Section: Doctrine of Salvation (Soteriology)

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**TEACHING NOTES**

Tonight we continue in section 8 of the WOTC – the Doctrine of Salvation.

This week we are looking at questions 86, 87, and 88.

Question 86 asks “what must we do to be saved?” and questions 87 and 88 expand on the answer to that question as we look closer at the meaning of repentance and faith.

These two things, repentance and faith are connected to the step in salvation called conversion.

Before we get started Let’s pray.

**Q86. What must we do to be saved?**

**When we are enabled by the power and will of God, we joyfully and willingly turn from sin and trust in Christ Jesus alone. This is saving faith.**

The first thing our answer seeks to do is to remind us that we can’t actually DO anything in and of ourselves to be saved. Without God’s divine power and will to first enable us, we would never willingly, much less joyfully turn from our sin and trust In Christ Jesus alone.

In the lessons leading up to tonight we have thoroughly covered man’s inability and our need to be born again/regenerated by the power of God. We’ve seen that the doctrine of election is an incredibly comforting truth that assures us of our salvation because it is God who has planned and done everything necessary for our salvation and we cannot lose what has been secured for us by Christ Himself.

Our question tonight “what must we do to be saved?” comes at this point in our catechism on purpose. We have been working through this section of the Word of Truth Catechism on Soteriology (the doctrine of salvation) in the order that God works in salvation.

Knowing the order of salvation, or the Ordo Salutis as it is called in Latin, is helpful to our understanding of HOW God works in our salvation.

The *ordo salutis* is: as follows

1. Election/Predestination (this took place before time began, in the Covenant of Redemption made before creation)
2. General Gospel Call – proclamation of the gospel message that goes out generally to any and all people (this happens at some point in our life prior to regeneration)
3. Regeneration – includes the Effectual Call of the Holy Spirit (this can happen immediately upon hearing the General Gospel Call or it may be years later, possibly after hearing the gospel many, many times—either way, it’s according to God’s preordained timing and the work of God upon a person)
4. Conversion (what we’re focusing on tonight): As a result of regeneration, God immediately gives the gift of saving faith by which a person willingly repents of sin and trusts his/her life and salvation to Jesus Christ alone. (Many people today associate the moment of their conversion with an alter call or a time where they repeated a prayer with a friend, pastor or TV evangelist. That may very well be the actual moment of their conversion but it’s also likely that their actual conversion - where they truly exercised saving faith, happened at a time prior to or maybe even after that particular moment. The point I want to make is that true repentance and faith are something that takes place in our hearts. The evidence of faith is expressed with our mouths but the actual faith itself comes from within, by God’s work, before we ever say or do anything.)

Following the step of conversion is:

1. Justification
2. Adoption (which we receive immediately)
3. Perseverance and Sanctification (this is also an immediate benefit at conversion that plays out progressively over the life of a believer and culminates at our glorification)
4. Glorification (after we die)

Typically, when salvation is considered there is a focus on the moment of faith. But we hope in these lessons you are seeing biblically the bigger picture of all that happens (the fullness of all God has planned and does) for salvation. Knowing the *ordo salutis* is very helpful in our understanding of God, our praise for God, and our testimony of the gospel!

We see a *summary* of this chain of events (this ordo salutis) laid out in:

**Romans 8:30** And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified. (Break this down)

All those who are elected WILL be glorified, therefore, everything that must take place in between is also guaranteed to happen, including the step of conversion we’re focused on tonight.

God is the ultimate determiner and cause of each step in the process. In election, He has acted on our behalf and determined to save us even before we existed. We did not participate or have any experience in the act of our election.

Now, while we don’t see the step of conversion spelled out in Romans 8:30, we know from scripture that it not only must take place in order to be saved, but it is a command that must be obeyed by us. What this practically means for us is that since God has determined before creation that we will be saved, and that the exercise of saving faith is a necessary requirement of that salvation, then God has also determined that we WILL exercise saving faith - that His call, being referenced here in Romans will be effectual.

So when our answer to what we must do to be saved begins by saying “When we are enabled by the power and will of God” we are simply keeping in view that it is God who gets the glory for our saving faith being exercised.

Next we see that once “we are enabled by the power and will of God, we joyfully and willingly turn from sin and trust in Christ Jesus alone.”

