

BIBLE TRUTHS EXPLAINED

What the Bible Teaches About

REPENTANCE

Revised Edition, 2026

GORDON LYONS

ESV Edition

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Repentance

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Repentance

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PART 1

Synopsis: Repentance

Repentance unto life is the gift of God whereby condemned sinners—otherwise destined to perish—are enabled by the grace of God to turn in faith and wholehearted contrition to the Lord Jesus Christ for forgiveness of sin. This gift is wrought in the sinners' soul by the working of the Holy Spirit in effectual calling. The innermost desires of the sinners' soul are so changed that they seek with all their hearts after the cleansing power of Christ's redeeming blood, and the full remission of their many sins. In virtue of the redemption secured for them by Christ Jesus, God forgives all those who repent and believe on his Son. By his Spirit, he regenerates, justifies, sanctifies, glorifies and grants to them life eternal. A believer proves his repentance toward God by bringing forth spiritual fruit in his life. This fruit is the outward evidence that the Holy Spirit has accomplished a true inward and spiritual work of grace in that person's life, which has resulted in their regeneration and conversion.

Note 1: Repentance Unto Life

Repentance unto life is so called because it is the only kind of repentance that is associated with the gift of full salvation and eternal life. This kind of repentance is itself a gift from God. In regeneration, the Holy Spirit grants the sinner the ability and willingness to turn to God in true repentance and with godly sorrow, and to receive the gift of eternal life through faith in his Son.

Scripture References (ESV)

Repentance Unto Life

Luke 18:13-14

¹³ But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me, a sinner!'

¹⁴ I tell you, this man went down to his house justified, rather than the other. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted." (See vv.9-12)

John 6:40

⁴⁰ For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day." (See vv.35-39; see esp. v.36)

Acts 11:17-18

¹⁷ If then God gave the same gift to them as he gave to us when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could stand in God's way?"

¹⁸ 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." (See vv.1-16)

Note 2: Remorse is Not Repentance

Repentance contains the elements of sorrow and remorse; but, in and of themselves, sorrow and remorse do not constitute repentance. Repentance must issue from a truly contrite heart—a heart that acknowledges its utter sinfulness in the sight of a holy God. Again, it must proceed from a heart that realises its total helplessness to find forgiveness and cleansing other than through faith in Christ and his redeeming work. Those whom the Holy Spirit thus causes to recognise their sinful and helpless condition, he also enables to turn to the Lord by regenerating them to newness of life (the new spiritual birth). Everyone thus regenerated or born again by the Spirit of God turns to the Lord in godly sorrow for their sins, expressing genuine repentance toward God and receiving by his grace his complete forgiveness, justification and reconciliation.

Scripture References (ESV)***Remorse is Not Repentance***

Psalms 51:4

⁴ Against you, you only, have I sinned
and done what is evil in your sight,
so that you may be justified in your words
and blameless in your judgement.

Psalms 51:7

⁷ Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean;
wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. (Cf. Isa. 1:18)

Psalms 51:17

¹⁷ The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit;
a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.
(Cf. v.10)

Zechariah 12:10

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. (See vv.9-14; see also Zech. 13:1-7)

2 Corinthians 7:10

¹⁰ For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret, whereas worldly grief produces death. (See vv.8-12)

We should observe that most of the foregoing references refer to God’s backslidden children rather than unbelievers. Nevertheless, the principle remains true for those who are not God’s children. All

those who repent in the manner described above will experience the forgiveness and the full salvation of the Lord.

Note 3: Repentant Sinners Depend on God's Mercy

Conversion is turning to God in repentance and faith, and being accepted and reconciled by the Father. When, eventually, he realised his desperately undone state and condition, the prodigal son turned back to his father. Having returned, however, he was then totally dependent on his father for forgiveness and reconciliation. So it is with the repentant sinner. As the Holy Spirit convicts and enables him, he may turn back to God in repentance and faith. But, having returned, the sinner is then totally dependent on the grace of God for mercy, forgiveness and reconciliation. Nevertheless, all whom the Spirit draws to the Father through the Son will certainly be received and welcomed by both the Father and the Son—as was the prodigal by his father. Every sinner thus received and forgiven, brings about joy in the presence of the angels in heaven.

Scripture References (ESV)

Repentant Sinners Depend on God's Mercy

Isaiah 55:6-7

⁶ “Seek the LORD while he may be found;
call upon him while he is near;
⁷ let 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. (See vv.1-11)

Luke 15:10

¹⁰ Just so, I tell you, there is joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents.”

Luke 15:21

²¹ And the son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.’¹ (See vv.11-32)

Acts 3:19-20a

¹⁹ Repent therefore, and turn again, that your sins may be blotted out,
^{20a} that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord...

¹ [Luke 15:21](#) Some manuscripts add *treat me as one of your hired servants*. (ESV footnote)

Colossians 1:21-23

²¹ And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds,
²² he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to
present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him, ²³ if indeed
you continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope
of the gospel that you heard, which has been proclaimed in all creation
under heaven, and of which I, Paul, became a minister. (See vv.12-20)

Note 4: Repentance is God's Gift

It is impossible for a sinner to merit salvation, since he is already under condemnation for having broken God's righteous and holy law. Again, a condemned sinner cannot contribute anything toward his salvation. Salvation—in its entirety—is a gift of God's free, sovereign, and unmerited grace. The elements of salvation—including effectual calling, regeneration, faith, repentance, and justification—are freely bestowed on the formerly condemned sinner out of the sheer mercy and good pleasure of God. In addition, they accord with God's foreordained purposes in election. A person repents when God's Holy Spirit regenerates that person, illuminating their mind and enabling him or her to understand for the first time the absolute immensity and seriousness of their sin before a most holy and righteous God. Having thus been brought to see their sinful state, they then repent of their sins and sinful lifestyle, turning to God to seek his mercy and forgiveness—which they most certainly receive. However, we must observe that an unregenerate person can turn to God only after the Holy Spirit has regenerated them and enabled them to see and comprehend their sinful condition and the justice of God's wrath against sin. The ability to acknowledge their sin therefore and repent of it, comes as a result of the Holy Spirit granting them new birth (regeneration). Thus, the *ability* to repent with godly sorrow is a gift from God.

Scripture References (ESV)

Repentance is God's Gift

Acts 5:31

³¹ God exalted him [i.e. *the risen Lord Jesus*] at his right hand as Leader and Saviour, **to give repentance** to Israel and forgiveness of sins.
(*bold emphasis added, here and below.*)

Acts 11:18

¹⁸ When they heard these things they fell silent. And they glorified God, saying, "Then to the Gentiles ² also **God has granted repentance** that leads to life."

Ephesians 1:5-7

⁵ he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, ⁶ to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he

² *Gentiles*: Acts 11:18; Greek, ἔθνος **ethnos**, That is, non-Jewish peoples; sometimes referred to as 'Greeks', *pagans* or *heathens*. Often described as being '*ungodly*'.

has blessed us in the Beloved. ⁷ In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, (See vv.3-12)

Ephesians 2:8-9

⁸ For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, ⁹ not a result of works, so that no one may boast. (See vv.1-7)

2 Timothy 2:25

²⁵ correcting his opponents with gentleness. **God may perhaps grant them repentance** leading to a knowledge of the truth,

1 Peter 1:3

³ Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, (See vv.1-5)

Related Bible Truths

Closely related to the doctrine of repentance are the doctrines of *predestination*, *regeneration* and *faith*. No-one can turn to God in true repentance, except the willingness and ability to exercise true godly sorrow and repentance has been given to him or her by the Father. However, God grants to everyone whom he has chosen in Christ from before the creation of the world the gift of salvation and eternal life. We deem this to include regeneration, repentance, faith, justification, sanctification and glorification.³

Summary below

³ See *Bible Truths Explained: Predestination; Regeneration; Faith; Justification*.

Part 1 Summary

- **Repentance unto life is God's gracious gift.** It is not a human achievement, but a work of God whereby condemned sinners are enabled to turn to the Lord Jesus Christ in faith, wholehearted contrition, and godly sorrow for sin.
- **The Holy Spirit produces true repentance in the soul.** Through effectual calling and regeneration, the Spirit changes the sinner's inward desires so that he or she seeks forgiveness, cleansing, and full remission through Christ's redeeming blood.
- **Repentance is inseparable from faith in Christ.** Those who truly repent do not merely regret their sin; they turn to Christ as the only Saviour, trusting in his finished work for forgiveness, justification, reconciliation, and eternal life.
- **God forgives all who repent and believe.** Because Christ has secured redemption for his people, God pardons those who turn to him through his Son and grants them salvation in its fullness.
- **Salvation is entirely of grace.** Regeneration, repentance, faith, justification, sanctification, glorification, and eternal life are all bestowed freely by God and cannot be merited or contributed to by condemned sinners.
- **True repentance produces spiritual fruit.** A believer's changed life gives outward evidence that the Holy Spirit has accomplished an inward work of grace, resulting in regeneration and conversion.
- **"Repentance unto life" leads to eternal life.** It is so called because it is the only repentance associated with full salvation; the Holy Spirit grants both the willingness and ability to turn to God and receive eternal life through faith in Christ.
- **Remorse alone is not repentance.** Sorrow, regret, and remorse may accompany repentance, but they do not constitute it unless they arise from a truly contrite heart before a holy God.
- **True repentance recognises sin's seriousness.** The repentant sinner acknowledges utter sinfulness before God, personal helplessness, and the impossibility of forgiveness apart from Christ's redeeming work.
- **Godly grief differs from worldly grief.** Godly sorrow leads to repentance and salvation, whereas worldly grief remains self-centred and does not bring true forgiveness or spiritual life.
- **The repentant sinner depends wholly on God's mercy.** Like the prodigal son returning to his father, the sinner may turn back in repentance and faith only as the Spirit enables, and must then rely entirely on God's grace for pardon and reconciliation.
- **God welcomes all whom the Spirit draws.** Those brought to the Father through the Son will certainly be received, forgiven, and reconciled, producing joy in heaven over the sinner who repents.
- **Repentance is granted by God.** Scripture teaches that God gives repentance leading to life; it is bestowed out of sovereign mercy and according to his gracious purposes in election.
- **The unregenerate cannot repent savingly by themselves.** A person can truly acknowledge sin, understand its seriousness, and repent with godly sorrow only after the Holy Spirit has granted new birth and spiritual illumination.
- **Repentance is closely related to predestination, regeneration, and faith.** God grants salvation and eternal life to those chosen in Christ, including regeneration, repentance, faith, justification, sanctification, and glorification.

