

## Of Repentance unto Life (Part 2)

Luke 13:1-5; Rm 3:21-31; WCF 15.3-15.4

Reformed Church of Wainuiomata, 5 January 2020, 16:30

(Sermon put together by Pieter van Huyssteen with due acknowledgement)<sup>1</sup>

### Intro

Congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ,

Last Sunday afternoon we had the first of three sermons on repentance.

And we looked at three reasons why the Christian will want to repent of his/her sin – that is...

- 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

So, that's a very brief summary of last Sunday's sermon: three reasons why anyone – especially he/she who has tasted God's grace in Christ – should repent of his/her sins.

But this afternoon, we would like to see what the Bible teaches about the place of repentance in our salvation. And we have four points.

Here is the first one...

### Is My Repentance the Grounds for My Pardon?

My brother & sister, of course, your & my repentance of our sin makes up a very important part of our salvation!

Yet, we should never give to our repentance a power which does not belong to it!

What do I mean?

Well, that God *does* forgive us when we repent of (turn away from) our sin, and turn to Him in Christ. But God does not forgive us because He considers our repentance *a deed that deserves a reward!*

Yes, no one should ever pray (or even think), “Dear Father in heaven, if I turn away (repent) from my sins, will You then please be impressed with my achievement – yes, will You then reward me with eternal salvation?”

Surely, you & I (as people who are well-trained in the faith) will straightaway reject such a prayer as wrong or even arrogant. Yet, is it not an all-too-natural thing for even you & me to think that our repentance will impress God – and impress Him to the point of scoring for us points unto getting into His good books; or scoring for us points unto earning our own salvation!?

So, it must be said loudly & clearly: Our repentance can never earn God's pardon.

Sadly, that was exactly how people in the late medieval times thought. And that's how it happened that the Roman Catholic Church, at the time, invented the sinful practice of penance, which means that the sinner had to pay the price for his own sin by doing pious deeds before God!

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<sup>1</sup> 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.

But, already at the times of Ezekiel, God showed His people that any such thought is wrong!

You see, God told His people that He was going to transform their hearts, but that He was not going to it for *their* sakes – i.e. not for anything they had done or were about to do!

No, God was going to help them in spite of themselves!

Why would God do such a thing?

Well, only because He is merciful and gracious!

So, how was God's people to respond to such mercy & grace?

Well, their only appropriate stance was to be ashamed of their sinful ways, and to show their gratitude to God by repenting (turning away) from their sins!

So, there was no reason whatsoever for them to boast!

My brother & sister, please hear the words of God from Ezekiel 36:28-32...

***You will live in the land I gave your forefathers; you will be my people, and I will be your God. <sup>29</sup> I will save you from all your uncleanness. I will call for the grain and make it plentiful and will not bring famine upon you. <sup>30</sup> I will increase the fruit of the trees and the crops of the field, so that you will no longer suffer disgrace among the nations because of famine. <sup>31</sup> Then you will remember your evil ways and wicked deeds, and you will loathe yourselves for your sins and detestable practices. <sup>32</sup> I want you to know that I am not doing this for your sake, declares the Sovereign Lord. Be ashamed and disgraced for your conduct, O house of Israel!***<sup>2</sup>

Well, so far re point 1: “Is My Repentance the Grounds for My Pardon?”

Here's point 2...

### Free Grace in Christ

As we have just seen from God's Word, you & I should never think that repentance is the grounds of our pardon/salvation.

No, the grounds of our pardon are God's free grace in Jesus Christ!

Look, is that not what the Apostle Paul says in Rm 3:21-24, “***But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. <sup>22</sup> This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, <sup>23</sup> for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, <sup>24</sup> and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.*”<sup>3</sup>**

See?

It is not our new walk of life (a walk according to God's Law) that saves us! Rather, our salvation comes only through Jesus' blood!

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<sup>2</sup> [The Holy Bible: New International Version](#). (1984). (Eze 36:28–32). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan (Emphasis mine). Here is v.32 in Hebrew, אֵלֶּא לְמַעַן תִּשְׁמְרוּ אֶת-עַבְדֵי יְהוָה וְהַפְּלִמוּ מִדְּרֻכֵיכֶם<sup>a</sup> לֹא לְמַעַן תִּשְׁמְרוּ אֶת-עַבְדֵי יְהוָה נְאֻם אֲדֹנָי בְּיַת יִשְׂרָאֵל:

<sup>3</sup> [The Holy Bible: New International Version](#). (1984). (Ro 3:21–24). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan (Emphasis mine).

In other words, the forgiveness of our sins does not happen in accordance with the quality of our repentance, but as Paul says in Eph 1:7, “...*in accordance with the riches of God’s grace.*”<sup>4</sup>

Look, is it now a wonder that God, already through Hosea, said about His people, “*I will heal their waywardness and love them freely...?”<sup>5</sup>”<sup>6</sup>*

So far re point 2: “Free Grace in Christ.”

