

Each week of 2019 we will take a brief look at one or more questions from the Westminster Shorter Catechism. To read previous weeks' briefs go to oakhillpca.com/wsc

Q. 87. *What is repentance unto life?*

A. Repentance unto life is a saving grace, whereby a sinner, out of a true sense of his sin, and apprehension of the mercy of God in Christ, does, with grief and hatred of his sin, turn from it unto God, with full purpose of, and endeavor after, new obedience.

One of the clearest examples of repentance is the church at Thessalonica. Paul received the "Macedonian Call" in Acts 16, the first initiative to bring the gospel of Christ to Europe. Paul starts in Philippi and then travels to Thessalonica. Just imagine a city and culture entrenched in the idolatry of Greek mythology, having no prior Christian witness. There is a synagogue, so Old Testament scriptures were taught, but for the vast majority, Thessalonica was a pagan city.

Paul writes, after a brief visit (a month at best), "You turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God" (1 Thes. 1:9). This is what repentance looks like. A change of allegiance. A change of mind. A change of heart. A change of life actions.

Just like faith, repentance is a "saving grace," meaning it is a gift from God. In Acts 11:18, in response to Peter's report about Cornelius coming to faith, the leaders in Jerusalem say, "Then to the Gentiles also God has granted repentance that leads to life." And Paul affirms this principle in 2 Timothy 2:25, "God may perhaps grant them repentance." God removes the obstacles in our hearts and wills so that we can respond to the gospel in repentance.

Repentance is the appropriate response to the gospel. As Joel 2:13 affirms, repentance is the apprehension of the evil of our sin and the hopefulness of God's mercy. Repentance and faith go hand-in-hand, like two sides of one coin, for salvation is a matter of allegiance. In repentance, we deny our old allegiances, confessing their emptiness and fruitlessness. In faith, we cling to Christ as our only hope of salvation.

As the Catechism is clear to state, repentance is not merely grief over sin (2 Cor. 7:10). There is a turning, a change of allegiance. True repentance transforms because one's heart has shifted to Christ. Being united to Christ produces fruit in one's life. Therefore, John the Baptist is able to say, "Bear fruit in keeping with repentance" (Matt. 3:8).

Christians often think of repentance as work we need to do, but it is a "saving grace" that frees us from the bondage to sin and unites us to the mercy of God.