Part 2 follows below

PART 2

Doctrine of Repentance: True and False Repentance

There are several distinct kinds of repentance mentioned in the Bible. Some of these are not genuine repentance from the heart, and they are known as *spurious* or *false* repentance. False repentance may include a degree of remorse, regret or superficial sorrow, but it does not lead to forgiveness of sin.

Concerning insincere or false repentance, the Scripture says:

Isaiah 29:13-14

¹³ And the Lord said:
“Because this people draw near with their mouth
and honour me with their lips,
while their hearts are far from me,
and their fear of me is a commandment taught by men,
¹⁴ therefore, behold, I will again
do wonderful things with this people,
with wonder upon wonder;
and the wisdom of their wise men shall perish,
and the discernment of their discerning men shall be hidden.”
(See vv.1-24; cf. Ezek. 33:31)

Matthew 27:3-5

³ Then when Judas, his betrayer, saw that Jesus was condemned, he changed his mind and brought back the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and the elders, ⁴ saying, “I have sinned by betraying innocent blood.” They said, “What is that to us? See to it yourself.” ⁵ And throwing down the pieces of silver into the temple, he departed, and he went and hanged himself. (See vv.1-10; see also Acts 1:25b)

Hebrews 12:17

¹⁷ For you know that afterwards, when he [i.e. *Esau*] desired to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no chance to repent, though he sought it with tears. (See vv.14-16; cf. Gen. 27:34-40)

The kind of repentance that leads to forgiveness is that which issues genuinely from the heart, as a gift of God’s grace. This is the kind of repentance that causes a sinner to humble himself in a godly manner before the Lord Jesus Christ, seeking his mercy and forgiveness. This kind of repentance is known as *repentance unto life*. (Acts 11:18) This is because it is the only kind of repentance that is associated with the forgiveness of sins and the granting of life eternal.

Thus, concerning the nature of true repentance, God's Word gives the following examples:

Job 42:6

⁶ therefore I despise myself,
and repent in dust and ashes."

Isaiah 55:6-7

⁶ "Seek the LORD while he may be found;
call upon him while he is near;
⁷ let 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. (See vv.1-13)

Zechariah 12:10

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.

Luke 18:13-14

¹³ But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to
heaven, but beat his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me, a sinner!'
¹⁴ I tell you, this man went down to his house justified, rather than the
other. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who
humbles himself will be exalted." (See vv.9-12)

Acts 11:17-18

¹⁷ If then God gave the same gift to them as he gave to us when we believed
in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could stand in God's way?"
¹⁸ 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." (See vv.1-16)

Summary below

Part 2 Summary

- **Part 2 distinguishes between true and false repentance.** Scripture presents several forms of repentance, but not all are genuine repentance from the heart or lead to the forgiveness of sin.
- **False repentance may involve outward sorrow or regret.** It can include remorse, emotional distress, or a change of mind, yet still fail to bring a person to humble dependence on God's mercy in Christ.
- **Spurious repentance does not lead to forgiveness.** Superficial sorrow, religious formality, or fear of consequences is insufficient where the heart remains far from God.
- **Isaiah 29 warns against merely external religion.** People may honour God with their lips while their hearts remain distant from him; such worship is not true repentance but empty profession.
- **Judas is an example of remorse without saving repentance.** Though he acknowledged his sin in betraying innocent blood, his sorrow did not lead him to seek mercy and forgiveness from Christ.
- **Esau illustrates regret without true spiritual repentance.** He sought the lost blessing with tears, yet found no place for repentance, showing that emotional distress alone does not equal a changed heart before God.
- **True repentance issues genuinely from the heart.** It is produced by God's grace and causes the sinner to humble himself before the Lord Jesus Christ, seeking mercy, cleansing, and forgiveness.
- **True repentance is repentance unto life.** This is the only repentance associated with the forgiveness of sins and the granting of eternal life, as shown in Acts 11:18.
- **Job provides an example of deep self-abasement before God.** His repentance in dust and ashes reflects heartfelt contrition and a humbling of self before the holiness and majesty of God.
- **Isaiah 55 presents true repentance as seeking and returning to the Lord.** The wicked must forsake their way and thoughts, returning to God who promises compassion and abundant pardon.
- **Zechariah 12 describes repentance as mourning produced by grace.** God pours out a spirit of grace and pleas for mercy, leading people to mourn over sin in relation to the one whom they have pierced.
- **The tax collector in Luke 18 exemplifies humble repentance.** Unlike the self-righteous Pharisee, he stands before God conscious of his sin and pleads simply, "God, be merciful to me, a sinner."
- **Those who humble themselves before God are justified.** Jesus teaches that the contrite sinner, not the self-exalting religious person, goes home justified before God.
- **True repentance is granted by God.** Acts 11 shows that repentance leading to life is something God grants, not something sinners can produce by natural ability.
- **The essential contrast is inward grace versus outward appearance.** False repentance may look sincere outwardly, but true repentance springs from a heart renewed by grace and turns to Christ for salvation.

PART 3

Outline of Repentance

Repentance is being genuinely grief-stricken and wholeheartedly contrite for having sinned against God, and being truly and unreservedly determined to forsake sin and to seek God's forgiveness. This repentant attitude of mind is a gift of God's grace; and it is wrought in the sinner's heart by the Holy Spirit in effectual calling.

The principal elements of true repentance may be summarised under the following heads: ⁴

1. Repentance Involves Knowledge of Sin

Repentance is accompanied by a due sense of sin. This includes knowledge of sin. We must be made aware of the fact that we are sinners. The knowledge or awareness of sin also includes a proper sense of our own guilt and moral corruption.

The knowledge of sin supposes correct views of the holiness of God, and of his justice. This knowledge includes:

- A due recognition of the greatness and evil of sin.
- The awareness that a perfectly just and holy God can by no means acquit the guilty: i.e., a realisation that God cannot, and will not, overlook sin.
- The realisation that, if a sinner is to be forgiven, the demands of God's justice and holiness must be fully satisfied.

2. Repentance Involves Conviction of Sin

Repentance also involves a conviction of our own sinfulness. This conviction is a work of the Spirit, and it includes:

- A conviction that we are guilty.
- A conviction that we are inwardly polluted: i.e., our mind (or 'heart') is corrupted by sin.
- A conviction that, for our sins, we deserve to be punished.
- A conviction that we are helpless, or absolutely at God's mercy.

3. Repentance Involves Faith

Repentance must apprehend the mercy of God in Christ. We must apprehend and believe:

- That God is merciful.
- That a holy God can consistently exercise his mercy toward sinners.
- That we are, or may become, the objects of God's mercy.
- That this mercy is exercised through Christ; because—apart from Christ—our God is a consuming fire: i.e., he is unapproachably holy, righteous and just.

⁴ Based on C. Hodge, *Princeton Sermons*, [Edinburgh, Banner of Truth Trust, 1879, 1979 reprint], pp.123-124.

4. Repentance Involves Hatred for Sin

Repentance is attended by grief and hatred for our sins:

- Grief—i.e., a sincere and godly sorrow for having committed them—includes:
- Remorse.
- Self-abhorrence or hatred for sin.
- Self-condemnation.
- Shame.
- Guilt.

These attending circumstances arise out of a due sense of the evil of sin.

5. Repentance Involves Turning

The act of repentance involves turning from sin. This act includes:

- Turning from the *pleasures* of sin.
- Turning from the *indulgence* of sin.
- Turning from the *approval* of sin.
- Turning from the *promotion* of sin.

The act of repentance includes a total turning away from every sinful inclination and practice, and a wholehearted turning to God.

This turning away from sin, is part of the work of conversion. Conversion is turning from sin in repentance, and believing on the Lord Jesus Christ. (*Conversion = Repentance + Faith.*)

6. Repentance Involves Confession of Sin

The whole aim of turning to God in repentance is in order to experience his forgiveness, and to be justified and reconciled to God. When the Holy Spirit enables a person to turn to God in repentance, that person does so with a sense of total dependency on the mercy of God.

The sinner's only hope is in the atoning sacrifice of Christ. Upon that substitutionary sacrifice, he utterly relies for his salvation. He knows that Jesus Christ is able to save to the uttermost all who come to him by faith.

In turning to God, the repentant sinner does so with the following intentions:

- That he might acknowledge his sinful condition.
- That he might confess his sin to God.
- That he might be forgiven and justified.
- That he might experience reconciliation and peace with God.
- That he might thereafter serve God in holiness of life and conduct.

Since, in this life, no Christian will be able to attain perfection or a sin-free state of mind, it follows that every redeemed child of God will have need of ongoing repentance. When we fail God in some aspect of our lives or conduct, we must repent of our sin and confess it to God. The assurance we have from the Word of God is that the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanses us from all sin; thereby restoring us to fellowship with our Father in heaven. (1 John 1:7-10)

7. Repentance Involves Submission to God's Will

The purpose of repentance is the decision of a person's will to obey God in all things; the sincere and determined effort to do so—as the Holy Spirit empowers him—and the determination to persevere in holiness of life.

This involves:

- The consecration of our whole lives to God.
- The wholehearted desire to live only for God's glory.
- The desire to submit all our abilities, endowments and parts to God, that he may exercise total dominion over our lives—in both body and soul.
- The desire to live or walk by the Spirit, and not by the flesh: i.e., the old sinful nature.
- The desire to take up the cross and follow the Lord: i.e., to live for him and serve him, only in the place and manner of his own appointing—whatever the cost to ourselves in so doing.

The above outline represents the doctrine of repentance in summary form. We will now consider the principal elements of this doctrine in more detail. Before doing so, however, it may be helpful at this stage to explain the difference between the work of the Holy Spirit in *common grace*, and the work of the Holy Spirit in *efficacious grace*.