Here’s point 3...

### Not Without Repentance

My brother & sister, although our repentance is not the *grounds* on which God pardons us, we should nevertheless understand this truth: i.e. that there is no pardon *without* repentance!

Look, is it not the same as with our faith?

After all, God does not save us *because of* our faith in Jesus Christ (for our faith is after all a God-given gift to us). Granted, God saves us *through* faith, but not *because of* faith!

Yes, we are not saved *because of* faith. Yet, we are not saved *without* faith either!

Similarly, we are not saved *because of* our repentance, but we are not saved *without* repentance either!<sup>7</sup>

You see, the person in whose heart God’s Holy Spirit has worked faith in the saving power of Jesus Christ, is also the person who will, as an instant result, so loathe his sins that he will turn away from (yes, repent of) them! And we have seen an example of this, last week, when we looked at King David’s heartfelt repentance after God had confronted him with his sins (Ps 51)!

Thus, heartfelt repentance becomes proof of having been born from above (having been born again). And so, too, is ongoing (daily) heartfelt repentance proof of your and my close walk with Jesus, our Lord!

My brother & sister, it’s in this light that you & I should see our Lord Jesus’ words of Lk 13:3 & 5 and Paul’s words to the Athenians (in Acts 17:30-31).

- Here’s what our Lord said (in Lk 13:3 & 5): “*I tell you, no, but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish.*”<sup>8</sup>
- Here are Paul’s words (of Acts 17:30-31): “*In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent.*<sup>31</sup> *For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to all men by raising him from the dead.*”<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Eph 1:7, “*In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God’s grace...*”

<sup>5</sup> In Hebrew, *nəḏāvāh* (נְדָוָה), a Noun, Feminine, Singular, “voluntariness, free-will offering” used in an Adverbial sense, “*אֶהְבֶּם נְדָוָה* Ho 14:5 | (”) *will love them freely* (Brown, F., Driver, S. R., & Briggs, C. A. (1977). *Enhanced Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* (p. 621). Oxford: Clarendon Press).

<sup>6</sup> [The Holy Bible: New International Version](#). (1984). (Ho 14:4). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

<sup>7</sup> Yes, although the comparison between repentance and faith is not equal in all respects, to some degree it is. That’s why both Van Dixhoorn (ibid:198) and Sproul (ibid:151) make this comparison.

<sup>8</sup> [New American Standard Bible: 1995 update](#). (1995). (Lk 13:3). La Habra, CA: The Lockman Foundation.

<sup>9</sup> [The Holy Bible: New International Version](#). (1984). (Ac 17:30–31). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

Of course, by these words neither Jesus nor Paul meant to say that repentance *as a way to try and earn your own salvation* is the prerequisite (grounds) on which God will, in turn, give you forgiveness!

No! Forgiveness comes *by grace* through faith in Jesus Christ alone! But heartfelt repentance (a serious turning away from sin) is what the born-again person is moved to do!

Thus, as said, we are not saved *because of* our repentance, but we are not saved *without* repentance either.

So far re point 3: “Not without Repentance.”

Here’s the last point...

### The Sinner’s Comfort

My brother & sister, everyone needs to repent – also you & I. After all, does not Rm 5:12 say that *we all have sinned!*?<sup>10</sup>

Now, some people have argued that there are big sins and small sins; and that God would not give eternal punishment for small sins.

You see, such people have looked at the laws of Ancient Israel and have seen that the number of sins for which God’s Old-Testament Law demanded capital punishment was relatively few. So, such people have *come to the conclusion that God wouldn’t kill anybody for the minor peccadilloes (small sins) we commit.*<sup>11</sup>

But, look! The Apostle Paul did not say that the wages of *only really major* sin is death. No, he said (in Rm 6:23), “***For the wages of sin*** (sin without any specifications) ***is death...***”<sup>12</sup>

So, it’s in this regard that the Reformers took a strong stance against the Roman Catholic Church’s distinction between *venial*<sup>13</sup> (forgivable) sins and *mortal* sins (i.e. sins for which the believer had to do penance in order to earn back eternal life).

My brother & sister, if God’s Word had made a distinction between small sins and big sins, then why did God punish Adam & Eve so severely for a sin which many have described as a mere peccadillo (a small sin)? After all, Adam’s sin was not *murder*.

Neither did he *rape*. And Eve’s sin was not *adultery*! Yes, as my agnostic friend says, “The two of them *only ate a little bit of fruit* – granted, forbidden fruit!” “But why should they *and* their offspring have to receive the severe punishment of death – a punishment that far outweighs the crime?” (So far, my agnostic friend).

But here’s the point: every sin – even that relatively small sin of Adam & Eve – is, at its heart, a rebellion (an act of treason) against God!

See? See why our Lord Jesus once said (in Mt 12:36), “***I tell you that every careless word that people speak, they shall give an accounting for it in the day of judgment.***”<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Cf. Rm 5:12-13, “***Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned—*** <sup>13</sup> ***for sin indeed was in the world before the law was given, but sin is not counted where there is no law***” (Emphasis mine).

