

The Theology of the Westminster Standards WCF 15.1–2 – The Source and Nature of Repentance

“When they heard these things they fell silent. And they glorified God, saying, ‘Then to the Gentiles also God has granted repentance that leads to life.’” – Acts 11:18

“Q. 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.” (WSC 87)

I. Introduction: Faith and Repentance

A. Two sides of the same coin, two aspects of the same “turning”

1. **Isa 55:7** – “[L]et the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; let him return to the Lord, that he may have compassion on him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.”
2. **Acts 20:21–22** – “I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and teaching you in public and from house to house, ²¹ testifying both to Jews and to Greeks of repentance toward God and of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.”

II. The Source of Repentance, and the Necessity of Preaching it (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. (WCF 15.1)

A. Repentance must be given by God (“an evangelical grace”).

1. **2 Tim 2:24–26** – “And the Lord’s servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil, ²⁵ correcting his opponents with gentleness. God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth, ²⁶ and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, after being captured by him to do his will.”
2. What does the prophet Zechariah say will prompt repentance among God’s people? What other ways does God lead believers to repent of sin (hint: see Ezek 18:30–32)
 - a. **Zech 12:10** – “And I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a Spirit of grace and pleas for mercy, so that, when they look on me, on him whom they have pierced, they shall mourn for him, as one mourns for an only child, and weep bitterly over him, as one weeps over a firstborn.”

B. Repentance must be preached, specifically and consistently.

1. Jesus says that the *preaching* of repentance is part of his fulfillment of all of the Old Testament.
 - a. **Luke 24:45–47** – “Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, ⁴⁶ and said to them, ‘Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, ⁴⁷ and that repentance for the forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem.’”

2. Why do you think the Westminster Assembly theologians made this point about preaching repentance?
 - a. **Acts 20:30–31** – *“The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent,³¹ because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead.”*

III. The Nature of Repentance

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. (WCF 15.2)

- A. What additional component of repentance does WCF 15.2 introduce? Why is this important?

“A sense of the amazing goodness of God to us in the gift of his Son, and of our ungrateful requital of it [i.e., response to it], is the most powerful means of bringing the soul to genuine repentance for sin as committed against God.” – A. A. Hodge

- B. What’s the difference between repenting of our sin and “repenting” over the consequences of our sin? How can you tell the difference?
- C. How should we understand the biblical need to “bear fruit in keeping with repentance” (Matt 3:8) with the fact that we still carry a sinful heart until Christ returns?

“When our Lord and Master Jesus Christ said ‘Repent,’ he intended that the entire life of believers should be repentance.” – Martin Luther, 95 Theses

“If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. ⁹ If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” – 1 John 1:8–9