in Christ. These two go hand in hand.

We cannot, simply on the basis that in some texts only repentance or only faith is mentioned, assume that the other is not required or the other is *denied*. For we tried to show that both faith and repentance are the two sides of one coin. There is no faith without turning away from sin and toward God. Likewise, there is no turning away from sin toward God without faith in Christ. Therefore, whenever we read of the call to repentance alone, we understand that faith is assumed and vice versa. When the Lord Jesus warned that "unless you repent, you will all likewise perish" (Luke 13:3, 5), we see there the necessity of repentance for salvation, but we do not say that repentance is a work, or that faith is not necessary. We accept both as being the two sides of the one coin (conversion). Both are graces of the New Covenant. See also our discussion of these inseparable graces in the chapter on faith (**see here**).

---

§4 Repentance is to be continued through the whole course of our lives

4. As **repentance is to be continued through the whole course of our lives**, upon the account of the body of death, and the motions thereof, **1** so it is **every man's duty to repent of his particular known sins particularly. 2**
    1. Ezek. 16:60; Matt. 5:4; 1 John 1:9
    2. Luke 19:8; 1 Tim. 1:13, 15

Repentance is not an act once performed or a turn once taken. Rather, our whole life is to be a life of continual repentance from sin and turning toward God. This means that **repentance is to be continued through the whole course of our lives** because this **body of death** will always produce sin that needs to be repented of. So it is the **duty** of every Christian to **repent of his particular known sins particularly** and ask for forgiveness from God for his sins. We may also ask for forgiveness of unknown sins to us or which we do not remember, but the Confession specifically calls us to confess and repent of sins which we **particularly** and definitely know (we can point a finger to them).

The very first point in Martin Luther's *95 Theses* was:

> 1. When our Lord and Master Jesus Christ said, "Repent" (Mt 4:17), he willed the entire life of believers to be one of repentance.[13]

The Bible and the Reformers thus taught that repentance was not something we merely did at the beginning, in conversion, but we repent—we turn away from sin and toward God every day. As we sin every day and confess our sins with repentant hearts. We make it our aim to repent every day from all known sins and to confess them to the Lord so that we may be forgiven (1 John 1:8-2:2). As we confess our sins to God, we at the same time, commit ourselves to wage war against them. We seek to live a life that is in constant war with the flesh (Gal. 5:17) and that is through faith and by grace overcoming the flesh.

There is not much more to say in this paragraph. There is the one-time repentance where we turn from sin and toward God, and we place our faith in Christ and are justified. And there is the continued day to day repentance where we seek to mortify the flesh and turn from all our sins by the help of the Holy Spirit. The Christian life is a life of repentance and faith.

---

§5 There is no sin so great that it shall bring damnation on them that repent

5. Such is the provision which God hath made through Christ in the **covenant of grace** for the **preservation of believers unto salvation;** that although there is **no sin so small but it deserves damnation; 1** yet there is **no sin so great that it shall bring damnation on them that repent;** which makes the constant preaching of repentance necessary. **2**
    1. Ezek. 16:60; Matt. 5:4; 1 John 1:9
    2. Luke 19:8; 1 Tim. 1:13, 15

This continual life of repentance **is the provision which God hath made through Christ in the covenant of grace** (1 John 1:9). God has designed and commanded the Christian life to be a life of repentance and renewal unto salvation. For

what reason? **...for the preservation of believers unto salvation**. This is how God keeps us for Himself and in Christ. It is a means whereby the elect do not lose faith and do not perish in their sins. Lastly, the Confession points out that even the smallest sin **deserves damnation**, but also that **there is no sin so great that is shall bring damnation on them that repent**. Such is the amazing grace of God that His forgiveness and grace are so unbelievable and wide that He will forgive every sin imaginable if we repent and turn to Him by faith in Christ. Therefore, this **makes the constant preaching of repentance necessary** (Luke 13:3, 5), whereby people are reminded that God is willing to forgive every and any sin committed by them who turn to God in repentance and faith in the Lord Christ.

God knows that we will not fully overcome sin in this life (1 John 1:8), yet He loves and provides for us a way for cleansing through continual confession of our sins. There is not a sin so great that can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord! All the sins of God's people were placed upon the spotless Lamb and God punished Him for us. All our sins were paid for 2000 years ago, let us seek to walk in that forgiveness which was purchased for us and seek it through continued confession of sins and experience the forgiveness of God through Christ our Savior.

The Confession says that there is a provision made for believers in the Covenant of Grace which is repentance and it is meant for the "preservation of believers unto salvation". Repentance is a gift that God has given His people, not only at the beginning of their journey, but He supplies faith and repentance to His people daily. Repentance is necessary for our preservation as believers. God has given us repentance so that we may be restored to a loving and harmonious relationship with Him. The Confession deems it necessary for repentance constantly to be preached to believers and unbelievers alike because there is no sin which is so great as to hinder someone who is seeking to be saved, from finding Jesus to be a perfect Savior. Therefore, repentance should always be preached to people because that is how they turn to God and because "unless you repent, you will all likewise perish" (Luke 13:3, 5). Repentance and faith must be preached together because it is by the grace of God through faith and repentance that the people of God are saved.

testifying both to Jews and to Greeks of repentance toward God and of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.

(Acts 20:21)

Footnotes

1. a, b *Wayne Grudem. Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994). Chapter 35, p. 713.*
2. ^ *Many Scriptural references have been supplied by Samuel Waldron's Modern Exposition of 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith which was apparently supplied by the Westminster Confession of Faith 1646.*
3. ^ *Sam E. Waldron. A Modern Exposition Of The 1689 Baptist Confession Of Faith. (Darlington: Evangelical Press, 2013). p. 242.*
4. ^ *Jeremy Walker. The London Baptist Confession of Faith | Exposition of Chapter 15. Herald of Grace.*
5. a, b *Joseph Henry Thayer's Greek Definitions. Taken from the TheWord Bible Software. See reference for the Strong's number.*
6. ^ *Repentance unto Life. Covenant of Grace Church.*
7. a, b *John Calvin. Commentaries. Taken from the TheWord Bible Software. In loc.*
8. ^ *Jamieson, Fausset, Brown. Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible (Abridged). Taken from the TheWord Bible Software. In loc.*
9. ^ *Albert Barnes' Notes on the Bible. Taken from the TheWord Bible Software. In loc.*
10. a, b *J.C. Ryle. Repentance. Monergism.*

11. ^ *Philip Schaff. A Popular Commentary on the New Testament. Taken from the TheWord Bible Software. In loc.*
12. ^ *Benjamin Keach's Catechism*
13. ^ *Martin Luther. The 95 Theses.*