We have gone over election, the proclamation of the gospel as the means God uses to effectively call those who are chosen, and last week we looked at regeneration, also known as being born again. Up to this point in the order of salvation, none of these prior steps or conditions are given to us in the form of commands for us to obey.

We saw last week that being born again is a condition, or a necessary pre-requisite that ***must*** take place in order for us to be saved, but we are not commanded to be born again. When Jesus told Nicodemus that a person must be born-again he meant it only as a necessary pre-requisite that must take place, not as a command that we must obey.

But repentance and faith are not just pre-requisites that must take place, they are commandments that must be obeyed. We are commanded to repent and believe the gospel.

**Acts 17:30** ...[God] commands all people everywhere to repent…

**Mark 1:15** “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.”

We are commanded to repent and believe. See that the command to repent and believe is for ***all*** people, not only those who have received the grace of regeneration, but ***only*** those who are born again are willing and able to obey.

We are not commanded to be born again. Regeneration is something that happens to us, by God alone. It is effected upon us, we don’t experience it *as an action that we do*…but, repentance and trust in Christ ARE things that we experience as actions we do. Still worked in us by God, but something we *joyfully and willingly* do. His grace and power causes an action we do.

Through regeneration, we are enabled and empowered in a way that God guarantees will save His elect, but that doesn’t mean that our repentance and faith are something we do against our own will. Rather, our wills have been set free in new birth so that the saving faith that is gifted is expressed personally, joyfully, willingly, and lovingly! Before regeneration, as we have learned, man cannot will saving faith in Jesus. But the Holy Spirit’s work of regeneration in a person and His ongoing work and power empower a person to willingly exercise the gifted saving faith.

Repentance and trust in Christ/belief in the gospel are conditions that must be met for salvation just as regeneration is a condition that must be met. The difference in these conditions is that regeneration is not a commandment for us to comply with while repentance and trust in Christ are.

It is critical that we are faithful to be repenting and believing, just as it is critical that we are born again, but *our efforts in repentance and belief are actually the experiential reality that we have been born again.*

We will unpack repentance and trust in Christ in Questions 87 and 88 but before we do, our answer says that when these are both present, this is saving faith.

**SAVING FAITH**

The WOTC defines Saving Faith: Rather than trusting one’s own assumed worth, works, or ability, a person repents and believes that Jesus is God, trusts in Jesus’ sinless life of perfect obedience, Jesus’ sacrificial death on the cross in his/her place, and Jesus’ rising from the dead to claim salvation and victory for him/her. Saving faith is produced in the elect by God and is always accompanied by progressive sanctification and ongoing repentance from sin.

When we use the term saving faith, we are really just efforting to summarize the truth that true repentance and genuine faith in the person and work of Christ are inseparable. Trust in/belief in Christ and repentance are so closely connected that the Bible often times doesn’t even distinguish between the two.

Look at these several verses in your hand-out with me.

**Acts 17:30** ...[God] commands all people everywhere to repent…

**Matthew 4:17** From that time Jesus began to preach, saying, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”

**Acts 16:30-31** Then he brought them out and said, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” And they said, “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved...”

There are several places in scripture where the command is simply to repent, and other places where the command is to believe the gospel, or believe in Jesus. We must understand that these are not conflicting statements about what is required for us to be saved. Repentance and belief in Jesus are not technically the exact same thing but what we learn by seeing them used synonymously in scripture as a singular requirement in order to be saved, is that if you do either one of the two things in a genuine way, the other will be present.

In other words, it is impossible to truly repent from sin and self reign without believing and trusting in the finished work of Christ alone for salvation. Likewise, it is impossible to truly believe in and trust in Christ alone for salvation without repenting of sin and self reign.

Repentance and faith (belief in Jesus) are two sides of the same coin, distinct but inseparable.

Let’s look again at:

**Mark 1:15** “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.”

Here it is said to repent AND believe in the gospel. Again, this is two distinct things but it is meant to be understood as one continuous action…repent and believe in the gospel, turn from sin and turn to Christ.

If faith is genuine it will be accompanied by repentance. Genuine belief in the gospel, belief in Jesus will be reflected in a change of direction, a new way of living.

**James 2:18** But someone will say, "You have faith and I have works." Show me your faith apart from your works, and I will show you my faith by my works.

