

LORD'S DAY 33

87. Q. What is the true repentance or conversion of man?

A. It is the dying of the old nature and the coming to life of the new.¹

1. **Romans 6:1-11** What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound?² Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it?³ Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death?⁴ Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.⁵ For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection,⁶ knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin.⁷ For he who has died has been freed from sin.⁸ Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him,⁹ knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, dies no more. Death no longer has dominion over Him.¹⁰ For the death that He died, He died to sin once for all; but the life that He lives, He lives to God.¹¹ Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

1 Corinthians 5:7 Therefore purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, since you

truly are unleavened. For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us.

2 Corinthians 5:17 Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.

Ephesians 4:22-24 that you put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts,²³ and be renewed in the spirit of your mind,²⁴ and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness.

Colossians 3:5-10 Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry.⁶ Because of these things the wrath of God is coming upon the sons of disobedience,⁷ in which you yourselves once walked when you lived in them.⁸ But now you yourselves are to put off all these: anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy language out of your mouth.⁹ Do not lie to one another, since you have put off the old man with his deeds,¹⁰ and have put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him,

89. Q. What is the dying of the old nature?

A. It is to grieve with heartfelt sorrow that we have offended God by our sin, and more and more to hate it and flee from it.¹

1. **Psalm 51:3-4** For I acknowledge my transgressions, And my sin is always before me.⁴ Against You, O Lord, You only, have I sinned, And done this evil in Your sight; That You may be found just when You speak, And blameless when You judge.

Psalm 51:17 The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, A broken and a contrite heart; These, O God, You will not despise.

Joel 2:12-13 "Now, therefore," says the LORD, "Turn to Me with all your heart, With fasting, with weeping, and with mourning."¹³ So rend your heart, and not your garments; Return to the

LORD your God, For He is gracious and merciful, Slow to anger, and of great kindness; And He relents from doing harm.

Romans 8:12-13 Therefore, brethren, we are debtors; not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh.¹³ For if you live according to the flesh you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.

2 Corinthians 7:10 For godly sorrow produces repentance leading to salvation, not to be regretted; but the sorrow of the world produces death.

90. Q. What is the coming to life of the new nature?

A. It is a heartfelt joy in God through Christ,¹ and a love and delight to live according to the will of God I in all good works.²

1. **Psalm 51:8** Make me hear joy and gladness, that the bones You have broken may rejoice.

Psalm 51:12 Restore to me the joy of Your salvation, and uphold me by Your generous Spirit.

Isaiah 57:15 For thus says the High and Lofty One who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy: "I dwell in the high and holy place, with him who has a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones.

Romans 5:1 Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ,

Romans 14:17 for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.

2. **Romans 6:10-11** For the death that He died, He died to sin once for all; but the life that He lives, He lives to God. ¹¹ Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Galatians 2:20 I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.

91. Q. But what are good works?

A. Only those which are done out of true faith,¹ in accordance with the law of God,² and to His glory,³ and not those based on our own opinion or on precepts of men.⁴

1. **John 15:5** I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing.

Romans 14:23 But he who doubts is condemned if he eats, because he does not eat from faith; for whatever is not from faith is sin.

Hebrews 11:6 But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.

2. **Leviticus 18:4** 'You shall observe My judgments and keep My ordinances, to walk in them: I am the LORD your God.

1 Samuel 15:22 Then Samuel said: "Has the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed than the fat of rams.

Ephesians 2:10 For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.

3. **1 Corinthians 10:31** Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.

4. **Deuteronomy 12:32** Whatever I command you, be careful to observe it; you shall not add to it nor take away from it.

Isaiah 29:13 Therefore the LORD said: "Inasmuch as these people draw near with their mouths and honor Me with their lips, but have removed their hearts far from Me, and their fear toward Me is taught by the commandment of men,"

Ezekiel 20:18-19 But I said to their children in the wilderness, "Do not walk in the statutes of your fathers, nor observe their judgments, nor defile yourselves with their idols. ¹⁹ I am the LORD your God: Walk in My statutes, keep My judgments, and do them;"

Matthew 15:7-9 Hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy about you, saying: ⁸ "These people draw near to Me with their mouth, and honor Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me. ⁹ And in vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men."

In the previous Lord's Day, we saw that we who are redeemed by the blood of Christ are also renewed by the Holy Spirit so that we can do good works. The Holy Spirit works within us, turning us to God and away from sin.

This "*turning to God and away from sin*" is called **conversion** or **repentance**. As in the English, the original languages of both the Old and New Testament also use two words. One indicates an inward change of heart, while the other indicates an outward change in conduct. From this we learn that repentance means more than merely saying "*I'm sorry.*" It also means breaking with sin.

