

The Theology of the Westminster Standards
WCF 15.5–6 – The Practice 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 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.”*

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)

C. The necessity of repentance

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)

D. The warning and comfort of repentance

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)

II. The Practice of Repentance

A. General vs. specific repentance

Men ought not to content themselves with a general repentance, but it is every man's duty to endeavor to repent of his particular sins, particularly. (WCF 15.5)

1. **1 Tim 1:12–14** – *“I thank him who has given me strength, Christ Jesus our Lord, because he judged me faithful, appointing me to his service,¹³ though formerly I was a blasphemer, persecutor, and insolent opponent. But I received mercy because I had acted ignorantly in unbelief,¹⁴ and the grace of our Lord overflowed for me with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus.”*
2. How Paul model godly transparency about his past sins without glorifying or overly dwelling on his sin?
3. When do you think it might be unhelpful to recall all the details of a particular sin? When do you think it might be helpful to include the details?
 - a. **Ps 34:3, 5** – *“For when I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long ... I acknowledged my sin to you, and I did not cover my iniquity; I said, ‘I will confess my transgressions to the Lord,’ and you forgave the iniquity of my sin.”*

“[I]t was only when the payment that divine justice regarded as sufficient to cover the sinner's debt was made that atonement was actually effected. The beautiful atonement cover on its own was not sufficient; it had to be sprinkled with the blood of the sacrifice.” – John L. Mackay

- b. **Prov 28:13** – *“Whoever conceals his transgressions will not prosper, but he who confesses and forsakes them will obtain mercy.”*

B. Public vs. private repentance

As every man is bound to make private confession of his sins to God, praying for the pardon thereof; upon which, and the forsaking of them, he shall find mercy; so, he that scandalizeth his brother, or the church of Christ, ought to be willing, by a private or public confession, and sorrow for his sin, to declare his repentance to those that are offended, who are thereupon to be reconciled to him, and in love to receive him. (WCF 15.6)

1. What have you found to be the greatest fuel for repentance and confession of sin? Why?
2. When someone repents of sin to us, what is our duty before God? How do we express this? Consider 2 Corinthians 2:7–8. What would it look like for you to improve in this?