

Repentance unto Life

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[0 : 00] Zechariah chapter 12, we read at verse 10, And I will pour upon the house of David and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem the spirit of grace and of supplications, and they shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for him as one that is in bitterness for his firstborn.

It is some time since we last looked at the sections of the headings in the Confession of Faith, and we had dealt with the first 14 chapters in two separate sections.

And so we'll begin again this Lord's Day morning to look at the next section, that will under normal circumstances be chapters 15 to 21, or the headings, the biblical basis behind these headings of these chapters, and in each case we will look in each chapter, and we will take a biblical basis and see how this applies to the chapter heading and to the subject matter that we may learn a little more each week of the Confession of Faith that our branch of the church professes as its subordinate standard, that is, subordinate only to the Word of God, which is the ultimate standard of all faith and life.

And this morning we look then at the biblical content in chapter 15 of the Confession of Faith, which is entitled, Of Repentance Unto Life.

Of Repentance Unto Life. Now, we see here in the first that we read in Zechariah that there is great mourning in the people of Judah because they look upon the one whom they have pierced.

[1 : 48] And inasmuch as this is the Lord inspiring the prophets to speak of it, so write it down, it is as though it is coming from the mouth of the Lord himself, they will look upon me, i.e. the Lord, whom they have pierced.

And at the time when this was given and written, it would have been beyond anyone's comprehension to recognize how could God possibly be pierced or be suffering on behalf of his people.

And yet, of course, now with hindsight and with the New Testament and the Gospel, we know the truth of how this is. And we think of how prior to our own Confession of Faith, the original Scott's Confession put it in this way concerning the coming together of the Godhead and the manhood in the person of Jesus Christ.

It says, It says, Because God became man and died in his human body upon the cross, that we have the price of sin paid for all who will believe and trust in him.

And as we focus upon that, they will look upon me whom they have pierced. It becomes personal. It's not just a case of, Oh, we have to be sorry for our sins.

[3 : 31] And yes, Well, we should recognize what we've done. And say we're sorry to the Lord. When we look to the cross, when we look to the one whom we have pierced by our own sin, it becomes personal.

We see something of the cost of what we ourselves do. It is as though, if, say, a philandering man is contemplating an affair, and he thinks in terms of, Oh, yes, it will be exciting and new and different, and so much more exciting than my own life at home with my family.

But then if he stops to think, not of the excitement that he anticipates, but of the cost, the personal cost, to his own wife, when it comes out, as these things always do, to his children, and what they will think of him, to the relationship at home, to the future of the family, to the potential breaking up, and so on, and the damage with his work colleagues, and the ramifications throughout the whole of his life, when he begins to look at the people that will be affected by what initially seems such a maybe exciting and deliciously sinful prospect, and maybe makes him feel more abuzz, and young again, and so on, when he begins to consider the cost, personally of his sin, then suddenly it doesn't look so attractive.

And this is one reason why we look upon this verse today. When we think in terms of our sin in general, and our sins in particular, there is a cost, not only to us in the doing of them, because inevitably there is backlash, inevitably there are consequences in our lives, of the sins that we commit, but also, even if we think our sins are such that they are personal, just to ourselves, they are secret sins, nobody sees them, nobody knows about them, yet we have sinned against God in doing them.

Remember what David says in Psalm 51, verse 4, against thee, thee only have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight, that thou mightest be justified when thou speakest, and be clear when thou judgest.

[5 : 52] When we commit sin, yes, we usually are sinning against somebody else as well. And certainly in the case that David is speaking of there, in the situation with Bathsheba, and then the killing of Uriah, and the deception that followed from that, and then the death of the child that followed upon that, so many people were hurt by it, so many people were damaged by it.

Is it true to say it's only against God that he sinned, but when he sinned against all these other people again as well, but it is chiefly, primarily, ultimately, against the Lord that he has sinned.

And it is because of this, that there is this need for personal repentance unto life. Now, repentance is bound up inextricably with faith.

We looked with the Jones address about believing. If we believe in the Lord, in a pure and holy and sinless God, in one who has paid our price upon the cross, we cannot help as we believe in him, but recognize our own state by contrast.

And it doesn't mean that we need to have gone out and been murderers and drug dealers and all manner of evil crime related things. We just look at our own life. By comparison with this, by comparison with his purity and his divine goodness and holiness, and we can't but recognize how sinful we are.