Summary below

Part 3 Summary

- **Part 3 summarises the main elements of true repentance.** Repentance is genuine grief and wholehearted contrition for sin against God, together with a sincere determination to forsake sin and seek God's forgiveness.
- **Repentance is a gift of God's grace.** This repentant attitude is not produced by human effort alone, but is wrought in the sinner's heart by the Holy Spirit in effectual calling.
- **True repentance begins with knowledge of sin.** The sinner must be made aware of sin, personal guilt, moral corruption, and the seriousness of having offended a holy and righteous God.
- **Knowledge of sin includes right views of God.** Repentance recognises God's holiness and justice, the evil of sin, and the fact that God cannot simply overlook guilt without the demands of justice being satisfied.
- **Repentance involves conviction of sin.** The Holy Spirit convinces the sinner of guilt, inward pollution, deserved punishment, and complete helplessness apart from God's mercy.
- **Repentance involves faith.** The repentant sinner must apprehend and believe the mercy of God in Christ, recognising that God's mercy is exercised consistently with his holiness through the redeeming work of Christ.
- **Christ is the sinner's only hope.** Apart from Christ, God is unapproachably holy and just; therefore repentance looks to Christ as the only way by which sinners may receive mercy, forgiveness, and acceptance.
- **Repentance includes grief and hatred for sin.** True repentance is attended by godly sorrow, remorse, shame, guilt, self-condemnation, and self-abhorrence arising from a proper sense of sin's evil.
- **Repentance involves turning from sin.** The repentant person turns away from the pleasures, indulgence, approval, and promotion of sin, and turns wholeheartedly to God.
- **Conversion consists of repentance and faith.** Turning from sin in repentance and believing on the Lord Jesus Christ together form conversion.
- **Repentance involves confession of sin.** The sinner turns to God in order to acknowledge sin, confess it, seek forgiveness and justification, and experience reconciliation and peace with God.
- **The repentant sinner depends wholly on Christ's atoning sacrifice.** He relies entirely on the substitutionary work of Christ, knowing that Christ is able to save completely all who come to him by faith.
- **Repentance continues in the Christian life.** Since no believer attains sinless perfection in this life, every redeemed child of God must continue to repent, confess sin, and seek restored fellowship through the cleansing blood of Christ.
- **Repentance involves submission to God's will.** True repentance leads to a sincere determination to obey God, consecrate one's whole life to him, live for his glory, and walk by the Spirit rather than by the flesh.
- **Repentance leads to persevering holiness.** The repentant believer desires to take up the cross, follow the Lord, serve him in the place and manner of his appointing, and persevere in holiness of life whatever the cost.

Part 4 follows below

PART 4

Common and Efficacious Grace

1. Common Grace

Common grace is the term used to describe the work of the Holy Spirit as it applies to all mankind. The work of the Spirit in common grace may be connected with Creation, Providence, or Redemption.

Example of Common Grace

In grace that is common to all mankind (common grace), God's Holy Spirit brings the truths of redemption to bear upon the minds of those who are perishing. In this way, the Holy Spirit makes sinners aware of God's impending judgment upon sin. He makes them aware of the way of salvation, and he warns them of the consequences that will follow their refusal to heed the terms of God's salvation.

A sinner can resist common grace, however. If God's dealings with men in common grace are resisted persistently, God's Spirit will ultimately cease to strive with man, and will leave them to perish in their sin.

Common Grace and the External Call

The *external call* to repentance and faith (contained in the preaching of the gospel) is associated with common grace. In this sense, the grace of God extends to all mankind.

2. Efficacious Grace

Efficacious ⁵ grace is the term used to describe the work of the Holy Spirit as it applies to the elect only. Unlike common grace, a sinner cannot resist efficacious grace. Indeed, those who experience the power of the Holy Spirit in efficacious grace, ultimately find themselves yielding most willingly to the Spirit's drawing power.

Example of Efficacious Grace

When, by his Holy Spirit, God calls a sinner to faith in his Son, the Spirit enables that person to respond *freely and willingly* to God's call. As the Spirit draws him, he enables the sinner to understand the basic truths of redemption, and to repent and believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. Initially, the sinner may attempt to resist the drawing power or efficacy of the Holy Spirit. Ultimately, however, he finds that he cannot resist God's Spirit, but rather now desires to respond. The sinner must yield, and come to Christ. This aspect of the Holy Spirit's work is known as *efficacious* or *irresistible* grace.

⁵ *Efficacious (grace)*: That is, grace that is totally effective in achieving its intended purpose. Working through the Holy Spirit, God's *efficacious grace* cannot fail to accomplish his intended purpose to bring sinners to repentance and faith in Christ.

Efficacious Grace and Effectual Calling

Effectual calling—i.e. that calling which unfailingly draws a sinner to Christ for salvation—is associated with efficacious grace. In this sense, the grace of God extends to all those whom he has predestined to eternal life, and to whom he grants *repentance unto life*.

Summary of Common and Efficacious Grace

The following lists summarise some of the principal differences between common grace and efficacious grace—insofar as they relate to the doctrine of repentance.

❖ *Points Regarding Common Grace*

- Common grace is a work of the Holy Spirit that has reference to all mankind.
- Common grace is associated with the preaching of the gospel to all nations (the external call).
- Common grace can be resisted.

❖ *Points Regarding Efficacious Grace*

- Efficacious grace is a work of the Holy Spirit that has reference only to those whom God has elected to salvation and eternal life.
- Efficacious grace is associated with the gifts of regeneration (*effectual calling*), repentance, and faith.
- Efficacious grace cannot be resisted.

We have considered briefly the distinction between the work of the Spirit in common grace and the work of the Spirit in efficacious grace. Now, bearing this distinction in mind, we will consider how God calls upon mankind to repent and believe the gospel, and why many do not respond.

Summary below

Part 4 Summary

- **Part 4 explains the distinction between common grace and efficacious grace.** This distinction helps clarify how the Holy Spirit works in relation to repentance, the gospel call, and salvation.
- **Common grace refers to the Spirit's work toward all mankind.** It is connected with Creation, Providence, and Redemption, and includes God's general dealings with humanity.
- **In common grace, the Spirit brings gospel truth before sinners.** He makes people aware of God's coming judgement, the way of salvation, and the consequences of refusing God's gracious terms.
- **Common grace is associated with the external call of the gospel.** Through the preaching of repentance and faith, God's call goes out broadly to all people.
- **Common grace can be resisted.** Sinners may reject the Spirit's warnings and refuse the gospel call; if resisted persistently, God's Spirit may cease striving with them and leave them to perish in sin.
- **Efficacious grace refers to the Spirit's saving work in the elect.** Unlike common grace, it applies specifically to those whom God has chosen to salvation and eternal life.
- **Efficacious grace cannot finally be resisted.** Although a sinner may initially resist, the Holy Spirit ultimately brings the person to yield willingly to God's drawing power.
- **Through efficacious grace, sinners respond freely and willingly.** The Spirit enables them to understand the basic truths of redemption, repent of sin, and believe on the Lord Jesus Christ.
- **Efficacious grace is also called irresistible grace.** It does not force the sinner against the will, but renews and changes the will so that the sinner now desires to come to Christ.
- **Effectual calling is associated with efficacious grace.** This is the inward, saving call of God that unfailingly draws a sinner to Christ for salvation.
- **Repentance unto life belongs to efficacious grace.** God grants repentance and faith to those whom he effectually calls, bringing them to salvation through Christ.
- **The external call and effectual calling must be distinguished.** The external call comes through the gospel and may be resisted; effectual calling is made inwardly effective by the Holy Spirit and certainly brings the sinner to Christ.
- **Common grace explains why many hear but do not repent.** People may receive warnings, invitations, and gospel truth, yet still refuse to turn to God because the call has not been made effectual in them.
- **Efficacious grace explains why the elect do repent.** Their repentance is not due to natural ability or superior willingness, but to the Spirit's gracious, powerful, and saving work in their hearts.
- **Part 4 prepares for the discussion of the external call.** By setting out the difference between common and efficacious grace, it lays the foundation for understanding how God calls all people to repent and why only those effectually called respond savingly.

PART 5

The External Call

Through the preaching and teaching of the Word, God calls upon all people everywhere to repent of their sins and believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. This call to repentance and faith is known as the *external call*. The external call is an example of the Holy Spirit's work in common grace. In this sense, the Holy Spirit is said to strive with *all* mankind.

Not everyone responds to this external call to repent. For example, in Noah's day—and through Noah's preaching—God called upon all mankind to repent and be saved from the coming judgment. But, apart from Noah, only seven people responded to this external call and were saved. All others disbelieved God's warning message given through his servant Noah. They resisted the Spirit of God, and ultimately they perished because of their sin, unbelief, and impenitence.

So it is in our day. Through the preaching of the Word, God's Spirit challenges vast numbers of people to repent and believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. Only by seeking repentance and faith can they be saved from the coming judgment. However, only a comparatively small number respond to this external call.

Scripture References (ESV)

The External Call

Concerning the fact that God's Spirit will not always strive with mankind, it is written:

Genesis 6:3

³ Then the LORD said, "My Spirit shall not abide in ⁶ man for ever, for he is flesh: his days shall be 120 years." (See vv.1-4)

Concerning the corruption and wickedness then prevailing among mankind, God's Word says:

Genesis 6:5

⁵ The LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. (See vv.6-8)

Genesis 6:11-13

¹¹ Now the earth was corrupt in God's sight, and the earth was filled with violence. ¹² And God saw the earth, and behold, it was corrupt, for all flesh⁷ had corrupted their way on the earth. ¹³ And God said to Noah, "I have

⁶ [Genesis 6:3](#) Or *My Spirit shall not contend with*. (ESV footnote)

⁷ *flesh*: [Genesis 6:11-13](#); Hebrew, בָּשָׂר *bāśār*, *flesh, soft tissue*, animal or human. In the present context, '*all flesh*' means all *human beings* or all *people*.

determined to make an end of all flesh, for the earth is filled with violence through them. Behold, I will destroy them with the earth.

