

REPENTANCE BEFORE BAPTISM

Repentance is the beginning of an individual's journey on the road to salvation. It precedes the water burial of baptism and is done for the remission for sins. However, many of the baptisms that have occurred from the fourth century up to the present time have not included this important step due to the ministering elders or clergy not stressing the importance and seriousness to the baptism candidate of repenting and reconciling differences before entering into the rite of baptism. In many cases, a church's priority is adding numbers to their particular denominations and following the requirements before baptizing new members is a secondary concern.

Some churches before a person joins a church via baptism, indoctrinate the baptismal candidate with the creeds of their particular denomination. By focusing on that, the candidate goes into the sacred sacrament of baptism with no thought of true remorsefulness for their past sins nor for the reconciliation with those they may have done wrong against. It is wrong for a church to require converts to take vows to the polity of the church as a precursor to being baptized – one should be baptized into Christ not into a church dogma.

Repentance must come before baptism and this is stated in scriptures. Baptism should not be undertaken until we are repentant of our past sins – only when we are truly sorrowful and remorseful are we aware of sin and then ready for the washing away and burial of those sins. ***“I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance.”*** Luke 15:7; ***“Testifying both to the Jews, and also to the Greeks, repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ.”*** Acts 20:21. Repentance is towards God because when we understand sin, we know sin is the trespassing of the Ten Spoken Words (ie. the Ten Commandments) of God. With this knowledge, we recognize sin because we know the law, and recognize we have sinned against God and our neighbour. ***“... I had not known sin, but by the law: for I had not known lust, except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet.”*** Romans 7:7b. The law of God makes His children aware of sin. One must know the law to see his or her sins, and only then can one be repentant towards God for his or her transgression. ***“Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law.”*** I John 3:4. It is the duty of every elder to make a candidate for baptism aware of the Ten Sayings of God that he or she can know what constitutes sin and thus be repentant. If one is not aware of sin, how can one be cleansed of sins if they do not know what actions constitute sin and thus do not know what actions to avoid? To tell a candidate that the law states we should not steal is not sufficient; he/she should also be instructed in the meaning of what stealing encompasses. If he or she is to have a conscious knowledge of behaviour towards his or her neighbour, it is necessary to provide the ground work to broaden their understanding of what stealing actually entails (eg. Underpaying workers, overcharging when selling things, cheating, etc.). It is a necessity to have knowledge of the commandments to know of one's sins against God in order to have repentance. ***“I acknowledge my sin unto thee, and mine iniquity have I not hid. I said I will confess my transgressions unto the LORD and thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin.”*** Psalms 32:5. Sins occur when not doing the will of God, so when we sin, it is against God. That is why repentance and confession is towards God.

While reading the Scriptures, one may notice that Jewish converts to Christianity were baptized soon after accepting Jesus and confessing repentance. Why was this? It was because the Jews, for the most part, were well versed in the commandments (even if they didn't always keep them), whereas Gentiles often did not know the contents of the Ten Words of God. Throughout their history, God constantly pleaded with the Jews to turn from their sinful ways through the prophets He sent, but the majority did not pay heed. ***“Therefore I will judge you, O house of Israel, every one according to his ways, saith the LORD God. Repent and turn yourselves from all your transgressions; so iniquity shall not be your ruin.”*** Ezekiel 18:30; ***“Bring forth therefore fruits worthy of repentance, and begin not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our Father: for I say unto you, That God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham.”*** Luke 3:8. Many of the Jews had become ignorant and conceited in believing that because they were the chosen people and the descendants of Abraham, no wrong could be found in them. They had lost

sight of the weightier things of the law and they did not repent of sins. They were warned that the Spirit of God would be given to the Gentiles but they did not listen. ***“And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.”*** Luke 24:47; ***“When they heard these things, they held their peace, and glorified God, saying, Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life.”*** Acts 11:18. The time of ignorance is over and now all mankind is granted repentance unto salvation. No longer is just for the Jews. ***“And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent.”*** Acts 17:30; ***“But showed first unto them of Damascus, and at Jerusalem, and throughout all the coasts of Judaea, and then to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God and do works meets for repentance.”*** Acts 26:20; ***“The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.”*** II Peter 3:9.

It is worth mentioning that some preach that baptism is not necessary for salvation. This could not be farther from the truth given the teachings of Jesus himself and the apostles. Jesus himself was baptized and instructed his disciples to baptize in his name (Matthew 28:19). It is true that baptism is symbolic, however, it is a required ordinance for those that wish to follow God and His son, Jesus. Taking the step of baptism signifies our belief that Jesus is the Son of God and shows a commitment to follow him and his teachings.

Another point that should be stressed is that leading up to baptism, we must believe in the gospel and accept Jesus for the remission of sins. Note that we are not talking about allegiance to a specific church’s dogma but simply we know that Jesus is our Messiah and only through him can we be saved. ***“And saying, The time is fulfilled, the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel.”*** Mark 1:15; ***“Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord.”*** Acts 3:19; ***“But when they believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women.”*** Acts 8:12; ***“Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.”*** Acts 2:38; ***“He saith unto them, But whom say ye that I am? And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.”*** Matthew 16:15, 16. One must know who Jesus is. It is easy for someone to say that they believe in Jesus but not know who the Christ is in relationship between mankind and God.

Repentance should not be taken lightly; there is more to repentance than just saying “I repent of my sins”. There is also believing in the gospel of Jesus and that he was the Christ of God. Persons without a strong belief or understanding in the aforementioned articles of faith before their baptism could be more prone to falling away because he or she has not rooted themselves in the gospel. ***“And have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come, If they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance, seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame.”*** Hebrews 6:5, 6. We need to take the step of baptism seriously so that we do not mock the Christ who died for us.

The true convert to Christianity is repentant of their past wrongs but do not regret nor yearn for the worldliness left behind. ***“For though I made you sorry with a letter, I do not repent, though I did repent: for I perceive that the same epistle hath made you sorry, though it were but for a season. Now I rejoice, not that ye were made sorry, but that ye sorrowed to repentance: for ye were made sorry after a godly manner, that ye might receive damage by us in nothing. For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of: but the sorrow of the world worketh death.”*** II Corinthians 7: 8 to 10. When we cast off worldliness and arise in the newness of putting on Christ, we walk in a new life eternal.

In closing it is important that no person should be rushed into getting baptized. Only when the candidate is aware of their sins, is sorrowful for them and has accepted Jesus as the Christ of God, can the person be ready for baptism. But they must be sure they are ready to lead a different life

than the one before baptism. That is not to say one will be perfect after baptism but knowing what sin is, they will fight to overcome those sins from that point forward, relying on the Word of God and Jesus' teachings for strength. While we do not encourage rushing a candidate to get baptized, we must also point out that one cannot put it off indefinitely for baptism is salvational and no one knows when they will die. ***"I tell you, nay: but except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish."***
Luke 13:3.