

What We Believe, and Why it Matters  
**Part 6: Repentance, Justification,  
Regeneration, Adoption**  
COTN Article of Faith 8-9

1. **Free Will**

- Joshua 24:14-15; Hebrews 2:1-3; John 15:16;  
1 John 4:19

2. **Repentance**

- Matthew 4:16-17; 1 John 1:8; 2 Corinthians 7:9-10;  
1 John 1:9; Acts 3:19

3. The **Salvation Trifecta:**

- **Justification**

- Romans 5:1-2

- **Regeneration**

- John 3:3-6; 2 Corinthians 5:17

- **Adoption**

- John 1:12-13; Galatians 4:4-7

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**West Valley Church**  
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**What We Believe, and Why it Matters**  
**Part Six: Repentance, Justification, Regeneration,**  
**Adoption<sup>1</sup>**  
***COTN Articles of Faith 7b-9<sup>2</sup>***

We've been in a series this fall exploring and unpacking our Articles of Faith, sharing with you the full, and sometimes difficult to understand, Articles of our Faith. They find their source all the way back to the original Apostles and their creed.

We are calling this series, "What We Believe, and Why it Matters," because there are important truths about the Christian faith that we all need to be sure that we not only *understand*, but that we *experience* if we are going to live life-to-the-fullest that God has for us in Christ, and if we are going to carry out our purpose in this world.

Over and over again in this series you've heard the message of God's deep, all-consuming desire for us to be in healthy, unhindered relationship with him. He wants us restored to our original capabilities. You heard that as the heartbeat of the Trinity – Father, Son, and Spirit, in eternal and equal relationship with each other, who are working together to restore us to relationship with God.

You heard it as the over-arching message of all of Scripture, which is why God has inspired and empowered it – so we would see the kind of God he is, and realize what Jesus Christ the Son has done to save us.

You heard it as you understood the devastating results of sin that we've all got in our DNA: 1) original sin, 2) the sin we continue to choose to commit, and 3) the pervasive, worldwide systemic sin that oppresses, abuses, and destroys people and creation.

We've seen God's incredible love for us as he sent his one and only Son to die on the cross, making atonement for our sins, bringing us to "at-one-ment" with him when we accept it. We saw the incredible extent of God's love for us through his grace

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<sup>1</sup> Resources: Frank Moore, *Coffee Shop Theology* (Beacon Hill Press, 1998); Frank Moore, *More Coffee Shop Theology* (Beacon Hill Press, 1998); Al Truesdale, Ed., *Global Wesleyan Dictionary of Theology* (Beacon Hill Press, 2013); Gay Leonard, *Articles of Faith: What Nazarenes Believe and Why* (Beacon Hill Press, 1995); *Manual: Church of the Nazarene, 2017-2021* (Nazarene Publishing House, Kansas City, MO, 2017); Randy L. Maddox, *Responsible Grace: John Wesley's Practical Theology* (Abingdon Press, Nashville, TN, 1994)

<sup>2</sup> See notes at the end of the manuscript for articles of faith 7-9

reaching into our lives, long before we ever realized we needed Christ, revealing to us that there is a way out of sin through Christ, as Pastor April shared last week.

So as we begin, it's important to realize that we can *choose* to accept God's grace, or we can *choose* to reject it; God leaves the decision up to us. This is called...

## 1. ***Free Will***

Remember that we were created in God's image, correct? And a key component of the image or character or nature of God within us is the ability to choose. Because God cooperates with us in his creation, he has chosen to limit himself to the extent that he gives us free will. Remember that we are morally responsible for our decisions, right? So if God holds us responsible for our decisions, then that means he gives us the freedom to choose. We are not living in some sort of predeterministic world where everything is pre-programmed or pre-ordained for us and we have no choice.

