

The Theology of the Westminster Standards WCF 15.3–4 – The Necessity 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. Review

A. The source and importance of repentance

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)

1. **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. **Acts 17:30–31** – *“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.”*

B. 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)

1. God must move us to repent by the Holy Spirit, but he also leads us to repent by causing us to consider the cost of sin (Zech 12:10), the danger of sin (Ezek 18:30), the magnitude of sin (Rom 3:20, 7:13), the personal character of sin (Ps 51:4), the filthiness of sin (Is 30:22), and the mercy of Christ in the face of sin (Prov 28:13).

II. The Necessity of Repentance it (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. (WCF 15.3)

- A. God does not forgive us because he considers our repentance as a work that deserves a reward.
 - 1. Can you detect any ways that you slip into a mindset of penance—of “paying for” your own sins through religious acts rather than receiving God’s forgiveness as a gift?

- B. God will not forgive us unless we receive his “free grace in Christ” by repenting of our sin and believing in His substitutionary provision for us.
 - 1. How might the parallel of faith as a necessity for salvation help us to understand the necessity of repentance in salvation?
 - 2. What is it about broader American culture that predisposes us to minimize or ignore the importance of repentance?
 - a. *“There were some present at that very time who told him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. ² And he answered them, “Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans, because they suffered in this way? ³ No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish.⁴ Or those eighteen on whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them: do you think that they were worse offenders than all the others who lived in Jerusalem? ⁵ No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish.” (Luke 13:1–5)*

III. The Warning and Warrant of Repentance (WCF 15.4)

As there is no sin so small, but it deserves damnation; so there is no sin so great, that it can bring damnation upon those who truly repent. (WCF 15.4)

- A. Sometimes we try to comfort ourselves by making our sin look smaller than it is. What does Scripture say about the impact of sin?

- B. In the face of our sin, what comfort does Scripture offer us? What phrases particularly comfort you?

“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