

Text

Ps 32 John 13:1-20

Main Point

The importance of ongoing Faith and Repentance in the life of a Christian.

Title: Continue How you Started: Ongoing Faith and Repentance

Introduction (300)

Hook

When you set out for a 5-day hike, how do you begin? With one step.

As the famous Chinese proverb tells us *“A journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step”*

And how do you continue your hike? By a whole series of single steps.

A hike begins, continues and ends with single steps, and it is similar with the Christian walk.

We continue as we began.

We begin with faith and repentance, and we continue with faith and repentance.

There are some who wrongly conclude that since we are justified once and for all there is no need for ongoing repentance. But this is a wrong conclusion.

Outline

This is what we will be looking at this evening, as we continue our study in the 1689:

“The Need of Ongoing Faith and Repentance in the life of a Christian”

To work through this topic, we will break our time up into three parts.

1. Justification secure
2. Fellowship Broken
3. Fellowship Restored

Part 1 – Justification secure

Justification our topic

Let us begin with our first section: Justification Secure.

Our study of the 1689 has been taking us through the order of Salvation. And the last couple of studies have been focusing on the doctrine of Justification.

As we have seen, the teaching of justification is foundational to the Christian faith.

It answers the fundamental question: How can a sinner be reconciled to the Holy God?

Chapter 11 of the confession provides a summary of this doctrine.

The overwhelming conclusion is that a person can be reconciled to the Holy God **only** by the work of Jesus Christ.

And therefore, our right standing before God is secure. Nothing can change it.

Debt Paid

You will remember that we are justified by double imputation.

We are declared righteous because a great exchange takes place.

- As sinners, we committed crimes against God.
- We repeatedly did actions of hate towards God.
- We insulted him,
- we spat in his face,
- we rebelled,
- we wanted to be God in his place.

In short, we sinned against God.

But Jesus Christ paid for those sins when he hung there on the Cross. Our sins were counted, or imputed to **his** account and he died to pay for those sins.

That is the first imputation. Jesus Christ taking the punishment for the crimes of sinners.

Righteousness conferred

And then the second imputation is that we receive the perfect life of Christ to our account.

You see, having no crimes on our record is not enough.

We must have a full record of good works to be acceptable for heaven. But all of our works are filthy rags!

Only Jesus Christ lived a perfect life. Only He is good enough to be declared Righteous by God.

And the wonder of wonders is that the Bible tells us that His Good works are seen on our account.

By God's Grace His Good works are imputed to us.

Bank account analogy

In a simplified way we can think of double imputation like a bank account.

Many of us know what it is like to be in debt:

- Maybe a mortgage,
- maybe a student loan,
- maybe a loan from family,
- or maybe a credit card debt.

Being in debt is to have your bank balance in the deep negatives.

Now if someone else paid the debt you owed your bank balance would be zero. This is much better.

You would be most grateful, but you still have no money. Still nothing to buy food, pay rent, or purchase the bare necessities.

Now if that same person not only paid the debt you owe, but also gave you 1 Million dollars. Now you have money to live your life. Now you can live.

Analogy applied

We had a debt before God. A Moral debt. Jesus's work on the Cross brought our debt to zero. And his perfect life was put to our moral account, filling our moral account to the brim, giving us the right to eternal life. Now able to be declared righteous. Justifying us.

Double imputation is how we are justified.

2 Cor 5:21 tells us of this double imputation in one sentence:

²¹ For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

Application - Our justification 100% sure

So how sure are you be that you will go to heaven when you die? Out of 100% how sure can you be?

If you trust that Jesus Christ paid for your sins and that his perfect life is seen on your record, you can be 100% sure that when you die, you will go to heaven. If you trust Jesus as your Saviour, His work saves you.

There is nothing arrogant about that. You can be 100% sure because it is based on His work, not yours.

Illustration - Last action sin

Or think about it this way.

Imagine you have a disagreement with your spouse.

But your old ways, those angry ways you practiced before you became a Christian come back, the disagreement turns into an argument, and you let anger take over. And things get worst, and while you are angry you say hurtful things to your spouse, and in a huff you leave the house.

And in your rage, you cross the SH1 but fail to see the truck coming and are fatally struck.

So, you are a Christian, but the last thing you did before you died were angry thoughts, angry words and angry actions against your spouse.

Your last actions were sins against your spouse and against God.

Would you go to Heaven or to Hell?

The biblical doctrine of Justification tells us that you would go to heaven. Jesus paid for that sin, even if it was the last thing you did. And any good actions of yours adds nothing to your right standing before God.

It is possible to live our lives **knowing** we are legally right before God because of what Jesus has done. Because we are In Christ.

Application – Justification Secure

So when your confidence levels are more in the 70% or the 50% remember how you are saved. You are saved by the Work of Christ alone. Nothing of your work.

- In Christ your justification is rock solid.
- Your justification is watertight,
- Your justification is air-tight.
- Your justification is more secure than any Swiss bank.
- In Christ, nothing can separate you from the Love of God.