Some of you might remember a movie called "The Truman Show," where Jim Carrey lived in a world that he thought was real; everything was predetermined for him and he just floated along in it. Until he slowly began to realize that the world he lived in was actually a fabricated reality show that he had been raised in since he was a baby, with everyone else in his life being played by actors. Everyone in the real world simply tuned in on their televisions to watch Truman.

My friends, that is not what this life is like. God created us with the freedom to choose. So we can either reject his salvation for us, or we can accept it and begin to participate with him in this world for his Kingdom.

Even as far back as the Old Testament, God made the choice clear:

"So fear the Lord and serve him wholeheartedly. Put away forever the idols your ancestors worshiped when they lived beyond the Euphrates River and in Egypt. Serve the Lord alone. But if you refuse to serve the Lord, then choose today whom you will serve. Would you prefer the gods your ancestors served beyond the Euphrates? Or will it be the gods of the Amorites in whose land you now live? But as for me and my family, we will serve the Lord." (Joshua 24:14-15, nlt)

Notice that key word: "choose"! God leaves the choice up to you. In the New Testament we read a similar warning about ignoring, or not choosing, Christ:

"We must pay the most careful attention, therefore, to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away. For since the message spoken through angels was binding, and every violation and disobedience received its just punishment, how shall we escape if we ignore so great a salvation? This salvation, which was first announced by the Lord, was confirmed to us by those who heard him." (Hebrews 2:1-3, niv)

God has already made his choice; he chose *you*. And because he chose you, you now have the ability to choose him:

“You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit—fruit that will last—and so that whatever you ask in my name the Father will give you.” (John 15:16, niv)

This is similar to 1 John 4:19, where we are told that we can love because he first loved us. In other words, because he’s chosen us and loved us, we now have the freedom to choose him and to love him, and step into the work that he has for us to do in this world.

Understand though that freedom is a two edged sword; just like Adam and Eve lived in paradise in perfect relationship with God, but then they chose to reject God. You too, having free will, will always have the freedom to accept or reject God, to step into faith or to step away from faith. The choice for Christ is a choice we make, and then we keep on making.

Think about the sun as an analogy. The sun *only* shines, just as God *only* loves. It is the nature of the sun to shine, to offer warmth and light. And it is the nature of God to love. We are free to get away from the sun—we can lock ourselves in a dark room—but we do not keep the sun from shining just because we put ourselves in a place where it cannot reach us.

So it is with God's love. We can reject it, but God keeps on loving us. No matter what our choices, God still loves. And because God loves us, a relationship with God is always possible, if we'll choose it.<sup>3</sup>

But choosing to accept what Christ has done for us is not simply us saying, “Okay, I’ll accept it.” There is a very important part of that choice, and that is our 8<sup>th</sup> article of faith:

## 2. Repentance

“Repentance” means literally a 180 degree turn. We are heading one direction – away from Christ. Repentance means that we realize our sin and the sinful direction we are headed, we own up to our responsibility in that sin, we confess it to God, and we repent – we turn 180 degrees away from sin and toward Christ. Pastor and author Gordon MacDonald writes this about the origins of the word from Jesus’ day: “Repentance is not basically a religious word. It comes from a culture where people were essentially nomadic and lived in a world with no maps or street signs. It’s easy to get lost walking through the desert. You become aware that the country side is strange. You finally say to yourself, ‘I’m going in the wrong direction.’ That’s the first act of repentance.” Repentance is a very important word to understand when it comes to our relationship with Christ.

“Jesus came to change people’s lives. That change involved repentance. He called people to repent and turn to God as a first step in restoring their (relationship) with

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<sup>3</sup> Les and Leslie Parrott, Relationships (Zondervan, 1998), p. 172

him. Jesus knew that a true change of heart involved more than determining to do better; it required a complete turnaround.”<sup>4</sup>

The Gospel of Matthew tells us about Jesus’ story, saying:

“The people living in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned.” From that time on Jesus began to preach, ‘Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.’”  
(Matthew 4:16-17, niv)

Jesus expected that we would repent, or turn away from one life – a life of sin, and turn into another life – a new life with him. This is vital to any new relationship with Christ, and it is vital to maintaining any ongoing relationship with Christ.

