

Of Repentance unto Life (Part 3)

Joshua 7; WCF 15.5-15.6

Reformed Church of Wainuiomata, 12 January 2020, 16:30

(Sermon put together by Pieter van Huyssteen with due acknowledgement)¹

Intro

Congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ,

This is the third (and last) sermon in a series about *repentance* – yes about making a 180° turn-around away from sin; indeed a 180° turn to abundant life in Christ!

Here, very briefly, is what we heard in the previous two sermons...

At first, we looked at three reasons why the Christian will want to repent of his/her sin – these were...

- because sin is death (yes, sin leads to brokenness, pain, and death)
- because sin is filth (of which I am so ashamed)
- because sin hurts my Lord

Then we were reminded that repentance – utterly important as it is – is not the *grounds* on which you & I are made right with God, because the only grounds for our salvation is what our Lord Jesus has worked for us on the cross!

Having said that, no one who is saved by Christ's cross-work is saved *without* him/her also repenting!

And lastly, we were reminded of this Bible-founded truth, i.e. that *no sin is so small that it does not deserve damnation. Neither is any sin so great that it can bring damnation upon those who truly repent!*

So, that's what we heard in the previous two sermons in this series.

But this afternoon, our topical sermon will give us a summary of what the Bible teaches regarding the practical outworking of our repentance.

And we have two points.

Here is the first one...

General Repentance versus Particular/Specific Repentance

My brother & sister, almost everyone (yes, also the Christian) will acknowledge that he/she is not perfect! And all Christians will confess that they are sinners!

So, look! Seeing that we all know that we are sinners *who still sin (and actively so!)*, then here is one thing that should never satisfy us – i.e. general confessions of sin, e.g. a hasty prayer like, “Dear Lord, please forgive me *all* my sins; in Jesus' Name; amen!”

That's a prayer asking God to forgive my sins, *in general!* And, with such a prayer, I am indicating that I'm committed to make a 180° turn-around from all my sins *without being able (or without taking the time)* to mention every specific sin that grieves me!

¹ In writing this sermon, I am greatly indebted to my two main sources whose guidance I appreciate: 1) Van Dixhoorn, Chad. 2014. *Confessing the Faith: a reader's guide to the Westminster Confession of Faith*. Carlisle, PA : The Banner of Truth Trust. 484p.

2) Sproul, R.C. 2006. *The truth we confess*. (In: Sproul, R.C. ed. *Truths we confess: a layman's guide to the Westminster Confession of Faith – in three volumes*. Vol. 2: *Salvation and the Christian Life (Chapters 9-22 of the Confession)* Phillipsburg, NJ : P&R Publishing. 279p.).

Many words & phrases I have written, I have gladly borrowed with great thankfulness from this source.

Of course, such a prayer is allowed to be prayed (if done so respectfully and sincerely). Yes, there *is* a place for making a general confession of sin – a general *confession* accompanied by a general *repentance*! That’s not a problem!

But the problem is that, for many people (especially for nominal Christians), their repentance is *only ever* general!

- They will never be heard confessing a *particular* sin.
- *That they were wrong*, they will never admit to their family, to their friends, to their colleagues, or to their elders.
- Even when they’re alone in their bedroom, even then will they not go on their knees to admit guilt for a particular sin!

My brother & sister, look! Is it not so that the man/woman (the child) who is always happy to just make a confession of his/her sin *in general* – is it not so that such a person, by that very “confession,” has proved him/herself to be the most stubborn of sinners!? But look! Here are the three steps of particular/specific repentance which we glean from the pages of Scripture...

- The first step is that you & I should *admit* (A) that we *have* committed (*are* committing) individual sins. After all, did David not *admit* the existence of specific sin in his life when he prayed that the Lord would keep him from *wilful* (*deliberate*) sins – yes, from *consciously* sinning? See the particular sin of which David admitted guilt!? Wilful sin – for which the Bible sometimes uses the words, “sinning/acting with a high hand”² (i.e. acting defiantly)! Hear how David’s admitting of this specific/particular sin comes out in his prayer (in Ps 19:13), “**Also keep back Your servant from presumptuous³ sins; Let them not rule over me; Then I will be blameless, And I shall be acquitted of great transgression.**”⁴

So, the first step of repenting from a particular/specific sin is to *admit* it!