Concerning the extent of God's judgment, the Scripture says:

Genesis 6:17

¹⁷ For behold, I will bring a flood of waters upon the earth to destroy all flesh ⁸ in which is the breath of life under heaven. Everything that is on the earth shall die. (See vv.14-22)

Genesis 7:21-22

²¹ Every living thing that moved on land perished—birds, livestock, wild animals, all the creatures that swarm over the earth, and all mankind.
²² Everything on dry land that had the breath of life in its nostrils died. (See vv.17-20)

Genesis 7:23

²³ Every living thing on the face of the earth was wiped out; people and animals and the creatures that move along the ground and the birds were wiped from the earth. Only Noah was left, and those with him in the ark. (See v.24)

After this judgment had passed, and the waters of the flood had subsided, the LORD said to Noah:

Genesis 8:21b

^{21b} ...“I will never again curse the ground because of man, for the intention of man's heart is evil from his youth. Neither will I ever again strike down every living creature as I have done. (See vv.15-22)

Concerning the fact that only a comparatively small number respond to the external call to repentance, the Lord Jesus said:

Matthew 22:14

¹⁴ For many are called, but few are chosen.”
(See vv.1-13; cf. Luke 14:15-24)

⁸ *all flesh*: Genesis 6:17; In this context, the Hebrew, בָּשָׂר **bāśār**, refers to all living creatures or all forms of air-breathing life, human and animal, on the earth. (It excludes life forms found in the oceans.)

Although comparatively few are chosen, the chosen few still amount to a countless multitude who respond to the gospel as they are enabled by God's Holy Spirit. This innumerable multitude of God's redeemed children are gathered by the Spirit of God from among all peoples and nations on earth, from the beginning of the creation of mankind to the end of the present age.

Summary below

Part 5 Summary

- **Part 5 explains the external call.** Through the preaching and teaching of the Word, God calls all people everywhere to repent of their sins and believe on the Lord Jesus Christ.
- **The external call belongs to common grace.** It is an example of the Holy Spirit's work toward mankind generally, by which he strives with sinners through the proclaimed message of salvation.
- **The call is universal in its outward address.** God's command to repent and believe is directed broadly to all who hear the gospel, not merely to those who will finally respond savingly.
- **Not all who hear the external call repent.** Many resist the Spirit's warnings and refuse the gospel message, remaining in unbelief and impenitence.
- **Noah's generation illustrates resistance to the external call.** Through Noah's preaching, God warned mankind of coming judgement; yet, apart from Noah and seven others, the people rejected the warning and perished.
- **Persistent resistance brings solemn consequences.** Genesis teaches that God's Spirit will not always strive with mankind; those who continue to resist may be left to perish in sin.
- **The flood demonstrates God's judgement on impenitence.** The corruption, violence, and continual evil of Noah's generation brought divine judgement upon the earth.
- **Only a remnant responded in Noah's day.** Although the warning was given, only Noah and those with him entered the ark and were preserved through the judgement.
- **The same principle continues in the present age.** Through the gospel, vast numbers are challenged to repent and believe, yet only a comparatively small number respond to the outward call.
- **Many are called, but few are chosen.** The Lord Jesus teaches that the external call may reach many, while only those chosen by God respond savingly through the Spirit's work.
- **The chosen still form an innumerable multitude.** Although few in comparison with all who hear, God's redeemed people are gathered from all peoples and nations throughout history.
- **The external call warns of coming judgement.** It confronts sinners with their guilt, the seriousness of sin, and the certainty of divine judgement if they remain unrepentant.
- **The external call points sinners to the only way of salvation.** It calls them to repentance and faith in Christ, through whom alone forgiveness and deliverance from judgement are found.
- **The external call may be resisted, but it is still sincere.** God truly commands sinners to repent and believe, even though many reject his gracious summons.
- **Part 5 prepares for the contrast with effectual calling.** By showing that many hear the external call but do not respond, it leads naturally to the later explanation of how God makes the call effectual in those whom he saves.

PART 6

How the External Call Comes

The external call comes to people in the following ways: ⁹

1. By making known to them the plan of salvation, as it is revealed in the Word of God.

This is done by the preaching or teaching of the gospel to all mankind:

Mark 16:15-16

¹⁵ And he said to them, "Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation. ¹⁶ Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned.

Acts 4:12

¹² And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved."

Acts 13:47-48

⁴⁷ For so the Lord has commanded us, saying,

"I have made you a light for the Gentiles,
that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth."
{Isaiah 49:6}

⁴⁸ And when the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord, **and as many as were appointed to eternal life believed.**
(bold emphasis added, here and below)

2. By assuring all those who hear, that God promises to accept everyone who assents to the terms of the gospel.

These terms include repentance and faith:

Acts 2:38-39

³⁸ 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. ³⁹ 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.**"

⁹ Based on C. Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, Vol. 2, [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1977 reprint], pp.641-642]

Acts 3:19-20

¹⁹ Repent therefore, and turn again, that your sins may be blotted out,
²⁰ that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and
that he may send the Christ appointed for you, Jesus,

Romans 10:9-10

⁹ because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in
your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. ¹⁰ For with
the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses
and is saved.

Romans 10:13

¹³ For “everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.” {*Joel*
2:32}

3. By challenging, exhorting, and inviting everyone who hears the gospel to accept of the offered mercy.

This includes exhorting or commanding people to repent and turn to God, and giving them the assurance that God will freely forgive everyone who comes to his Son in repentance and faith:

Isaiah 1:18

¹⁸ “Come now, let us reason together, says the LORD:
though your sins are like scarlet,
they shall be as white as snow;
though they are red like crimson,
they shall become like wool.

Matthew 11:28-30

²⁸ Come to me, all who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you
rest. ²⁹ Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and
lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰ For my yoke is easy,
and my burden is light.”

John 3:16-18

¹⁶ “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever
believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. ¹⁷ For God did not
send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the
world might be saved through him. ¹⁸ Whoever believes in him is not

condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God.

4. By showing or proving to all mankind why they must repent.

This includes the necessity of their being delivered from the wrath and curse of God by having their sins atoned for and forgiven. It includes also their being justified and reconciled to God through faith in his Son:

Ezekiel 18:30-32

³⁰ “Therefore I will judge you, O house of Israel, every one according to his ways, declares the Lord GOD. Repent and turn from all your transgressions, lest iniquity be your ruin. ³¹ Cast away from you all the transgressions that you have committed, and make yourselves a new heart and a new spirit! Why will you die, O house of Israel? ³² For I have no pleasure in the death of anyone, declares the Lord GOD; so turn, ¹⁰ and live.”

Luke 13:1-5

¹ 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.”

Romans 5:6-8

⁶ For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. ⁷ For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die— ⁸ but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

Romans 5:9-11

⁹ Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. ¹⁰ For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life. ¹¹ More than that,

¹⁰ *turn*: [Ezekiel 18:32](#); The Hebrew word used here means to *turn back* or *repent*.

we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.

No Other Way to God

Each of the above elements of the external call is included in the gospel; for the gospel is the revelation of God's plan for saving sinners. There is no other way of salvation.

Thus, it is written:

John 14:6

⁶ Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. (See also Acts 4:12; 1 Tim. 2:5)

Acts 4:12

¹² And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved."

Concerning the fact that the gospel is the revelation of God's plan for saving sinners, the Scripture says:

Luke 4:18

¹⁸ "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because he has anointed me
to proclaim good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives
and recovering of sight to the blind,
to set at liberty those who are oppressed,

Romans 1:16-17

¹⁶ For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. ¹⁷ For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, "The righteous shall live by faith." {*Hab. 2:4*}

Romans 10:15-17

¹⁵ And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!" ¹⁶ But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, "Lord, who has believed what he has heard from us?" ¹⁷ So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.

Part 6 Summary

- **Part 6 explains how the external call comes to sinners.** God calls people outwardly through the proclamation of the gospel and the revealed plan of salvation in his Word.
- **The external call makes known God's plan of salvation.** Through preaching and teaching, sinners are told that salvation is found only in the Lord Jesus Christ.
- **The gospel is to be proclaimed universally.** Christ commands his servants to preach the gospel to the whole creation, calling all who hear to repentance and faith.
- **There is salvation in no other name.** The external call declares that no one can be saved apart from Christ, for there is no other name under heaven by which sinners must be saved.
- **The external call reaches the nations.** The gospel is appointed as a light to the Gentiles, bringing the message of salvation to the ends of the earth.
- **Only those appointed to eternal life believe savingly.** While the gospel is preached outwardly to many, Scripture shows that only those ordained by God respond in true faith.
- **The external call includes God's promise to receive all who come on gospel terms.** Those terms include repentance, faith, confession of Christ, and calling upon the name of the Lord.
- **Repentance and faith are plainly commanded.** Hearers are called to repent, turn again, confess Christ as Lord, believe in his resurrection, and seek forgiveness of sins.
- **The gospel promise is sincere and generous.** Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved, and all who come to Christ in faith are assured of mercy.
- **The external call challenges, exhorts, and invites sinners.** It summons hearers to accept the offered mercy of God and come to Christ for rest, forgiveness, and life.
- **God freely offers cleansing from sin.** The call assures sinners that though their sins are deeply stained, God can make them white as snow through his gracious forgiveness.
- **Christ personally invites burdened sinners to himself.** Those who labour and are heavy laden are called to come to him and find rest for their souls.
- **The external call also explains why repentance is necessary.** Sinners must be delivered from God's wrath and curse, have their sins atoned for and forgiven, and be justified and reconciled to God through Christ.
- **Those who refuse repentance remain under judgement.** Scripture warns that unless sinners repent, they will perish; unbelief leaves a person condemned already.
- **Part 6 concludes that there is no other way to God.** The gospel reveals God's only plan for saving sinners: Christ himself is the way, the truth, and the life, and no one comes to the Father except through him.

PART 7

Effectual Calling

Those who respond to the external call of the gospel, and to whom God grants the gifts of repentance and faith, are said to have been *effectually called*. They have heard the external call to repentance; they have heeded this call, and they have turned to God in repentance and faith. This constitutes *conversion*. In their case, the external call to repentance has been made effective or effectual in their lives by the working of the Holy Spirit. Those whom God's Spirit effectually calls, receive forgiveness of sins and life eternal.

Effectual calling is a work of the Holy Spirit by which he imparts new spiritual birth (regeneration), and leads a person from spiritual blindness to spiritual sight and understanding. This includes the ability that God gives to those who are being saved to begin to understand the things of God. By nature, man cannot comprehend spiritual things, because, to his unspiritual or spiritually dead mind, they are foolishness. By grace, however, God gives life to the spiritually dead and removes the veil of darkness covering their minds so that they can see spiritual truths, understand with their minds, and believe.

