

Lesson 38: Questions 92 and 93

92-93

In Lesson 37, we saw that faith in Jesus Christ is the saving grace by which we receive and rest upon Him alone for salvation. Which raises an immediate question: what happens when a sinner truly comes to Christ? Salvation is by faith alone, but saving faith is never alone. Those who receive Christ also turn from sin unto God.

This turning is repentance unto life. Faith and repentance are distinct but inseparable graces. Faith receives Christ and rests upon His righteousness; repentance turns from sin because the sinner has begun to see both the evil of sin and the mercy of God in Christ. Repentance does not purchase forgiveness or prepare us to deserve Christ. It is part of God's gracious work in those whom He brings to Christ.

Question 92: What is repentance unto life?

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 endeavour after new obedience.

FIRST, repentance unto life is a saving grace. It belongs to God's saving work and is itself His gracious gift. When the Jewish believers heard how God had brought Gentiles to faith in Christ, they glorified God because He had granted them repentance leading to life ([Acts 11:18](#)). They did not praise the Gentiles for choosing God. They praised God for granting repentance.

Calling repentance a saving grace does not mean that repentance pays for sin. Christ alone has made satisfaction for sin, and His righteousness alone is the ground of our acceptance with God. Repentance is saving because it belongs to the salvation God gives in Christ. It is the Spirit-wrought turning that accompanies faith and leads in the way of life.

This protects us from two opposite errors.

1. We must not make repentance a work by which we earn pardon.
2. But neither may we separate repentance from salvation.

God does not forgive His people because their repentance is sufficiently intense or complete. He forgives them for Christ's sake, and the grace that unites them to Christ also begins to turn them from the sins for which Christ died.

Peter's preaching at Pentecost demonstrates this relationship. His hearers were confronted with their guilt concerning Jesus and asked what they should do. Peter did not direct them toward despair, self-punishment, or an attempt to compensate for their sin. He called them to repent in relation to Jesus Christ and to identify publicly with Him.

Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?" And 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. For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself." (Acts 2:37-39, ESV)

Their conviction was not the end of repentance, but it was an essential beginning. They could no longer regard their actions, or Jesus Himself, as they had before. Yet Peter's answer also directed them toward the promise of forgiveness and the gift of the Holy Spirit. Biblical repentance arises where guilt is exposed and mercy in Christ is proclaimed.

SECOND, repentance begins when a believer receives “a true sense of his sin”. A “true sense” of sin is more than embarrassment, fear of consequences, or disappointment in ourselves. It is a recognition that sin is rebellion against God, opposition to His holy character, and a violation of His righteous law. It sees particular sins honestly rather than hiding them beneath vague admissions that everyone makes mistakes.

God promised that when He cleansed and renewed His people, they would remember their evil ways and loathe themselves for their sins:

Then you will remember your evil ways, and your deeds that were not good, and you will loathe yourselves for your iniquities and your abominations. (Ezekiel 36:31, ESV)

This recognition does not arise because grace has failed, but because grace has succeeded and opened their eyes. The renewed heart begins to judge sin according to God’s judgment rather than excusing it according to personal desire.

At the same time, repentance includes an “apprehension of the mercy of God in Christ”. Here, “apprehension” means a believing perception or grasp. The repentant sinner begins to understand that the God against Whom he has sinned is merciful to sinners through Christ. Repentance therefore looks honestly at sin without looking away from the Savior.

This is why repentance is neither presumption nor despair. Presumption wants mercy without turning from sin. Despair sees sin but refuses to believe that God receives sinners through Christ. Repentance rejects both errors. It confesses the evil of sin while approaching God on the ground of His mercy. The prophets repeatedly joined God’s call to return with His gracious promise to receive and restore.

*“Return, O faithless sons; I will heal your faithlessness.”
“Behold, we come to you, for you are the LORD our God.” (Jeremiah 3:22, ESV)*

I have heard Ephraim grieving, ‘You have disciplined me, and I was disciplined, like an untrained calf; bring me back that I may be restored, for you are the LORD my God. For after I had turned away, I relented, and after I was instructed, I struck my thigh; I was ashamed, and I was confounded, because I bore the disgrace of my youth.’ (Jeremiah 31:18-19, ESV)

God’s gracious initiative does not eliminate the sinner’s repentance. It produces it. The sinner truly turns, mourns, and seeks God because God has begun His restoring work.

THIRD, repentance includes “grief and hatred of his sin”. Christian grief is not measured merely by tears, temperament, or outward intensity. Some people express sorrow readily, while others do so quietly. The essential issue is whether we are grieved by sin as sin and increasingly hate what dishonors God.

