

Of Repentance unto Life (Part 1)

Ps 51; WCF 15.1-15.2

Reformed Church of Wainuiomata, 29 December 2019, 16:30
(Sermon put together by Pieter van Huyssteen with due acknowledgement)¹

Intro

Congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ,

The number-one doctrine in the eyes of the Reformers was Salvation through Faith.²

Every one of us knows that!

And the WCF Article 14 has neatly summarised that doctrine for us – and that was what we studied in the last two sermons.

But now we have come to the WCF Article 15 which summarises for us what the Bible teaches regarding another doctrine, i.e. the doctrine of *Repentance!*

And, really, these two doctrines go hand-in-hand! After all, anyone who would 1) in God-worked *faith* receive Jesus as his/her Saviour & Lord, will 2) also be the person who *repents* of his/her sins!

I mean, if someone says, “I believe in Christ, but I’m not going to repent (I’m not going to make a head-heart-and-action turn-around) from my sins,” then you & I would have every right to doubt that *that person* has faith in (and *loves*) Christ!

So, 1) faith in our Lord Jesus and 2) repentance from sin go together!

Is that what the Bible says?

Absolutely!

For example, do you remember when the other apostles, at first, was upset with Peter that he had brought the Gospel to the pagans – yes, to Roman officer, Cornelius, and his household?

And do you remember how Peter then explained to them how the Lord so worked in Cornelius’ heart (and in the hearts of others in Cornelius’ household) that *they believed in Jesus Christ!*?³ (See doctrine no.1?)

Do you remember how the other apostles then reacted to this news?

Well, this is what they said (in Acts 11:18), “***So then, God has granted even the Gentiles repentance unto life.***”⁴ (See doctrine no.2?)

See how the two doctrines go together? Peter said that the Gentiles (Cornelius & his household) 1) ***believed in Jesus Christ!*** Then the apostles reacted, “***So then, God has granted even the Gentiles 2) repentance unto life.***”

Well, that’s *one* example of where the Bible links 1) *faith in Christ* with 2) *repentance!*

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.

² Of course, its fuller version is: Salvation by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone!

³ Cf. Acts 11:17, “***So if God gave them the same gift as he gave us, who believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I to think that I could oppose God?*” (Emphasis mine).**

⁴ [The Holy Bible: New International Version](#). (1984). (Ac 11:18). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan (Emphasis mine).

Here's another example...

Do you remember how Paul, with tears, reminded the Ephesian elders that he had faithfully ministered the Gospel of Christ to the Ephesian Church?

Then, in one single sentence, also *Paul* links for them the two doctrines (in Acts 20:21), "***I have declared to both Jews and Greeks that they must 2) turn to God in repentance and 1) have faith in our Lord Jesus.***"⁵

See? See how Paul, too, links 1) *faith in Jesus* with 2) *turning in repentance*!?

Thus, not only Peter, but also the other apostles and also Paul have linked 1) *faith in Christ* with 2) *repentance from sin* (repentance to God/life)!

But look! Here's a third Bible verse!

Indeed, also our *Lord Jesus Himself* emphasised the fact that Christians are ones who repent of their sins (repenting unto life).

Yes, remember when our Lord was walking with the Emmaus travellers who, at first, did not recognise Him – and who did not understand that their Messiah had to die?

Well, here (among other) is what our Lord then told them: "***This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, 47 and 2) repentance and 1) forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations...***"⁶

See? See how also our Lord Jesus Himself does not see 1) *forgiveness of our sins* (*through faith in Him*) as loose-standing from 2) *repentance*?

Again, my brother & sister, let no person ever say, "I believe Jesus Christ has forgiven all my sins, so now I don't need to take repentance seriously!"

No! Such faith is a false faith! Such a person is abusing God's grace! Yes, such a person has not yet understood Rm 6:1-2, "***What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? 2 By no means! We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer?***"⁷

See? See why the WCF 15.1 says, "*Repentance unto life* (let's call it 'doctrine no.2') *is...a doctrine... to be preached by every minister of the Gospel, just as is* (the '1st doctrine,' i.e.) *the doctrine of faith in Christ*"?⁸

Well, perhaps – despite all we have just said – someone is still asking, "But why should the Christian bother about daily repentance from sin?" "I mean, if Christ has died for my all my sins – even also for my *future* sins – then what's the need for me to keep on repenting from my sins?"

Well, my brother & sister, we'll answer such a person in the following way: *Ongoing repentance from your sins is a must, because...*

- Sin is Death

⁵ [The Holy Bible: New International Version](#). (1984). (Ac 20:21). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

⁶ [The Holy Bible: New International Version](#). (1984). (Lk 24:46–47). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan (Emphasis mine)

⁷ [The Holy Bible: New International Version](#). (1984). (Ro 6:1–2). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

⁸ MESV

- Sin is Filth
- Sin is Hurting my Lord

Sin is Death

My brother & sister, you & I – even if we are already in Christ – must repent; yes, must daily make a 180° head-heart-and-feet turnaround⁹ from sin, because sin leads to *pain*, *disaster*, and... *death*!