Conversion or repentance does not arise out of man himself. It is not man who turns to God on his own. Man is dead in sin. When man fell into sin, his heart became totally corrupt. He is unable to turn back to God. Of himself he would never seek God (cf. Romans 3:11). There are none who can come to Christ unless they are drawn by the Father (cf. John 6:44). No one can confess Jesus is Christ except through the Holy Spirit (cf. 1 Corinthians 12:3). Just as the Ethiopian cannot change his skin or the leopard its spots, neither can we change our evil nature and do good (cf. Jeremiah 13:23). Conversion or repentance is a gift of God. He turns us. He changes us. He gives us a new heart. Conversion or repentance is the result of being regenerated by the Spirit of God.

For this reason we do not appreciate the emphasis which is sometimes placed upon **our** acceptance of Christ as Saviour, as if this is our accomplishment. We do well to remember the words of our Lord, "*You did not choose Me, but I chose you...*" (John 15:16), and the words of John, "*We love Him because He first loved us*" (1 John 4:19).

The Catechism speaks about **the** conversion or repentance of man. This indicates that there is but **one** conversion and repentance. We can speak about the one conversion of man because it is the work of God. And whatever God begins, He also continues and finally completes. He will not leave His

work unfinished. Neither will He let His work be frustrated or come to nought.

That we speak about one conversion does not mean that conversion is simply a thing of the past, a one time act. Conversion or repentance is a **process**, a life-long process. We are *being* converted. We repent *daily*. The Catechism teaches us this with the use of the participles (*-ing* words): conversion is "*the **dying** of the old nature*" and "*the **coming** to life of the new nature.*" Only after this life do we enjoy the completion of conversion. Only then will we be able to live totally free from sin.

That the Holy Spirit begins to work in us does not mean that we are left without any responsibility. Indeed, we must work out our salvation (Philippians 2:12). We cannot do that of ourselves. That is the work of the Holy Spirit, who is at work in us. We must not resist the work of the Holy Spirit but allow Him to further His regenerating work in us, and pray ardently for this.

It is a sad fact, but we do not always allow ourselves to be led by the Holy Spirit. Sometimes we resist His work and we fall into sin. This happens daily in our lives, with the result that all our works are defiled with sin. Because of this we must repent daily. Every day again we must confess our sin and ask for forgiveness. We must turn from our sin and pray for strength to resist temptation. Thus we see that while we speak about **the** true conversion, we refer to it not as a one-time act, but as a process.

In this process of conversion there is also **progress**. Scripture often speaks about growing in spiritual maturity, in faith and in faithfulness. This, too, is reflected in the Catechism when we read about hating sin and fleeing from sin "**more and more,**" and when Scripture speaks about the growth of love for God and our neighbour (cf. Philippians 1:9,1 Thessalonians 3:12, 4:1,10). Just as in marriage love for the other grows stronger with the passing years, so also in the covenant of grace our love for God and for our neighbour grows stronger. If our love for God increases, that means that our hatred for sin also

increases. We want to please God, and we shun and flee from everything that would displease Him.

Although we cannot arrive at perfection in this life, and though even the holiest men have but a small beginning of this new obedience, yet with Paul we say that we press on to make perfection our own (cf. Philippians 3:12). Those who are truly converted never have the attitude, "*I've arrived! I've made it!*" We are never satisfied with the state that we are in. We are not content with the way that we live our lives. We don't say, "*Well, I know that I'm not perfect, but then nobody is. So I suppose everything's all right with the way that I live.*" That is not the way the truly converted will talk. As long as they see any shortcoming in their lives (and they will see this!) they will hate this imperfection, and strive for flawless obedience.

How does the Holy Spirit work this conversion? It is not different from the working of faith. In Lord's Day 25 we learned that the Holy Spirit uses instruments in working and strengthening faith, namely, the preaching of the gospel and the sacraments. In like manner, the conversion or repentance of man is worked through these same instruments.

In various charismatic "churches" we hear of instantaneous and rather dramatic conversions. We approach this with a measure of caution. For while the Holy Spirit is able to do anything, we learn from the Scriptures that faith is worked through the preaching of the gospel. While we do not doubt that the Spirit is capable of performing instant conversions, yet we maintain the scriptural viewpoint that a knowledge of Scripture is essential (Romans 10:14-17).

Furthermore, while Scripture displays some dramatic conversions, such as Saul on the way to Damascus, and the Philippian jailer, nowhere do we read that these are the norm for the Christian. We should not lose sight that the Spirit worked then in ways that He does not work now. Think only of the many miracles performed, and

the exceeding rapid growth of the Church after Pentecost.

Still further to this, we should not lose sight of the covenant, to which the children of believers belong. From their youth they are trained in the knowledge of the Lord. Already in their youngest years they display child-like faith in what their parents teach them, a faith that grows stronger as these children grow in knowledge and maturity. They experience nothing dramatic. They cannot rightly recall the day that the Holy Spirit began to work faith in them, and did not even perceive its steady growth in them.