Now, I want you to remember this series is not only what we believe, but why it matters; that theology must both inform and inspire. That it won’t do us any good if we can’t put it into practice, right? So let me tell you that repentance is one of the most basic things that you can put into practice. Because if you can’t do this, you won’t know what it means to be a Christian, or you will sabotage your Christian walk. God can’t and won’t repent for you; this one is all on you.

Let me explain the kind of repentance that the Bible talks about<sup>5</sup>: first, it means we have to admit to ourselves that we’ve done wrong in God’s sight – and you’d better be honest, because you’re talking to God, who knows you better than you know yourself. The Bible says:

“If we say that we have no sin, we are only fooling ourselves and refusing to accept the truth.” (1 John 1:8, tlb)

Second, we must be sorry – not sorry for getting caught, but sorry because we disobeyed God and broke his heart. The Bible calls the first kind of sorrow, “worldly sorrow,” and the second kind of sorrow is “godly sorrow.” When the Apostle Paul had to write a letter to correct some sinful behavior in the church in the city of Corinth, he followed up with this:

“Now I am happy, not because you were made sorry, but because your sorrow led you to repentance. For you became sorrowful as God intended and so were not harmed in any way by us. Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death.” (2 Corinthians 7:9-10, niv)

Notice the different results of the two types – one leads to salvation and a clean conscience, and the other leads to death – relationally, emotionally, and spiritually.

The third thing repentance means is that we confess our sins to God. Admitting them to ourselves and being sorry for them is good, but that’s not enough. We must also confess them to God, the One that we’ve wronged. Confession comes before God’s forgiveness:

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<sup>4</sup> Moore, *More Coffee Shop Theology*, 47

<sup>5</sup> *ibid*, 48-49

“If we confess our sins to him, he can be depended on to forgive us and to cleanse us from every wrong. And it is perfectly proper for God to do this for us because Christ died to wash away our sins.” (1 John 1:9, tlb)

Finally, the fourth thing about repentance is that we turn around, turn our back to sin, and turn toward God in Christ. We change our minds which results in a change of behavior, and we trust God to give us the strength to follow through.

The Apostle Peter was preaching to the crowd in Jerusalem and told them this crucial step of faith:

“Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord.” (Acts 3:19, niv)

Genuine, real repentance, then, involves getting honest with yourself and with God, being truly sorry for your ways, confessing your condition to God, and changing your mind and behavior about sinful actions and attitudes. When those elements are all present, we are in a position for God to help us. And boy will he!

Because of what Christ has done for us on the cross, when we repent, confess, and turn to God, God carries out...

### **3. The *Salvation Trifecta*:**

God responds fully and completely because of what Jesus has done for us, and he saves us – in an instant! We are now a Christian. I remember when I was a 17 year old non-Christian. I’d started going to church, and realized I needed to be a Christian – I thought it was simply a choice I’d make, similar to saying something like, “I’m going to start working out and getting in shape now.” So I’d been trying my best to be a Christian, but I’d never truly repented and turned to God. I was trying to be a Christian without Christ in my life! And I was a miserable failure. I don’t know if you’ve ever tried that, but if you are thinking about it, I’d highly discourage you, because it’s impossible! So anyway, baseball season in high school had just ended and football season was just three months away, so I was working out at a gym there in my home town, and it happened to be owned by a Christian man, and wouldn’t you know it, when I was ready to throw in the towel and quit this Christianity stuff, Jerry, the owner, asked me if I was a Christian. I told him I tried to be, but I failed. He said, “Of course you did! Have you repented and asked God to forgive you, accepted what Christ did for you, and asked him to come into your life and give you the power to live for him?” “Uh, no.” He said, “What’s keeping you from doing it now?” So on May 2, 1979 as a 17 year old kid, we went to the garage behind the gym, knelt down at a stack of wood, and I did just that. I repented, and asked God to forgive me and that I wanted to live with and for him in Christ. The moment I said “amen” and stood up, I knew that I knew that I knew there was a fundamental shift that had taken place in my life. The guy I was right before I knelt down and prayed was not the same guy who said “amen” and stood up! My entire life from then on was on a completely different trajectory. I was a Christian!