To this end, God's Word says:

1 Corinthians 2:14

¹⁴ The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned.

2 Corinthians 3:16

¹⁶ But when one turns to the Lord, the veil is removed. (See vv.12-18)

Until God intervenes to create spiritual birth and to remove the veil of spiritual blindness and unbelief, all mankind remains unable to comprehend spiritual truths. As it is written:

2 Corinthians 4:3-6

³ And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled only to those who are perishing. ⁴ In their case the god of this world ¹¹ has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. ⁵ For what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. ⁶ For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness", has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

¹¹ the god of this world (or age): 2 Corinthians 4:4; That is, the devil or Satan.

Regeneration, or the new birth, is an element of effectual calling. This is an example of the work of the Holy Spirit in efficacious grace.¹²

Necessity of Repentance

The necessity of repentance is twofold:

1. While a person's sins are unforgiven, that person remains at enmity with God (or an enemy of God), and God remains at enmity with him. It is only by repentance and faith in God's Son that a person can be forgiven and reconciled to God, through the atoning sacrifice of Christ. (Rom. 5:9-10; 2 Cor. 5:18-19; Col. 1:21-22)
2. In consequence of man's rebellious and sinful condition, God's righteous wrath abides even now upon the unrepentant and unforgiven sinner. This wrath will be poured out in full measure at the last day when the sinner will be consigned to the torments of an eternal hell. Thus, it is essential that a person repents and believes the gospel if he is to experience forgiveness of sins, and if he is to find deliverance (or salvation) from God's wrath. (Acts 17:30-31; 2 Thess. 1:6-10; Heb. 2:3; 9:27)

True repentance is thus essential to the forgiveness of sins and acceptance by God. There can be no forgiveness apart from the prior acknowledgement and confession of sin to God; accompanied by real repentance from the heart for every sinful thought, word, and deed.

It is not necessary to be able to remember every individual sin ever committed. However, it is essential that our sinful condition be acknowledged; and that all known sin be repented of, confessed to God, and immediately forsaken.

Repent or Perish

God commands all mankind to repent and turn to him. To this end, his Word says:

Isaiah 45:22

²² "Turn to me and be saved,
all the ends of the earth!
For I am God, and there is no other.
(See v.23; cf. Isa. 49:6)

Isaiah 55:6-7

⁶ "Seek the LORD while he may be found;
call upon him while he is near;
⁷ let the wicked forsake his way,
and the unrighteous man his thoughts;

¹² *efficacious grace*: Grace that is fully effective to unfailingly achieve God's intended purpose; i.e. the salvation of every single person, from every nation on earth, that God calls to himself through repentance and faith, and by the work of the Holy Spirit in their lives. (See also *Bible Truths Explained: Regeneration*.)

let him return to the LORD, that he may have compassion on him,
and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.

Luke 13:5

⁵ No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish.”
(See vv.1-4)

Acts 17:30-31

³⁰ 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.” (See vv. 22-32)

If people do not heed God’s warning voice, they will certainly perish in their sin and unbelief. However, if men heed the warning of God—given in the external call to repentance—then God promises to be merciful and gracious to them.

Repentance is by God’s Grace, Not by Performance of Duty

It is impossible for an unregenerate person to perform any duties relating to God and salvation unless and until the Holy Spirit regenerates him or her to newness of life in Christ Jesus.

The ability and willingness to repent is entirely a gift of God’s grace, and it follows immediately from the gift of regeneration or the new birth. Repentance should never be considered as merely a moral duty which a person performs of their own free will. God commands all people everywhere to repent and it is their moral duty and responsibility to seek the Lord while he may be found. Nevertheless, because of their fallen, sinful nature, it is impossible for any person to be found acceptable to God or able to express genuine godly repentance of their own free will. Therefore, they remain helpless and lost—until God, in his love, mercy and grace, grants them the necessary ability to repent and believe through the gracious and illuminating work of the Holy Spirit in regeneration.

Therefore, genuine heartfelt repentance with contrition is all of God and none of self. Only after a person has been regenerated or born again (spiritually) are they enabled by God’s grace to repent of their sins and believe on the Lord Jesus Christ *freely and willingly*.

Summary below

Part 7 Summary

- **Part 7 explains effectual calling.** Those who respond savingly to the external call of the gospel do so because God grants them repentance and faith by the work of the Holy Spirit.
- **Effectual calling makes the external call effective.** The outward summons to repent and believe becomes inwardly powerful in the sinner's life through the Spirit's gracious operation.
- **Those effectually called are converted.** They hear the gospel, heed its call, turn to God in repentance and faith, and thereby experience true conversion.
- **Effectual calling results in forgiveness and eternal life.** Those whom the Spirit effectually calls receive the forgiveness of sins and the gift of life eternal through Christ.
- **Effectual calling includes regeneration.** The Holy Spirit imparts new spiritual birth, giving life to those who were spiritually dead and unable to understand the things of God.
- **The Spirit leads sinners from blindness to sight.** By nature, the natural person cannot receive or understand spiritual truth, but by grace God removes the veil of darkness from the mind.
- **Spiritual understanding is God's gift.** The ability to see, understand, and believe divine truth is not native to fallen humanity, but is granted by God to those whom he is saving.
- **The unregenerate mind cannot comprehend spiritual things.** Scripture teaches that the things of the Spirit appear foolish to the natural person because they are spiritually discerned.
- **God enlightens the heart and mind.** In effectual calling, the Spirit enables sinners to perceive the truth of the gospel, understand their need, and recognise Christ as the only Saviour.
- **Effectual calling brings repentance and faith together.** The sinner turns from sin in repentance and turns to Christ in faith, receiving the gospel promises by grace.
- **Conversion is the visible result of effectual calling.** The inward work of the Spirit is seen outwardly when a person responds to Christ with genuine repentance, faith, and obedience.
- **The Spirit's work is gracious and powerful.** He does not merely offer help to spiritually dead sinners, but gives them new life, spiritual illumination, and willingness to come to Christ.
- **Effectual calling differs from the external call.** The external call may be heard and resisted by many, but effectual calling unfailingly brings those chosen by God to salvation.
- **The whole work belongs to God's sovereign grace.** Repentance, faith, regeneration, conversion, forgiveness, and eternal life are all bestowed through God's gracious purpose and the Spirit's saving power.
- **Part 7 shows why some truly respond to the gospel.** They do so not because of natural ability, but because the Holy Spirit has made the gospel call effectual in their hearts.

PART 8

Repentance and Faith (Conversion)

God demonstrates his grace in reaching out to someone who has heard the external call of the gospel, and who desires to repent. Of himself, the sinner is incapable of repenting and believing because he is spiritually dead in trespasses and sins. However, in his great mercy, and by the working of the Holy Spirit in efficacious grace, God enables that person to repent—*freely and willingly*—and to exercise faith in his Son.

To all such as turn to God in this way, the Scriptures give these assurances:

Isaiah 1:18

¹⁸ “Come now, let us reason together, says the LORD:
though your sins are like scarlet,
they shall be as white as snow;
though they are red like crimson,
they shall become like wool.
(See vv.19-20; see also vv. 4-6)

John 6:37

³⁷ All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me
I will never cast out. (See v.45)

John 6:40

⁴⁰ For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son
and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the
last day.” (See vv.38-39)

Acts 2:21

²¹ And it shall come to pass that everyone who calls upon the name of the
Lord shall be saved.’ {*Joel 2:28-32*} (See Acts 2:14-20)

Acts 3:19-20

¹⁹ Repent therefore, and turn again, that your sins may be blotted out,
²⁰ that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and
that he may send the Christ appointed for you, Jesus,

Repentance plus faith constitutes conversion.

Repentance that leads to salvation and eternal life is an essential element of effectual calling. Effectual calling always includes regeneration.

Regeneration and Conversion

Although sometimes used interchangeably, regeneration and conversion are not identical. The following may help to illustrate the difference:

- Regeneration is a sovereign work of God, who—operating by his Holy Spirit—creates new spiritual life within a sinner enabling him to repent and believe, freely and willingly, on the Lord Jesus Christ.
- Conversion is the immediate response of the sinner to his spiritual rebirth, and is expressed by the sinner turning toward God in true repentance and genuine faith.
- Regeneration cannot exist without conversion. It is not possible for a person to be regenerated by God's Holy Spirit, and not at the same time be converted: i.e., repent and believe on the Lord Jesus Christ.
- Every person who has experienced regeneration and conversion must bring forth the fruit of a renewed and sanctified life.

What Must We Do to be Saved?

Those who thought that they must strive to earn salvation by their own good works, righteous acts, or by the performance of moral duties, put this question to the Lord Jesus Christ:

John 6:28b

^{28b} ...“What must we do, to be doing the works of God?”

To which the Lord replied:

John 6:29b

^{29b} ...“This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent.”

No amount of good deeds, righteous acts or performance of moral duties can contribute in any way toward a person's salvation. Again, no-one can earn salvation by the exercise of faith—or by turning to God in repentance—merely of his own free will. Of his own free will, fallen man has no desire to turn to God in repentance, nor can he exercise faith to the saving of his soul. These things are not within his power (ability) to achieve. Both repentance and faith are the gifts of God. God freely bestows these gifts upon all those whom he has appointed to eternal life.

Thus, the Scripture says:

Acts 13:48

⁴⁸ And when the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord, and as many as were appointed to eternal life believed.
(See vv.44-49)

When a sinner is being effectually ¹³ called to Christ, the Holy Spirit enables that person to repent and believe—*freely and willingly*. The sinner need only be told on whom he must believe. To this end, the Holy Spirit convicts a person of sin, and makes him deeply aware of God’s righteous judgment against sin. At this point, the sinner may cry out, ‘*What must I do to be saved?*’

To this question, the Scripture answers:

Acts 16:31

³¹ ... “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household.” (See vv.25-34)

Like the Philippian jailer and all his household, the sinner must repent and believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. The sinner will be able and willing to do this since God has effectually called him to faith in Christ by his Holy Spirit.