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Sproul (ibid:152)

<sup>12</sup> [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#). (2016). (Ro 6:23). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

<sup>13</sup> Middle English via Old French from late Latin *venialis*, from *venia* ‘forgiveness’ (<https://www.lexico.com/definition/venial> ).

<sup>14</sup> [New American Standard Bible: 1995 update](#). (1995). (Mt 12:36). La Habra, CA: The Lockman Foundation (Emphasis mine).

No wonder John Calvin said that every sin is a mortal sin – mortal in the sense that it deserves damnation!<sup>15</sup>

And so, my brother & sister, *which human being will, in his/her own strength, ever be able to leave the bar (the court bench) of heaven breathing a sigh of relief that God did not care about his/her little sins!? Yes, who can sincerely say that God's Word is excluding you & me in its sweeping (all-covering) declarations about mankind and man's sins!?*<sup>16</sup>

Yet, here is the sinner's comfort, i.e. that if he receives Jesus Christ as his Saviour and Lord, then no sin in the Christian's life is so serious that it will prevent him from receiving eternal life!

Yes, as the saying goes, "There is no sin so great that it can bring damnation upon those who truly repent."<sup>17</sup>

Granted, there *is* a sin for which there is no forgiveness – i.e. the sin against the Holy Spirit, which is the sin of saying that our Lord Jesus Christ did what He did in the power of the devil, i.e. that Jesus is in league with the devil. But no true follower of Christ will ever say such a thing, because, according to God's Word, Christ will never let those whom the Father has given Him be snatched out of His hand!<sup>18</sup> Yes, remember e.g. our Lord's words of Jn 6:44, "***No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him. And I will raise him up on the last day.***"<sup>19</sup> And remember His words of Jn 10:28, "***I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand.***"<sup>20</sup>

And so, as for the Christian, we can safely accept that he/she, by God's gracious preserve, will never commit the sin against the Holy Spirit; and that the saying is true which says that *there is no sin so great that it can bring damnation upon those who truly repent.*

My brother & sister, is that not in effect what God was saying through the prophet Isaiah (in Is 55:7) and through the Apostle Paul (in Rm 8:1)?

- Here are the words of Is 55:7...  
***"Let the wicked forsake his way  
And the unrighteous man his thoughts;  
And let him return to the Lord,  
And He will have compassion on him;  
And to our God,  
For He will abundantly<sup>21</sup> pardon."***<sup>22</sup>

- And here are God's words through the Apostle Paul (in Rm 8:1) ...

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<sup>15</sup> Calvin (apud Sproul, *ibid*:151).

Also cf. George P. Moseley's Internet article entitled, "Coffee with Calvin" at <http://www.coffeewithcalvin.com/2010/04/2857-2860-mortal-sin-vs-venial-sin.html>

<sup>16</sup> My adaptation of the well-said words of Van Dixhoorn (*ibid*:198)

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Van Dixhoorn (*ibid*:198)

<sup>18</sup> For more on the topic of sinning against the Holy Spirit, cf. Sproul (*ibid*:153-160)

<sup>19</sup> [\*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version\*](#). (2016). (Jn 6:44). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

<sup>20</sup> [\*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version\*](#). (2016). (Jn 10:28). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

<sup>21</sup> Literally, "...for He will make great to pardon/forgive" (Hebrew: כִּי-יַרְבֶּה לְסַלֵּחַ)

<sup>22</sup> [\*New American Standard Bible: 1995 update\*](#). (1995). (Is 55:7). La Habra, CA: The Lockman Foundation (Emphasis mine).

***“Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.”<sup>23</sup>***

Well, what comfort for the repentant sinner to know that, because God has given His precious Son over for him/her, God will now not reckon his/her sins (great or small) against him/her.

What wonderful news!

What comfort!

Look, is this not also why, already in the Old Testament (in Is 1:16, 18), we read, ***“Come now, and let us reason together,” Says the Lord, “Though your sins are as scarlet, They will be as white as snow; Though they are red like crimson, They will be like wool”***?<sup>24</sup>

Dear Wainui member (Dear visitor), is there some or other sin in your life? Have you done some bad/evil thing? Have you perhaps wounded others with your careless words? If so, then look up and see the grace of God in the person and work of Jesus Christ! Be moved in your heart by what He has done for you! And, having been moved, then *repent* (yes, make a 180° turn) from your sins.

If you do, then you will surely find a gracious redemption which is abundantly complete and free!

AMEN (2,278 words excluding footnotes)

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<sup>23</sup> [New American Standard Bible: 1995 update](#). (1995). (Ro 8:1). La Habra, CA: The Lockman Foundation (Emphasis mine).

<sup>24</sup> [New American Standard Bible: 1995 update](#). (1995). (Is 1:18). La Habra, CA: The Lockman Foundation.