There is a way to test the authenticity or genuineness of our faith, and that is by looking at the fruit that it produces. Faith without the fruit of works is a dead faith (verse 17), it does not lead to life. Faith that is not accompanied by repentance… turning from sin to righteousness, is not saving faith.

Saving faith begins at conversion and continues in the life of a truly saved person. Repentance from sin and trusting in Christ is something that is practiced throughout the life of all who are truly saved, not perfectly, but continually.

Let’s look closer at the meaning of repentance by moving to our next Q&A.

**Q87. What is turning from sin called?**

**Turning from sin is called repentance.**

**In light of the gospel, repentance is to turn away from sin, including self-reign, and we turn instead to Jesus Christ as our Savior and the Lord of our lives.**

Now we focus our attention on the thing we must do called repentance. It is very important for us to know what repentance is because Jesus said in

**Luke 13:5** “…unless you repent, you will all likewise perish.”

Repentance was a fundamental component of Jesus’ ministry.

**Matthew 4:17** From that time Jesus began to preach, saying, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”

This is how Jesus’ ministry began, by calling people to repent. And at the end of His earthly ministry, He told His disciples (including us) that repentance was to be a part of the message we are to continue in His name.

**Luke 24:46-47** [Jesus] said to them, “Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem."

When Jesus sent out the 12 disciples in Mark 6, it says in verse 12:

**Mark 6:12** So they went out and proclaimed that people should repent.

Peter’s first sermon after Pentecost was a message of repentance.

**Acts 2:38** And Peter said to them, “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins…”

And Paul preaches the same thing at Mars Hill in:

**Acts 17:30-31** "...[God] commands all people everywhere to repent, because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead.”

There should be no question that repentance is taught and commanded throughout the New Testament. It is not only in places where the word “repent” or “repentance” is used. It is taught as a concept throughout scripture even where the word itself is not used.

Just one example would be:

**Romans 12:1-2a** I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. 2 Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind…

Martin Luther saw this theme so clearly in scripture that he made this the first of his 95 thesis that he nailed to the Wittenberg door:

*When our Lord and Master Jesus Christ said, "Repent", he willed the entire life of believers to be one of repentance.*

So what does it actually mean for us to repent? Many people think of repentance as a deep sorrow for sin or remorse/regret, usually prompted by fear or a deep desire to avoid the consequences. And that is certainly a part of it, but that is not all of it, and if that is all it consists of, it is not true Christian repentance.

Our answer says that repentance is not only a turning from sin, but also a turning to God. And again, those really aren’t two separate things. They are one thing. It is one turn, one action that involves a refocus or a redirection. It’s not just getting off the road I’m on. It’s turning on to the only road that will lead to life, but it requires me getting off the road I’m on.

Far too many people have attempted to turn to God without turning from sin. They have conceived of and believed a deception that Jesus comes to them in such a way that he accompanies them down the path of their choosing. That Jesus doesn’t require them to completely abandon all of their previous priorities, that he will patiently walk with them and slowly ween them off their idols. They believe that they can continue to serve their idols while they claim Jesus as Lord.

At the root of all sin is a belief in the lie that we can be satisfied in something other than God, which is idolatry. So any sin we turn from that is not a turning to God, is just turning from one sin to another sin. We cannot turn from sin unless we turn to God. Anything less than turning to God is sin and hence, it is not true Christian repentance.

I used to struggle with the account of Judas Iscariot because the Bible is clear that he was not saved. But when I read the account of his remorse and regret over betraying Jesus, I thought that was evidence of repentance. But look at the difference between him and Peter. Was Peter’s sin more forgivable than Judas’? No, that was not the difference. The difference was that Peter turned from his sin TO Christ, Judas did not. Peter did not hide in shame when He saw the resurrected Christ. He jumped out of the boat he was in and swam to the shore immediately. He acted upon his love for Jesus and sought forgiveness.

He exercised His faith in the love and forgiveness of Christ. Peter’s grief was based on how his sin caused him to feel a loss of loving fellowship with Jesus. His repentance was motivated by a desire to experience the reassurance of Jesus’ unchanging love. Judas’ grief had nothing to do with a desire for Christ, it was about the consequence of sin upon his own conscience. Judas went out and killed himself in an (unsuccessful) effort to escape the torment of his sin. His sorrow and grief was not true repentance, it was the inevitable consequence of all sin– pain and misery. If the pain and misery of our sin is not placed on Christ, we will bear the full weight of it ourselves, in this life and for eternity.

