Laying the Foundation

Lesson 6

PREPARE THE WAY OF THE LORD

Catechism Two, Lesson 6

Reading: Isaiah 40:1–5; Jeremiah 4:1–4

1. How Essential Is Repentance To Beginning A New Life In Christ?

We cannot begin a new life in Christ without first turning from our old life of sin. Repentance is the inner transition from self-dependence and self-government to submission to God. The kingdom of God means having someone rule over us—having a real King. We cannot crown Jesus Lord of our lives in practical experience except through the assistance of the Holy Spirit in the realm of repentance. Calling Jesus “Lord” with full Biblical meaning requires the renouncing of self-rule or imagined “independence.” It includes the acknowledgment of the need of someone else to guide and direct our lives. Repentance is our acknowledgment that we are finished with the way we have been living and are ready to embrace His new life. This transference of dependence was considered so basic in the New Testament that every major teacher introduced the gospel with the necessity of repentance.

A. John the Baptist.

In those days came John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness of Judea, and saying, Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand (Matt. 3:1, 2).

B. Jesus Himself.

From that time Jesus began to preach, and to say, Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand (Matt. 4:17).

C. The Twelve Disciples.

And they went out, and preached that men should repent (Mark 6:12).

D. The Apostle Paul.

But shewed first unto them of Damascus, and at Jerusalem, and throughout all the coasts of Judaea, and then to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance (Acts 26:20).

E. The Apostle Peter.

The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance (2 Pet. 3:9).

Both the Lord’s “Great Commission” to His disciples, and their application of this commission, emphasize repentance.

And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem (Luke 24:47).

Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost (Acts 2:38).

2. Is Repentance Only An Initial Experience?

Laying the foundation of repentance from dead works includes first of all the initial repentance which turns us from darkness to light. We see ourselves as sinners in God’s sight and acknowledge this. We turn from our life of sin to God. But repentance does not end there; this is only the beginning. Initial repentance is like a door into a whole new world of repentance. As we come to know God’s love and holiness more and more, we see ourselves in increasing need of change. Acknowledgment of our need for change, and sorrow for being unlike God in character, is a continuing in repentance. The Lord Jesus continues to examine us for evidence of repentance as He walks among His people today. We notice, for example, in the book of Revelation, Jesus is walking in the midst of seven local churches. To five out of the seven, He warns them that He must see repentance on their part or they will experience severe loss. The difference between initial repentance and continuing repentance is this: initially we repent for what we are—sinners; after this we repent for what we do or fail to do—specific sins.

(1) Ephesus

Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent (Rev. 2:5).

(2) Pergamos

Repent; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth (Rev. 2:16).

(3) Thyatira

And I gave her space to repent of her fornication; and she repented not. Behold, I will cast her into a bed, and them that commit adultery with her into great tribulation, except they repent of their deeds (Rev. 2:21, 22).

(4) Sardis

Remember therefore how thou hast received and heard, and hold fast, and repent. If therefore thou shall not watch, I will come on thee as a thief, and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee (Rev. 3:3).

(5) Laodicea

As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent (Rev. 3:19).

3. Why Must Repentance Precede Any Other Foundation?

Repentance is the preparation of our hearts for God. Before God can build in our lives, He must first clear away the debris and clutter. Before He can plant good seed, He must remove the weeds. Otherwise we will always be a mixture. The seeds of sin will choke the good seed.

A. Repentance eliminates our inner deviousness, enabling us to be direct with God.

Until repentance has done a complete work, we avoid being fully open and direct with God about our need. We hide behind excuses and erect defenses to keep ourselves from knowing what is really going on inside. But repentance clears away all lies and rationalizing, and we are then able to call sin sin and allow God to come to the heart of our need. We welcome His remaking of our inner landscaping.

The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low: and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places plain (Isa. 40:3, 4).

B. Repentance cleanses the “land of our heart” from bad seeds.

It is not enough to cut down the bad plants of external sin; the roots must be pulled and the seeds must be destroyed. Land which has not been cultivated must be cleansed by repeated plowing up; once is not enough. Such fallow ground—uncultivated land—must undergo successive plowing to break up all hard clods and to deeply purge the soil of all remaining seeds dropped by birds or brought by the wind. Neglected land does not become a desert, but a wilderness. It grows bad seed if not used for good seed. This is what the prophet Jeremiah was talking about when he said:

For thus saith the Lord to the men of Judah and Jerusalem, Break up your fallow ground, and sow not among thorns. Circumcise yourselves to the Lord, and take away the foreskins of your heart, ye men of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem … (Jer. 4:3, 4).

