

“What is the Gospel: Part 8”

Review: God entered into a covenant with the first man Adam in the garden of Eden. In that covenant, He promised him life, if he would obey Him perfectly, but death, if he would disobey. Of course, whichever way Adam chose would affect all his posterity. Adam chose to disobey God, and when he did, he fell under the curse of the covenant, along with all of his children. But the Lord was pleased to make a second covenant, called the Covenant of Grace. In this covenant, the Lord Jesus Christ took the place of all His people, rendering the obedience that they failed to give, and offering Himself up as a sacrifice for their sins. Because of His work, He has become the surety, or guarantee, that His people will receive the blessings of that covenant, eternal life and an inheritance in heaven. All that His people must do is repent of their sins and turn to Him in faith. Now, after we finish looking at what true repentance and faith is, and after reminding ourselves that man as he comes into the world is spiritually dead and completely unable to do anything pleasing to God, we will then see what the Lord must first do before any of His people will ever believe on Him.

IV. Let's continue then to look at what man must do in the Covenant of Grace, if he is to be saved. What is it that he must do? He must repent and believe.

A. Everything that Christ has done will be no good to anyone unless they repent of their sins and believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. What does it mean to repent and believe?

1. To repent means to turn from all of your sins to all righteousness, from doing everything wrong to everything right. There are generally three elements to biblical repentance. Do you know what they are?

a. To repent, a person must know what sin is and acknowledge that they have sinned.

(i) Can a person do this and not be saved? Yes. Pharaoh confessed that he sinned, but he was not truly repentant. After the plague of the thunder and hail, “Pharaoh sent for Moses and Aaron, and said to them, ‘I have sinned this time; the LORD is the righteous one, and I and my people are the wicked ones’” (Ex. 9:27). When the children of Israel sinned against God by not believing that He was able to bring them into the Promised Land, Moses then writes, “In the morning, however, they rose up early and went up to the ridge of the hill country, saying, ‘Here we are; we have indeed sinned, but we will go up to the place which the LORD has promised’” (Num. 14:40). But the Lord was not with them, and many of them were killed.

(ii) A man might acknowledge his sins and not be truly repentant, but you cannot be truly repentant without acknowledging your sin. David wrote in Psalm 51:4, “Against Thee, Thee only, I have sinned, and done what is evil in Thy sight, so that Thou art justified when Thou dost speak, and blameless when Thou dost judge.” We must acknowledge the justice of God in condemning us for our sin.

- b. A person must also be sorry for his sin.
- (i) Can he be sorry for his sin and not truly repentant? Yes. Judas was sorry when he saw that Jesus had been betrayed. Matt. 27:3-5, “Then when Judas, who had betrayed Him, saw that He had been condemned, he felt remorse and returned the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders, saying, ‘I have sinned by betraying innocent blood.’ But they said, ‘What is that to us? See to that yourself!’ And he threw the pieces of silver into the sanctuary and departed; and he went away and hanged himself.” King Saul was sorry both times when David spared his life, but he was not truly repentant (1 Sam. 24:17; 26:21).
 - (ii) A person can be sorry without saving repentance, but he can’t savingly repent without being sorry. God will work sorrow in their hearts. David wrote, “Be gracious to me, O LORD, for I am in distress; my eye is wasted away from grief, my soul and my body *also*. For my life is spent with sorrow, and my years with sighing; my strength has failed because of my iniquity, and my body has wasted away” (Psalm 31:9-10). And he writes, “For I am ready to fall, and my sorrow is continually before me. For I confess my iniquity; I am full of anxiety because of my sin” (38:17-18).
- c. But there is one more thing. A person must so hate his sin and grieve over it, because it is an affront to God, that he turns from all of it to righteousness.
- (i) Can the unconverted person do this? No. They might turn away outwardly from their sin, but not inwardly. They might hate it and grieve about it because of what it cost them -- their reputation or their peace -- but they will not hate it or grieve over it because it is an affront to God.
 - (ii) But the truly repentant will hate all of their sins and turn away from all of them to righteousness. God told His people in Ezekiel 36:31 that He was intending to turn to them again and to give them new hearts and new spirits. And when that happened, He said, “Then you will remember your evil ways and your deeds that were not good, and you will loathe yourselves in your own sight for your iniquities and your abominations.” He said in Isaiah 30:22, “And you will defile your graven images, overlaid with silver, and your molten images plated with gold. You will scatter them as an impure thing; *and* say to them, ‘Be gone!’” The psalmist wrote, “It is time for the LORD to act, *for* they have broken Thy law. Therefore I love Thy commandments above gold, yes, above fine gold. Therefore I esteem right all *Thy* precepts concerning everything, I hate every false way” (119:126-128). And Paul writes, “For behold what earnestness this very thing, this godly sorrow, has produced in you: what vindication of yourselves, what indignation, what fear, what longing, what zeal, what avenging of wrong! In everything you demonstrated yourselves to be innocent in the matter” (2 Cor. 7:11).
- d. Can a person be truly repentant, if he is only repentant over a few things in his life? No, his repentance must be universal. He must turn from all sin to all

