

Shorter Catechism 87
Hosea 13:4-14:9
Psalm 51
1 John 1

“What Is Repentance?”

September 29, 2013

Introduction: A True Sense of Our Sin (Hosea 14)

Ladies, can you imagine being in labor,
but your child decides not to come out?

Hosea 13:13 speaks of this:

*The pangs of childbirth come for him, but he is an unwise son,
for at the right time he does not present himself at the opening of the womb.*

No matter how hard you push,
that baby just sits there, “Nope, sorry mom, not coming!”
You know as well as I do what would happen:
the mother would die!

Ephraim is an unwise son.
He refuses to come out.

And so God asks,
*Shall I ransom them from the power of Sheol?
Shall I redeem them from Death?
O Death, where are your plagues?
O Sheol, where is your sting?
Compassion is hidden from my eyes.*

God says, no.
I am not going to rescue Ephraim.
Israel is going to die.
In Hosea this is a call for Sheol and Death to triumph over God’s people.
Do you see that in Hosea 13:14?
God is saying that he *will not* ransom his people.
He’s going to hand them over to death.

Ironically, Paul quotes this in 1 Cor 15 as a description of how death has lost its sting!
Is Paul just ignoring the context of Hosea and using verse 14 as a prooftext
wrenched out of context?
Hosea’s whole point is that God *is* the only Savior,
but that now is not the *time* of salvation.
In 1 Cor 15 Paul is saying is that what God did *not* do in the days of Hosea,
he *now* has done in Jesus.

The sting of death fell upon Israel in Hosea's day,
but because it has *now* fallen upon Jesus,
therefore the sting of death and the grave
will *not* fall upon those who are in Christ.

Drought, war, and brutal devastation
will come against Samaria because she has rebelled against her God.

I want you to think about this.
Is rebellion really worth it?
If you haven't figured this out yet for yourself,
take this lesson from Israel:
rebellion results in destruction!
Sin is counter-productive.
Sin does not produce happiness, joy, or peace.
Sin produces misery, death, and chaos.

We saw two weeks ago
that to escape the wrath and curse of God due to us for sin,
God requires of us faith in Jesus Christ, repentance unto life,
with the diligent use of all the outward means
whereby Christ communicates to us the benefits of redemption.

We saw last week that *faith in Jesus Christ* is a saving grace,
whereby we receive and rest upon him alone for salvation
as he is offered to us in the gospel.

Today we ask:

Q. 87. *What is repentance unto life?*

A. Repentance unto life is a saving grace, whereby a sinner, out of a true sense of his sin, and apprehension of the mercy of God in Christ, does, with grief and hatred of his sin, turn from it unto God, with full purpose of, and endeavor after, new obedience.

Faith and repentance are intimately bound together.

You cannot repent unless you believe that Jesus is who he says he is!
But if you believe, then you are repenting
of whatever it was that you were relying on before!

Many have said that faith and repentance are the two sides of the same coin.
And you see that emphasis in Hosea's words at the beginning of chapter 14:

*Return, O Israel, to the LORD your God,
for you have stumbled because of your iniquity.
Take with you words and return to the LORD;*

*say to him, 'Take away all iniquity; accept what is good,
and we will pay with bulls the vows of our lips.*

Repentance often *starts* with words.

Since God alone can save, Israel must confess,

Assyria shall not save us;

*we will not ride on horses (e.g., our own might will not save us)
and we will say no more, 'Our God' to the work of our hands.*

In you the orphan finds mercy.

But while repentance *starts* with words,

repentance is not just saying "I'm sorry."

Repentance involves a commitment to new obedience.

When we repent of our sins,

*we must also repent of our confidence in ourselves, and in any other power,
and entrust ourselves entirely to the God who alone can save us.*

And then we hear God's comforting words:

I will heal their apostasy;

I will love them freely, for my anger has turned from them.

I will be like the dew to Israel;

he shall blossom like the lily;

he shall take root like the trees of Lebanon;

his shoots shall spread out;

his beauty shall be like the olive,

and his fragrance like Lebanon.

They shall return and dwell beneath my shadow;

they shall flourish like the grain;

they shall blossom like the vine;

their fame shall be like the wine of Lebanon.

God promises that he will heal the penitent.

He will refresh and nourish his people,

and make them bloom and take root and flourish.

Hosea frequently uses the language of grain, wine and oil,

the three chief crops of Israel.

But here he says that Israel will become these crops:

the olive, the grain, the vine.

