

Heidelberg Catechism 88-89–What Is True Conversion? Part 1

Beloved Brothers and Sisters in Jesus: Some are confused by Question 88, because they don't understand how the word "repentance" is used here. Now there are two primary ways the word "repentance" is used in the Bible.

When used specifically, **repentance means "the act of being sorry for, being contrite for, hating, and forsaking your sins."** It is most often used this way in the Bible.

When used generally, **repentance "describes one's coming to faith in Jesus Christ."** This used of the word repentance is used interchangeably with conversion. Why? Because repentance is a large part of your conversion, it is often used to represent the whole. (Similarly, the largest tribe of Israel, Ephraim, was often used to refer to the whole Israel).

Today you will hear from God **the first part of about what repentance or conversion looks like**. We will use "conversion" instead of "repentance" to avoid confusion.

Our headings are:

Conversion: Described

Conversion: Dying to Self

Our goals are: **That you will see the need to daily die to your own desires and live a liberated life for Jesus Christ, who has already regenerated you by his Holy Spirit.**

Conversion: Described

Q & A 88. Q. What is involved in genuine repentance or conversion?

A. Two things: the dying-away of the old self, and the coming-to-life of the new.

1. There are 2 parts to conversion (or repentance): "the dying-away of the old self," and "the coming-to-life of the new self."

2. Now the "old life" and this "new life" we are not 2 lives, rather, they are "2 ways of life."

You don't turn into someone else when you become a Christian – there is no physical change to your body. If you had heart disease, you will still have heart disease. If you had allergies, you still have

allergies. Your physical looks remain the same – though you might smile some more. The difference is that you begin to live spiritually differently – till you die.

3. How will you be living differently:

a. Things you did before that were transgressions of God’s law, you stop doing.

b. Things you didn’t do, like worship and working for the Lord – you start doing.

Your old way of life yields more and more to the new way of life, as Christ works in you through his Word and Spirit.

4. Why do you need to have and show that you have new life?

a. God demands it.

b. You had to change because the first way of life was “old,” decayed and corrupted and you shouldn’t stay there. If you stay there you give evidence to your neighbor and to the Lord that are still in that old, decayed, and corrupted place. You need to show that you have moved from that spiritual cemetery to the mansion on the hilltop. You have to leave the garbage dump for the Garden of Eden.

5. There are some people, however, who go through sham conversions.

a. Some genuinely feel bad about their sins, so they decide to live a moral life – and even attend church regularly. You can see this in the life of many kings of Judah and Israel, and is much like the life of Pharaoh, who pretended to be a believer (Ex 8) and asked Moses to pray for him. (But asking for prayer is not proof of conversion.) True conversion is a reversal of that old lifestyle... visibly and provably. Pharaoh did not show that.

b. Some have sham conversion because they feel pressured by friends. Maybe they don’t want others to think they were bad, so they start attending church and maybe are even baptized. But consider the Thessalonians example of true conversion. They clearly abandoned their old lifestyles and embraced God’s law... There was no sham conversion here!

1Thessalonians 1:9 For they themselves declare concerning us what manner of entry we had to you, and

how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, 10 and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, even Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.

Look at what Apostle Paul demanded from the Ephesian Christians. They had to be visibly and provably Christians.

Ephesians 4:22 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.

6. Is conversion only an instantaneous change?

No. It isn't always an instantaneous change. It rarely is! Conversion is a process. You are instantly regenerated and declared righteous by the Lord, but visible change takes time. The outward realization of the inward reality takes time. You learn more and more to live the new life as you are nourished with the food of God's Word as you change.

This is a reason to be patient with new believers.

Conversion: Dying to old self

Q & A 89 Q. What is the dying-away of the old self?

A. It is to be genuinely sorry for sin, to hate it more and more, and to run away from it.

1. Now let us consider the details of the first part of conversion: The dying away of the old self.

a. It is common to think of death as a funeral...worms and rotting bodies. But there is another death that you must have before you die at the end of your life: You have to die to your old ways. This is a death that God requires.

Colossians 3:5 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.

You must do you uttermost to make sure you are separated from these sins. How do you do that?

b. The problem comes here when some do not have the proper concept of death. But death means separation ... death does not mean “cease to exist.” That’s the way the Jehovah’s Witness and Seventh Day Adventists interpreted things.

c. So you don’t die in your person, but you die in your practices. You separate yourself from them. You shut them out of your plans and your actions. The bad things you used to do, you don’t do them anymore. This **dying is an action**...an action every Christian must do! You are to die to sins.