While faith may be worked quickly and dramatically in some, it is often worked slowly and quietly among the covenant youth. It is not important *when* we were converted. What is important is *that* we are converted.

Through the work of the Holy Spirit, those who are truly converted will produce good works. And it is only the converted who can do good works. The unconverted cannot. You might question this. Is it not true that even the unconverted and unbelieving often do good deeds? When you visit a hospital, you will find unbelieving people volunteering their time to help in the care of the sick. You will find unconverted people giving large donations to charitable organisations. You will find unconverted people who will not use foul language and who live very *clean* lives. Are these not good works?

No, they are not. Why not? Because there is something lacking in their deeds. For a work to be considered "*good*" by God, there are three requirements:

1. The **SOURCE** of good works. "*Without faith it is impossible to please [God]*" Hebrews 11:6). With these words we learn that God does not only consider the outward actions of man, but also the motivation for his actions. Do we not do the same? Two men might both buy flowers for their wives. But if the heart of one man is not right towards his wife, and if he does not love her or trust her, the outward action of giving flowers will

hardly be acceptable to her. Both men have done the same, but the source of their actions differed. And the source of our actions is important to us.

So it is with God also. Though a believer and an unbeliever outwardly do the same act, there is a great difference in the source of their action. There is a great difference in their hearts. The child of God does it out of faith in God. He believes that God requires this of Him, and that this pleases God. He does it out of love for God, and out of thanksgiving to God. This makes all the difference to God when judging the deeds we do, whether they are good or evil.

2. The **NORM** for good works. Good works must be done according to God's law. That is the *norm* or *standard*. God's law determines or regulates what is good and what is evil.

Many people today speak about love as the norm that determines what is good or evil. This is called *situation ethics*. Take, for example, a young woman who is about to die because of some wasting disease. She becomes increasingly helpless. Some would argue that out of love for that person we should allow her to die in dignity. We should allow her to receive a lethal injection so that she dies immediately without having to suffer any more. To use a phrase often applied to animals: we should put her out of her misery as we do animals which have been seriously injured.

But God's law teaches us that no one can give or take life except God alone. To put the woman to death by an injection may be given a nice name (euthanasia), but God calls it murder. Love towards fellow man is not the norm that determines what is good and lawful. Neither is man the one who determines right and wrong. God is the Law-giver. He determines right and wrong. He dictates in His Word what is good and acceptable.

Let it be understood that the law is not opposed to love. Indeed, love is

the fulfilling of the law. But let us remember that the first and greatest commandment is that we love the Lord our God. This love must be shown by keeping God's commandments (John 14:15). Our love for God and our obedience to His law determines what we do out of love for our neighbour.

The **PURPOSE** of good works. Good works must have the aim to glorify God. Whatever man does for self-glory or self-honour or for self-gain is not good in the eyes of God. Only those works are deemed good which have the glory of God as their aim and purpose. If we seek glory for ourselves in doing them, then Christ says that we have our reward already from men, and we will not be rewarded again by God (Matt 6:1). But if we seek to please God alone, then God will regard these works as good, and He will reward them.



Questions:

1. What is conversion or repentance? What do the two words in the original languages teach us about conversion and repentance?
2. From where does conversion *not* arise? Why?
3. From where does conversion arise? What do John 15:16 and 1 John 4:19 say respectively?
4. How many conversions will a man experience in his life? Why?
5. Is conversion something that only happens once in the past? How does the Catechism teach us this?
6. If conversion is a work of God, does that leave us without any responsibility? If not, what must we do?
7. Are those who are converted free from sin? What must we do daily, then?
8. What do we mean when we say that there is progress in conversion? How does the Catechism teach us this?
9. Will we ever be able to reach perfection in this life? What must we confess about our obedience?
10. Will the converted ever be satisfied with the state that they are in? What will the converted do with respect to their remaining imperfection?
11. How does the Holy Spirit work this conversion?
12. What should be our attitude towards instantaneous conversions? What Scriptural viewpoint should we maintain?
13. Do we read of any dramatic conversions in Scripture? Should we accept them as the norm (that is, as being normal) for us today?
14. How is conversion often worked among the covenant youth?
15. What is not important about conversion? What is important?
16. What will the converted produce? Does it appear that the unconverted produce the same? Why are they not what they appear to be?
17. What must be the source of good works if they are to truly be considered good in the eyes of God? What does Hebrews 11:6 say?
18. What does the word "*norm*" mean? What must be the norm for good works? What cannot be the norm? Give an example of how the ungodly sometimes apply the wrong norm to do what they think is good? What does John 14:15 say?
19. What must be the purpose of good works? What does Matthew 6:1 say? What does this teach us?