Now, come back to the call on each of us to repent. The key to understanding true repentance is not the focus of our effort to simply turn away from sin. It is the expulsive power of a new affection for Christ as our Savior and Lord, turning to and focusing our efforts on gaining Him as our greatest treasure. The point of repentance is getting Jesus—it is living in the love of Christ, according to the commands of Christ, for His glory and our good.

It is a paradigm shift in our thinking where we no longer see our sin as the thing that will fulfill our desires, but instead we see the sinful trappings of this fallen world as the things that are keeping us from knowing and having Christ, our greatest desire. This is what Paul is getting at in Phil 3:7-11. Look there with me:

**Philippians 3:7-11** But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. 8 Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ 9 and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith— 10 that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, 11 that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead.

We are not focused on the sin. We are focused on our Savior, but we are so intent to go after Him that we will sacrifice and count as loss anything that gets in our way. Let’s bring in a more practical example.

Let’s plug in a sin and see what repentance might look like practically. Let’s say I struggle with the sin of gossiping. We all know that gossiping is a sin. I could feel very sorry for gossiping, especially if I am called out on it. I could even determine not to gossip, but if the message I am telling myself in the face of temptation is simply “don’t gossip, it’s a sin”, and I am just trying to abstain from gossip because I know I‘m not supposed to, or maybe I’m trying not to because I understand the damage it can do and I would not want people to gossip about me; none of these is the same as being motivated primarily by faith in Jesus.

True repentance would be my acknowledgement that my gossiping is a sin against God first and foremost, and that my sin is a hindrance to how I experience my relationship with Him. In true repentance, I would be broken over the way that my sin has defamed the name of Jesus. I would suffer the shame and humiliation of confessing my sin, with a willingness and commitment to cut out my tongue (figureatively) if necessary.

I would cry out to God for His gospel mercy and go forth with a new resolve to battle my fleshly desire to gossip by yielding to the Spirit who has called me to love my neighbor out of the overflow of my love for God.

Hopefully that helps you see what I mean when I said “We are not focused on the sin. We are focused on our Savior, but we are so intent to go after Him that we will sacrifice and count as loss anything that gets in our way.” When my focus is God-centered and gospel-centered, that doesn’t mean I won’t think deeply about my sin in an effort to conquer it in the power of Christ. We need to take our sin seriously. Focusing our eyes on God doesn’t mean that I simply ignore the sin that lies in the way of me being able to see Him more clearly. Look with me at:

**Matthew 5:23-24** So if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, 24 leave your gift there before the altar and go. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.

Jesus is teaching that unrepentant sin in our life will hinder our experience of relationship with God. In this case, true repentance is more than just sorrow, more than just turning to God in prayer or religious sacrifice. He says to go be reconciled. He says that if you are truly living in the forgiveness and grace of God, you will make a real and genuine effort to correct the sin, not just be sorry for it.

Jesus goes on in this same sermon to say that if your eye causes you to sin, cut it out. We know that this was an analogy not meant to be taken literally, but what is the meaning of the analogy? He is saying that sin is dangerous to our souls and that we must take real and tangible steps to avoid it, even extreme steps. True repentance takes real and tangible steps in our hatred of sin.

And our hatred of sin cannot be primarily based on the way its consequences negatively impact us, it must be toward how it violates God’s good and perfect law. If our hatred toward sin is simply because of sins temporal, horizontal consequences that we experience, then it is not true repentance. It’s possible to genuinely hate sin in that way without ever lifting a finger to actually avoid it. If we truly hate sin as God hates sin, we will take steps to avoid it.

We can’t just get angry after we have sinned. That anger must lead us to plot against our sin, we have to make a battle plan and be ready and eager to slay it when the opportunity comes in the form of temptation.

We cannot be deceived into thinking that our tears in the moment will be enough to carry us through the next temptation long after the tears have dried up.

I want to wrap up this section by quickly touching on the last part of our answer.

Our question asked “What is turning from sin called?” And the answer is:

Turning from sin is called repentance. In light of the gospel, repentance is to turn away from sin, including self-reign, and we ***turn instead to Jesus Christ as our Savior and the Lord of our lives.***

Turning to Jesus as Savior AND Lord of our lives is another way of recognizing the elements of saving faith in regards to following Jesus. Turning to Him as Savior means that we abandon all of our own efforts of salvation and trust solely in Him. We will unpack this more in our next Q&A.