Look, is that not why God Himself, through the prophet Ezekiel, urged His people to see and sense the danger of sin; to see in sin their peril!?

Hear what God says (in Ezek. 18:30-31), “**Therefore, O house of Israel, I will judge you, each one according to his ways, declares the Sovereign Lord. Repent! Turn away from all your offenses; then sin will not be your downfall.³¹ Rid yourselves of all the offenses you have committed, and get a new heart and a new spirit. Why will you die, O house of Israel?**”¹⁰

See?

God talks of *downfall* and of *dying* if we continue in sin!

Why will unrepentant sinners see their downfall? Why will they die?

Well, because God who is holy – who has not the slightest speck of sin in Him – hates sin, and will not let it go *unpunished*!

And so, if someone stubbornly or flippantly (in cavalier manner) continues sinning – yes, if the sinner does not repent, well, yes, then it firstly shows that he does not really love Christ!¹¹ But what else does it show? Well, that such person is headed for God’s punishment – even eternal *downfall* and *death* (i.e. the second death – a spiritual death with eternal condemnation).

But even before eternal downfall & death, such a person’s sin will work for him pain, downfall and spiritual death already in *this* life!!

I mean, sin does have consequences! You commit adultery, and you will have pain and downfall! And if you don’t repent, then eternal pain, downfall and death is your future!

See?

Sin is death!!

So, *what a good reason* to repent of your sins and to repent to life!!

We say, *fearing your downfall and death* is a good reason to repent!

And surely it is!

But if this is the *only* reason why you want to repent of your sins, then such repentance might still not indicate a sincere sorrow for your sins – yes, such repentance might still be bereft/empty of *contrition*! Indeed, such repentance might be a sign of mere *attrition*!¹²

What does this mean?

Well, if *fear of punishment* is the only reason why you & I want to make a 180° away from sinning, then our heart might well be no different to what my heart was when I was little and did the one or other naughty thing. Then, as soon as I saw my Dad coming with

⁹ Remember the two words for *repentance* used in the New Testament. They are *metanoëō* (μετανοέω), a word which puts the emphasis on a radical change of *thought* (cf. e.g. Lk 13:3, “**I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish**”); and *epistréphō* (ἐπιστρέφω), which puts the emphasis on a change of action/behaviour (cf. e.g. Acts 9:35, “**All those who lived in Lydda and Sharon saw him and turned to the Lord**”). Of course, each of these two words is often used with both meanings understood – a head/heart- and behaviour-turnaround).

¹⁰ [The Holy Bible: New International Version](#). (1984). (Eze 18:30–31). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

¹¹ Cf. Jn 14:15

¹² For a lengthy discussion (with many illustrations) on attrition, cf. Sproul (ibid:137ff.)

the cane in his hand to discipline me, I shouted out, “Sorry!” “Sorry, Dad!” (In my mother tongue,¹³ “Jammer!” “Jammer, Pa!”).

But *what for* was I saying *sorry*?

Well, only because I thought that saying *sorry* would cause my Dad to put away the cane!

And so, quite often people say *sorry*, not because they are *really* sorry, but for no other reason than to use *sorry* as a magic word by which they try to avoid punishment!

Well, that shows a heart not filled with *contrition*, but filled with mere *attrition* – which means that *fear-of-punishment* (pain/death) is the *only* reason why I want to repent!

But, look, here’s the second reason why a person would want to repent...

Sin is Filth

You & I will also want to repent from our sins, because we look at our sins – at our missing the mark, i.e. the mark which man, before the Fall, was able to hit with a bull’s eye! Yes, we look at our sins and then we see their repulsiveness – yes, their filth! And we feel *ashamed*! Not just ashamed, but we feel the greatest *remorse* and *sorrow*!

My brother & sister, hear what God once, through Ezekiel said to His sinful (and *sinning*) people (in Ezek 36:31-32): “***Then you will remember your evil ways and wicked deeds, and you will loathe yourselves for your sins and detestable practices.*** ³² ...***Be ashamed and disgraced for your conduct, O house of Israel!*** ¹⁴

Question: That hurtful word which you (I) have spoken today to someone who is living under the same roof with us – yes, that sinful selfish word – are you (am I) ashamed of that!? Do we see that as filth clinging to us?

You know, God (once through the prophet Isaiah) told His people, that the day on which they would turn again to Him is the day when they will throw away all their idols – they will scatter them as one throws away a filthy cloth (Is 30:22)!¹⁵

Will you & I ever remember that sin is a *dirty, filthy, loathsome, and repulsive* thing, for it is absolutely contrary to the holy nature of the Almighty God!?