His beauty shall be like the olive – and his fragrance like Lebanon.

Israel will become beautiful – fragrant – full of joy and peace.

Hosea is about this shocking love –

the love of a prophet for his prostitute wife –

and the love of God for his prostitute people.

But what Hosea does not yet see
is the *way* in which God will show his love for his adulterous people.

Because while we were yet sinners, Christ loved us and gave himself for us.

And so let us sing Psalm 51 in response to Hosea's call.

Sing Psalm 51

Read 1 John 1

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The Shorter Catechism's definition of repentance
appears to be drawn from the structure of Psalm 51!

David opens Psalm 51 with a very clear sense of his sin –
but also a very clear sense of the mercy of God in Christ.

1. Apprehension of the Mercy of God in Christ (51:1-2)

*“Have mercy on me, O God,
according to your steadfast love;
according to your abundant mercy
blot out my transgressions.”*

2 Samuel 11-12 tell the story that forms the backdrop for this Psalm.

David had sinned by committing adultery with Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah.

When she became pregnant,

he then ordered that Uriah be put in the front of the battle,

so that he would be killed,

so that David could then marry Bathsheba.

And so it happened.

Uriah was killed and David took Bathsheba as his wife.

Then the prophet Nathan came to David and confronted him with his sin,

and told him that because of this sin, his son would die.

Then, and only then, did David repent.

You might think that this was a bit late.

David had been sinning, and scheming about how to get away with his sinning,
for several months.

And only when Nathan says, “your son will die,”

does David finally get around to repenting!

How often has that been true for you?

You only repent when someone catches you and calls you on it?

And no, that's *not* good.

You *shouldn't* need someone to catch you and call you on it!

But while we should be grieved by our sin as soon as we commit it,
there are times when we need someone else to call us to account.

And the first question is – how do you respond when you're caught?

Do you *repent*?

Or do you make excuses?

And the second question is – given that we all need someone to call us to account –
are you willing to be that person?

Are you willing to tell someone that he needs to repent?

Rebuke a wise man and he will love you.

And the key is that David *did* repent.

He calls out to God “Have mercy on me, O God!”

David had committed adultery and murder.

What is the sacrifice prescribed for adultery and murder?

There is none.

What is prescribed for the one guilty of adultery and murder is death.

David could slaughter every bull, every sheep, and every goat in all Israel,
and God would still not be pleased.

The sacrificial system of Israel was designed for unintentional sins–
for the little stuff–you might say.

High-handed sins–open rebellion against God–was punishable by death.

David deserves to die.

And David has no sacrifice to offer.

Therefore he pleads with God to show mercy:

“according to your abundant mercy blot out my iniquity.”

He appeals to God's “steadfast love”–his *hesed*–sometimes translated,

“covenant faithfulness.”

If God's covenant revealed by Moses called for adulterers and murderers to be executed,
then why would David plead for God's *hesed*?

why would David plead for God to be faithful to his covenant?

Why?

Because God's covenant included the promise of the forgiveness of sins.
In Deuteronomy 29-30 Moses said that someday Israel's sins would be so great,
that God would drive them out of the land into exile.
But God also promised that he would restore Israel.
God's faithfulness to his covenant meant that even though Israel broke covenant,
God would never forget his people.
In the end, he would have mercy on them, and would give them a new heart.
In the end, God's covenant faithfulness was the only hope Israel had!

David saw this.

He saw that there was no sacrifice on earth that could cleanse him from sin.
It was only if God himself would wash him and cleanse him,
that he could be clean.

David understood what John would say later:

"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins
and cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

And so David confesses his sin to God in verses 3-6.

2. With Grief and Hatred of Our Sin (51:3-6)

"For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me."

Why does David not name his sins here?

Why doesn't he say "I have committed adultery and murder"?

It is because he wants you to be able to sing this Psalm too!

Psalm 51 is designed to be sung in worship.

All the people of God must be able to sing it together.

And since not all of you have sinned the same sin,
there are no particular sins named!

But when you sing "I know my sin, it will not leave my mind,"
you know full well what sins you have committed.

And it is appropriate to think of those sins and repent of them particularly
as you sing the Psalm.

Listen to how David says this:

"Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight."

David understands that he has sinned against God.

Certainly he had also sinned against Bathsheba and Uriah,
and indeed, as the king of Israel, he had sinned against all Israel—
but he sees that above all,
he has sinned against God.