righteousness, even if that thing he thinks is sin really isn't sin; if he believes that it is, he must turn from it.

- (i) James 4:17 "Therefore, to one who knows *the* right thing to do, and does not do it, to him it is sin."
- (ii) Rom. 14:23 "But he who doubts is condemned if he eats, because *his eating is* not from faith; and whatever is not from faith is sin."
- (iii) If we do not turn from all sin, then we really don't hate sin, for if we did, we would turn from all of it.
- (iv) Likewise, if we really love righteousness, we would not do only some, but all of it, or else we really don't love it.

2. What is saving faith? It also has three elements. What are they?

a. First, a person must know the truth: what it is that is to be believed.

- (i) Paul writes, "For whoever will call upon the name of the Lord will be saved. How then shall they call upon Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach unless they are sent?" (Rom. 10:13-15).
- (ii) You cannot believe what you do not know.

b. But is knowing the facts enough? What else is needed? A person must believe that the facts are true.

- (i) Can a person know the facts and even believe them, but still be unconverted? Yes.
- (ii) James writes, "You believe that God is one. You do well; the demons also believe, and shudder" (2:19). The devil and the demons know more than we do and even believe it, for they are afraid of what they know. But are they saved? No. Do the damned souls in hell know and believe the truth? Yes.
- (iii) What is the name that theologians use to refer to this kind of faith? Historical faith: The belief in the facts of history. But that is as far as they go.
- (iv) A person can know and believe the facts without being saved, but he cannot savingly believe without knowing and believing the facts.

c. There is one more thing that a saving faith will do. What is it? It will embrace that truth. What does this mean?

- (i) A person must not only know and believe the facts, he must also embrace Jesus. He must trust in Him alone to be saved. He must look outside of himself and his own works to Christ and His works alone.
- (ii) This is what the word faith means. It can mean merely to believe the facts, but as we've seen, that isn't enough. It also means to trust in the object of that faith. Friberg's Lexicon puts it this way, "As primarily a religious commitment, especially with God or Christ as the object of faith *believe (in), trust*; . . . as denoting relying on God for help *have confidence, believe (MT 21.22)*; (3) as committing something to someone *entrust, trust*

(LU 16.11) . . .”

- (iii) It is a trusting in Christ, but it is also a receiving of Him. John writes, “But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, *even* to those who believe in His name” (John 1:12).
- (iv) It is a union with Christ in His death and life. Paul writes, “I have been crucified with Christ; and 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 delivered Himself up for me” (Gal. 2:20).
- (v) Faith also implies obedience. John writes, “He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him” (John 3:36).
- (vi) Our *Confession* summarizes it this way, “By this faith, a Christian believeth to be true whatsoever is revealed in the Word, for the authority of God Himself speaking therein; and acteth differently upon that which each particular passage thereof containeth; yielding obedience to the commands, trembling at the threatenings, and embracing the promises of God for this life and that which is to come. But the principal acts of saving faith are accepting, receiving, and resting upon Christ alone for justification, sanctification, and eternal life, by virtue of the covenant of grace” (14.2).
- (vii) Can a person who is unconverted do this? No.