- Here’s the second step: *Name it* (N)! Yes, call that specific sin by its name! My brother & sister, you will remember how the Apostle Paul made the following confession in one of his letters to Timothy (1 Tm 1:15), “**Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the worst.**”⁵ See how Paul confesses that he is a sinner – in fact, the worst sinner!? Well, that’s a very moving confession. But do you know that this confession would still have been empty if it were not for Paul’s specific sins which he mentions *by name* two verses earlier!?

² Cf. e.g. Num 15:30 **But the person who does anything defiantly, whether he is native or an alien, that one is blaspheming the Lord; and that person shall be cut off from among his people** (NASB; Underscoring mine).

“Does...defiantly” is a free translation of *ta`āseh bəyad rāmāh* (תַּעֲשֶׂהָ בְיָד רָמָה), “...does with a lifted hand...”

³ In Hebrew *mizzedîm* (מִזְעֵדִים), a Substantivised Adjective Masculine Plural from *zed* (זֵד), insolent, presumptuous (Brown, F., Driver, S. R., & Briggs, C. A. (1977). [Enhanced Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon](#) (p. 267). Oxford: Clarendon Press).

⁴ [New American Standard Bible: 1995 update](#). (1995). (Ps 19:13). La Habra, CA: The Lockman Foundation (Emphasis mine).

⁵ [The Holy Bible: New International Version](#). (1984). (1 Ti 1:15). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

Here they are (1 Tm 1:13), "... ***I was once a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent man...***"⁶ Granted, Paul does not go again *into the details* of his *blaspheming, persecuting, and violence*, but such detail is no longer needed, for Timothy (and the early church) knew already all those details. Yet, Paul lists those three sins by their names!

Well, that's the second step in repenting from specific sins – i.e. you should name them!

- Here's the third (and last) step: *Turning (T) away* from that particular sin! Look, is this not what Zacchaeus the Tax Collector did? You see, Zacchaeus did not simply admit that he was a sinner. Neither did he stop at the point of naming his sin. No, he made a 180° turn *away from* that sin by adding action to his sorrow/shame – yes, Zacchaeus said, "***Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount.***"⁷

So, there (in **Admit, Name it, and Turn away**) we have seen the three basic steps in repenting from a specific/particular sin! And we should consider these in our own prayers before the Lord; and in the prayers of our children as we teach them how to pray; and in the prayers of our leaders – yes, the prayers of mothers & fathers and elders and deacons! Let's face it, my brother & sister, is it not so that there remains a big void if we only ever please ourselves with a general repentance?

What void remains?

Well, unfinished business, because, with general confessions, no particular sin gets ever identified. As a result, no particular sin is turned away from! Besides, the sinner is missing out on embracing Christian grace!⁸

So far, regarding point 1: "General Repentance versus Particular/Specific Repentance." Here's the second (and last) point...

Private Repentance versus Public Repentance

My brother & sister, as long as someone sins (that's *always*, in this life), he/she will confess his/her sins *privately to God!* That should always happen!

But then, at times, you & I might have sinned against someone else – or even more publicly before a whole group of people! It is *then* that it will not be good enough if I come only in private (just God & I) and confess my particular sin just before God.

No, it is then that not just private but public confession and repentance must be done!

Well, let's first look at some examples from the Bible about private repentance...

Again, we look at the example of David's confession of sin in Ps 51!

Remember, although David, in his adultery with Bathsheba, had not just sinned against God, but also against Bathsheba and her husband Uriah (and *that* even publicly with many people knowing about it), David nevertheless came and confessed those specific sins first before God, and said, "***Against you, you only,***

⁶ [The Holy Bible: New International Version](#). (1984). (1 Ti 1:13). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan (Emphasis mine).