When God brings a sinner to repentance and faith, the believing sinner then receives the gift of the indwelling Holy Spirit. Having regenerated that person, the Holy Spirit then begins the life-long work of sanctifying him. In the sight of God, however, the sinner has already been justified ¹⁴ or reckoned righteous, once-for-all, with the righteousness of Christ) through faith in his Son, and has been adopted into the family of God as a child and an heir.

The Holy Spirit, who sanctifies the believer, also seals him to God. The indwelling Spirit of God guarantees the believer’s eternal security until the day of final redemption.

Summary below

¹³ *effectually*: That is, effectively or unfailingly (called to Christ).

¹⁴ *justified*: That is, *reckoned* or *accounted* righteous. When God justifies a person (once-for-all) God does not thereby make the believer inherently (inwardly) righteous at that point. However, at a believer’s regeneration or new birth, God, by his grace, credits the perfect righteousness of his own Son to the believing sinner’s account. Therefore, when God looks upon the believing and redeemed sinner, he does not look upon the believer’s old unrighteous nature. Rather, God looks upon the absolutely perfect righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ that has been credited to the believer’s account through the act of justification.

See further on *Bible Truths Explained: Justification, Sanctification*. Although often conflated by certain people, these two doctrines are totally distinct. Justification is a once-for-all act of God the Father whereby a believing sinner is declared righteous in his sight. Sanctification, however, is a life-long process in a believer’s life produced by the indwelling Holy Spirit. This life-long process culminates in *glorification* when the believer is taken home to be with the Lord forever and when that believer is presented by the Lord Jesus faultless and blameless (perfectly righteous) before the throne of God in heaven.

Part 8 Summary

- **Conversion consists of repentance and faith.** A person is converted when they turn from sin in repentance and trust in the Lord Jesus Christ by faith.
- **Salvation is entirely the work of God's grace.** Sinners are spiritually dead and cannot repent or believe by their own ability; God enables them through the Holy Spirit.
- **The Holy Spirit works through efficacious grace.** God enables those whom he calls to repent and believe freely and willingly in Christ.
- **Scripture assures salvation to all who come to Christ.**
 - God promises to cleanse sin (Isaiah 1:18).
 - Christ will never reject those who come to him (John 6:37).
 - Everyone who believes in the Son receives eternal life (John 6:40).
 - Everyone who calls on the Lord will be saved (Acts 2:21).
 - Repentance brings forgiveness and spiritual refreshing (Acts 3:19–20).
- **Repentance leading to salvation is part of effectual calling.** Wherever God effectually calls a sinner, regeneration and conversion follow.

Regeneration and Conversion

- **Regeneration and conversion are closely related but distinct.**
- **Regeneration** is God's sovereign act of creating new spiritual life in a sinner by the Holy Spirit.
- **Conversion** is the sinner's immediate response to this new life, expressed in repentance and faith.
- **Regeneration always produces conversion.** A person cannot be truly regenerated without repenting and believing in Christ.
- **True conversion results in a transformed life.** Those who have been regenerated should show the fruit of a renewed and sanctified life.

What Must We Do to Be Saved?

- **Salvation cannot be earned by good works, moral duties, or religious efforts.**
- When asked what work God requires, Jesus answered: **"Believe in him whom he has sent."** (John 6:29)
- **Repentance and faith are gifts of God.** Fallen humanity lacks both the desire and ability to turn to God apart from divine grace.
- Scripture teaches that **those appointed to eternal life believe.** (Acts 13:48)
- In effectual calling, the Holy Spirit:
 - Convicts sinners of their sin.

- Reveals God’s righteous judgment.
- Enables them to repent and believe willingly.
- The biblical answer to the question, “*What must I do to be saved?*” is: “**Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved.**” (Acts 16:31)

Results of Repentance and Faith

- The believer receives the **indwelling Holy Spirit**.
- The Holy Spirit begins the lifelong work of **sanctification**.
- The believer is **justified**—declared righteous through faith in Christ.
- The believer is **adopted into God’s family** as a child and heir.
- The Holy Spirit **seals** the believer and guarantees eternal security until final redemption.

Key Message

Conversion is repentance toward God and faith in Jesus Christ, made possible by God’s grace through regeneration and effectual calling. Salvation is not earned by works but received through God-given faith, resulting in justification, adoption, sanctification, and eternal security.

PART 9

The Prodigal Son

Enjoying the Pleasures of Sin

One of the clearest practical illustrations of the elements of true repentance is given in the story of the prodigal (or lost) son. This young man sought and obtained his share in his father's inheritance, and then he journeyed to a distant country.

When he was far away from his father's home and influence, the young man thought it safe to live as he pleased. He indulged himself freely in all the pleasures of sin. By his unrestrained and spendthrift manner of life, however, he soon squandered his entire inheritance.

The young man had absolutely nothing left. He had spent everything on satisfying his sinful passions and excessive desires. Now, he could scarcely find sufficient means to feed himself. He had enjoyed himself for a while. In the process, however, he had brought himself to misery and ruin.

As ever, God's Word had proved all too true to this man's life:

Jeremiah 4:18

¹⁸ Your ways and your deeds
have brought this upon you.
This is your doom, and it is bitter;
it has reached your very heart."
(See v.14)

Bitter Regret

What was this young man to do now? If he returned to his father, his father would surely disown him for the way he had lived, and for the disgrace he had brought upon his name. In any event, how could he face his father? What would his father think of him—or say to him? The father had once loved his son. How could he ever love him now, after the things he had done?

Yet, the young man knew that his father was his only hope. Even if he no longer wanted him as his son, perhaps he would accept him as one of his hired servants.

The more the young man considered his present situation, the more he realised that he had no other option. At last, he resolved to make the journey home. It would be extremely difficult for him to face his father. In his heart, however, he knew that his father had once cared for him. What, though, would he say to his father? How would he explain that he was truly repentant? Would his father believe him—or would he cast his wayward son out of his presence forever?

Repentance, Sorrow and Humility

Finally, the young man made up his mind what he was going to say. There was only one thing he could say:

Luke 15:18b

^{18b} ... “Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you.

Observe what the young man will say:

^{18b} ... “Father, I have sinned against heaven...”

He will acknowledge his sin against God. This is the **root** of true repentance.

The young man continues:

^{18b} ... “and before you.”

He will acknowledge his sin against his father. This is a **fruit** of true repentance.

Not Worthy to be Called My Father’s Son

The young man will go further, however. His repentance will be accompanied by true contrition and humility. He will say to his father:

Luke 15:19a

^{19a} “I am no longer worthy to be called your son...”

And then he will add:

^{19b} ... “Treat me as one of your hired servants.””

Thus, he has determined what he will say, and how he will say it. The Scripture continues:

Luke 15:20a

^{20a} And he arose and came to his father....

However, as the truly repentant young man at last catches sight of his childhood home, his father—who had long been yearning for his son’s safe return—saw him coming. The Scripture says:

Luke 15:20b

^{20b} ...But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him...

For many months or perhaps years, his father had been looking for his son and longing for his safe return. Then, one day, he saw him from afar.

And how did the father respond to the return of his wayward son?

^{20c} ...and [he] felt compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him.

The father ran toward his son to meet him in the way. Filled with compassion for his lost son, he embraced him in his loving arms and showed him the deepest affection of his heart.

You Are My Son, Whom I Love

Even before the young man had had the opportunity of expressing his repentance toward his father, his father had shown him deep compassion. Even although the young man had recognised that he had no more right to be called his father's son, his father had accepted and welcomed him. Even although he had sinned grievously against God and against his father, yet, for all that, he was still his father's son—and still his father loved him.

Upon his repentance, this young man had been restored to his father's fellowship and love, and to all his rights and privileges as a son. The father had forgiven his son. Never again would he remind his son of the sins and misdeeds of his youth.

So God Loves the Repentant Sinner

So it is with God our Father in heaven. For all those who truly repent and seek his mercy, God forgives us all our sins and transgressions. He will never again remember them. In loving compassion, mercy and grace, the penalty or punishment for all the sins committed by us has been paid in full by God's own Son. God justifies us, or accounts us as righteous in his sight, because his Son died as our atoning Sacrifice upon the cross and was raised again on the third day for our justification.

These thoughts were well expressed by the hymnwriter:

1. To God be the glory, great things He hath done,
So loved He the world that He gave us His Son,
Who yielded His life an atonement for sin,
And opened the life gate that all may go in.

Refrain:

Praise the Lord, praise the Lord, let the earth hear His voice!
Praise the Lord, praise the Lord, let the people rejoice!
Oh, come to the Father, through Jesus the Son,
And give Him the glory, great things He hath done.

2. Oh, perfect redemption, the purchase of blood,
To every believer the promise of God;
The vilest offender who truly believes,
That moment from Jesus a pardon receives.

3. Great things He hath taught us, great things He hath done,
And great our rejoicing through Jesus the Son;
But purer, and higher, and greater will be
Our wonder, our transport, when Jesus we see.

(Frances J. Crosby (Fanny Crosby), 1875. (Public Domain))

Summary below

Part 9 Summary

- **The prodigal son provides a practical illustration of true repentance.** His experience demonstrates the progression from sin, to conviction, to repentance, and finally to forgiveness and restoration.
- **Sin promises pleasure but ends in ruin.** The young man left his father's home, pursued a life of self-indulgence, wasted his inheritance, and eventually found himself destitute and miserable.
- **Sin ultimately brings painful consequences.** The prodigal discovered that sinful choices had led him into bitterness, poverty, and despair.
- **Hardship led him to reflect on his condition.** Realising the seriousness of his situation, he recognised that he had nowhere else to turn and that his father was his only hope.
- **True repentance begins with recognising one's guilt.** The prodigal resolved to return and confess, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you."
- **Repentance acknowledges sin against God first.** His confession, "I have sinned against heaven," shows that true repentance recognises sin primarily as an offence against God.
- **Repentance also acknowledges sin against others.** By admitting he had sinned against his father, the young man accepted responsibility for the harm his actions had caused.
- **True repentance is accompanied by humility.** The prodigal no longer claimed any rights or privileges for himself but considered himself unworthy to be called his father's son.
- **Repentance involves action as well as confession.** Having resolved to return, he arose and went back to his father.
- **The father's response illustrates God's mercy.** Seeing his son from afar, the father ran to meet him, embraced him, and welcomed him with compassion and love.
- **God welcomes the genuinely repentant sinner.** The father accepted his son before hearing his full confession, demonstrating grace, forgiveness, and reconciliation.
- **Repentance results in restoration.** The prodigal was restored to fellowship, love, and all the privileges of sonship despite his past failures.
- **Forgiveness means sins are no longer held against the repentant person.** The father did not continually remind his son of his former wrongdoing.
- **The parable reflects God's love for repentant sinners.** God forgives all who truly repent and seek his mercy, receiving them into his family through grace.
- **Forgiveness is founded on Christ's atoning work.** Through the death and resurrection of God's Son, believers are justified, their sins are forgiven, and they are accepted as righteous before God.