Remember Rom 8:38-39

³⁸ For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, ³⁹ nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

There is nothing you can think of that can separate you from God if you are In Christ.

This is the glory of Justification. We are secure in Christ.

Possible questions from sure Justification

So if our justification is so sure, and our standing is so immovable, what is the point of ongoing faith and repentance?

Is there a need for ongoing repentance for those who are already declared righteous?

Sure, we need to exercise faith and repentance to **become** a Christian, but surely once we are in, there is no need to continue to repent?

In fact, would it not be offensive to God for someone who is legally righteous to continually ask for forgiveness?

If Jesus paid for my future sins, what is the point of repenting of them?

Link

Some people misuse the doctrine of justification to remove the responsibility of ongoing faith and repentance in the life of a Christian.

The underlying motives of such questions is not a desire for God's glory, but a love for sin and a foolish desire to hold on to sins. The one who loves his sin hates to repent, and any excuse not to repent is good enough, especially if it sounds spiritual.

This is what paragraph 5 of chapter 11 of the confession addresses.

Which brings us to our second part:

Part 2 – Fellowship Broken

The Confession (ch11 pr 5)

Paragraph 5 of chapter 11 of the 1689 states:

God does continue to forgive the sins of those that are justified, and although they can never fall from the state of justification, yet they may, by their sins, fall under God's fatherly displeasure; and in that condition they have not usually the light of his countenance restored unto them, until they humble themselves, confess their sins, beg pardon, and renew their faith and repentance.

Sin multifaceted

The key to distinguish here is that sin is multifaceted. Yes there is a legal component as a law is broken and punishment must be paid. This is a major part of sin.

But sin is more than that. Sin is also personal. Sin breaks relationship with God.

Illustration the judge and the car thief

Imagine a judge whose main work is to pass sentence on car thieves. He is good at what he does and gives appropriate punishment for the various seriousness of the crime. Over the years he may have passed sentence on 100s of car thieves who are complete strangers to him.

But then one day, his own vehicle is stolen. He is devastated because it was his father's Ford Falcon that

they had rebuilt together. The police find the vehicle and it is a complete write-off. And the police also find evidence that it was the judge's son who had stolen the vehicle and crashed it.

The judge understands the legal consequences of a car being stolen. And he may even choose not to press charges.

But the broken relationship, the broken trust, the insult, and the lack of love would hit him hardest. The broken relationship would affect their family for months if not years to come. The crime broke the law, but it also broke relationship.

Sin Personal to God

When people sin, it is a personal offence against God, it is not simply breaking the rules.

When **Christians** sin, it is a personal offence against their heavenly Father. And we do far worse than stealing our father's car.

In James 4:4, Christians who sin are called "adulteresses". When humans sin it is immensely personal to God.

So it is true, when a Christian sins we are told the legal component is taken care of. We are justified.

But we must still deal with the broken relationship. The interpersonal relationship has been broken and must be restored.

Teaching how to pray

Remember how our Lord taught his disciples to pray.

Turn with me to Matthew 6. We know this passage well.

The way he teaches his disciples how to pray implies that Christians will sin. But when we ask for forgiveness, we are praying to our Father, not to a judge.

That distinction is incredibly important.

How does the pray start in vers 9?

*“Our **Father** in heaven,
hallowed be your name.”^[a]*

We pray to our father. The legal status is secure. Nothing can change that.

And in verse 12 we pray that He would forgive us our debts.

And verse 11 implies that we would be praying in this way on a daily basis. We pray for our daily bread, and then in the same breath, we pray that God, our Heavenly Father, would forgive our sins against him.

Illustration – Washing of the Feet

This is what our Lord was illustrating when he washed the feet of the disciples.

Do you remember what Jesus replies to Peter during the foot washing in the upper room, after Peter, in his desire to show his dedication and commitment blurts out: *“Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!”*

In verse 10, Jesus replies:

¹⁰Jesus said to him, “The one who has bathed does not need to wash, except for his feet,^[a] but is completely clean. And you^[b] are clean, but not every one of

you.” ¹¹ *For he knew who was to betray him; that was why he said, “Not all of you are clean.”*

Illustration applied

As Christians our whole beings have been washed by the Blood of Christ. Our justification is secure.

But we continue to walk and work in this world. Our feet get dirty. Often because we chose paths we ought not to travel. The lure of indwelling sin still drives us to filthy paths

Our Lord Jesus knows our feet will get dirty. He knows they need to be washed often. Which is why he taught us to pray to ask for forgiveness daily in order to restore our relationship with our heavenly Father.

Sin is serious, and as a Christian, shunning our personal relationship with our heavenly father should break our hearts.

In a way our sins are worst than the unbeliever's because we know who we sin against and what Christ did to pay for that sin.

We also know how loving, compassionate, and merciful God is. It is a heart breaking thing for a follower of Christ to sin.