There is a whole bunch of things God will begin to do in our lives, but there are three things that he will *always* do, in an instant, at the same time when we become Christians. These are three different things but God does them all at the same time. The first is...

### - ***Justification***

Jesus talked a lot about our need to be in right standing with God. Many people think that the way that is done is by thinking that God has this scale that has two plates balanced on either side with one side holding our good deeds, and the other side is our bad deeds. The thinking is that at the end of our lives we'll stand before God, and as long as the good deeds outweigh the bad ones, we'll be okay and get into heaven. That idea works great, if our right standing with God was based on a transaction. But it's not. You see, God is so full of pure love that he is holy. And with a holy God, if there is even a speck of dust of sin on the sin side of the scale, it weighs a ton! We are condemned and cannot be in right relationship with God, let alone spend eternity with him. So we needed more than an exchange; we needed an entire healing, deliverance and cleansing, we need the sin to go away, and that is what Jesus did for us by dying on the cross in our place – the holy for the unholy, the sinless for the sinner, the God of Life dying for us who are in bondage to death and sin. In the Bible God says he will throw our sins into the depths of the sea (Micah 7:19) and that as far as the east is from the west, so far has God removed our sins from us. (Psalm 103:12) Because of Jesus, the sins are altogether taken off the scale.

That's why the Bible says:

“Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we boast in the hope of the glory of God.” (Romans 5:1-2, niv)

“Christ's sacrificial death on the cross enables the Father to see us through eyes of grace and mercy. God *declares* us free from the guilt and penalty of our past sins and gives us a new start. This is the spiritual life Christ brings us. With sins forgiven, God accepts us as justified in his sight.”<sup>6</sup>

So here's a simple way to remember what “***justification***” means: ***because of Christ's death on the cross, God sees us “just as if” we never sinned.***

When it comes to our salvation, God did it all. All we need to do is accept it and say “thank you”. It's not automatic, like direct deposit at the bank – I must accept this gift of salvation.<sup>7</sup>

So when we accept what Jesus has done for us on the cross, we are justified, and at the same time, we experience...

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<sup>6</sup> *ibid*, 56

<sup>7</sup> *ibid*

## - Regeneration

That's another one of the those big words that theologians like to throw around, but let me explain it.

Jesus had a late night conversation with a man named Nicodemus. Nicodemus was a member of the religious rulers, which is probably why he approached Jesus at night – Jesus was already becoming a threat to the religious powerbrokers, so it was probably safer for Nick at night (get it?). But Nicodemus asked Jesus what he needed to do to be saved, and if you remember, Jesus' answer was this:

“Jesus replied, ‘Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again.’

‘How can someone be born when they are old?’ Nicodemus asked. ‘Surely they cannot enter a second time into their mother’s womb to be born!’

Jesus answered, ‘Very truly I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit.’” (John 3:3-6, niv)

To become a Christian is to be born all over again – so great is the new start that God gives us. Regeneration, or new birth, happens the moment a person repents and has faith in Jesus Christ. God justifies us first. He forgives our sins. Then he creates in us a new spiritual life. Sin killed our relationship with God; regeneration gives us a new birth and restores it. This is nothing we can do on our own. God the Holy Spirit performs this miraculous transformation in the heart of every new believer. The Bible describes this dramatic change this way:

“So then, if anyone is in Christ, that person is part of the new creation. The old things have gone away, and look, new things have arrived!”  
(2 Corinthians 5:17, ceb)

God the Father sent his Son, who died on the cross for us and rose from the dead, so that if we'll accept him, the Holy Spirit will wipe our slate clean, transform us, and make us brand new!