⁷ [The Holy Bible: New International Version](#). (1984). (Lk 19:8). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

⁸ My adaptation of the well-said words of Van Dixhoorn (ibid:201)

have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you may be justified in your words and blameless in your judgment.”⁹

And the rest of Ps 51 shows David’s shame and heartfelt sorrow for that specific filth (those specific sins). And he pleads with God to take that filth away for it haunted him!¹⁰

We see the same thing happening in our Old-Testament passage (Ps 32 which we have read). Yes, also in *this* psalm King David acknowledged his sin to God, covering nothing! David then also urges everyone who is godly to pray to God while He may be found (Ps 35:5, 6), “***I acknowledged my sin to you, and I did not cover my iniquity; I said, ‘I will confess my transgressions to the Lord,’ and you forgave the iniquity of my sin. Selah***

Therefore let everyone who is godly offer prayer to you at a time when you may be found; surely in the rush of great waters, they shall not reach him.”¹¹

My brother & sister, here is the good news: i.e. that whoever confesses his sins before God – *and turns away¹² from them – finds mercy¹³* (Prov. 28:13)!¹⁴

This is good news, because it’s a *promise from God* – God who cannot lie – that He *will* grant forgiveness for those who truly & sincerely confess their sins!

So, my brother & sister, if anyone of you has sincerely confessed your sin before the Lord, and repented from it, then trust that your sins *are* forgiven! You see, it is true that some people assume that their sin has been forgiven – yes, they *feel* forgiven. But that does not necessarily mean that they *are* forgiven!

However, there are also those who *are* forgiven, but they don’t *feel* forgiven! But look again what John says in 1 Jn 1:9, “***If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.***”¹⁵

⁹ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#). (2016). (Ps 51:4). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

¹⁰ Cf. Ps 51:4-5, 7, 9, 14.

¹¹ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#). (2016). (Ps 32:5–6). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

¹² The Hebrew has *vəʾozēv* (וָזַעַב), a Qal Active Participle Masculine Singular of *ʾāzav* (אָזַב), *leave, forsake, loose* (Brown, F., Driver, S. R., & Briggs, C. A. (1977). [Enhanced Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon](#) (p. 736). Oxford: Clarendon Press).

The NLT has rendered it as “and turn from.”

¹³ Literally, “...he will receive mercy/compassion!” In Hebrew, *yəruḥām* (יְרוּחַם), Pu`al Imperfect 3rd Masculine Singular from *rāḥam* (רָחַם) *have compassion; be compassionate* (in the Pi`el pattern) (Brown, F., Driver, S. R., & Briggs, C. A. (1977). [Enhanced Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon](#) (p. 933). Oxford: Clarendon Press).

¹⁴ Prov 28:13, “***He who conceals his sins does not prosper, but whoever confesses and renounces them finds mercy.***”

¹⁵ [New American Standard Bible: 1995 update](#). (1995). (1 Jn 1:9). La Habra, CA: The Lockman Foundation.

What comfort! Let the person who sincerely grieves over his sin, confess it to God! But, on the strength of Scripture, let that person then trust that God who is faithful to His promises, *has* forgiven that person!

Well, that's regarding a private confession to God! And, according to God's word, this is a necessity! Yes, you & I cannot get away from confessing our sins (general and specific), in private, to God!

But let's see what the Bible teaches about public repentance...

My brother & sister, there are some cases – particularly cases in which we have hurt a brother or sister or damaged their reputation! Well, the person who has sinned in this way – and is truly sorry for what he has done – will not shrink from a true repentance *before the person* whom he has wounded!

And in this regard, I think it is true to say that husbands find it generally harder to confess their sins before their wives, more so than wives who have to confess their sins to their husbands!

Also, I think mothers may often find it difficult to confess their sins to their daughters.

But there will be no real forgiveness – and no real peace – until the sinner has confessed his particular sins to the person whom he has hurt!

And there's no need to publish our sins for all to hear – especially if you have not sinned against all!

But God's Word does call us to confess our specific sins to those whom we have wounded. Is this not what James is saying (in Js 5:16), "***Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another so that you may be healed. The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much.***"¹⁶

Yes, the Bible is clear about it that the sinner and the offended person should meet up to discuss the sin committed and to ask for forgiveness. This scenario is clearly laid out in Lk 17:3-4, "***...If your brother sins, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him. "And if he sins against you seven times a day, and returns to you seven times, saying, 'I repent,' forgive him.***"¹⁷

My brother & sister, the circle gets wider when you or I sin publicly!