[7 : 26] When we come to faith, then it becomes synonymous with repentance. It must do. Coming to faith must involve either beforehand, as we repent of our sins, we loathe and detest them and hate them, and then we find relief in Christ, or else we might think we're pretty good beforehand, which most worldlings probably do.

They think they're good beforehand. They finally encounter Christ. They put their faith in him, and they see how sinful they are. We have, for example, the situation in the Acts of the Apostles, when after Peter is brought to the house of Cornelius, the Gentile, the Roman centurion, and all his followers there, his kinsmen there, and they preach the gospel to them, and then we read of how, that as Peter spake, while Peter yet speak these words, the Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the word.

And they of the circumcision which believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because that on the Gentiles also was poured out the gift of the Holy Ghost. For they heard them speak with tongues and magnify God.

Then answered Peter, Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized, which have received the Holy Ghost as well as we? And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord, then pray to him to tarry certain days.

But the Jewish believers back in Judea weren't entirely convinced of this, so they said to Peter, You shouldn't have been going into these Gentiles. They should have become Jews first. And then he told them what had happened, how he'd been brought to them through the Lord's message, and that he had gone and proclaimed the gospel to them.

[9 : 07] They had repented, or rather they had believed the gospel, and their spirit was poured out upon them. And then the apostles and the others, when they were told this, when they heard these things, they held their peace and glorified God, saying, Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life.

Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life. Now, Peter's account in chapter 10 of Acts, with Cornelius and the Romans that are there, it doesn't actually explicitly mention them saying, Oh yes, we do repent of our sins.

Oh yes, we're terribly bad. We know how awful we are. But rather, they have received the Holy Ghost. They have been converted. And the apostles back in Jerusalem, they recognize that conversion and repentance will be not one and the same thing, but they'll be two sides of the same coin.

That you cannot be truly converted without there being true repentance. And this is why they say to the Gentiles also, hath God to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life.

Now, if we return a few more pages of the Acts of the Apostles, we'd see in chapter 20, that Paul says to the Ephesian elders, when he gathers with them, I kept back nothing from you, what was profitable unto you, but I've showed you and I've taught you publicly and from house to house, testifying both to the Jews and also to the Greeks, repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ.

[10 : 42] These two, you see how they're bound up together. Repentance and faith. Repentance and faith. Now, our confession of faith describes repentance unto life as an evangelical grace.

In other words, evangelical means bound up with the evangel, the good news. It is good news. It is a grace, a gift of good news. Remember what our verse says in Zechariah.

I will pour upon the house of David and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem the spirit of grace of free gift and of supplications, that is, pleading with the Lord, of pray, pleading to the Lord.

And they shall look upon thee whom they have pierced and they shall mourn for him as one mourner for his only son. and shall be in bitterness for him as one that is in bitterness for his firstborn.

What is the bitterness from? Not from the forgiveness of sin. The bitterness is for the cost. The bitterness is for what our sins have brought our Lord to.

[11 : 45] We look to the cross and we see the price of our sin. Paul, of course, reminds us in Romans 6, the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Christ Jesus our Lord.

But that verse isn't in isolation. But rather it says, if we go back to verse 20 of chapter 6 in Romans, when you were the servants of sin, you were free from righteousness.

Great, you could do what you like, supposedly. What fruit then had ye in those things whereof you were now ashamed. For the end of those things is death. In other words, when you lived without Christ, you lived and you did what you liked, you sinned your little heart out and you did what you thought you wanted to do.

Well, what benefit did it ever give you? What benefit did you ever receive from it, is what he was saying. But now when you encounter Christ, but now being made free from sin and become servants to God, you have your fruit unto holiness and the end or final objective, everlasting life.

For the wages of sin is death. But the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. We're back to this gift, free gift, grace. I'll pour it upon them in the spirit of grace and of supplication.

[13 : 03] But wages, that's what you get in a contract. You do a job, you get your pay. And your master, your employer, doesn't owe you a thing. He pays your wages, he doesn't owe you anymore.

He doesn't have to be nice to you. He doesn't have to take you home and look after you. He doesn't have to provide anything else for you. If he has fulfilled what's in the contract, if there was anything additional, whether it was health insurance or anything else with it, then yes, he's going to pay that too.