Application/ Link – sin not reason to doubt salvation

But on the flip side, committing a sin is not enough reason to question your salvation. Jesus Christ knows the reality of indwelling sin and the constant battle with our Flesh. He knows that battle will continue until we are glorified.

Committing a sin is not enough reason to doubt your salvation, but how you deal with that sin certainly is.

Which brings us to our third and final point: Fellowship Restored

Part 3 – Fellowship Restored

Continue how you started

What is a person's responsibility if they wish to become a Christian?

What must they do to be saved?

They must repent and believe. They must repent and have faith.

Without repentance and faith, there is no assurance of salvation.

We call this initial act of faith and repentance "Conversion".

But faith and repentance is not only the entry gate into Christianity. It is also the path of Christianity.

When you first repented of your sins, how complete was your repentance?

When you first exercised faith, how solid was your faith?

Repentance and faith at conversion are sincere, but they are far from being perfect.

The Christian life is an ongoing process of putting off sinful patterns of life, and increasing our trust and reliance in God.

Ongoing faith and repentance validate the reality of your initial faith and repentance. We don't look back to some event to give us assurance of salvation. We look to our present faith and repentance to give us assurance.

Bad response to sin

So how do you respond when you sin?

- Do you ignore it and brush it under the carpet telling yourself that you prayed a prayer in the past to deal with all your sins?
- Do you brush it off lightly as if it were no big deal?
- Do you compare your sins to others and consider yourself not too bad?

Friends, if you do not deal with sin as God requires, you will *"fall under God's fatherly displeasure"* as the confession tells us.

God will not be pleased with you, and He loves you enough not to leave you in this broken relationship.

Your conscience will plague you, and your peace will escape you.

Good response to sin

On the other hand when you sin, do you respond in a way similar to what the confession outlines?

- Do you humble yourself?
- Do you confess your sins?
- Do you ask for pardon?
- Do you renew your faith and your repentance?

Only in humbling ourselves, in renewed repentance and faith will we have the light of God's countenance restored.

King David knew this truth all too well.

In Psalm 32: 5, after sinning grotesquely, he cries out:

*I acknowledged my sin to you,
and I did not cover my iniquity;
I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the Lord,"
and **you forgave** the iniquity of my sin.*

That is a prayer of faith and repentance to restore relationship with his heavenly Father.

Faith and Repentance hard

Ongoing faith and repentance is hard and painful. That is why we tend to avoid it, but it is the best thing for us.

It is hard and painful because it denies your selfish, self-centred desires.

When you repent, we are saying "NO" to your self-centred desires and we hate to do that

- Anger gets things done **your** way. But you must repent of anger.
- Gossip makes you feel good about **yourself**. But you must repent of gossip.
- Neglecting responsibilities seems easy for **you**. But you must repent of laziness.
- Sexual immorality and pornography satisfy your **own desires**. But you must repent of lust.

Repentance is hard because it means no longer living for ourselves. Repentance means denying self and living for Christ.

2 Cor 5:15

*¹⁵ and he died for all, that those who live might **no longer live for themselves** but for him who for their sake died and was raised.*

Dying to self is impossible without Christ.

Faith and Repentance linked

Which is why it is ongoing repentance **and** faith. Faith and repentance go hand in hand. They are the two sides of the same coin of the Christian life.

Repentance alone leads to self-righteousness, which is vile in the eyes of God, just another manifestation of pride.

And mere belief in some key truths about God is dead too. True faith leads to action. True faith is seen by a changed life.

So repentance is by faith, and faith is demonstrated by repentance.

Ongoing Faith

And so we must take every opportunity to grow in faith.

We increase our knowledge of God, God' character, and His promises.

And we do not despise the hard times, and even the times of suffering which test and refine our faith.

These trials not only test your conviction of the truths about God, but tests your commitment to these truths.

- When finances are tight, will you fear for the future or will you trust God?

- When you are tempted to sin, will you believe the lie or will you trust God that His ways are better?
- When you are confronted by others, will you be afraid of man, or will your faith in God remove all fear?

Our faith is tested daily because it is so precious. Faith is how we please God, how we overcome trials, how we overcome temptations and how we are assured of eternal life.

1 Peter 1:6-7 encourages us in this

⁶ In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, ⁷ so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

Friends, faith and repentance are the ongoing themes of the Christian life. As Christians we must exercise these spiritual disciplines daily.

Conclusion

We praise God that our justification is secure. Nothing can change that. We are justified in Christ by Double Imputation. And nothing we can do, or not do, will change our legal status before God. There is no condemnation for those in Christ.

And so when we sin, as Christians, our legal standing is not changed. We are still justified, but our relationship with our heavenly Father has been broken. The personal elements of sin still need to be dealt with.

And so we must ask our heavenly father for forgiveness. We must continue to repent and turn from sin. We must continue to trust God for all things.

As Christians we continue how we started: With faith and repentance.

Let us pray.