

CHAPTER FIFTEEN: REPENTANCE UNTO LIFE AND SALVATION

Types of People Who Need Repentance

1. *Some of the elect are not converted until well on in life, having continued in the state in which they were born, and having followed after all kinds of evil cravings and pleasures. Then God's effectual call reaches them and He gives them repentance leading on to life eternal.*

2. *There is not a man on earth who does good and is without sin; and the best of men, through the power and deceitfulness of their indwelling corruptions and the strength of temptation, may commit great sins hateful to God. Because of this, in the covenant of grace God has mercifully made provision that believers who so sin and fall shall be restored, through repentance, to salvation.*

(a) Those **converted “well on in life”** (section 1). Biblical examples include Manasseh (2 Chronicles 33:11-17), Saul of Tarsus (Acts 9:1-18), the Philippian jailer (Acts 16:25-34). They each had many years to practice sinful lifestyles.

(b) **Believers who “commit great sin”** (section 2). Indwelling sin continues to have great power and to exercise deceit even in the most mature of believers. So David committed adultery, arranged for the death of her lawful husband, and for many months tried to cover his sin (2 Samuel 11-12). So Peter, after he had been specifically warned by his Master, denied Him three times (Matthew 26:31-34, 69-75).

(c) **Question.** Why does the Confession only refer to these two types of people needing repentance? Do not all people in the world need such repentance?

Answer. The writers of the Confession wanted to distinguish between a crisis experience of repentance and the ordinary grace of repentance. All must have the ordinary grace, while only some will have a crisis. For example, a child raised in a Christian home and who has never led an outwardly evil life still needs to repent, although it will probably not be like the crisis experience of the jailer. Do not demand for your own experience certain specific emotional details that others might have. Just make sure you have genuine repentance as described in the following section.

Description of True Repentance

3. *The repentance that leads on to salvation is a gospel grace by means of which a person who is caused by the Holy Spirit to feel the manifold evils of sin is also caused by faith in Christ to humble himself on account of sin. This humiliation is characterized by godly sorrow, a detestation of the sin, and self-loathing. It is accompanied by prayer for pardon and strength of grace, and also by a purpose and endeavour, in the power supplied by the Spirit, to conduct himself in the sight of God with the consistency of life that pleases Him.*

Using the above description, think of repentance as a TREE, under the following 4 headings:

(a) The type of **soil** needed. Repentance is a “gospel grace”, the work of the Holy Spirit. It does not grow in the soil of men’s thinking or efforts. Without the gracious power of God, repentance is impossible. Read John 16:7-11, Acts 5:31, 11:18, 2 Timothy 2:25.

(b) The **roots**. There are two great convictions that give rise to genuine repentance –

1. A feeling of “the manifold evils of sin”. Sin is felt to be as a great and many-sided evil against God.
2. A humbling on account of sin “by faith in Christ”. No one can truly face up to sin without a corresponding faith in Christ that God will show mercy.

These two roots must be together, as in Psalm 130 and Luke 15:17-20. Judas had a true sense of sin but no feeling that there was mercy with God for his sin (Matthew 27:3-5). There is a worldly sorrow that does not lead to genuine repentance (2 Corinthians 7:9-10). Repentance is not just turning away from sin, but also turning to Christ (Acts 9:35, 11:21).

(c) The **trunk and branches**. These are the main features of true repentance –

1. “Godly sorrow, a detestation of the sin, and self-loathing.” Repentance is a turning from sin with grief and hatred for it. It is seen as primarily against God (Psalm 51:4). In days when we are being encouraged to think good of ourselves, true repentance is “self-loathing” (see Ezekiel 16:60-63, 36:31-32).
2. “Prayer for pardon and strength of grace.” A seeking for forgiveness.

(d) The **fruit**. Confession and forsaking of sin, so as to live a new life of obedience by the power of the Spirit (see Proverbs 28:13, Luke 3:1-14, 1 Thessalonians 1:9-10). This is against those who claim to have repented but they are not concerned to please God in all they do. Note it is not a perfect forsaking, but “a purpose and endeavour” in the heart to do so.

Repentance is Continual

4. *Because we carry about with us (as Scripture tells us) a ‘body of death’ biased towards evil, repentance is to continue through the whole course of our lives. Hence it is every man’s duty to repent of each particular sin of which he is conscious, and to do so with particular care.*

Repentance is not a once-for-all act when we become Christians. We must continue to repent of our sins throughout our lives: so the Corinthians (2 Corinthians 7:9), the seven churches in Asia (Revelation 2:5,16,21-22, 3:3,19). This is because we do not live sinless lives, due to the “body of death”, our corrupt nature, that still indwells us (Romans 7:24). Therefore, for each sin of which we are conscious, we must repent before God.

Assurance of Forgiveness Upon Repentance

5. *In the covenant of grace God has made full provision for the preservation of believers in a state of salvation, so that, although even the smallest of sins deserves damnation, there is no sin so great that it will bring damnation to them that repent. This renders the constant preaching of repentance essential.*

This assurance is based on the covenant of grace (see chapter 7). God has promised to keep us in “a state of salvation”, a state that involves continual repentance. He promises that whatsoever sin we commit as Christians, if we repent, He will forgive. Remember David’s sin (2 Samuel 12:13).

Question. What about the sin of ‘blasphemy against the Holy Spirit’ which never has forgiveness (Mark 3:29)? Such a sin will never be forgiven because the person committing it will not, and cannot repent, his heart is so hard against God. This is the awful truth of Hebrews 6:4-6 and 10:26-27.