But if he pays you what he owes you and you do the job for him, that's it, contract's finished. There is wages to be paid. There is a price to be paid for what he's done.

Now the wages of sin, it serves as death. Now, death is not simply the separation of the soul from the body. That happens, yes, to us all, unless the Lord comes back first, in which case we'll be changed.

But otherwise, we expect at some point our soul will be separated from our body. There will be the dissolution of our flesh. It will fade away to dust. It will decay and so on.

[14 : 05] But the soul will live eternally. At the resurrection, of course, the body will be raised and it will be transformed and changed and reunited with the soul. But for now, death is separation between body and soul.

Ultimately, death is separation from God. The wages of sin is separation from God. Death, that's what death is. But the gift of God is eternal life, the opposite of death, being brought back together with the Lord, reunited with the Lord through Jesus Christ, our Lord.

It's a free gift. And we can only inherit that free gift with repentance and faith. These two are bound up together. At the very beginning of what is usually taken as being the first gospel account, Mark's account of the gospel, when Jesus first begins his public ministry, we read in chapter 1, verse 14, after that John was put in prison.

Jesus came into Galilee preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, the good news, and saying, the time is fulfilled and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent ye and believe the gospel.

Repent and believe. Repent and believe. Repentance and faith bound up together. Repentance unto life. It's not just saying, oh, we're sorry for our sins.

[15 : 29] Oh, we're sorry we did this. Sorry we did that. And then carry on as though nothing had changed. Repentance unto life means a turning away from the old ways and the old practices and the old behaviours and the old sins to the new life that is in Christ in whom we believe.

And as we believe in him, as we have faith in him, so we receive of his grace, receive of his spirit, receive of his strength, and are enabled more and more to put greater distance between us and our old life on sin.

You know, if, let's say, the ship of faith is sailing and you run up the gangplank and there you are and you're ready to sail and then you're not quite sure. Maybe it's a small boat and you're moving away from the jetty and you think, oh, well, I could still put a leg on the jetty.

I could have one foot in the boat and one foot in the jetty. Oh, well, there's still time and then the boat begins to move away. You have to decide, are you going to commit to this fate? Are you going to stay where you were before? And you think, no, I'm going to go on the fate.

Now, there's times you'll fall back. There's times, yes, you might slip back into the water. There's times you might want to panic and grab for the shore. You will fail, you will fall and you will soon again.

[16 : 47] But the point is you get back into the boat. The point is that you pick up and the Lord picks you up and you keep going. You don't say, oh, that's it, I'm going back and the more you go on with Christ, the more the boat moves away from the quay, the greater is the gulf between the old life of sin and the new life of faith.

As we go on with the Lord, then repentance unto life means it really is new life and the gulf gets wider and wider and wider. There was a time when they were very close together when you'd only just turned from your sin and you could just put a foot back in that camp, one foot in the boat, one foot in the jeffy.

But as the boat moves further away, it's harder and harder then to plunge back into that old life. Thank God that it is harder. Sometimes, of course, we do still fall, we do still sin, but the point is that the Lord grasped us like he grasped Peter, remember, when he began to sin.

He grabbed them and he said, oh, Peter, wherefore didst thou doubt all ye of little faith? Why do we doubt the Lord's grace? Because the Lord desires to pour upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, his ultimate Jerusalem, not just the earthly Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and of supplication, the free gift, grace, and prayerfulness of pleading with the Lord, they shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for him.

You see, this is part of the reality of repentance. We see the personal cost. We recognize it's not just, oh, well, now I'm going to start again from scratch.

[18 : 30] Oh, but can I ever really be truly forgiven when I look at what it's cost Jesus, when I look at how much he suffered, I'll never be worth that. No, you'll never be worth it. You and I will never be worth what Christ has done for us, but the fact is he has done it for sinners.

He has done it so that we might have life and have it more abundantly. We have two problems that we often face. One is not believing that we can possibly be forgiven on the one hand, or on the other, not believing that really we're that bad, and, you know, we don't really have too much to confess and repent of.

Well, you know, this is what Jesus says about sins however small. Remember that there is no sin however small, but it demands or it will earn us a lost eternity.

