

What We Believe: Knowing and Loving our Doctrines
 Adult Sunday Studies 2023-24
 23 | Saving Faith and Repentance

HOW REDEMPTION IS APPLIED: SAVING FAITH & REPENTANCE

Review: From eternal election to temporal effectual calling; aka, “*he chose us in him before the foundation of the world*” (Eph. 1.4) and “*caused us to be born again*” (1Peter 1.3).

WLC 66 - “The union which the elect have with Christ is the work of God's grace, whereby they are spiritually and mystically, yet really and inseparably, joined to Christ as their head and husband; which is done in their effectual calling.” (Eph 1:22; 1 Cor 6:17; John 10:28; Eph 5:23,30; John 15:5; Eph 3:17)

Union with Christ: WLC 69 - “The communion in grace which the members of the invisible church have with Christ, is their partaking of the virtue of his mediation, in their justification, adoption, sanctification, and whatever else, in this life, manifests their union with him.”

And what do regenerate, born again sinners united to Christ do? They repent and believe!

Saving Faith

Gal. 2.15-21 - “15 *We ourselves are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners; 16 yet we know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, so we also have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law, because by works of the law no one will be justified. 17 But if, in our endeavor to be justified in Christ, we too were found to be sinners, is Christ then a servant of sin? Certainly not! 18 For if I rebuild what I tore down, I prove myself to be a transgressor. 19 For through the law I died to the law, so that I might live to God. 20 I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. 21 I do not nullify the grace of God, for if righteousness were through the law, then Christ died for no purpose.*” [cf. Rom. 3.21-26; Acts 15.11]

- We'll get to what “being justified” means next week (think: forgiven and made righteous), but **notice here the importance of faith.**

- What does faith “do” according to this passage? How are we justified through faith? What happens to us through faith?
- Why doesn't being justified through faith make me a transgressor of the law or a servant of sin?
 - Notice how important union with Christ is!

WCF 14.1 - The grace of faith, whereby the elect are **enabled to believe** to the saving of their souls, is the work of the Spirit of Christ in their hearts, and is ordinarily wrought by the ministry of the Word, by which also, and by the administration of the sacraments, and prayer, it is **increased and strengthened**.

14.2 - By this faith, a Christian believeth to be true whatsoever is revealed in the Word, for the authority of God himself speaking therein; and acteth differently upon that which each particular passage thereof containeth; yielding obedience to the commands, trembling at the threatenings, and embracing the promises of God for this life, and that which is to come. But the principal acts of saving faith are **accepting, receiving, and resting upon Christ alone** for justification, sanctification, and eternal life, by virtue of the covenant of grace.

- WLC 72 uses “assents” as a synonym for “accepts”. If assenting or accepting the truth is not enough, why not? And what is enough?
 - Why is “receiving and resting upon Christ” essential as well?
 - And what is notably *not* added?

Technically we are saved *through* faith, not *by* faith. Why?

Repentance unto Life

Notice “repentance” as often a synonym of “belief”.

- Jesus first public words - *“The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.”* (Mark 1.15)
- Jesus after the resurrection - *“Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that **repentance for the forgiveness of sins** should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem.”* (Luke 24.46-7)
- Peter at Pentecost, in response to the crowds asking, “What shall we do?” - *“Peter said to them, “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus*

Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.” (Acts 2.38)

WCF 15.1 - Repentance unto life is an **evangelical grace**, the doctrine whereof is to be preached by every minister of the gospel, as well as that of faith in Christ.

15.2 - By it, a sinner, out of the sight and sense not only of the danger, but also of the **filthiness and odiousness of his sins**, as contrary to the holy nature, and righteous law of God; and **upon the apprehension of his mercy in Christ** to such as are penitent, so grieves for, and hates his sins, as to turn from them all unto God, purposing and endeavoring to walk with him in all the ways of his commandments.

- Notice that seeing the mercy in Christ is a motivation to repent
- We’re not just aware of the danger (leading us to Hell, God’s displeasure, negative consequences, etc.) of sin, but of what else?
- *There’s no such thing as saving faith without repentance - why?*
 - Notice WLC 72 on “Justifying Faith” includes repentance in its description
 - “Justifying faith is a saving grace, wrought in the heart of a sinner by the Spirit and Word of God, whereby he, being convinced of his sin and misery, and of the disability in himself and all other creatures to recover him out of his lost condition, not only assenteth to the truth of the promise of the gospel, but receiveth and resteth upon Christ and his righteousness, therein held forth, for pardon of sin, and for the accepting and accounting of his person righteous in the sight of God for salvation.”

Issues & Controversies with Repentance and Faith

1. **Don’t make it a work or prerequisite for faith** - “WCF 15.3 - Although repentance be not to be rested in, as any satisfaction for sin, or any cause of the pardon thereof, which is the act of God’s free grace in Christ; yet it is of such necessity to all sinners, that none may expect pardon without it.”
 1. “I do not offer Christ to you on the grounds that you have repented. Indeed I offer him to men and women who are dead in their trespasses and sins. This gospel offer of Jesus Christ himself is for you, whoever and whatever you are.” - Thomas Boston
 2. To ask someone to repent before she has faith is to ask her to do the impossible.

3. ***Christ died for you because God loves you!*** NOT God loves you because Christ died for you. Otherwise the gospel is distorted, our relationship to the Father is as to an unwilling God, and we're never quite sure if the Father truly loves us, remaining always suspicious. "How can the elder brother be comfortable at a party when he still wonders if his once-prodigal brother has been sorry enough for his sin and sufficiently ashamed of his faults?" - Sinclair Ferguson
 4. What would be the difference between a legal / religious repentance and a gospel repentance? 2Cor. 7.8-11 - *"For even if I made you grieve with my letter, I do not regret it—though I did regret it, for I see that that letter grieved you, though only for a while. 9 As it is, I rejoice, not because you were grieved, but because you were grieved into repenting. For you felt a godly grief, so that you suffered no loss through us. 10 For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret, whereas worldly grief produces death. 11 For see what earnestness this godly grief has produced in you"*
2. **Saving faith does NOT equal perfection** - An indication of the absence of saving faith is NOT sin by itself, but *unrepentant* sin. Why?
 1. We're not in heaven yet!
 2. Note WCF 18.4 on Assurance - "IV. True believers may have the assurance of their salvation divers ways shaken, diminished, and intermitted; as, by negligence in preserving of it, by falling into some special sin which woundeth the conscience and grieveth the Spirit; by some sudden or vehement temptation, by God's withdrawing the light of his countenance, and suffering even such as fear him to walk in darkness and to have no light: yet are they never utterly destitute of that seed of God, and life of faith, that love of Christ and the brethren, that sincerity of heart, and conscience of duty, out of which, by the operation of the Spirit, this assurance may, in due time, be revived; and by the which, in the meantime, they are supported from utter despair."
 3. **Faith w/o Repentance?** What could be the danger of distancing repentance from faith? Or from distancing faith from repentance?
 1. Consider the parable of the sower (Mark 4)
 4. **General Faith vs. Saving Faith** - There's a lot of things we could have "faith" in! What could be signs of spurious conversions?