

The Doctrine of Repentance—*Thomas Watson*

Chapter Three — The Nature of True Repentance

- I. *Repentance is a grace of God's Spirit whereby a sinner is inwardly humbled and visibly reformed.* It is a spiritual medicine made up of six special ingredients. If any one is left out it loses its virtue.
 - A. **Confession of Sin—**
 1. Sorrow for sin must have a vent. It vents itself at the eyes by weeping and at the mouth by confession, Neh 9.2; Hos 5.15.
 2. This confession is naturally self-accusing, 2Sam 24.17. The benefit of this self-accusing before God is that we disarm Satan's accusing us to God.
 3. Also, this confession includes an acknowledgment of God's just sentence upon our sin, Ps 51.4
 4. Eight qualifications are required for confession of sin to be right and genuine:
 - a) It must be voluntary, coming from our mouths freely. The confession of the wicked is forced by pain or bribery (Num 23.24); but the confession of a child of God is offered up freely (Lk 15.18).
 - b) It must be with a sense of guilt, Ps 38.4. "It is one thing to confess sin and another to feel sin."
 - c) It must be sincere; our hearts must go along with our mouths. Augustine said that before his conversion he confessed sin and begged power against it, but his heart whispered within him, "Not yet, Lord." He was afraid to leave it too soon. A Christian's heart keeps pace with his tongue. He is convinced of the sins he confesses and he abhors the sins he is convicted of.
 - d) It must be particular. A wicked man acknowledges that he is a sinner in general. He confesses his sins by wholesale. He says, "I have sinned," but cannot say what it was. The Christian is like a wounded man who comes to the Doctor and points to his pain. So the Christian comes to confession and points to his sin.
 - e) It must acknowledge the fountain. The Christian acknowledges the pollution of his nature, Ps 51.5. "Our nature is an abyss and seminary of all evil, from whence come those scandals that infest the world."
 - f) It must acknowledge all the circumstances and aggravations, Ps 78.32
 - g) It must charge self, Ps 51.4
 - h) It must be joined with a resolution not to act the sin over again, Isa 1.16
 - B. **Uses:**
 1. Here is a bill of indictment against four sorts of persons.
 - a) It reproves those who hide their sins. Many would rather have their sins covered than cured. But whether or not men have a tongue to confess, God has an eye to see and He will unmask it, Ps 50.21; Prov 28.13.
 - b) It reproves those who do confess, but only by halves. They confess the pennies but not the dollars. They confess the outward sins, but not the heart sins. But if we do not confess all, how should we expect that God will pardon all?
 - c) It reproves those who in their confessions mince and extenuate their sins. A gracious soul labors to make the worst of his sins, but a hypocrite labors to make the best of them. They do not deny that they are sinners, but they do what they can to lessen their sins. These are excuses rather than confessions, 1Sam 15.24; Gen 3.12. "How apt we are to pare and curtail sin, and look at it through the small end of the telescope."
 - d) It reproves those who are so far from confessing sin that they boldly plead for it, Jon 4.9. "When men commit sin they are the devil's servants; when they plead for it, they are the devil's attorneys—and he will pay them for it."
 2. Let us show ourselves penitents by the sincere confession of sin.
 - a) The thief on the cross made a confession of sin (Lk 23.41) and Christ replied with the assurance that he would be with Him in paradise (v.43). If we do the same, we may appropriate the same assurance. In order that we might make a sincere confession, let us consider:
 - (1) Holy confession gives glory to God, Josh 7.19. "When we confess sin, God's patience is magnified in sparing us, and His free grace is magnified in saving such sinners as we are."
 - (2) Confession is a means to humble the soul. "He who describes himself as a hell-deserving sinner will have little heart to be proud of."
 - (3) Confession gives vent to a troubled heart.

- (4) Confession purges out sin. Augustine called it the expeller of vice. “Confession is the sponge that wipes the spots from off the soul.”
 - (5) Confession of sin endears Christ to the soul, Rom 7.24-25.
 - (6) Confession of sin makes way for pardon, Lk 15.20; 2Sam 12.13; 1Jn 1.9
 - (7) How reasonable and easy is God’s command that we should confess sin!
 - (a) It is reasonable because it rights what is wrong.
 - (b) It is easy compared to the merciless covenant of works and even compared with the demand for an unending sacrifice of animals, Jer 3.13.
3. A case of conscience: Are we bound to confess our sins to men?
- a) A public offense ought to receive public confession.
 - b) If a sin confessed to God still plagues the conscience, it is good to confess it to a trusted friend that he may speak a word in season.
 - c) Where a man has slandered another and injured his good name and reputation, he must go to him and confess it and be reconciled to him, Mt 5.23-24.

***Next Study — Apr 5: The Nature of True Repentance: Shame for Sin**