B. But how can a person who is spiritually dead, as we have seen, savingly trust and believe in One whom he hates?

1. He can't.
 - a. Remember Paul writes in Romans 8:5-8, “For those who are according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who are according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. For the mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace, because the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able *to do so*; and those who are in the flesh cannot please God.”
 - b. So what must he do? There is nothing he can do to change his heart. God must change it, or he is forever lost.
2. How does God change the heart? He does so through His Holy Spirit.
 - a. Jesus said, “No one can come to Me, unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up on the last day” (John 6:44).
 - b. He said later in that chapter, “For this reason I have said to you, that no one can come to Me, unless it has been granted him from the Father” (v. 65).
 - c. How does the Father grant this blessing of drawing to Himself? He does so through the Spirit of God.
 - d. Jesus said to Nicodemus, “Jesus answered and said to him, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.’ Nicodemus *said to Him, ‘How can a man be born when he is old? He cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born, can he?’ Jesus answered, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is

flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, “You must be born again.” The wind blows where it wishes and you hear the sound of it, but do not know where it comes from and where it is going; so is everyone who is born of the Spirit” (John 3:3-8).

- e. Paul writes in Ephesians 2:1-10, “And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience. Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest. But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly *places*, in Christ Jesus, in order that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, *it is* the gift of God; not as a result of works, that no one should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.”
 - f. A person must be born again by the Spirit of God before he can see the kingdom of God, before he can enter the kingdom, before he can turn from his sinful ways.
3. When does God usually change a person’s heart, if He is intending to do so? It is when the Gospel is preached or witnessed.
 - a. When was the Ethiopian Eunuch converted? When Philip was explaining to him the Scripture (Acts 8).
 - b. When was Lydia converted? When Paul was speaking to her about the Gospel. Luke writes, “And on the Sabbath day we went outside the gate to a riverside, where we were supposing that there would be a place of prayer; and we sat down and began speaking to the women who had assembled. And a certain woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple fabrics, a worshiper of God, was listening; and the Lord opened her heart to respond to the things spoken by Paul” (Acts 16:13-14).
 - c. When were the three thousand converted on the Day of Pentecost? When Peter preached the Gospel (Acts 3). When were the five thousand after them converted? Again, when Peter preached the Gospel. Luke writes, in Acts 4:4, “But many of those who had heard the message believed; and the number of the men came to be about five thousand.”
 - d. Paul writes in Romans 1:16-17, “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. For in it *the* righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, ‘But the righteous man shall live by faith.’”
 4. Now here is an interesting question: Can a person believe the facts of the Gospel and not be saved?

- a. Yes, we already saw that they could.
- b. Can a person believe the facts of the Gospel, know that they are in danger of hell, and yet still not be able to repent and believe? Yes, otherwise it wouldn't be possible to believe the facts and not be saved.
- c. Does the fact that a person is frightened by hell give him the ability to savingly believe? No.
- d. What can that person do to be saved? Nothing. There is nothing he can do to bend God's arm to give him His Spirit.
- e. Does that mean that the person should do nothing? No. He should begin to pray that God will change his heart and save him.
- f. Is there anything else he should do? Yes, he should sit under the preaching of the Gospel, and expose himself to God's Word as much as possible, for that is the means that the Lord uses to save, and he won't be saved without it.
- g. If a person does these things, will he be saved? Not necessarily. If we said yes, then we would believe in a work a person can do to have God save him. The Bible says that it doesn't "depend on the man who wills or the man who runs, but on God who has mercy" (Rom. 9:16). But certainly, if he turns away and goes back to his old way of living and doesn't seek the Lord for His mercy, he will surely perish.
- h. We must remember that not everyone who says he believes the facts of Christianity is necessarily saved. There are many who believe them, but who are not saved, and who need still to pray for God's mercy.
- i. Next week, we will consider how a person can know that he is truly born again, and delivered from death to life.