People everywhere want a new start. They are desperate for it. People change jobs, move, get divorced, buy new cars or houses, they elect someone new into office, all hoping for a new start. The advertising industry is built on this internal desire that every person has to start over. They promise that their product or their service will give people that new start they long for. But no matter how good it sounds, it doesn't work! Troubles follow us into our new house and new relationship, because we bring all our sins and baggage with us. The only real new start comes from Christ. God will make you an entirely new and different person, wired for the love of the Kingdom of God!

Not only are you born again as a new person, you are born into a new family; you experience...



## - Adoption

You are no longer an orphan without a father God to love you; you are legally adopted into God's family. That's exactly what the Bible says:

"Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God— children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God." (John 1:12-13, niv)

There are several people in our church family who are either foster parents or adoptive parents, and others who have been adopted. They know better than the rest of us what a miracle this is, to be accepted into a new family of love. I had a good friend in college who was adopted, and I remember asking him if it was hard knowing he was adopted. He said, "yes, sometimes. But truthfully, biological parents get what they get. My parents *chose me*." That is a powerful truth!

In another place the Bible says:

"But when the set time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those under the law, that we might receive adoption to sonship. Because you are his sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, "*Abba, Father*." So you are no longer a slave, but God's child; and since you are his child, God has made you also an heir. (Galatians 4:4-7, niv)

God the Father sent God the Son to die in our place, justifying us from our sin. He rose from the dead, being the first to experience new, eternal life for us. He sent God the Holy Spirit to regenerate us and make us new, and God the Father adopts us into his family, even though it was our sin that sent his Son to die.

Author and Pastor Mark Buchanan writes the story of a woman named Regine. Originally from Rwanda, Regine came to Christ while reading her sister's Bible during the genocide that ravaged her country. When she fled to Canada for refuge, she met her husband, Gordon. They decided to return to Rwanda to show the love of Christ to the people who had once been her enemies. Regine told Mark Buchanan this story of *agape* love of a woman in her village: A woman's only son was killed. She was consumed with grief and hate and bitterness. "God," she prayed, "reveal my son's killer."

One night she dreamed she was going to heaven. But there was a complication: in order to get to heaven she had to pass through a certain house. She had to walk down the street, enter the house through the front door, go through its rooms, up the stairs, and exit through the back door.

She asked God whose house this was.

"It's the house," he told her, "of your son's killer."

The road to heaven passed through the house of her enemy.

Two nights after she had that dream, there was a knock at her door. She opened it, and there stood a young man. He was about her son's age.

"Yes?"

He hesitated. Then he said, "I am the one who killed your son. Since that day, I have had no life. No peace. So here I am. I am placing my life in your hands. Kill me. I am dead already. Throw me in jail. I am in prison already. Torture me. I am in torment already. Do with me as you wish."

The woman had prayed for this day. Now it had arrived, and she didn't know what to do. She found, to her own surprise, that she did not want to kill him. Or throw him in jail. Or torture him. In that moment of reckoning, she found she only wanted one thing: a son.

"I ask this of you. Come into my home and live with me. Eat the food I would have prepared for my son. Wear the clothes I would have made for my son. Become the son I lost."

And so he did.<sup>8</sup>

*We are guilty of killing God's Son. It was our sin that sent him there. But because he died for us, we can show up on God's doorstep. We repent and confess, and we tell God, "I am the one who killed your son. Since that day, I have had no life. No peace. So here I am. I am placing my life in your hands. Kill me. I am dead already. Throw me in jail. I am in prison already. Torture me. I am in torment already. Do with me as you wish." We offer ourselves to him, and to our shock, instead of doing all those things to us, we find that he will take us in, feed us, dress us in the clothes of his son, and make us his own son and daughter.*

*Pray*

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<sup>8</sup> Mark Buchanan, *Hidden in Plain Sight* (Thomas Nelson, 2007), pp. 187-189