Well, that’s the second reason why you & I will want to repent from our sins – they are filthy!!

Here’s the third reason...

Sin is Hurting my Lord

My brother & sister, the Apostle Paul once told the Corinthian Church that there’s such a thing as worldly sorrow – a sorrow which does not produce repentance and life, but leads to death (2 Cor 7:10).¹⁶

Now, such sorrow is a sorrow that’s expedient (momentarily convenient), because it just wants to avoid punishment! That’s what we have earlier called *attrition* – not *contrition*!

But you know what?

True repentance is not only filled with sorrow for sin and its filth, but it also *sees a Saviour* – yes, a Saviour who has given Himself self-sacrificially (and in love) over to pain & God-forsakenness so that you & I may live forever!

¹³ Afrikaans

¹⁴ [The Holy Bible: New International Version](#). (1984). (Eze 36:31–32). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

¹⁵ Is 30:22, ***Then you will defile your carved idols overlaid with silver and your gold-plated metal images. You will scatter them as unclean things. You will say to them, “Be gone!”*** (ESV. Emphasis mine).

¹⁶ 2 Cor 7:10, ***“For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret, whereas worldly grief produces death.”***

And so, true repentance is one that looks at our Lord Jesus Christ and is overcome by the greatest sorrow for having (again) hurt the One who loved (loves) me so much!

My brother & sister, remember what God, through Zechariah, prophesied?

He told His people that the Holy Spirit would be poured out upon them in a special measure, and then God's people would sincerely consider the cost of their sin – yes, on that day, they will look on Him whom *they have pierced, and they will mourn for Him as one mourns for an only child, and grieve bitterly for Him as one grieves for a firstborn Son* (cf. Zech. 12:10).¹⁷

My brother & sister, sin (your & my sin) is set against God Himself – the One who so loved us that He gave His only-begotten Son so that whoever believes in Him will not perish but have eternal life!

Our sin hurts the very One whom we ought to have been faithful to!

Look, is that not why King David (in our Old-Testament passage, Ps 51) was so absolutely stricken with grief when the Prophet Nathan confronted him?

You remember the story...

The LORD sent the prophet Nathan to David with a parable about two men – a rich man and a poor man. The poor man had one small ewe lamb – a pet for his children. The rich man had extensive flocks and herds. One day, a visitor came to dine with the rich man, but rather than slaughter a lamb from his own abundant flock, the rich man sneakily took that pet lamb from the poor man, killed it, cooked it, and served it to his visitor.

When David heard that story, he was angry! And he ordered that the rich man die, and that from his estate the poor man be given fourfold!

Nathan looked David in the eye and said, “**You are that man!**”¹⁸ (2 Sm 12:7) – *and David disintegrated!*¹⁹

My brother & sister, is this not the way we are?

It's much easier to see *other* people's sins and to be angry about them, while we shield our souls from our own transgressions!

What did David do *then*?

Well, in line with what we heard under point 2 (above), David saw his sin for what it was – *filth!*

Look, is that not why he said (Ps 51:3), “**My sin is ever before me!**”?

David *sees* his filth! Yes, he now feels dirty and filthy, and even a bath & cloth would be no help!

So, in greatest remorse, he pleaded with God (Ps 51:2), “**Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin!**”

But look! What else did David say?

Well, in agreement with what we said under point 3 (this point), David cried out (Ps 51:4), “**Against You, You only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight...**”²⁰

¹⁷ Zech. 12:10, “**And I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and supplication. They will look on me, the one they have pierced, and they will mourn for him as one mourns for an only child, and grieve bitterly for him as one grieves for a firstborn son.**”

¹⁸ אָתָּה הָאִישׁ

¹⁹ Well-put by Sproul (ibid:141)

²⁰ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#). (2016). (Ps 51:4). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

Yes, instantly & suddenly, David knew: “Although I have sinned against Bathsheba, Uriah, and the baby from our union, most of all *I have grieved my LORD Himself!*”
My brother & sister, is that how you/I see our sins?
I hope/pray so! For if we don’t, then we are falling short of the best, purest, and noblest reason why you & I should repent of our sins!
And God desires nothing else from the sinner!
Yes, as David prayed (Ps 51:16-17) ...

You do not delight in sacrifice, or I would bring it; You do not take pleasure in burnt offerings. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, You will not despise.

My brother & sister,
The Christian – the one who practically lives what I have called “doctrine no.1” – yes, the one who truly *believes in (and loves) the Lord Jesus Christ*, is the one who will also be deeply moved to practice what I have called “doctrine no. 2” – i.e. to ongoingly repent from his/her sins!

Why?

Well, for our Lord said, “***If you really love Me, you will obey My commandments!***”²¹

AMEN (2,405 words excluding footnotes)

²¹ Cf. Jn 14:15