Yes, what if you have made some or other rude comment during dinner in the presence of your friends, or when you have lost self-control in front of your whole family?

But look! What if a Christian's behaviour has dragged the Name of the Lord through the mud before the whole *congregation* – or before the whole *community*?

Yes, what if your sin was so public that everyone has already seen it or heard of it?

Well, in such a case, because your sin is already known to the whole community, you will find yourself in the same situation as Achan. You see, Achan's sin had an

¹⁶ [New American Standard Bible: 1995 update](#). (1995). (Jas 5:16). La Habra, CA: The Lockman Foundation.

¹⁷ [New American Standard Bible: 1995 update](#). (1995). (Lk 17:3–4). La Habra, CA: The Lockman Foundation.

effect on the whole community of Israel, for I mean, was it not because of Achan's sin that the whole community suffered losses in battle against their enemies? If Achan had not sinned, the many who were now dead in his camp would still have been alive! So, one man's sin had serious consequences for his whole community!

But look, Achan's sin also dragged God's Name through the mud before Israel – and before their *pagan enemies* who were now thinking nothing of Yahweh!

My brother & sister, what if you or I have sinned in this way?

Well, then we would have to do what Achan did! He confessed his specific sin publicly¹⁸ even though that confession did not help him to escape the penalty for it in this life!!

You see, even after his confession, Achan still had to be on death-row – and eventually be executed!

A similar thing will happen to a member of our church if he/she should commit a heinous crime publicly! Yes, that person may ask publicly for forgiveness, but that will not prevent him/her from completing jail time!

So, for Achan's sin against his people (and for his sin of dragging God's Name through the mud), Achan received the death penalty!

Would Achan now be in heaven or in hell?

Well, that's not for human beings to decide. Yet, of this one thing Achan on death-row could be assured: "My public confession and my penalty are giving glory to God, for now it will be known that not Israel's God, but I, Achan, was the reason for our battle losses!"¹⁹

Well, my brother & sister, so far re public confession and public repentance.

But there's one small (yet a very important) thing to say before we finish: i.e. that just as we have now been reminded that *God* will forgive those who repent of their sins against Him, so the Bible also tells you & me that *we* need to *readily forgive* those who repent of their sins against us!²⁰ And it does not matter whether their sin against us was private or public!

You see, when a brother or sister or neighbour repents of his/her sin against us, we *must* be reconciled. In fact, the Bible tells us to receive such repentant sinner *in love*; and *comfort* him/her!

Is this not how Paul urged the Corinthians to do, lest anyone be "overwhelmed by excessive sorrow."²¹

¹⁸ Cf. Josh 7:19-21 (especially v.20), "***Then Joshua said to Achan, "My son, give glory to the Lord, the God of Israel, and give him the praise. Tell me what you have done; do not hide it from me."***

²⁰ ***Achan replied, "It is true! I have sinned against the Lord, the God of Israel. This is what I have done: ²¹ When I saw in the plunder a beautiful robe from Babylonia, two hundred shekels of silver and a wedge of gold weighing fifty shekels, I coveted them and took them. They are hidden in the ground inside my tent, with the silver underneath"*** (NIV84; Emphasis mine).

¹⁹ For the background to this, cf. e.g. the words of Joshua's prayer (in Josh 7:8-9 – especially v.9), "***O Lord, what can I say, now that Israel has been routed by its enemies? ⁹ The Canaanites and the other people of the country will hear about this and they will surround us and wipe out our name from the earth. What then will you do for your own great name?***" (Emphasis mine).

²⁰ Cf. the Lord's Prayer (Mt 6:12)

²¹ Cf. 2 Cor 2:7-8, "***Now instead, you ought to forgive and comfort him, so that he will not be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow. ⁸ I urge you, therefore, to reaffirm your love for him"*** (Emphasis mine).

Yes, in doing so, you & I will be showing the same mercy to others than that which our Heavenly Father has shown to us in Christ His precious Son!

AMEN (2,526 words excluding footnotes)