Key Message

The story of the prodigal son shows that true repentance involves recognising sin, humbly confessing it, turning back to God, and relying entirely on his mercy. God graciously receives, forgives, and restores all who come to him in genuine repentance and faith.

Part 10 follows below

PART 10

God Not Willing that Any Should Perish

In Luke's record of the lost or prodigal son, we are dealing with a parable. Parables, however, are designed to illustrate truths that are relevant to the circumstances of everyday life. No-one can imagine the heart-break and grief this young man must have caused his father over many months and years. Yet, although he must have agonised greatly over his wayward son, his father had never ceased to love him.

Thus it is with God in heaven. God hates sin, and no unrepentant sinner will ever escape the fire of God's wrath. Even now, this wrath is being unleashed against the ungodly by temporal judgments such as war, famine, and plague. At the last day, however, God will pour out his righteous wrath without measure upon all those who persist in their ungodly ways, and who encourage others to live sinful, corrupt and immoral lives.

Yet, although God's judgment is certain, God does not desire the death and perdition of anyone. Rather, he desires that they should turn to him and live. Thus, the Scripture says:

Ezekiel 18:23

²³ Have I any pleasure in the death of the wicked, declares the Lord GOD, and not rather that he should turn from his way and live? (See vv.19-22)

Ezekiel 18:32

³² For I have no pleasure in the death of anyone, declares the Lord GOD; so turn, and live." (See vv.30-31)

Ezekiel 33:11

¹¹ Say to them, As I live, declares the Lord GOD, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live; turn back, turn back from your evil ways, for why will you die, O house of Israel? (See vv.7-16)

Again, the Scripture says:

2 Peter 3:9

⁹ The Lord is not slow to fulfil his promise as some count slowness, but is patient towards you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance. (See vv.3-12; cf. Rev. 2:21)

The Lord is not slow concerning his promise of coming judgment and retribution. That judgment will surely come. Nevertheless, like the father of the prodigal son, God longs to show mercy and compassion to every repentant sinner, that they may be spared his terrible wrath.

God Blots Out All Sins

When, by the grace of God, a sinner repents of his sinful ways, forsakes them, and turns with all his heart to the Lord, God grants to that person full and free forgiveness of his sins. The Lord Jesus Christ has fully met the penalty for that person's sins. Through faith in his only Son, God justifies the repentant sinner, and delivers him from his righteous wrath. God also grants to the believer all the rights and privileges of sonship within his own family.

Concerning those whom the Spirit has convicted and convinced of their sin, and who return in true repentance to the Lord their God, acknowledging and confessing their sinful state and trusting only in the atoning sacrifice of Christ their Redeemer, the Scripture says:

Isaiah 43:25

²⁵ "I, I am he
who blots out your transgressions for my own sake,
and I will not remember your sins. (Cf. Heb. 8:12; 10:17)

Isaiah 44:22

²² I have blotted out your transgressions like a cloud
and your sins like mist;
return to me, for I have redeemed you.

Isaiah 55:6-7

⁶ "Seek the LORD while he may be found;
call upon him while he is near;
⁷ let 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. (See vv.1-5)

No Remembrance of Sin

Never again will God call to remembrance the sins and misdeeds of the repentant sinner. On the cross, the Lord Jesus atoned for these sins. There, he fully satisfied (or propitiated) God's righteous wrath against sin. By that one sacrifice, Christ has made perfect forever those who are being made holy.

As God's Word says:

Romans 3:23-25

²³ for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, ²⁴ and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, ²⁵ whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. (See vv.21-26)

Hebrews 7:25-27

²⁵ Consequently, he is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them.

²⁶ For it was indeed fitting that we should have such a high priest, holy, innocent, unstained, separated from sinners, and exalted above the heavens. ²⁷ He has no need, like those high priests, ¹⁵ to offer sacrifices daily, first for his own sins and then for those of the people, since he did this once for all when he offered up himself. (See vv.22-28; see esp. v.25)

Hebrews 10:9-10

⁹ then he added, "Behold, I have come to do your will." He does away with the first in order to establish the second. ¹⁰ And by that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. (See vv.4-8)

Hebrews 10:12-14

¹² But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God, ¹³ waiting from that time until his enemies

¹⁵ *those high priests*: [Hebrews 7:27](#); That is, the Jewish high priests serving God in the temple during the Old Testament era. These high priests offered daily and yearly sacrifices of unblemished animals to God to signify atonement for their own sins and the sins of the people. This demonstrated to the people that without the shedding of blood, there could be no forgiveness of sin.

However, although commanded by God, these animal sacrifices were only typical or representative sacrifices. They could never *actually* atone for, or take away, sin. Their purpose was to foreshadow and represent a future time when God would *actually* provide a full atonement for all sin. This God did when he yielded up his own Son, the unblemished Lamb of God, as a perfect atoning Sacrifice for the sins of all who believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. This was the fulfillment of all the Old Testament sacrifices and offerings. Jesus' atoning and substitutionary sacrifice was a once-for-all, final or complete sacrifice for sin, and can and need never be repeated.

When we say it was a '*substitutionary*' sacrifice, we mean that Jesus acted as the believing sinner's Substitute who would—in his own Person—bear God's wrath and punishment due to the sinner. Thus, God's righteous wrath and justice was laid upon his own Son instead of upon the believing sinner. Since God's justice has been satisfied in full at the cross, God will never again condemn a forgiven and redeemed sinner for sins he or she has committed.

should be made a footstool for his feet. ¹⁴ For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified. (See v.11)

Hebrews 10:16-18

¹⁶ “This is the covenant that I will make with them
after those days, declares the Lord:
I will put my laws on their hearts,
and write them on their minds”,

¹⁷ then he adds,

“I will remember their sins and their lawless deeds no more.” {*Jer. 31:34*}

¹⁸ Where there is forgiveness of these, there is no longer any offering for sin. (see v.15)

Summary below

Part 10 Summary

- **Part 10 emphasizes God's desire that people repent rather than perish.** Although God is holy and must judge sin, he takes no pleasure in the destruction of the wicked and calls them to turn to him and live.
- **The father of the prodigal son illustrates God's heart toward sinners.** Just as the father continued to love his wayward son, God continues to show compassion toward those who have wandered from him.
- **God's judgment against sin is certain.** Unrepentant sinners remain under God's righteous wrath, and final judgment will come upon those who persist in ungodliness and refuse to turn from sin.
- **God repeatedly calls sinners to repentance.** Through Scripture, God urges people to turn from their evil ways and receive life rather than face judgment.
- **God is patient and longsuffering.** His delay in bringing final judgment is not weakness or forgetfulness, but patience, giving sinners opportunity to repent.
- **Repentance brings full forgiveness.** When a sinner turns from sin and seeks the Lord, God freely forgives and pardons all transgressions.
- **Christ has fully paid the penalty for sin.** Forgiveness is possible because the Lord Jesus Christ bore the punishment due to sinners through his atoning sacrifice.
- **God justifies the repentant believer.** Through faith in Christ, the sinner is declared righteous before God and delivered from divine wrath.
- **Believers are adopted into God's family.** Those forgiven through Christ receive the rights and privileges of children of God.
- **God blots out sin completely.** Scripture declares that God removes the sins of the repentant and compares them to clouds that have vanished from sight.
- **God remembers forgiven sins no more.** The sins and transgressions of those who repent and believe are never again held against them.
- **Christ's sacrifice was once-for-all.** Unlike repeated sacrifices under the old covenant, Jesus offered a single, perfect sacrifice that fully accomplished redemption.
- **Christ completely satisfied God's justice.** By his death, he propitiated God's righteous wrath against sin and secured forgiveness for his people.
- **Christ continually intercedes for believers.** As the perfect High Priest, he is able to save completely those who come to God through him.
- **The new covenant provides complete forgiveness.** Because Christ's work is sufficient, no further sacrifice for sin is required.
- **Believers are both justified and sanctified.** Through Christ's finished work they are accepted before God and are being made holy throughout their lives.

Key Message

God does not delight in judgment but calls sinners to repentance. Through the once-for-all sacrifice of Jesus Christ, God fully forgives, justifies, and adopts all who turn to him in faith, blotting out their sins and remembering them no more.

PART 11

Immoral Practices

Repentance must involve the renouncing and forsaking of sin. The Holy Spirit had convicted this young man of his sin and had convinced him of the necessity of seeking forgiveness for his sinful way of life. In arising and going to his father, the prodigal son renounced for ever his sinful way of life—and so it must be with everyone whom the Spirit convicts, convinces and converts. Those who imagine that God will forgive them—while they continue in the deliberate practice of sin—are yet under the wrath and curse of God.

A sinner who professes true repentance cannot expect to experience God's grace while continuing in his former sinful way of life. For instance, it is utterly incompatible with the Christian way of life, and with the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, to engage in any form of deceitful practises or in any form of immorality. Our conduct must be above reproach and honourable in the sight of God. Therefore, a believer must not engage in any dishonest, disreputable or underhand practices, nor must he condone such practices or encourage others to engage in them.

Similarly, no-one who is indwelt by the Spirit of holiness should ever defile the temple of God's Spirit; i.e. his or her body—for that temple is holy. Thus, no Christian must ever engage in any kind of sexual immorality. This includes casual sexual relations, pre-marital sex, and living together (whether as committed partners or not). The only relationship that God approves of and blesses is the marriage relationship itself. In his Word, God forbids all forms of sexual relations outside of marriage.

God, who instituted marriage, makes it abundantly clear in his Word that the marriage relationship can exist only between one man and one woman (i.e. between one biological male and one biological female.)