It deserves hell. Jesus said, every idle word that men shall speak, Matthew 12, verse 36, every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account then of in the day of judgment.

By thy words thou shalt be justified, by thy words thou shalt be condemned. Now, it doesn't just mean, okay, you see the right pattern, if you've got the right speech, now that's you covered. Remember what we said a couple of weeks ago about the Hebrew term for word, although New Testament is written in Greek, but almost all those who are authors of it or inspired by God to write it were Hebrews, they were Jews themselves, by thy words thou shalt be justified, by thy words thou shalt be condemned.

[20 : 04] Word means matter. It means that which is of substance. It doesn't just mean the things that come out of your mouth. It means the fullness, it means the matter, it means the substance.

By what you are and do and say everything about you, thou shalt be justified by thy words also. Thou shalt be condemned. Every idle word you speak, even, you'll have to give an account for in the day of judgment.

Now that's not, that's before you even get to profanity or vulgarity or blasphemy. You know, it always makes my blood run cold when you hear the ease of people in the street with which they blaspheme the name of the Lord and just drop expletives of the name of the Lord or the Savior into their sentences as a swear word.

Every single one of those instances they will have to give an account for. Not only every vulgar word, not only every blasphemous word, but every idle word that men speak.

They will have to give an account for every sin in your life, multitudes of which you and I will have forgotten. Let us never believe. Oh, we haven't got too much to confess.

[21 : 20] Oh, yes, you do. You and I do. We have so much to confess, so much to repent of. We would never be done repenting.

And that makes us think, well, what hope then have we got? You know, we're surely done for. We'll never be able to remember it all. We'll never be able to repent of it all. Well, this is why repentance and faith are bound up together.

Because going back to the Romans, remember what Paul says. There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus who walk not after the flesh but after the spirit.

For the law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death. No condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus who walk not after the flesh but after the spirit.

Even the sins you can't remember, if you do truly repent of your old sinfulness, if you do truly repent, I mean, you should be trying to remember. We ought to be trying to remember our particular sins and repenting of those particular sins particularly.

[22 : 34] But at the same time, there's often so much we don't remember. There's so much perhaps we don't even know. I mean, okay, yes, I've mentioned many times in the past, you know, one of my besetting sins is the difficulties, shall we say, that I encounter on the road.

And an awful lot of people irritate and upset me on the road that wouldn't upset me any other walk of life. But then, I don't know how many times I have upset people.

I genuinely don't know how many times when I've been stuck behind some person who wouldn't get out of the way or wouldn't let you overtake or was trangling along way too slow or whatever.

I honestly do not know how much I might have been actually upsetting them or ruining them. Maybe they had a bad day. Maybe they just had bad news. And there was this idiot right up their bumper, couldn't get past them, obviously trying to get past but wouldn't give them much consideration.

Or so it would seem. I don't know how much damage I might have done to such a person without even knowing. I don't know how many times an idle word that I have said might have been misinterpreted or taken the wrong way by somebody who was inflicted with huge hurt that I never even knew, that I never even intended, I would certainly never have chosen to do.

[24 : 01] I do not know how many times the lack of a word passing someone in the street that I genuinely might not have seen because I was focusing on something else and they thought I was ignoring them.

I do not know how many times I may or may not have done such things as that, but each little piece of damage or hurt inflicted will be a sin for which I will have to account.

And if the blood of Christ does not cleanse me from all sin, I am sunk, I am finished, I have not a hope in heaven, but a full, full scope to fulfill in hell.

If my sin is not forgiven and the only way my sin is forgiven is through Christ and the only way to Christ is through faith and repentance unto life.

Repent and believe the gospel. That's what Jesus himself says, repent and believe the gospel. You see, our sins against others, yes, they are bad, but ultimately our sin is against God, against thee, thee only have I sinned and done this evil on our side.

[25 : 09] All sin is ultimately a violation of God's perfect goodness. We don't think we have enough to confess. We have got more than we could ever imagine.

How are we to respond to this? Well, we're to respond by way of repentance in the same way as we're to respond in love. Remember what Jesus said about the first and the greatest commandment. Back again in Mark, chapter 12 here, verse 30.

Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, with all thy soul, with all thy mind and with all thy strength. This is the first commandment, the greatest commandment. And the second is like, namely this, thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.