Romans 6:1 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?

2. Further “dying” connotes a process...a continuing action; it is not simply a one-time thing.

Dying is a verb in continuous tense.

Romans 7:18 For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I do not find. 19 For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, **that I practice**. 20 Now if I do what I will not to do, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me. **21 I find then a law, that evil is present with me, the one who wills to do good.**

This contradicts the revival crusades conversions of the Charismatics, where quick belief is promoted: “Say “yes” and sign on the dotted line

and you have a free ticket to heaven.”

3. Dying to sin starts with sorrow for sin.

a. Sorrow for sins means sadness or regret. You will have real pain in your heart as a result of your transgressions. The thief on the cross said it well when he spoke to the other thief on the cross: “We are getting what we deserve.” In the parable of the Publican, the Publican said: “Lord, have mercy on me a sinner.” These both express this idea of true sorrow. They made no excuses for their sinfulness. They blamed no one else. They acknowledged they had no excuses. So sorrow is not the pain you get from being punished. **Sorrow is inward pain for hurting God.**

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

If you are not sorry for your sins why would you want to leave them behind or be separated from them?

b. Sorrow for sin requires hatred of sin. Sin must be detested, detested because it is abominable to God. God hates sin. So hold your spiritual nose when you come near sin...like you might hold your nose when you come to a dead rotting body.

c. Sorrow requires fleeing from sin. The greater the distance from sin, the better. Flee like Joseph from Potiphar’s wife – literally and figuratively. Apostle Paul said in 1Corinthians 6:18 Flee sexual immorality. And again he said in 1Corinthians 10:14 -Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry. In 2Timothy 2:22 Flee also youthful lusts. This is true death to sin.

4. Look at examples of how you are to truly die to sin.

a. You must avoid those who encourage you to sin...even if it were a family member or a friend (which is often the case). Offending God is the worst thing you can do in your life. And even if your family or friend were offended by your refusal to compromise, that is a good offense. It might make them try to find out why their sin is so offensive to you and to God. Maybe they are upset because you won’t go to a party on Sunday. Maybe they want you to join them in their pagan mass. Hold your ground. Maybe they think you should sleep

around and not get married. Hold your ground.

b. Be busy doing other things that are good and God-glorifying. When you put off a bad habit – when you die to a sin - you need to replace it with living the truth. If you waste time playing computer games or on the internet, get out and cut the grass...or shovel the snow...or send an e-mail to someone and ask how he is doing...or pray for one who is going through hardships. This might also mean you have to avoid certain universities where the environment or the teachers might hinder your growth. Whatever causes you to dishonor Christ and imperil your soul, flee from it.

c. Constantly remind yourself that you belong to Jesus Christ and think of the shame you would cause him if you let the old life resurrect in your heart, mouth, or actions.

5. Keep in mind that you can only die to sin through the help of God's Holy Spirit.

Try in your own might, you lose. Your attachment to sin will be too strong.

Conclusion:

So conversion is dying of the old self and the coming to life of the new. In the dying of the old self you realize that this is a long continuous struggle in life. Foundationally, you die to sin – you quell your lusts of the flesh, lusts of the eyes, and the pride of life.

Brothers and Sisters in Jesus Christ:

1. You are saved by grace, through faith, and not of yourselves. If you were saved by yourself you would boast about it. But you can't because you weren't.

2. Yet, to show that you were saved, there would be noticeable changes in your life...in your talk...in your walk...and in your thought. These changes take place because of the change that has taken place in you. There are no secret Christians. Repentance or conversion is visible and demonstrable. 2Corinthians 5:17 Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new. And do not forget you are only able to do these good works of dying

to sin, and living to righteousness (repent) as God's Spirit works in you.

3. If you refuse to die to sin and live for Christ, it means you haven't been changed in your heart; you are not regenerated. If that were the case, you need to ask God to make you his child. Remember, it doesn't matter if you are a member of a Christian church – if you don't repent – and show it consistently by dying to sin and living for Christ– you are NOT converted. But God can change you today.

Finally, if you are a stranger who is an unrepentant sinner to God, he can change you from a sinner to a saint. He will take you and clean you. He will give you a new name, and new heart, a new record, and a new life – a life which you can and must live to bring glory to the one who saved you.