C. Repentance is the digging down deep to establish foundations on solid rock.

The taller a building, the deeper the foundation. The foundation must support the entire structure. For this reason, God does not attempt to build His new life upon our surface habits alone; He insists on stripping us to our base and beginning “from scratch” as they say. Jeremiah’s call as a prophet of repentance emphasizes the necessity of the destructive work of God before the building can begin.

Then the Lord put forth his hand, and touched my mouth. And the Lord said unto me, Behold, I have put my words in thy mouth. See, I have this day set thee over the nations and over the kingdoms, to root out, and to pull down, and to destroy, and to throw down, to build, and to plant (Jer. 1:9, 10).

4. How Does Repentance Differ From Reformation?

Reformation deals only with the surface; repentance is a change of heart. During the history of the nation Israel, the prophets were constantly calling for a thoroughgoing repentance from idolatry and a return to God. Under several of the kings, Judah experienced reformation. The idols were cut down and certain idolatrous practices—abominations to the Lord—were eliminated. But the people’s hearts were not turned to God. Their affections were not captivated by Him alone. While things looked good on the outside, they were doing the same things inside in subtle, disguised ways. But God is always concerned with the heart, the root of our conduct. Sinners can quit smoking and drinking and the like, but this does not make them Christians. Only the Holy Spirit creating inner change can make genuine new creatures.

Hosea, the prophet, paints a vivid picture of the difference between reformation and repentance when he urges the people not to merely plant new seeds, but to plow fresh ground. Prepare the way for God’s Word. Jesus said much the same thing in His famous parable of the sower.

Sow to yourselves in righteousness, reap in mercy; break up your fallow ground: for it is time to seek the Lord, till he come and rain righteousness upon you. Ye have plowed wickedness, ye have reaped iniquity; ye have eaten the fruit of lies: because thou didst trust in thy way, in the multitude of thy mighty men (Hos. 10:12, 13).

5. What Kind Of Fruit Will A Repentant Heart Bring Forth?

We call it repentance “unto life” because it is just that. We turn from dead works, from the futility of our own efforts to achieve righteousness. God gives us His own life. Stimulated by this new life, we bring forth fruit of Christlikeness. We produce in our own lives His character. His seed and His life will grow up like Himself. We call this “the fruit of the Spirit.” It is the result of our union with Him. Jesus periodically checks the fruit in our lives, just as He did the fig tree (Matt. 21:19). If our root has been changed, this will show in the fruit of our character.

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance: against such there is no law (Gal. 5:22, 23).

(1) Love (agape)

God sheds His own love through us by His Spirit. This is a self-giving love, demonstrated both in devotion to God and in concern for His people.

(2) Joy

God’s Spirit shares Christ’s own joy and gladness with us. This inner rejoicing is not dependent on circumstances, but gives us the ability to bounce back in resiliency when pressures pile upon us.

(3) Peace

What the world must find in tranquilizers and other artificial means for producing relaxation, the Spirit does within us. This inner peace also makes for concord or harmony in relationships and unity in the assembly.

(4) Longsuffering

Longsuffering is exactly that. A better word is perhaps patience or fortitude. It is the ability to endure in expectancy of God’s help. It is slowness in avenging ourselves of injuries and forbearance because we hope in God.

(5) Gentleness

We are obliging and easy to work with because of the Spirit’s work in us making us agreeable where most people would be touchy and ornery.

(6) Goodness (agathos)

This is more than the absence of evil; it is positive virtue. It makes us generous in attitude and profitable to the kingdom. We are morally upright but we also have blessings to impart.

(7) Faith or faithfulness

Because we are at rest inside through the Spirit’s inworking of firm assurance and confidence toward God, we are able to deal with others in good faith and we are known for faithfulness and truthfulness in all our dealings.

(8) Meekness

Meekness is not weakness, or Moses would not have been cited as the meekest man on the earth. It is the ability to remain mild and gentle and forgiving under trying circumstances. It requires more strength than reacting.

(9) Temperance

Self-mastery is the result of discipline, but this is only successful when stimulated by the indwelling Spirit. Self-control grows out of genuine relationship with God through the Spirit.

Home Study: Lesson 1–6

Name\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Date\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Vocabulary: Look up the meaning of these words in the class notes and/or in any good dictionary. Write a brief but accurate definition beside each word on the list.

1. Condemnation—

2. Confidence—

3. Dead Works—

4. Foundation—

5. Grace—

6. Guilt—

7. Hamartiology—

8. Metanoia (Greek)—

9. Regeneration—

10. Repentance—

11. Remorse—

12. Sin—

13. Soteriology—

14. Temptation—

15. Total depravity—

16. Volition—

Questions From Lesson 6

1. List four or five New Testament preachers who emphasized repentance.

a.

c.

e.

b.

d.

2. Why is reformation not repentance?

BECOMING FULLY PE