

# A MATTER OF LIFE OR DEATH



**By Rev. James Brown Jr.**

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## **Preface**

When submitted and conformed to the Word of God, the Church serves as a pillar and foundation for the truth in its doctrine and practice. Through its Biblical teachings and traditions, it stands as a defense against all the onslaughts of the Devil.

Throughout the ages, the Church has faced relentless attacks by Satan and his agents, both from without and within. False teachings and heresies have repeatedly arisen, threatening to lead Western Christendom astray. During most of our Western history, the saints of God have been able to overcome these assaults due to the strength of the Western Church.

However, in our present day, the Church and all Western nations have been deconstructed and Christendom is now destroyed. This destruction is so complete that we no longer have a benchmark to discern the times. The old schemes of that "great dragon...that serpent of old, called the Devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world" (Revelation 12:9) are rising in greater intensity at the very time when the Church is at its weakest. Because of this, the effects of these old heresies are immeasurably worse because we no longer have a strong, robust Church to resist, restrain, and defeat these enemies of Christ's kingdom.

We are witnessing a dangerous resurgence of Paganism due to the deconstruction of the Church and Western Christendom. One of these damnable heresies that cause havoc within and without the Church denies the need for repentance, distorts the grace of God, and promotes lawlessness under the pretense of grace. These views, often described as antinomianism or hyper-grace, strike at the vitals of the Christian religion and are hostile to the very essence of Christianity.

This booklet is a response to this growing crisis within the Church. Its purpose is to contend for the faith once delivered to the saints with a sound doctrinal call of the Gospel to faith and repentance. God's grace is not a license to sin but is the power of God through which we are justified, sanctified, and ultimately glorified in Christ.

Scripture is clear on these matters. Christ came to save us from our sins—not to leave us in them. The Gospel message requires a response of faith and repentance sinners turn

away from sin toward God through Christ our Lord. As believers, those who have been united with Christ, we are called to walk in the new life of Christ empowered by the Holy Spirit to live in obedience to God's Word. This is not a form of legalism, but true freedom from the bondage of Satan to be submitted to God's will and purpose.

We hope this little book will be a useful resource for anyone seeking to deepen their understanding of the gospel, stand firm in the truth, and resist the errors of the age. May it inspire the Church to remain faithful to the truth passed down through the centuries, reject falsehood, and pursue holiness, trusting that by God's grace, we are being conformed to the image of Christ.

Soli Deo Gloria,

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## Introduction

**“Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out,** so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that He may send Jesus Christ, who was preached to you before, whom heaven must receive until the times of restoration of all things, which God has spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began.” –Acts 3:19-21 (NKJV) **[Emphasis mine]**

**“Repentance unto life** is an evangelical grace, the doctrine whereof is to be preached by every minister of the gospel, as well as that of faith in Christ.” –Westminster Confession of Faith, Chapter 15, paragraph 1 **[Emphasis mine]**

Connected to repentance and conversion, this title—A Matter of Life and Death—may be sensational to some or an over-emphasis to others. It is evident that the vast majority of professing Christians do not take the Gospel seriously, which is evident in their belittling of some, most, or every part of the Gospel. In most cases today, there is an indifference or hostility towards repentance that has wreaked havoc in the deconstruction of Christianity. My purpose in this title is to clearly state that repentance and conversion signify life, and where there is no repentance and conversion it means death. Yes, repentance and conversion are a matter of life or death as are regeneration, justification, sanctification, and ultimately, glorification.

Notice the words in Peter's sermon—“Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out...” Without question, Peter is saying that repentance and conversion are essential in our sins being blotted out. The Greek word, *ἄρᾳ*, translated as “may be blotted out” in the New King James Version, means to “completely remove” as in “wipe away”, “obliterate” or to “remove totally from a previous state with the outcome of being blotted out (erased).” The blotting out of sins is contingent on whether there is repentance and conversion. Therefore, since all have sinned and the wages of sin is death, the removal of sin is a matter of life and death.

Today, there is a renewed and growing hostility against the doctrine of repentance in what is called the Free Grace or Hyper-Grace movement. Although, in esoteric pride, its proponents believe it is something newly revealed to them, it is just the continuation and renewal of an ancient demonic heresy that was labeled as "antinomianism" by Martin Luther. However, in the ancient Church, it was also known as Gnosticism, Nicolaitanism, or the combined form of Nicolaitan Gnosticism.

If you are having problems with my use of "demonic heresy," let me remind you of the admonition of St. Paul in Ephesians 6:11-12 to "Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places" (NKJV).

Or, in 1 Timothy 4:1-2, Paul instructs Timothy, that "the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, **giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons**, speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their own conscience seared with a hot iron" (NKJV) **[Emphasis mine]**

Paul warns that false teachings are inspired by "deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons." The Apostle John warns us in chapter four and verse one of his first epistle, "Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world" (NKJV). If they are not of God then from where do they come? Doctrines that deny the fundamental articles of the Christian faith are heresies that come from Satan and his demonic angels. All falsehoods come from Satan because he is the father of lies.

Jesus said to the unbelieving Jews in John 8:44, "You are of your father the **devil**, and you want to do the desires of your father. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth because there is no truth in him. Whenever he speaks a lie, **he speaks from his own nature**, for he is a liar and the **father of lies.**" (NASB1995) **[Emphasis mine]**

Satan is the opposite of Jesus. Everything that is anti-Christ comes from him. And though he is against Christ, his deception is so clever that he causes people to believe he is the angel of light.

The Apostle Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 11:13-15, "For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into apostles of Christ. And no wonder! For **Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light**. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also transform themselves into ministers of righteousness, whose end will be according to their works" (NKJV) [Emphasis mine].

That's right, false doctrines that are in essence "anti-Christ" or those doctrines that turn us away from Christ come from Satan and are therefore demonic. This is a spiritual or supernatural war and what could be any more demonic than to teach or be deceived into believing that sinful man does not have to turn from sin unto a holy God? Therefore, those doctrines that deny the necessity of obedience to the Gospel are anti-Christ.

When it comes to the demonic doctrines that deny true repentance and conversion, the root issue is the denial of the law, which is what "antinomianism" means—anti (against) and nomos (law). It was identified and described by Jude in verse 4 of his epistle as a heresy that came from "ungodly men, who pervert the grace of our God into immorality [lawlessness] and deny the only Lord God and our Lord Jesus Christ" (Modern English Version).

Sinful men do not like authority or law. They are laissez-faire. They love darkness rather than light because their deeds are evil (John 3:19). They want to be their own god and do not want their nature to be restrained or condemned by law.

In denying the perpetual validity of the law and grace as a remedy for man's transgression of the law, they turn the grace of God into a "license to sin" by denying the necessity of repentance. At this point let's be clear before proceeding, the rejection of repentance as a changing of mind that brings about the turning away from sin and the turning towards God according to the law and the gospel is heresy.

Our text in Acts 3:19-21 reveals the essence of repentance and conversion in the Christian life. It addresses the need for a spiritual transformation, the blotting out of sins, and the subsequent refreshment that flows from the presence of the Lord. Anything short of these things is inadequate and not according to the Apostolic order, and is therefore, not according to the doctrine of Christ.

According to John 3:4, sin is the transgression of the law. Therefore, St. Paul asked in Romans 6:1, "Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound?" He answered this question clearly in Romans 6:2-4, saying, "Certainly not! **How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it?** Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life" (NKJV) **[Emphasis mine]**

### **Repentance: A Turning Away from Sin by Faith**

Repentance, as seen in Acts 3:19, is the first command issued by St. Peter and the first action of new believers in his second recorded sermon after the Ascension of Christ. In his first sermon on the day of Pentecost in Acts 2, his command to the Gospel sermon was "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." Are we to think there is a dichotomy between his first and second sermons or any other use of the command to sinful men to repent?

The Greek word for repentance, *metanoia*, means a change of mind—a turning away from sin and a turning toward God. The modern heretic will seek to deconstruct the meaning of the word repentance to the point of only meaning "a change of mind" and then identify this "change of mind" as only having to do with believing that Jesus is the Messiah. At first, this may seem like semantics because if one changes their mind they will change their actions. Right? And, if one changes their mind about "who is Christ" they will acknowledge and surrender to Jesus Christ as the King of kings and the Lord of lords. Right? Of course they will! This changing of the mind has major and broad implications and this is the rub in the conversation because the modern heretic is not seeking to construct a meaning of the word but to deconstruct the word to the point where there is no meaning.

For example, in today's deconstructed context what does it mean to "change your mind" from unbelief to belief? Is it simply to acknowledge that Jesus existed? That he was a good teacher? A prophet? Of course not! None of these beliefs are saving faith in and of themselves. Even to say that the changing of the mind has to do with Jesus being the



Messiah is meaningless without living and active saving faith. Can you acknowledge Jesus as Messiah without acknowledging His Divinity? His Virgin Birth? His Resurrection? Many do it all the time. How? Because they have deconstructed what it means to be the Messiah just as those who are rejecting repentance and conversion are deconstructing what it means to believe in Christ and follow Him.

False faith, or unbelief, deconstructs the Gospel until nothing is left and the sinner can continue in sin trusting in his righteousness—whatever it is that he perceives in himself to be righteous.

The modern manifestation of the ancient heresies of Gnosticism, Nicolaitanism, and Antinomianism may like to describe themselves as Free Grace, but it is falsely so-called. It's not Free Grace but rather an "Impotent Grace." It is not free because it is not the work of God that absolves and cleanses from sin. Rather, theirs is a libertarian self-righteousness that declares their unrighteousness to be righteous since there is no need for their sin to be forgiven and cleansed by the righteousness of Christ, which is freely imputed to us. Therefore, is the righteousness of Christ impotent or ineffectual to cleanse us from sin?

The deconstructed "grace" of anti-repentance heretics leaves you in your sin and the Bible emphatically declares that "the wages of sin is death (Romans 3:23). It is not grace because it deconstructs the grace of God's redemptive plan to make it ineffectual. Their's is a woke deconstruction of grace which is why they never construct a definition of repentance but only seek to deconstruct its meaning until it is meaningless.

Repentance is not merely defined as the mental assent of feeling sorry for one's sins, regret, or even a change of mind. Repentance also involves a deep recognition of sin's offense against a holy God and an earnest desire to forsake sin (2 Corinthians 7:9-11). This repentance is comprehensive, impacting the heart, mind, and will, leading to a transformed life that bears fruit in obedience (Matthew 3:8).

John Calvin, one of the leading figures in Reformed theology, defined repentance as "the true turning of our life to God, a turning that arises from a pure and earnest fear of Him, and it consists in the mortification of our flesh and the old man, and in the vivification of the Spirit." This means that repentance is an ongoing process in the believer's life, not a

one-time act. It involves a daily dying to sin and living unto righteousness (Romans 6:11). In other words, God’s grace is effectual. The work that God “has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ” (Philippians 1:6) because “it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure” (Philippians 2:13).

Yet, godly repentance is not a work of man to justify himself or to produce good in him to merit justification. Repentance is a gospel grace that is granted to sinners unto new life. Therefore, repentance is a product of regeneration.

“When they heard these things they became silent; and they glorified God, saying, ‘Then God has also granted to the Gentiles repentance to life.’ –Acts 11:18 (NKJV)

It is by this gospel or evangelical grace that sinners “out of the sight and sense not only of the danger, but also of the filthiness and odiousness of his sins, as contrary to the holy nature, and righteous law of God; and upon the apprehension of his mercy in Christ to such as are penitent, so grieves for, and hates his sins, as to turn from them all unto God, purposing and endeavoring to walk with him in all the ways of his commandments” (Westminster Confession of Faith, Chapter 15).

Because it is a gospel grace given to sinners, “repentance [is] not to be rested in, as any satisfaction for sin, or any cause of the pardon thereof, which is the act of God’s free grace in Christ; yet it is of such necessity to all sinners, that none may expect pardon without it” (Westminster Confession of Faith, Chapter 15).

Why is pardon not to be expected without repentance? Because God grants repentance to those He regenerates. We have been justified by the merits of Jesus Christ in His perfect obedience and the perfect satisfaction of His suffering and death. The imputation of His righteousness and atonement of our sins is transformational or else it is powerless, ineffective, and useless to remedy sin.

This justifying work of Christ is effectual in that it regenerates, converts, and grants faith and repentance in the believer. Just as we are justified by the faith of Jesus Christ, we are justified in faith toward Christ that we might be justified by the faith of Christ.

“...knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified.” – Galatians 2:16 (KJV)

Faith is the instrument in which we believe in Jesus Christ so that we might be justified by the faith of Christ. We are not justified by our faith, the faith of Adam, or any other man, except the man Christ Jesus. Our trust is in the perfect faith of Christ that was demonstrated in His perfect righteousness and sacrifice for sin.

“But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets; **even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe**: for there is no difference: for all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; **being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus**: whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God; to declare, I say, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus.” –Romans 3:21-26 (KJV) [**Emphasis mine**]

In both Galatians and Romans, Paul declares unequivocally that our justification is not of ourselves, it is a gift of God through the faith of Jesus Christ. And yet, in both contexts, Paul is quick to point out the purpose and fruit of this justification.

In Galatians, Paul immediately follows up the declaration that we are not justified by the works of the law but by the faith of Jesus Christ by saying in verse 17, “But if, while we seek to be justified by Christ, we ourselves also are found sinners, is therefore Christ the minister of sin? God forbid.”

In Romans chapter 6, Paul states very clearly that the justification in chapters 3, 4, and 5 is transformative. [Read the whole quote below. No cheating!]

“What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it? Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection, knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin. For he who has died has been freed from sin. Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him, knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, dies no more. Death no longer has dominion over Him. For the death that He died, He died to sin once for all; but the life that He lives, He lives to God. Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord. Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts. And do not present your members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin, but present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God. For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law but under grace. What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? Certainly not! Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one’s slaves whom you obey, whether of sin leading to death, or of obedience leading to righteousness? But God be thanked that though you were slaves of sin, yet you obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine to which you were delivered. And having been set free from sin, you became slaves of righteousness. I speak in human terms because of the weakness of your flesh. For just as you presented your members as slaves of uncleanness, and of lawlessness leading to more lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves of righteousness for holiness. For when you were slaves of sin, you were free in

regard to righteousness. What fruit did you have then in the things of which you are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death. But now having been set free from sin, and having become slaves of God, you have your fruit to holiness, and the end, everlasting life. For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord” (NKJV).

Now, how can you read Romans 6 and come to the conclusion there is no repentance in salvation? When Paul told Felix that he first preached to the Jews and then to the Gentiles "that they should repent, turn to God, and do works befitting repentance” (Acts 26:20), is Romans 6 not part of Paul’s contextual understanding?

Or how about the context of the following?

“Remind them of these things, charging them before the Lord not to strive about words to no profit, to the ruin of the hearers. Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth. But shun profane and idle babblings, for they will increase to more ungodliness. And their message will spread like cancer. Hymenaeus and Philetus are of this sort, who have strayed concerning the truth, saying that the resurrection is already past; and they overthrow the faith of some. Nevertheless the solid foundation of God stands, having this seal: ‘The Lord knows those who are His,’ and, **‘Let everyone who names the name of Christ depart from iniquity.’** But in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and silver, but also of wood and clay, some for honor and some for dishonor. Therefore **if anyone cleanses himself from the latter, he will be a vessel for honor, sanctified and useful for the Master, prepared for every good work.** Flee also youthful lusts; but pursue righteousness, faith, love, peace with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart. But avoid foolish and ignorant disputes, knowing that they generate strife. And a servant of the Lord must not quarrel but be gentle to all, able to teach, patient, in humility correcting those who are in opposition, **if God perhaps will grant them repentance, so that they may know**

**the truth, and that they may come to their senses and escape the snare of the devil, having been taken captive by him to do his will.**" –2 Timothy 2:14-26 (NKJV) [Emphasis mine]

"Again, do you think that we excuse ourselves to you? We speak before God in Christ. But we do all things, beloved, for your edification. For I fear lest, when I come, I shall not find you such as I wish, and that I shall be found by you such as you do not wish; lest there be contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, backbitings, whisperings, conceits, tumults; lest, when I come again, my God will humble me among you, and I shall mourn **for many who have sinned before and have not repented of the uncleanness, fornication, and lewdness which they have practiced.**" –2 Corinthians 12:19-21 (NKJV) [Emphasis mine]

**"Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God."** –2 Corinthians 7:1 (NKJV) [Emphasis mine]

Then there is the context of the Book of Revelation. Notice what happens to those who will not repent of their sin.

"But the rest of mankind, who were not killed by these plagues, did not repent of the works of their hands, that they should not worship demons, and idols of gold, silver, brass, stone, and wood, which can neither see nor hear nor walk. **And they did not repent of their murders or their sorceries or their sexual immorality or their thefts.**" –Revelation 9:20-21 (NKJV) [Emphasis mine]

"Then He who sat on the throne said, 'Behold, I make all things new.' And He said to me, 'Write, for these words are true and faithful.' And He said to me, 'It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. I will give of the fountain of the water of life freely to him who thirsts. He who overcomes shall inherit all things, and I will be his God and he shall be My son. **But**

**the cowardly, unbelieving, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death.”** –Revelation 21:5-8 (NKJV) **[Emphasis mine]**

Regardless of those who deny repentance with their “word salads,” woke ideology, and deconstructionist apostasy, the Bible is clear: Repent or perish! Yes, repentance is a matter of life or death!

“But we know that the judgment of God is according to truth against those who practice such things. [What things? Romans 1:18-32.] And do you think this, O man, you who judge those practicing such things, and doing the same, that you will escape the judgment of God? [Judgment of God on what things? Romans 1:18-32.] Or do you despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering, not knowing that the **goodness of God leads you to repentance?** [Repentance of what things? Romans 1:18-32.] **But in accordance with your hardness and your impenitent heart you are treasuring up for yourself wrath in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God,** who ‘will render to each one according to his deeds’: eternal life to those who by patient continuance in doing good seek for glory, honor, and immortality; but to those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness—indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, on every soul of man who does evil, of the Jew first and also of the Greek; but glory, honor, and peace to everyone who works what is good, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For there is no partiality with God.” –Romans 2:2-11 (NKJV) **[Emphasis mine]**

### **Conversion: Turning to God by Faith**

The second command and action of true believers in Acts 3:19 is that of conversion. While repentance is a turning away from sin, conversion is a turning towards God. It should be noted that both actions are required in Acts 3:19. Turning from sin and turning to God are not suggestions or good things that believers might do, no, they are gospel

commands that do take place in salvation. Jesus began His ministry in Mark 1:15 preaching, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel” (NKJV).

This conversion in Acts 3:19 is a work of the Holy Spirit who has regenerated the heart and enables the will of a sinner to receive the faith of Jesus Christ as his own. Faith and repentance are inseparable gifts from God (Ephesians 2:8-9; Acts 11:18) that bring about the believer's union with Christ.

Therefore, conversion is a work of God that follows and is inherently united to several Biblical doctrines. Conversion refers to the process by which a person turns from sin through repentance and turns to God through faith in Jesus Christ. It involves both repentance and faith as a response to God's sovereign work in salvation.

## 1. God's Sovereign Grace

Conversion begins with the sovereign grace of God, which is the root cause of a person's conversion. It is not initiated by the effort or merit of man but is entirely a work of God's mercy and love. Ephesians 2:8-9 highlights that salvation (and thus conversion) is a gift of God:

"For by grace you have been saved through faith, **and that not of yourselves;** it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast." (NKJV) [**Emphasis mine**]

There are no spiritual, physical, or moral labors of man that can be done to merit salvation. It is a gift that is bestowed solely because of God's grace. God grants this unmerited favor upon sinners according to His mercy.

“Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit.” –Titus 3:5 (NKJV)

Sinful man cannot even will himself unto salvation as Paul says in Romans 3:11, “There is none who seeks after God” (NKJV).



"So then it is not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God who shows mercy." –Romans 9:16 (NKJV)

“But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.” –John 1:12-13

God's sovereignty in our salvation is not only current in His providential work now in our salvation but extends to eternity past.

“[God] who has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was given to us in Christ Jesus before time began.” –2 Timothy 1:9 (NKJV)

“Just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will.” –Ephesians 1:4-5 (NKJV)

Truly David declares in Psalm 86:8-10, “Among the gods there is none like You, O Lord; Nor are there any works like Your works. All nations whom You have made Shall come and worship before You, O Lord, And shall glorify Your name. For You are great, and do wondrous things; You alone are God” (NKJV).

## **2. The Effectual Calling of God**

Conversion proceeds from God’s effectual calling. This is the work of the Holy Spirit by which God calls individuals to Himself, bringing them from spiritual death to spiritual life. This calling is not merely an external invitation to believe but an internal work of the Spirit that ensures the sinner responds in repentance and faith.

**“No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up at the last day.” –John 6:44 (NKJV)**  
**[Emphasis mine]**

**“It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing. The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life. But there are some of you who do not believe.’ For Jesus knew from the beginning who they were who did not believe, and who would betray Him. And He said, ‘Therefore I have said to you that no one can come to Me unless it has been granted to him by My Father.’ –John 6:63-65 (NKJV)** **[Emphasis mine]**

“For we ourselves were also once foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving various lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful and hating one another. But when the kindness and the love of God our Savior toward man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, **through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit**, whom He poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior, that having been justified by His grace we should become heirs according to the hope of eternal life. This is a faithful saying, and these things I want you to affirm constantly, that those who have believed in God should be careful to maintain good works. These things are good and profitable to men.” –Titus 3:3-7 (NKJV)  
**[Emphasis mine]**

The Westminster Shorter Catechism in Question 31 defines conversion as part of effectual calling stating:

“Effectual calling is the work of God's Spirit, whereby, convincing us of our sin and misery, enlightening our minds in the knowledge of Christ, and renewing our wills, he doth persuade and enable us to embrace Jesus Christ, freely offered to us in the gospel.”

True conversion involves both the intellect and the will—a full commitment to Christ as Lord and Savior, which is expressed through faith and demonstrated by a life of obedience.

### 3. Regeneration (New Birth)

Conversion is also a result of regeneration, which is the work of the Holy Spirit that transforms a sinner’s heart. Regeneration is the act of God by which He imparts spiritual life to the spiritually dead, enabling them to respond to the gospel in faith and repentance. Jesus speaks of this new birth in John 3:3.

"Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is **born again**, he cannot see the kingdom of God." (NKJV) [**Emphasis mine**]

Regeneration precedes conversion because it is God who first brings spiritual life, making it possible for sinners to repent and believe in saving faith of Christ.

“But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: **who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.**” –John 1:12-13 (NKJV) [**Emphasis mine**]

“Jesus answered, ‘Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water **and the Spirit**, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and **that which is born of the Spirit is spirit**. Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘You must be born again.’ The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes. **So is everyone who is born of the Spirit.**” –John 3:5-8 (NKJV) [**Emphasis mine**]

### 4. Conviction of Sin

Conversion also proceeds from the conviction of the Holy Spirit in the lives of sinners. The Spirit causes a sinner to become convicted of his sin and aware of his guilt before God. In John 16:8, Jesus says:

“And when He [the Holy Spirit] has come, **He will convict the world of sin**, and of righteousness, and of judgment” (NKJV) **[Emphasis mine]**.

This conviction of sin leads to repentance, where the sinner acknowledges their sin and turns to Christ for forgiveness.

“Now when they heard this, **they were cut to the heart**, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, ‘Men and brethren, what shall we do?’” –Acts 2:37 (NKJV) **[Emphasis mine]**

“The sacrifices of God are a **broken spirit, a broken and a contrite heart**—These, O God, You will not despise.” –Psalm 51:17 (NKJV) **[Emphasis mine]**

## **5. The Preaching of the Gospel**

Conversion comes directly from the preaching of the Word of God. It is by the foolishness of preaching the gospel that God was pleased to save them that believe (1 Corinthians 1:21). Romans 10:17 emphasizes the importance of hearing the gospel in the conversion of sinners:

"So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God."  
(NKJV)

It is through the preaching of the gospel that God calls sinners to repentance and faith. The external preaching of the Word in cooperation with the internal work of the Holy Spirit brings sinners to spiritual life in Christ.

“**Since you have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit in sincere love of the brethren, love one another**

**fervently with a pure heart, having been born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God** which lives and abides forever, because ‘All flesh is as grass, And all the glory of man as the flower of the grass. The grass withers, And its flower falls away, But the word of the Lord endures forever.’ Now this is the word which by the gospel was preached to you.” –1 Peter 1:22-25 (NKJV) **[Emphasis mine]**

## **6. The Love of God in Christ**

The love of God revealed in Christ’s atoning death and resurrection is the ultimate foundation for conversion. God’s love is the motivation behind His redemptive work in Christ. Conversion is the response to God’s loving offer of salvation through Christ, as expressed in John 3:16:

"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life" (NKJV).

Yet, repentance and conversion are not the first causes of eternal life, but rather the love of God. Repentance and conversion are the proper responses to God's love in manifesting the perfect faith and obedience of Jesus Christ to the world, which saves sinners.

“In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him. In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.” –1 John 4:9-10 (NKJV)

“But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” –Romans 5:8 (NKJV)

“For we ourselves were also once foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving various lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful

and hating one another. But when the kindness and the love of God our Savior toward man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior, that having been justified by His grace we should become heirs according to the hope of eternal life. This is a faithful saying, and these things I want you to affirm constantly, that those who have believed in God should be careful to maintain good works. These things are good and profitable to men..” –Titus 3:3-8 (NKJV)

“Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. Or do you think that the Scripture says in vain, “The Spirit who dwells in us yearns jealously”? But He gives more grace. Therefore He says: ‘God resists the proud, But gives grace to the humble.’ Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Lament and mourn and weep! Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up.” –James 4:4-10

These infinite mysteries of God are difficult to understand, just as Peter acknowledged in 2 Peter 3:15-16. Nevertheless, they are to be received as they are the words of God and not of men (1 Thessalonians 2:13). This is the real issue—is the Bible the Word of God nor not?

Ignorant and unstable men who are full of pride may twist the revelation of these infinite mysteries of God to their destruction (2 Peter 3:15-16), but those who have humbled themselves before the Lord will beware of these things lest they fall from their steadfastness and are led away with the error of the wicked. Instead, they will grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ (2 Peter 3:17-18).

No other conclusion can be made from Scripture or traditional Church teachings, other than conversion proceeds from God's love, sovereign grace, effectual calling, regeneration, conviction of sin, repentance, faith, the preaching of the gospel, and God's love revealed in Christ. It is a comprehensive and complete work of God that transforms the believer from sin to new life in Christ. From the first awakening of conviction to the act of faith, all aspects of conversion are ultimately grounded in the work and will of God.

### **The Blotting Out of Sins: Forgiveness and Justification**

In Acts 3:19, the promise that follows the command to repent and be converted is “that your sins may be blotted out.” Here we find a connection to the Biblical imagery of sins being recorded in a book and erased or wiped away by God's mercy and names being recorded or blotted out of a book of life.

“Then Moses returned to the Lord and said, ‘Oh, these people have committed a great sin, and have made for themselves a god of gold! Yet now, if You will forgive their sin—but if not, I pray, **blot me out of Your book which You have written.**’ And the Lord said to Moses, ‘**Whoever has sinned against Me, I will blot him out of My book.**’” –Exodus 32:31-33 (NKJV) [**Emphasis mine**]

“Furthermore the Lord spoke to me, saying, ‘I have seen this people, and indeed they are a stiff-necked people. Let Me alone, that I may destroy them and **blot out their name from under heaven**; and I will make of you a nation mightier and greater than they.’” –Deuteronomy 9:13-14 (NKJV) [**Emphasis mine**]

“He who overcomes shall be clothed in white garments, and **I will not blot out his name from the Book of Life**; but I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels.” –Revelation 3:5 (NKJV) [**Emphasis mine**]

“Let them be blotted out of the book of the living, And not be written with the righteous.” –Psalm 69:28 (NKJV) [**Emphasis mine**]

“Have mercy upon me, O God, According to Your lovingkindness; According to the multitude of Your tender mercies, **Blot out my transgressions.**” –Psalm 51:1 (NKJV) [**Emphasis mine**]

“I, even **I**, am **He who blots out your transgressions** for My own sake; And **I will not remember your sins.**” –Isaiah 43:25 (NKJV) [**Emphasis mine**]

Theologically, the blotting out of sins is synonymous with justification, where God declares the sinner righteous based on Christ's righteousness imputed to them by faith. By the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, the Apostle Paul writes in Romans 4:7-8, "Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven, and whose sins are covered; blessed is the man against whom the Lord will not count his sin." Justification is not progressive but an instantaneous act of God's grace declaring sinners are forgiven and righteous in Christ.

Even so, the blotting out of sins in Acts 3:19 is literally and grammatically tied to the act of repentance and conversion. However, it is repentance and conversion that is the offspring of justification and regeneration, not the other way around. It is through God's effective work of justification and regeneration that believers are born again as new creations in Christ. As regenerated sons of God, we are given faith and repentance by which to live as new creatures in Christ and be progressively conformed to the image of Christ.

The rejection of the necessity of repentance misrepresents, distorts, and perverts the integrity of the gospel. Where no repentance exists, no man comes to true conversion; where there is no conversion, sins are neither forgiven nor blotted out. Repentance and conversion are not merits unto justification, yet neither are they the first cause of salvation, being that they are secondary causes and effects in salvation. Nevertheless, they are essential components of salvation.

Either sins are blotted out through repentance and conversion by the grace of God, or, their name is blotted out of the Book of Life where there is no repentance and conversion.



## **The Anti-Repentance Movement: A Growing Danger**

Today, there is an increasing movement within certain “Christian” circles that downplays or outright rejects the need for repentance. This movement often promotes the idea that an isolated, empty, and impotent grace is sufficient for salvation, to the exclusion of the biblical command to repent. While faith alone is the only instrument in the salvation of sinners, Scripture is clear that genuine faith is always accompanied by repentance (Luke 24:47, Acts 2:38).

The reason why genuine faith is always accompanied by repentance is because Jesus came to save us from sin. Paul says in Romans 6:23, "For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." Sin and death are the problems that must be remedied.

"And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name Jesus, **for He will save His people from their sins.**" –Matthew 1:21 (NKJV) [Emphasis mine]

"The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, '**Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!**'" –John 1:29 (NKJV) [Emphasis mine]

"This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that **Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners**, of whom I am chief." –1 Timothy 1:15 (NKJV) [Emphasis mine]

"And you know that **He was manifested to take away our sins, and in Him there is no sin.**" –1 John 3:5 (NKJV) [Emphasis mine]

"But go and learn what this means: ‘I desire mercy and not sacrifice.’ **For I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance.**" –Matthew 9:13 (NKJV) [Emphasis mine]

"He then would have had to suffer often since the foundation of the world; but now, once at the end of the ages, **He has appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself.**" –Hebrews 9:26 (NKJV) **[Emphasis mine]**

Not only did Jesus die for our sins but “He [God] made Him [Jesus] who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him” (2 Corinthians 5:21). Yes, in justification, we are declared to be righteous only by the righteousness of Christ being imputed to us (Romans 4), but we are also being made righteous in sanctification by the righteousness of Christ being infused into us (2 Corinthians 3:18; Philippians 1:6; Philippians 2:12-13; Ephesians 4:22-24; Colossians 3:9-10; 1 Thessalonians 5:23; 2 Peter 1:3-4).

Jesus Christ “bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness—by whose stripes you were healed” (1 Peter 2:24). Paul reminds us in Titus 2:14 that Jesus “gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works.”

Remember, as we quoted earlier in Romans chapter 6:

“What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? Certainly not! **How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it?** Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, **even so we also should walk in newness of life.** For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection, knowing this, that **our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin. For he who has died has been freed from sin.**” –Romans 6:1-7 (NKJV) **[Emphasis mine]**

In Christ, you who have “been set free from sin” and have “became slaves of righteousness” (Romans 6:18), have “been set free from sin, and having become slaves of God, you have your fruit to holiness, and the end, everlasting life” (Romans 6:22).

The tendency of many today who seek to deconstruct the Gospel contradicts not only the teachings of Scripture but also the historical confessions of the faith in traditional Christianity. Reformed theologians have always insisted that repentance is not a work that merits the right to salvation but is act of obedience that necessarily follows the reception of God's grace. Question 88 of the Heidelberg Catechism defines true repentance as "the dying of the old self and the coming to life of the new." If repentance does not happen, then the old self lives on in sin, and a person can't truly receive the refreshing of forgiveness from the Lord.

### **Conclusion: Repentance and Conversion are Essential**

The growing anti-repentance movement must be resisted with bold affirmations that repentance and conversion are essential components of the gospel. The blotting out of sins cannot be separated from obedience to the gospel call to turn away from sin unto God in faith. To neglect or reject repentance is to undermine the gospel and risk the eternal well-being of soul and body.

“And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him [God] who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.” –Matthew 10:28 (NKJV)

“Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.” –1 Thessalonians 5:23 (NKJV)

Following the apostolic command and example found in Acts 3:19, the Church must continue to proclaim the necessity of repentance in salvation, both in conversion and sanctification. The call to "repent and be converted" remains as essential today as it was in the early Church. Even though repentance is not the origin of justification or an act that merits justification, nevertheless, there is no remission of sins without it.

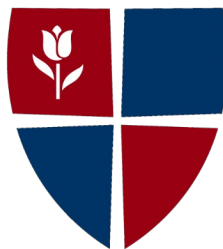
To deny the necessity of repentance and conversion is to deny the Lord who bought us, the gospel of Jesus Christ, and the clear call of the gospel. The contemporary anti-repentance movement known as "Free Grace" by its adherents or "Hyper-grace" by its detractors is better understood as a by-product of "Progressive Christianity" with all of its modernism, post-modernism, and deconstructionist characteristics. Historically, it is found in the Gnostic, Nicolaitan, and Antinomian movements. Therefore, it is not new but simply a regurgitation of old heresies.

Regardless of its present novelty, it has been, is, and always will be a damnable heresy no matter how subtly they craft their arguments. For it is not a building up of the faith, it is not a maturity of grace and knowledge, nor is it a growth unto holiness, but rather, it is a deconstruction of the Word to reduce the Christian faith to a meaningless void of skepticism filled with iniquity.

**“And because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold.” –Matthew 24:12 (NKJV)**

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