

Instruction In The Westminster Standards

The Historic Standards of Presbyterian Denominations

○ STUDIES IN THE WESTMINSTER SHORTER CATECHISM

Q. 87. What is repentance unto life?

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, doth, with grief and hatred of his sin, turn from it unto God, with full purpose of, and endeavor after, new obedience.

Scripture References: Acts 11:18. Acts 2:37. Joel 2:13. II Cor. 7:11. Jer. 31:18, 19. Acts 26:18. Psalm 119:59.

Questions:

1. Why is repentance called a "saving grace"?

It is called a saving grace because it is inseparably a part of salvation and is worked in the heart of the sinner by the Holy Spirit through the instrument of the Word of God.

○ 2. Who is the subject of repentance?

The sinner is the subject of it for the person who is saved needs no repentance as is taught in Luke 15:7.

3. What is meant in this Question by "a true sense of sin?"

A true sense of sin is the recognition on the part of the sinner of the danger of his position along with the filthiness of his sin. He knows he is in danger because he knows his sinful condition is contrary to God's holiness and is offensive to God.

4. Why is the mercy of God connected with Christ?

The mercy of God is connected with Christ because God's mercy extends to the sinner through the obedience and satisfaction of Christ in His death on the Cross.

5. Is it possible for repentance to be separated from faith?

No, it is not possible to separate the two. These are both by the grace of God and therefore can be distinguished but can not be separated.

○ 6. What is this hatred of sin mentioned here?

It is both the loathing of sin and ourselves because of that sin (Isaiah 6:5).

7. What is this new obedience to which the repentant person turns?

It is the obedience as is found in the Gospel and proceeds from the new nature in man. The new man recognizes that he must have a new purpose, a new way of walking. He will not be perfect but he will be diligent in his endeavors to walk after righteousness.

TURNING FROM SIN UNTO GOD

True repentance causes a change to take place in a man. True repentance is a fruit of regeneration and it is a gift of the Spirit. When the word "Repent!" is used, many times the change of heart is neglected. But the Bible teaches over and over again that genuine repentance consists not only of a man being humiliated for his sins but also of change in the whole man.

Repentance causes a man to change his mind about a lot of things. Before a man is saved, he takes a worldly look at things, the old man is all that is present within him. After a man is saved he wants to please God, give Jesus Christ the pre-eminence in his life. Further, it causes a man to change his attitude toward sin. Sin no longer is a delight to him as it was before he knew Christ. Sin now becomes something for which he sorrows. He prays daily, "Lord, teach me more and more to hate sin in my life." Further, repentance causes a man's heart to change and this spreads out into his whole life. Note the change that took place in Paul. His conversion was not simply that his sins were forgiven but it meant his life changed completely. He turned around in his way of living. Paul knew full well that he had to break off with sin and turn to the Lord. He knew he would never be the same again.

"A contrite and a broken heart, O God, thou wilt not despise" states the Psalmist in Psalm 41:17. But the Psalmist also stated, "I hate every false way" in Psalm 119:104. In these two verses the two parts to repentance are noted. The heart is broken before the Lord and the heart begins to hate sin. A divorce with the life of the world takes place and will continue throughout life. In the wonderful hymn book compiled by Ira D. Sankey are found these words that so wonderfully tell the story of genuine repentance:

"I come, O blessed Lord, to Thee I come today;
I am no longer satisfied to stay away.
I will not wait until my life like Thine shall grow;
I'll come at once—I know I've sinned: I'll tell Thee so.
Help me that I forget myself in loving Thee;
And let Thine image on my heart reflected be."

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