Turning to Him as Lord of our lives means that we submit to Him as our Lord, our King, our ruler. It means we obey His commands. It means that we are serious about repenting of the sin He has commanded us not to do as well as the sin of not doing what he has commanded us to do (sins of commission and omission). It means that we are living to do His will, not our own. It’s about trusting Him completely. We don’t just trust that he has saved us from the penalty of our sin, we trust that His word and His commandments are the path of life. By following and obeying Him we can experience true freedom and true life, even now.

When we are united to Jesus by grace through faith, it is all of Him that we submit to and are blessed by. It’s not possible to have Him only as Savior- but not as Lord. It’s the whole of Christ that we are united to; Savior and Lord. And no part of this submission to Christ is begrudging. When we truly see and believe in Him as the glorious savior and redeemer of our soul that He is, our desire to serve Him and live for Him is a natural response. That doesn’t mean that following Him will be easy, any more than it was easy for Him to go to the cross for us.

He told us that following Him would be difficult; He even used the imagery of us needing to pick up our own cross and follow Him. But just as He set an example for us by enduring the cross for the joy set before Him (Hebrews 12:2), if it is truly our joy to have Him as savior, we will follow Him as Lord through all the trials of this life. We endure not by mustering up our own grit and determination to succeed, but by keeping our eyes fixed on the one we follow, trusting Him as He leads us, wherever He leads us. No matter how hard the road gets we don’t let it discourage us to the point of turning back because we know that going wherever He goes is worth it all.

The London Baptist Confession says these encouraging words about saving faith:

*This faith may exist in varying degrees so that it may be either weak or strong.11  Yet even in its weakest form, it is different in kind or nature (like all other saving graces) from the faith and common grace of temporary believers.12  Therefore, faith may often be attacked and weakened, but it gains the victory.13  It matures in many to the point that they attain full assurance through Christ,14 who is both the founder and perfecter of our faith.15 – 1689 London Baptist Confession*

Ok, let’s move on to our last question.

**Q88. What does it mean to trust only in Jesus Christ?**

It is to believe (trust) in the deity and work of Jesus Christ, rather than trusting one’s own assumed worth, works, will, or ability**.**

As I mentioned at the beginning, Q87 and 88 are meant to help us have a deeper understanding of saving faith, as described in Q86.

Let’s look at it again.

Q86. What must we do to be saved?

When we are enabled by the power and will of God, we joyfully and willingly turn from sin (this is the repentance part of saving faith that we just looked at in question 87***) and trust in Christ Jesus alone*** (this is what we will look at now). This is saving faith.

Christianity is the only religion where one’s own effort plays no role in earning or keeping salvation. All other religions are dreamed up by man, and they make man a determining factor in his own salvation.

Don’t we love redemption stories where the bad guy grows a conscience and manages to do some really good things in his effort to make things right? There is a certain kind of glory in redemption stories. Fallen man wants to receive that glory for himself and in order to do so it is necessary for him to believe that he is capable of self-redemption.

It is the default of fallen man to think that he is capable of doing enough good to outweigh any bad he has done. To trust in Christ Jesus alone is to repent of this way of thinking. It is to rightly believe that I can do nothing in myself to settle the debt for my disrespect of God’s perfect holiness and disregard for His perfect law. It is to rightly believe that my sin is so great in light of God’s perfect holiness, that even an eternity in Hell could never redeem me or make up for how far I have fallen short of His glory. I need a savior, the one and only Christ Jesus alone.

The main focus of this question and answer is found in the word “alone”. One of the five Solas(sola being the Latin word for alone) of the reformation is Solo Christo – Christ Alone.

True saving faith sees that it’s not Jesus PLUS something else….such as Jesus PLUS my best efforts, or Jesus PLUS my parents hope I’d be saved, or Jesus PLUS my so-called “free will”, or Jesus PLUS my assumed worthiness. It’s not Jesus doing his part PLUS me doing my part.

No, saving faith trusts in the whole, complete, sufficient, and exclusive *person and work of Jesus Christ, alone*. True trust in Christ is to believe in the deity and work of Jesus Christ, rather than trusting one’s own assumed worth, works, will, or ability.

