

REFORMATION 500 WEEK 33: HEIDELBERG CATECHISM QA'S 88-91

Question 88: IN HOW MANY THINGS DOES TRUE REPENTANCE OR CONVERSION CONSIST? **In two things: the dying of the old man, and the making alive of the new.**

Having considered why we must do good works (out of thankfulness for salvation), we will now learn that doing good works is part of what it means to live a repentant and converted life – which is exactly what sanctification involves.

The terms *repentance* (change of mind) and *conversion* (turning around) basically mean the same thing: to turn from sin to God for forgiveness and to obey Him out of thankfulness for salvation in Christ (Acts 11:21). “*Repent* therefore and *be converted*, that your sins may be blotted out” (Acts 3:19). The *repentance* of the Gentiles (Acts 11:18) is called “the *conversion* of the Gentiles” (Acts 15:3).

When God grants us true repentance so that we are truly converted, this is the beginning of our life-long experience of sanctification. By His Holy Spirit God has set us free from the enslaving power of our old sinful nature by giving us a new holy nature (2 Cor. 5:17). This does not mean we no longer have our old sinful nature, but it does mean we are no longer *slaves* to it (Rom. 6:6, 14). We have a new nature that hates sin and desires to please God out of thankfulness for salvation (Col. 3:10). “There is a part of us which is **renewed** [the new man] and a part which retains its natural corruption [the old man]” (Calvin). The process of sanctification is the process of repentance and conversion, of turning from our old sinful nature and living according to our new nature. Scripture says to “**put to death**” (Col. 3:5) or “**put off**, concerning your former conduct, **the old man** which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, and ... **put on the new man** which was created according to God [in His image], in righteousness and holiness” (Eph. 4:22-23). We are sanctified “so that we may more and more **die unto sin** and **lead holy and unblameable lives**” (Q&A 70).

Question 89: WHAT IS THE DYING OF THE OLD MAN? **Heartfelt sorrow for sin, causing us to hate and turn from it always more and more.**

The *dying* of the old man is the life-long *process* of mortification, of putting to death our sins by the grace and power of the Holy Spirit: “if by the Spirit **you put to death** the deeds of the body, you will live” (Rom. 8:13). “Therefore, **put to death** your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry” (Col. 3:5; cf. Eph. 5:22-32). The Holy Spirit works in our hearts a godly sorrow for sin (Joel 2:13), which causes us to hate our sins and to turn from them more and more; “godly sorrow produces repentance” (2 Cor. 7:10). “I *abhor* myself, and *repent* in dust and ashes.” (Job 42:6). This is a very painful process (Gal. 5:17). The apostle Paul, speaking as a new man in Christ, expressed what is true for every believer, “I do the very thing I *hate*.... For I do not do the good I *want* to do but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing. Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I who do it, but sin [my old sinful nature] that dwells in me” (Rom. 7:15, 19-20). “Our conversion to God is not perfect in this life, but is here continually advancing, until it reaches the perfection which is promised in the life to come” (Ursinus, 474). “He who has begun a good work in you will complete it” (Phil. 1:6).

Question 90: WHAT IS THE MAKING ALIVE OF THE NEW MAN? **Heartfelt joy in God through Christ, causing us to take delight in living according to the will of God in all good works.**

The making alive of the new man is the life-long process of God **remaking** us into His holy image, causing us out of thankfulness and joy to put on the new man. The old man must decrease. The new man must increase. Paul tells his fellow believers: “you have put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him.... Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering,” etc. (Col. 3:10, 12). “Therefore, be imitators of God as dear children. And walk in love, as Christ also has loved us” (Eph. 5:1-2). Just as heartfelt sorrow causes us to hate sin and turn from it more and more, heartfelt joy in God through Christ causes us to take delight in living according to God’s will in all good works (Rom. 5:1; Gal. 2:20). “I *delight* to do Your will, O my God, and Your law is within my heart” (Psalm 40:8). When we do not put our sins to death but give in to them, then we must confess our sins to God and pray for the renewal of the new man. “Create in me a clean heart, O God, and *renew* a right spirit within me.... *Restore* to me the joy of Your salvation” (Psalm 51:10, 12; cf. Jer. 31:18; Luke 12:32). “*Revive* us, and we will call upon Your name” (Psalm 80:18).

To sum up, the sanctified life is putting off the old man and putting on the new man. For example, “putting away **lying**, let each one of you speak **truth** with His neighbor” (Eph. 4:25). “Let him who stole **steal no longer**, **but** rather let him **labor**...that he may have something to **give** him who has need. Let **no corrupt word** proceed out of your mouth, **but what is good** for necessary edification” (Eph. 5:28-29). To put it very simply: “**Turn away from evil** and **do good**” (1 Peter 3:11).

Question 91: WHAT ARE GOOD WORKS? **Those only which proceed from true faith, and are done according to the Law of God, unto His glory, and not such as rest on our own opinion or the commandments of men.**

Three things are necessary for our works to be good: (1) A good root: True faith. “Without faith it is impossible to please God” (Heb. 11:6). Remember that prior to regeneration we are spiritually dead incapable of doing anything good. “A bad tree cannot bear good fruit” (Matt. 7:18; cf. Matt. 12:33). The Lord makes us spiritually alive, giving us faith in Christ; and from the seed of faith comes a tree full of good fruit. True believers are “those who hear the word, accept it, and bear fruit” (Mark 4:20; cf. Heb. 13:15); (2) A good standard: God’s law (John 14:15; 1 John 2:4) – *not* what is right in our own eyes (Judges 21:25); not according to the traditions or commandments of men (Matt. 15:9). (3) A good goal: God’s glory; “whether you eat or drink, or *whatever you do*, do all to the glory of God” (1 Cor. 10:31). To do anything to the glory of God, “is to do it, that we may testify our love, reverence and obedience to God, and that for the sake of showing our thankfulness for the benefits which we have received,” and not “from a desire to advance our own selfish interests;” God must “be respected *first* whenever we do anything; nor must we care what men may say, whether they praise or reproach us” (Ursinus, 478). Our good works are not *perfectly* good, but the unregenerate have no good works at all!

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