There is none other commandment greater than these. As he puts in Matthew, these two hang all the law and the prophets. Now, God and your neighbour, God and your neighbour, who do we sin against?

We sin against God and we sin against each other. Sometimes we even sin against ourselves. Does that mean then there is no hope? Well, we've just read Romans 8, remember, no condemnation to those who are in Christ.

[26 : 14] But we don't even just have to take it in the New Testament. God hasn't changed. He's the same forgiving God as he always was. Remember what he writes in the prophet Isaiah, chapter 1, where he says, wash you, make you clean.

Put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes. Cease to do evil. How can we be washed? It can only be washed in the blood of Christ. Wash you, make you clean.

Chapter 1, verse 16 of Isaiah. And then he says in verse 18, come now, let us reason together, saith the Lord. Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow.

Though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool. This is what the Lord promises. However bad and deep-dyed your sin may be, there is repentance unto life.

It is an evangelical grace. It is bound up with the evangel, with the good news. Repent, Jesus says, and believe the gospel.

[27 : 20] You see, there is always a need for this repentance and faith. Repentance and faith always going together. When the letter to the Hebrews warns against, you know, always staying at the baby stage of faith, you've got to grow.

It says in chapter 6, verse 1, therefore, leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection, not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God of the doctrine of baptisms and laying on hands.

Now he's not saying you forget about these things. He's not saying forget about the doctrine of Christ, forget about perfection, forget about laying the foundation of repentance from dead works. You should have done that and move on.

But notice the foundation is repentance from dead works and then of faith toward God. Repentance and faith bound up together.

What are these dead works? Well, then a few chapters of the confession of faith will come to the question of what is good works and what is dead works and might even be in the next chapter for all I can remember.

[28 : 23] But anyway, dead works are basically that which is done in a state of sin. It might even be that which you consider to be good works. You thought you were a good person doing these good things but you do them in a state of sin and they are effectively dead works.

Dead works from which we have to repent. Sin from which we have to repent. But repentance is not just going through emotion. Repentance is a recognition of the human and personal and even divine cost of our forgiveness.

We sorrow for our sin because we sorrow for the damage to our relationship to God and to others. We sorrow for the cost and we sorrow most when we recognize that cost to be personal.

Look unto the Jesus in whom you believe. repentance and faith. Repentance and faith. Repentance and delight because there had been faith first in Christ.

So look to the Lord Jesus Christ. I will pour upon the house of David and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem the spirit of grace and of supplications of pleading with the Lord of praying to the Lord of receiving the free gift of the Lord and they shall look upon me whom you have pierced and they shall mourn for him as one mourneth for his only son and shall be in bitterness for him as one that is in bitterness for his firstborn.

[29 : 59] If you love the Lord Jesus Christ which is what faith in his name will bring you to love for the Lord and then with the eye of faith are enabled to think on the cross and to see there what crucifixion involved and we won't go into the details of that just now but if you know what crucifixion involves and you know that he was pierced with nails and with the spear of the soldier at the last as John 19 verse 37 tells us how he was crowned with thorns how he was scourged before that how he hung there bleeding and dying for us then we cannot look even with the eye of faith on such a sight and be unmoved we can't say oh well thanks very much Jesus that's great I'm off to commit some more sins knowing that you've paid the price that's fine and I know I'll be safe at the end of the day so that's great thanks very much such a heart has been untouched such a heart remains a heart of stone it's not a heart of flesh it's not a seed of the spirit of Christ otherwise we cannot look upon him whom we have pierced with our own sin and not mourn and not sorrow for our sin and not turn away from it in such a way as to make a complete turning around it's not just being penitent it is repented turning around turning away from our old life our old temptations our own sins to the new life in Christ to the new way that he leads us the new priorities the new desires which put sin gradually more and more to death just as crucifixion was not an instantaneous quick death it was a slow agonizing death putting our sins to death especially our favorite besetting sins will not be the work of the day it is a long agonizing process of what the old writers used to call mortifying putting to death our old sins the deeds of the body the particular lust and problems that we may have but as we turn to men we turn not into all greater misery can't even do these things that it is to life life in all its fullness they will look on me whom they have pierced but to the Gentiles also and not just the inhabitants of Jerusalem now hath the Lord granted repentance unto life let us know