Unnatural Practices Condemned

Concerning homosexual practices: Never at any time do such practices receive God's approval or blessing. Never at any time in God's Word does it teach or suggest that same-sex relationships or 'marriages' are valid in his sight.

In this connection, however, we must observe that there are some people within the church of God who do not know the meaning of true repentance. Evidently, these men and women have never experienced the regenerating and sanctifying power of the Holy Spirit.

Posing as servants of God, these individuals shamefully and brazenly pervert the grace of God and turn the truth of God into a lie. They condone sin in others; and some among them even admit practising the sexually immoral and unnatural behaviour that God in his Word uncompromisingly condemns.

Scripture References (ESV)

Homosexual Practices Forbidden

Concerning homosexual practices, God's Word expressly declares:

Leviticus 18:22

²²You shall not lie with a male as with a woman; it is an abomination.

Leviticus 20:13

¹³If a man lies with a male as with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination; they shall surely be put to death; their blood is upon them.

Romans 1:24

²⁴Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonouring of their bodies among themselves, (See vv.22-23)

Romans 1:25-27

²⁵because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshipped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed for ever! Amen.

²⁶For this reason God gave them up to dishonourable passions. For their women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature; ²⁷and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in themselves the due penalty for their error. (See vv.28-32)

According to the Word of God, such people are not servants of Christ. Rather, they are servants of Satan. The doctrines they propound in the name of God, are doctrines of demons. Although their church or denomination may accept, or even approve of, their actions, these people stand eternally condemned—unless they are brought to true repentance and faith in Christ. However, if they continue in their sinful ways, and encourage others to follow them, they will reap what they sow—not only in this life, but also in the life to come.

False Teachers Distort God's Word

Concerning those who, in one way or another, distort the true teaching of God's Word—or who turn the truth of God into a lie—the Scripture says:

2 Corinthians 11:13-15

¹³For such men are false apostles, deceitful workmen, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. ¹⁴And no wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. ¹⁵So it is no surprise if his servants, also, disguise themselves as servants of righteousness. Their end will correspond to their deeds. (See v.4)

Galatians 1:6-9

⁶I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel— ⁷not that there is another one, but there are some who trouble you and want to distort the gospel of Christ. ⁸But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed. ⁹As we have said before, so now I say again: If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to the one you received, let him be accursed.

Galatians 6:7-8

⁷Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap. ⁸For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life. (See v.9)

2 Peter 2:1-2

¹But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing upon themselves swift destruction. ²And many will follow their sensuality, and because of them the way of truth will be blasphemed. (See v.3)

2 Peter 2:9-10

⁹then the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from trials, and to keep the unrighteous under punishment until the day of judgement, ¹⁰and especially those who indulge in the lust of defiling passion and despise authority.

Bold and wilful, they do not tremble as they blaspheme the glorious ones,
(See vv.4-11)

2 Peter 2:17

¹⁷ These are waterless springs and mists driven by a storm. For them the gloom of utter darkness has been reserved. (See vv.12-22)

Excluded from God's Kingdom

It has been necessary to make this observation—not to pass judgment—but to point out that such people are deceiving others and hastening them to hell by their example and by their teaching. We can only remind these men and women—and ourselves—of the solemn warnings given by God in the Scriptures of truth.

One such Scripture declares:

1 Corinthians 6:9-10

⁹ Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practise homosexuality,¹⁶ ¹⁰ nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. (See vv.12-20)

Similarly, Paul writes to Timothy:

1 Timothy 1:9-10

⁹ understanding this, that the law is not laid down for the just but for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and sinners, for the unholy and profane, for those who strike their fathers and mothers, for murderers,
¹⁰ the sexually immoral, men who practise homosexuality, enslavers, liars, perjurers, and whatever else is contrary to sound doctrine,

¹⁶ *homosexuality*: [1 Corinthians 6:9](#) The two Greek terms translated by this phrase refer to the passive and active partners in consensual homosexual acts. (ESV footnote).

The Greek text is μαλακός **malakos** (malakos arsenokoitēs). This means, *male prostitute, male homosexual, or men who share the same bed*. However, the term is equally applicable to females who share same-sex partners (*Lesbian* relationships). Both forms of same-sex relationships are expressly forbidden by God and condemned as an abomination in his sight.

Mercy for Those Who Forsake Their Sins

The above Scripture continues, however:

1 Corinthians 6:11

¹¹ And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.

For those, however, who refuse to forsake their sin and turn to God in repentance, the Scriptures record this example of God's judgment as a warning to others:

Jeremiah 21:5-6

⁵ I myself will fight against you with outstretched hand and strong arm, in anger and in fury and in great wrath. ⁶ And I will strike down the inhabitants of this city, both man and beast. They shall die of a great pestilence. (See vv.1-4,14; cf. Deut. 28:15-22)

The Lord our God is a compassionate God; and he promises to be merciful to all who repent of their sinful ways. If, however, a person is to escape the just retribution of God, he must be willing to acknowledge his sin. He must truly repent of it, confess it to God, and utterly forsake his sinful behaviour.

To this end, the Scripture says:

Jeremiah 26:13

¹³ Now therefore mend your ways and your deeds, and obey the voice of the LORD your God, and the LORD will relent of the disaster that he has pronounced against you. (See vv.1-15; see esp. v.3)

Jeremiah 30:15

¹⁵ Why do you cry out over your hurt?
[i.e. *affliction*]
Your pain is incurable.
Because your guilt is great,
because your sins are flagrant,
I have done these things to you.
(See vv.10-17b)

To those who truly repent, and utterly forsake their sin, God's Word declares:

Jeremiah 33:8

⁸ I will cleanse them from all the guilt of their sin against me, and I will forgive all the guilt of their sin and rebellion against me. (See vv.1-7)

Epilogue

The Believer's Need of Repentance

In this study, we have been considering *repentance unto life*; i.e. repentance that results from the inward convicting, convincing and converting power of the Holy Spirit, and that leads to the gift of salvation and eternal life. However, during this lifetime, no believer will ever become so sanctified that he or she will attain to perfection, or a sin-free state. Throughout this life, it will be necessary for every child of God to repent of his or her sins on a daily basis.

The Lord Jesus Christ is our Great High Priest who intercedes for us before the throne of God. He is also our Advocate with the Father—the one who pleads his merits in our defence on the grounds of his perfect, atoning and vicarious or substitutionary sacrifice. For his sake, and in virtue of the work that the Son of God accomplished in redemption, God continues to forgive our sins. God is faithful to his promises, and just in all his ways. If we confess our sins, the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all unrighteousness.

Scripture References (ESV)

God Forgives Those Who Have Sinned

Regarding these things, God's Word says:

Hebrews 7:25

²⁵ Consequently, he is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them. (See vv.24-28)

Hebrews 8:12

¹² For I will be merciful towards their iniquities, and I will remember their sins no more."
{*Jer. 31:31-34*} (See Heb. 8:6-13)

1 John 1:8-10

⁸ 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. ¹⁰ If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us. (See vv.5-7)

1 John 2:1-2

¹ My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. ² He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.

Repentance is unto *life*—life that we are to live to God's glory. Every truly repentant and justified person must bring forth the fruit of a renewed and sanctified life. That fruit is holiness. Without this fruit, the tree is dead.

Summary below

Part 11 Summary

- **True repentance requires the renouncing and forsaking of sin.** Genuine conversion involves turning away from a sinful lifestyle and seeking to live in obedience to God.
- **Repentance and deliberate sin cannot coexist.** Those who claim forgiveness while continuing knowingly and willingly in sin have not demonstrated genuine repentance.
- **Christian conduct should be honourable and above reproach.** Believers are called to reject dishonest, deceitful, and immoral practices, and not encourage or condone them in others.
- **The believer's body is to be treated as holy.** Christians are called to avoid sexual immorality and to pursue lives that reflect the holiness of God.
- **Marriage is presented as God's ordained context for sexual relations.** The chapter teaches that sexual conduct is to be governed by God's design and commands.
- **Part 11 warns against approving or promoting conduct that Scripture identifies as sinful.** It stresses the importance of aligning beliefs and behaviour with biblical teaching.
- **False teachers are described as those who distort God's truth.** Scripture warns against those who alter, deny, or misrepresent the gospel and lead others into error.
- **Believers are urged to remain faithful to the true gospel.** Any teaching contrary to the message revealed in Scripture is to be rejected.
- **God is not mocked.** Scripture teaches that people will ultimately reap the consequences of the way they live, whether according to the flesh or according to the Spirit.
- **The chapter includes warnings about exclusion from God's kingdom.** Various sinful lifestyles and practices are presented as incompatible with inheriting the kingdom of God.
- **Yet God's grace is available to repentant sinners.** The message of the gospel is not merely condemnation but transformation, forgiveness, and renewal through Christ.
- **Former sinners can be changed by God's grace.** Those who repent and trust in Christ can be washed, sanctified, and justified through the work of Christ and the Holy Spirit.
- **God's judgment remains upon those who refuse to repent.** Scripture warns that those who persist in sin and reject God's call face divine judgment.
- **God promises mercy to those who confess and forsake sin.** He invites sinners to amend their ways, obey his voice, and seek his forgiveness.
- **God cleanses and forgives those who truly repent.** Repentance is accompanied by God's promise to remove guilt and pardon rebellion against him.

Epilogue: The Believer's Continuing Need of Repentance

- **Repentance remains necessary throughout the Christian life.** Even believers do not attain sinless perfection in this life and must continue to repent of their sins.

- **Christ continually intercedes for his people.** As Great High Priest and Advocate, Jesus represents believers before the Father.
- **God continues to forgive confessing believers.** When Christians acknowledge their sins, God remains faithful to forgive and cleanse them through Christ's atoning work.
- **Believers are encouraged to confess their sins honestly.** Denying sin is self-deception, but confession brings forgiveness and restoration of fellowship with God.
- **The goal of repentance is a holy life.** Genuine repentance produces the fruit of sanctification, holiness, and devotion to God's glory.

Key Message

True repentance involves turning away from sin, embracing God's ways, and living a life marked by holiness. God offers mercy, forgiveness, cleansing, and transformation to all who genuinely repent, while believers continue throughout life to depend on Christ's intercession, confess their sins, and grow in sanctification.

END