This is explained by the rest of the sentence:

"so that you may be justified in your words and blameless in your judgment."

What was God's judgment?
That David's son must die.
David was supposed to be the example—the model—of what the Son of God should be.
David's sin was not just the sin of an ordinary Israelite—
it was the sin of the one who was supposed to know better.

But wait!

This is a song that all Israel is supposed to sing!
Yes, David was the king.
And the kingship had been established
in order to show forth the son of God in all his glory.
But according to Exodus 19, this was supposed to be true of *all* Israel.
Israel was supposed to be a kingdom of priests—a holy nation.
God had called Israel *my firstborn son*.

So even the “ordinary Israelite” could sing this song.

“Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight.”

Do you grieve over your sin?

Do you *hate* your sin?

If you love God, then you must *hate*, you must *despise* your sin.

And so we sing with David and all Israel,

“Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me.”

All of humanity is tainted from birth—indeed, from conception!

There was never a time when you were not a guilty and polluted sinner.

I have been present for all seven of my children's births,

I even delivered William—since the midwife was late!

I cannot imagine how anyone could think that these little ones are innocent at birth!

They scream at you if they don't get what they want.

You never have to teach a child selfishness—

but to do good and to share?

that takes a lifetime of training!

In verse 5 we see that we are sinful from conception.

In verse 6 we start to see the solution:

we need to learn wisdom.

*Behold, you delight in truth in the inward being,
you teach me wisdom in the secret heart.*

Truth must take root in our hearts.

If you would learn wisdom, then you need to learn to grieve over your sin –
to with *grief and hatred* of your sin to God.

3. Turning from Sin to God (51:7-12)

The wisdom of God—that inward teaching of the secret heart—
is a wisdom that cleanses.

*Purge me with hyssop and I shall be clean;
wash me and I shall be whiter than snow.*

David is here reflecting on the ceremonial cleansing of the unclean.
Part of the ceremony of the restoration of the unclean included a washing with water.

One of the most important images of baptism in the Scriptures is that of cleansing!

David understood that he was filthy.

He needed to be cleansed/washed.

There was a stain on his soul that water alone could not touch.

He needed to be cleansed on the inside!

You may look all squeaky clean on the outside,
but what is the color of your heart?

Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones that you have broken rejoice.

Let me hear the declaration of pardon!

David says that we need to *hear* the words of joy and gladness—
we need to feel that wholeness in our very bones.

How do you respond to the declaration of pardon?

What goes through your mind when I say,

“Believer in Jesus Christ, you are free from the power and guilt of sin”?

I hope that when you hear those words you remember,

“Ah, that’s right!

God has hidden his face from my sins, and has blotted out all my iniquities!”

He has done what he promised!

The declaration of pardon is a week by week reminder of your justification.

Your sins are forgiven.

God declares you righteous in Jesus Christ!

What greater joy is there?

And so at the very heart of the Psalm we hear these famous verses:

Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me.

Cast me not away from your presence, and take not your Holy Spirit from me.

Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and uphold me with a willing spirit.

There was a special sense in which David had the Holy Spirit—
he was the LORD's anointed king.

If God took the Holy Spirit from him,
that would be equivalent to removing the kingship from him
(which God *had* done to Saul, when Saul rebelled against him).

But David wrote this for all of us.

And so we should understand this in the light of Hebrews 6—
that there are those who “share in the Holy Spirit” temporarily—
who are part of the covenant community, and yet through their sin
“grieve the Holy Spirit” (as Paul says in Ephesians 4)
and return to their old ways of sin and rebellion.

But David says,

Let me not be one of those!

If you leave me to myself, then I would turn away from you.

If you do not create a clean heart in me,

if you do not give me a right and willing spirit,

then you will cast me away from your presence.

Because the only way that I can stand in your presence is if you have mercy on me.

David wholeheartedly affirms the sovereignty of God in salvation.

If you do not show mercy, then I am doomed.

If you do not create new life in me, then I am a walking dead man.

This is the prayer of a Christian.

This is not the prayer of an unbeliever who is coming to Christ for the first time.

This is the prayer of a believer who has fallen into sin.

It is also the prayer of the One who knew no sin.

How can I say that?

How could Jesus sing Psalm 51?

Jesus never sinned.

How could he sing David's prayer of repentance?

Because he who knew no sin *became sin* for us.

He took our sins upon himself.

NOT that he *became guilty!* But rather, he *bore* our guilt.

He was born of the virgin, so no stain of original sin lay upon him.