Paul distinguishes godly grief from the sorrow of the world. Godly grief produces repentance and bears fruit in earnestness, a desire to address the wrong, and a serious response to sin:

For see what earnestness this godly grief has produced in you, but also what eagerness to clear yourselves, what indignation, what fear, what longing, what zeal, what punishment! At every point you have proved yourselves innocent in the matter. (2 Corinthians 7:11, ESV)

Worldly grief may hate exposure, damaged reputation, broken relationships, or painful consequences while still loving the sin itself. Godly grief wants deliverance not only from sin’s consequences but also from sin’s guilt, corruption, and mastery.

Hatred for sin must not become hatred for ourselves as though God’s grace offered no hope. The believer’s hatred is directed toward the sin that contradicts God’s holiness and harms communion with Him. That hatred sends us back to Christ for cleansing and into renewed obedience by the Spirit. The clearer our apprehension of God’s mercy in Christ becomes, the less reason we have to defend, conceal, or cherish our sin.

FOURTH, repentance includes a “turn from [sin] unto God”. Repentance is more than feeling differently about the past. It involves a change of direction. The sinner turns away from rebellion and returns to the God against Whom he has rebelled.

Through Joel, God calls His people to return to Him with all their heart:

“Yet even now,” declares the LORD, “return to me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning;” (Joel 2:12, ESV)

The accompanying fasting, weeping, and mourning are meaningful only as expressions of a heart returning to God. Repentance is not satisfied with outward displays. It seeks God Himself.

This turning also means that repentance cannot be reduced to self-improvement. A person may abandon one destructive habit because it has become inconvenient, replace a socially unacceptable sin with a respectable one, or adopt better discipline without returning to God. Biblical repentance turns from sin **unto God**. Its aim is restored fellowship with Him, submission to His authority, and glad obedience to His will.

FIFTH, repentance proceeds “with full purpose of and endeavor after new obedience.” The catechism does not say that the repentant sinner immediately attains perfect obedience. We discussed last week how we cannot and should not expect sinless perfection in this life. A “full purpose” is a sincere resolve to obey God without protecting a favored category of sin. “Endeavor” describes the real effort that follows that resolve. Grace does not make effort unnecessary; grace changes its source, direction, and purpose.

Isaiah gives concrete expression to this new obedience.

Wash yourselves; make yourselves clean; remove the evil of your deeds from before my eyes; cease to do evil, learn to do good; seek justice, correct oppression; bring justice to the fatherless, plead the widow's cause. (Isaiah 1:16-17, ESV)

This new obedience is not the **root** but the **fruit** of restoration with God. Nor is it limited to dramatic moments of conversion. The Christian life includes continuing repentance because believers still contend with remaining sin. We do not repeatedly lay a new foundation for our justification; we repeatedly return to the God Who has received us in Christ.

Question 93: What are the ordinary means of grace?

- Q. What are the outward means whereby Christ communicateth to us the benefits of redemption?
- A. The outward and ordinary means whereby Christ communicateth to us the benefits of redemption are His ordinances, especially the word, baptism, the Lord's supper, and prayer; all which means are made effectual to the elect for salvation.

Repentance directs us toward God, but God has not told us to seek Him through methods of our own invention. Christ has given His church ordinances through which He ordinarily nourishes faith, deepens repentance, strengthens assurance, and preserves His people in the way of salvation.

An **ordinance** is a practice instituted and commanded (ordained) by Christ for His people. These means belong to Him. Their authority and usefulness do not arise from church tradition, human creativity, emotional power, or personal preference. Because Christ appointed them, the church must neither neglect them nor replace them with supposedly more impressive alternatives.

They are also **ordinary** means. This does not mean that they are dull, powerless, or merely customary. It means that they are the **regular** means Christ has appointed for the life of His church. We should not despise God's ordinary provision while waiting for an extraordinary experience. Christ **ordinarily** forms mature Christians through repeated exposure to His Word, participation in the worship of His church, remembrance of His promises, and dependence upon Him in prayer.

The catechism says that Christ “communicateth to us the benefits of redemption”. To communicate here means to impart, convey, or bring into our experience what Christ has purchased. Christ alone accomplished redemption through His obedient life, sacrificial death, and victorious resurrection. His ordinances do not add to that finished work. Through them, Christ applies the benefits of His redemption to His people, confirms His promises to them, and nourishes their faith.

FIRST, Christ has appointed these means by His own authority. In the Great Commission, the risen Lord sends His church to make disciples, baptize them, and teach them to observe all that He commanded. He joins these responsibilities to the promise of His abiding presence.

“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” (Matthew 28:19-20, ESV)

SECOND, the first church received these means with steadfast regularity.

And they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. (Acts 2:42, ESV)

The apostles’ teaching gave the church the authoritative Word concerning Christ. The breaking of bread included the shared life of the church and, in this context, its remembrance of Christ at His table. The prayers expressed the congregation’s dependence upon God. These practices were not occasional supplements for unusually devoted Christians. The believers devoted themselves to them. Each of these will be addressed in depth in future lessons, but the essential point here is that baptism, the Lord’s Supper, and prayer belonged to the apostolic pattern and continue throughout the life of the Church in This Age.

THIRD, Christ makes these means effectual by His Spirit. The ordinances are neither empty rituals nor automatic mechanisms. Their power does not reside in water, bread, a cup, the physical sound of preaching, or the mere act of speaking a prayer. Their effectiveness rests upon Christ, Who works through His Spirit according to His Word.

Yet we must not respond by treating the ordinances as bare symbols or unnecessary forms. Christ truly uses what He has appointed. Through the Word, He calls sinners and nourishes believers in the truth. Through baptism and the Lord’s Supper, He presents and confirms the gospel through visible signs. Through prayer, He draws His people into conscious dependence upon God and grants what accords with His will. The catechism says that these means are made effectual “to the elect for salvation.” That wording places our confidence in God’s sovereign grace rather than in human performance. The ordinances do not create God’s electing purpose, and ministers do not control the Spirit. Christ faithfully applies His redemption to those whom the Father has given Him.

“Salvation” here should not be restricted to the first moment of conversion. Rather, it is a holistic use of the term, which includes God’s continuing work of sanctifying, preserving, assuring, and maturing His people until they enter glory. The Word that first brings the message of Christ continues to correct and feed us. Prayer that expresses our first cry for mercy continues throughout the Christian life. Baptism marks the believer’s entrance into the visible community of disciples. The Lord’s Supper continues to nourish the church’s faith and hope.

The life of the Jerusalem church illustrates this continuing pattern.

And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved. (Acts 2:46-47, ESV)

These verses portray a glad, worshiping, shared life rather than isolated religious experiences. At the same time, the growth of the church is attributed to the Lord. Their devotion was real, but the saving effect did not arise from their religious efficiency. The Lord Himself added those who were being saved.

The word ordinary also guards against two practical errors.

FIRST: neglect. Because the means do not operate mechanically, we might wrongly conclude that regular participation does not matter. But Christ commands and uses these means. Deliberately neglecting the Word, baptism, the Lord's Supper, prayer, or the gathered church is not a mark of spiritual maturity.

SECOND: superstition. We may participate outwardly while trusting the act itself. Attendance does not replace faith. Baptism does not excuse unbelief. Receiving the Supper does not "compensate" for unrepentant sin. Repeating prayers does not place God in our debt. The ordinances direct us to Christ and benefit us only through His gracious working.

Conclusion

Questions 92 and 93 show how God graciously turns sinners unto Himself and ordinarily communicates to His people the benefits Christ has purchased.

92. THE GRACE OF REPENTANCE: Repentance unto life is not mere regret, self-improvement, or payment for sin. It is a saving grace by which a sinner, seeing both the evil of his sin and the mercy of God in Christ, turns from sin unto God and pursues new obedience.
93. THE MEANS OF GRACE: Christ ordinarily communicates the benefits of redemption through His appointed ordinances, especially the Word, baptism, the Lord's Supper, and prayer. These means are neither empty rituals nor automatic mechanisms. Christ makes them effectual to the elect for salvation by His Spirit.

Take this with you in three ways.

- FIRST, repent with hope.
Do not conceal your sin, excuse it, or despair because of it.
Look honestly at your sin while apprehending the mercy of God in Christ.
- SECOND, pursue concrete new obedience.
Do not merely cease evil; learn to do good in the specific duties God has set before you.
Your obedience will be imperfect in this life, but pursue it sincerely; make no peace with sin.
- THIRD, diligently receive the means Christ has appointed.
Hear His Word.
Obey Him in baptism.
Participate faithfully in the Lord's Supper.
Call upon Him in prayer.
Receive these ordinances with faith, gratitude, expectancy, and regularity.

You do not repent to purchase mercy.

You repent because God is merciful in Christ.

You do not use the ordinances to manufacture grace.

You receive them because Christ has appointed them for your good.

Christ is the mercy apprehended through repentance.

Christ is the Lord Who appoints the ordinances.

Christ, by His Spirit, makes them effectual for salvation.

Turn from sin unto God.

Pursue new obedience.

Receive the gifts of Christ.