This Sola of the reformation was emphasized because Roman Catholic teaching had developed the tradition that a priest of the Roman Catholic church was meant to act as a mediator between man and God, rather than affirming scriptures teaching that Christ alone is our high priest.

**1 Timothy 2:5** For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus

Jesus is not just one among many, He’s not even the best among many, He is the ONLY one. As soon as we try to add anyone or anything to Christ we are diminishing His greatness by saying that He is insufficient in and of Himself. We cannot add anything to Him without taking away from Him. Jesus plus anything equals nothing. The truth of who Jesus is does not exist where He has been added to. There is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.

Those who have saving faith in Jesus are covered, are clothed in His perfect righteousness by imputation. His spotless and pure righteousness is credited to us as a gift. By contrast, scripture says that OUR righteousness is as filthy rags (Isaiah 64:6), righteousness here referring to deeds we consider to be righteous that are done with the mind that they belong to us and are from us, rather than from Christ.

Think of the analogy, our sin is completely covered/hidden as we are robed in the righteousness of Christ. To try and adorn that robe with “righteous deeds” that come from us is tantamount to taking the filthy rags that are covered by the robe of Christ’s righteousness and tying them to the outside of that robe. There is absolutely nothing from within us that can do anything more than to pollute and adulterate the purity of Christ’s righteousness.

Our righteousness, our salvation, our new life is from Christ alone and it must remain that way. As we are progressively sanctified and begin to bear the fruit of good works by remaining in Christ and trusting in Him alone, it is a very natural tendency of our flesh to begin to focus on the fruit of good works in such a way that we begin to move our focus away from our trust in Christ alone. If there is not a diligence to be on guard against this tendency by an ongoing trust and repentance, the ending result is that we will drift further and further away from the joyful, peace-filled communion we have with Christ when we are truly trusting in Him alone.

Now this is very weighty if we are being honest with ourselves. How often are we putting our trust in other things? How often is our hope in earthly things, in things that are by-products of our union with Christ, rather than in Christ alone? If our faith was something that ultimately depended upon us, upon our ability, our faithfulness to believe, we would have reason to be concerned about whether or not we would endure to the end. Our thoughts, feelings, and emotions can be subject to the whims of our flesh that can stir up anxious thoughts of doubt about our identity in Christ.

This is why trusting in Christ alone is NOT trusting in our own perceived worth, works, will, or ability. Trusting in any of these things will always leave us with uncertainty because we know that we are fallen and fallible and that those things are not dependable. Christ ALONE is perfect and unchanging. His promises do not shift and change depending on how we perform.

2 Timothy 2: 13 if we are faithless, he remains faithful—

for he cannot deny himself.

Trusting in Christ alone is the key to our eternal assurance because He alone is faithful.

When we looked earlier at James and talked about testing the genuiness of our faith, how many of you hear those words and still think of them in terms of your performance being tested, as though the test is really about measuring the strength of your will to believe.

If you don’t remember anything else from tonight, I pray that you will hear and remember this: the testing of our faith is NOT at all about measuring our performance, it is about magnifying the perfect performance and faithfulness of CHRIST ALONE! Our faith may be as small as a mustard seed but the strength of it comes not from ITS size, but from WHO our faith is in.

1 Peter 1: 3-7 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, 4 to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, 5 who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. 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.

Oh! That is SO good! Do you see that it is not about US passing the test. The testing is a GIFT! It’s a gift that proves through the various trials of life, that our salvation is secure in Christ alone! It’s not us proving to God that our faith is genuine, it’s God proving to us that Jesus, who is the object of our faith, is faithful. When we come out the other side of a trial with our faith stronger than it was before it started, the preciousness is found not in us being convinced that we are stronger than we thought, it’s in knowing that we would never have passed the test on our own, it’s in seeing the evidence of God’s grace to carry us through any storm, no matter how big the storm or how much it rages. We see that our faith is not in vain, because He is holding on to us even when we are tempted to let go.

See here that God’s ultimate purpose in this is that it may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ. It leads to worship, the outward expression of our joy in Christ.

The greatest hindrance to our joy in Christ is not the trials that test our faith, James says that we should count those as joy (James 1:2). The greatest hindrance to our joy in Christ comes from our own sin, when we fail to walk in genuine faith and repentance.

So how do we truly trust in and rest in Christ alone when we realize that every sin we commit ultimately comes back to a failure to keep our eyes fixed on Christ alone? How does this not become a heavy weight of burden that robs us of our joy and causes us to want to throw up our hands in defeat?...By acknowledging again that we are saved by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone. This is how we walk in repentance. By constantly re-orienting our hearts and minds to the way, the truth, and the life – Jesus.

All of our sin has been paid for by Christ alone, past, present, and future sins, even the sin of not consistently living in perfect accordance with our trust in Christ alone. Just as Satan’s aim in tempting us to sin is to chip away at our trust in Christ, our aim in repenting of our particular sins should be with the aim of that more perfect trust in Christ alone. We should be encouraged by the truth that through God’s gracious work of sanctification in our lives, we ARE experiencing victory over sin. We ARE becoming progressively more and more holy.

The battle against sin is truly a battle and we are prone to discouragement in the midst of the ongoing reality that we will never be done with the battle on this side of eternity. As we continue to trust in Christ and repent of sin, we WILL see ongoing victory over particular sins. These victories should fuel our efforts and encourage us by helping us to see that we are growing in spiritual maturity and learning to truly trust in Jesus more and more.

I want to turn now and look at another important aspect of how we are to do this.

Our question reads “What does it mean to trust only in Jesus Christ?”

And our answer says “It is to believe (trust) in the deity and work of Jesus Christ, rather than trusting one’s own assumed worth, works, will, or ability.”

What does it mean to believe in Jesus? It means not just believing in Him – that is, believing that He exists, It means believing Him, taking Him at His word, believing what He said about Himself and believing what God’s word says about Him. It is a trust in the one true God who, in the second person of the Godhead, took on flesh to reveal Himself to mankind-the invisible God making Himself visible. Christ revealed Himself in the flesh and in the whole of scripture, revealing that all of the law and the prophets point to Him (Luke 24:27).

**John 1:1, 14** In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God… And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.

Jesus IS the word. It is impossible to truly believe in Jesus and not believe His word. To truly believe in Jesus is to believe every word of scripture, every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.

The London Baptist Confession of Faith says this in chapter 14 paragraph 2:

*By this faith Christians believe to be true everything revealed in the Word, recognizing it as the authority of God himself.4  They also perceive that the Word is more excellent than every other writing and everything else in the world,5because it displays the glory of God in his attributes, the excellence of Christ in his nature and offices, and the power and fullness of the Holy Spirit in his activities and operations. So they are enabled to entrust their souls to the truth believed.6  They respond differently according to the content of each particular passage—obeying the commands,7 trembling at the threatenings,8 and embracing the promises of God for this life and the one to come.9  But the principal acts of saving faith focus directly on Christ—accepting, receiving, and resting upon him alone for justification, sanctification, and eternal life, by virtue of the covenant of grace.10- 1689 London Baptist Confession*

If our belief in Jesus is not being informed by His own word, then by default it will be informed by our own understanding. If we are trusting and believing in a Jesus who has been imagined by our own thoughts, desires, and will, we aren’t really trusting in Jesus at all, we’re trusting in ourselves and in our own ability to know Him and His will for our lives.

We can’t be deceived into thinking that our present understanding of who Jesus is and what His will for our lives is, is sufficient and somehow permanently fixed in our minds and is unwavering as we go about our lives. We must recognize that our thoughts and understanding of God are constantly being challenged and shaped by outside influences. The only way to guard against being influenced by the world, the flesh, and the devil is to constantly be in the word, letting it influence us, submitting to the Holy Spirit in our understanding of it, and believing it, in joyful obedience to what it says.

If we are not being transformed by the renewing of our mind through the active and ongoing pursuit of God’s word, we will be conformed to the pattern of this world through the passive osmosis that can occur just by our being in the world. The world is constantly bombarding us with its own alternative ideas and beliefs about who God is and who we are in relation to Him, and if we are not diligently seeking to grow in maturity, we will begin to adopt these worldly philosophies without even meaning to.

As we wrap up I want to close by reading;

**2 Timothy 2:15** Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth.

What we believe dictates how we behave. If we are diligent to know and believe God’s word and to grow in our faith, then ongoing repentance will follow and the fruit of righteousness will also grow.