But as the Son of David, when he went to the cross,

he freely took upon himself all the sin and guilt of his people.
God judged him guilty in our place.

And so now we sing this Psalm in Jesus.

And in the very act of confessing our sins,
we also confess that God is able to forgive us, and to make us new.

4. With a Full Purpose of and Endeavor after New Obedience (51:13-17)

Now, when God restores the joy of salvation through the forgiveness of sins,
how do you respond?

Our catechism says

“Repentance unto life is a saving grace, whereby a sinner,
out of a true sense of his sin, and apprehension of the mercy of God in Christ,
does, with grief and hatred of his sin, turn from it unto God,
with full purpose of, and endeavor after, new obedience.”

It’s not enough simply to say, “I’m sorry.”

The words must be followed by actions.

There must be a full purpose of, and endeavor after, new obedience.

David puts it this way:

*Then I will teach transgressors your ways, and sinners will return to you.
Deliver me from bloodguiltiness, O God, O God of my salvation,
and my tongue will sing aloud of your righteousness.
O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth will declare your praise.*

And when you hear God’s declaration of pardon

(because it is **not** my voice that matters—you must hear, through my lips,
the voice of our Lord Jesus Christ declaring *his* Word to you),

you are to give thanks and rejoice because if *God* be for us, who can be against us!

The response to God’s abundant mercy is to teach, to sing, and to declare.

The singing and declaring appear to be in the assembly,
as Israel gathers for worship.

That’s why we sing after the declaration of pardon!

Our mouths declare the praises of God for his great mercy.

But there is also the response of teaching transgressors your ways.

David was the king, so he had lots of opportunities
to teach and instruct as he judged the nation.

But so do you!

You do this with your children.
You do this with your friends and neighbors
And through your rejoicing over the salvation that God has brought in Jesus,
sinners are brought to repentance,
as Peter says, “always be ready with an answer for the hope that is in you.”

*For you will not delight in sacrifice, or I would give it;
you will not be pleased with a burnt offering.
The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit;
a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.*

It does no good to pile up religious ceremonies.
Man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart.

Is your heart broken over your sin?
Or do you think, “eh, God will forgive me, I’ll just do it again!”
A sacrifice is costly.
A bull or a goat is expensive!
The economic cost of the OT sacrifices was designed to point the Israelites
to the far deeper cost of setting their hearts on God.
As Jesus put it, “deny yourself, take up your cross, and follow me.”

A broken and contrite heart is not cheap.
It will cost you dearly in time and energy.
The struggle against sin—putting off the old self—to use Paul’s language from Eph 4—
requires hard work.

But God will not despise a broken and contrite heart—
because it is his own gift to you.

God is enabling you to see yourself as he once saw you.
You are seeing how ugly and putrid is that life you once lived.

Conclusion: Forgiveness and the City of God (51:18-19)

In conclusion,
after having said that God will not delight in sacrifice,
and that the sacrifices of God are a broken spirit and a contrite heart,
David says that when God does good to Zion,
then he will delight in right sacrifices—in burnt offerings, no less!

Why does David tie his sin together with the condition of Zion.
Because, as we have seen, there is no sacrifice that can remove the guilt of murder and adultery.
And David is the king.

Why did Israel need a king?

Because Israel, the son of God, is not doing a very good of looking like his father.
In those days everyone did what was right in his own eyes,
because there was no king in Israel.

Israel needs a king who will lead them in doing what is right in God's eyes.

And God makes a covenant with David,

establishing the son of David as God's own son.

The Davidic king, therefore, is the son of God who will lead Israel in their divine sonship.

And so when the Davidic king sins,

that has implications for the whole people of God.

Israel as a whole suffers—because if God will not listen to your king,
then you're in trouble when your enemies come around.

Look at verse 18—"Do good to Zion in your good pleasure; build up the walls of Jerusalem."

When the king sins, it is as though the walls of Jerusalem have been removed.

Because if the king is vulnerable to God's wrath,

then the whole nation is vulnerable to God's wrath.

But if God forgives David and restores "the joy of my salvation"

then the nation will be secure, and the whole sacrificial system can be restored.

And that is where we are in Christ.

God has restored the joy of our salvation in Jesus Christ.

In Jesus we have a king who is the righteous Son of God.

"Therefore you are

to put off your old self,

which belongs to your former manner of life

and is corrupt through deceitful desires,

and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds,

and to put on the new self,

created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness."