

### **The Book of Acts (#16); Conversion to Christ (7)**

It is providential that we return to Acts 2 this morning to consider the biblical teaching regarding conversion to Jesus Christ. Here we may see clearly what we are to tell people who need to become Christians, who need to be converted unto Christ. They need to believe upon fully, and submit wholly, unto the once crucified, but risen and enthroned King, Jesus Christ.

The resurrection of Jesus Christ had occurred 50 days before the events recorded before us. But the fact of the ascension and enthronement of Jesus Christ was pressed on the minds and hearts of these Jewish people in Jerusalem on this very significant day—the day of Pentecost—when the enthroned Lord Jesus baptized His disciples in the Holy Spirit. The apostle Peter stood to address the gathered crowd. And then filled with the Holy Spirit, he spoke clearly and boldly that though these people had unjustly abused and crucified Jesus of Nazareth, their promised Messiah, God had raised Him from the dead and had enthroned Him in heaven over all of creation. If they were to be saved from the guilt and condemnation of their sins, they would need to hear and respond to what he was declaring before them. Peter had declared to them, “Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ.” We then read of the response of 3,000 Jewish people.

<sup>37</sup>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?”

<sup>38</sup>Then Peter said to them, “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. <sup>39</sup>For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call.”

<sup>40</sup>And with many other words he testified and exhorted them, saying, “Be saved from this perverse generation.” <sup>41</sup>Then those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them. <sup>42</sup>And they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers. <sup>43</sup>Then fear came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles. <sup>44</sup>Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common, <sup>45</sup>and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need.

<sup>46</sup>So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, <sup>47</sup>praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.

Upon hearing the preaching of the apostle Peter who had been filled with the Holy Spirit, the people listening to him came under great conviction of their sin for having rejected and crucified Jesus. What we considered for several weeks in John 16 regarding the ministry of the Holy Spirit in the world was clearly manifested in the hearts and minds of these people. The Holy Spirit had convicted them of sin, of righteousness, and of the certainty of God’s judgment, for not having believed on Jesus as their Messiah. Although they had unjustly tried and wickedly crucified Him, God the Father had vindicated His Son, when He raised Him from the dead, and had exalted Him to be both Lord and Christ. These people had come to know their hopelessness, in that they were guilty before God and under His wrath. They knew their helplessness, that there was nothing they could do to remedy their condition, to reconcile themselves to this Lord and God, before whom they were so guilty and condemned. It is no wonder they cried out to the apostles, “Men and brethren, what shall we do?”

Peter answered them very clearly and succinctly. “Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.” In these few simple words he set forth the way of salvation from sin and the manner in which a saving relationship with God may be experienced. Before us is the message that we are to proclaim to the world today. Let us consider carefully these words, their meaning, and their implications for us and for those who will hear us.

## I. Peter said to them, “Repent.”

If we were to reflect carefully on this command, we might question what was meant and what was being conveyed by the apostle to these people. First, let us consider what Peter did not precisely and succinctly say. Peter did not command these people to “believe”. Does this not lead us to ask a few questions? After all, we know that sinners are justified before God through faith alone in Jesus Christ alone. But Peter did not command these people to believe something, but to do something. He commanded them, “Repent!”

Why did not Peter command them to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ? That is what the apostle Paul would later tell the Gentile jailer at Philippi, when he asked a similar question. We read in Acts 16 that Paul and Silas had been thrown into prison after preaching the gospel. But the Lord caused “a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken, and immediately all the doors were opened and everyone’s chains were loosed.” The keeper of the prison came and fell down trembling before Paul and Silas. The jailer then brought Paul and Silas out and then asked them, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” What was Paul’s response? He told the man, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved” (Acts 16:31). But here in Acts 2:38 Peter did not command these three thousand Jews to believe something, but rather they were to do something: they were to repent. Why is this, for faith and repentance are not identical? Faith is believing or trusting; repenting is taking action, doing something, turning from one way of thinking and doing to another way of thinking and doing. Peter was commanding the people to repent, that is, to acknowledge and repudiate their self-willed existence and to submit unto Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior.

Now commonly in evangelical teaching and preaching the biblical meaning of repentance is corrupted and skewed. In fact, perhaps as many as 50% of so-called Bible-believers and their churches are wrong in their understanding and teaching regarding biblical repentance. Because they have a twisted understanding of justification through faith alone, they wrongly teach that to obtain salvation you do not have to do anything, but you are only to believe what is true, then you will have salvation. They teach that if anyone tells you (someone like me) that you must do something in order to be saved, he is teaching the false doctrine of works-righteousness. They teach, “Believe only. You do not need to do anything, for salvation is a gift regardless how you live, for salvation is not of works.” But that is false doctrine. It is the age-old false doctrine of antinomianism. They have twisted the meaning of God’s grace in that they promise salvation for those who may continue to live in their sin, if they but believe. They fail to teach the biblical doctrine of repentance.

The Bible devotes a good deal of attention to false teachers of this stripe. They slip into churches as pastors and teachers. They write books publishing their error. They may speak what sounds to be truth about God’s grace and faith, but they have twisted the biblical teaching regarding the precious biblical doctrine of grace. Jude wrote of these false teachers:

Beloved, while I was very diligent to write to you concerning our common salvation, I found it necessary to write to you exhorting you to contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints. <sup>4</sup>For certain men have crept in unnoticed, who long ago were marked out for this condemnation, ungodly men, who turn the grace of our God into lewdness and deny the only Lord God and our Lord Jesus Christ. (Jude 3, 4)

Not long ago I was given a book that addresses this matter, written by a puritan of whom I had never heard or read.<sup>1</sup> **Nicholas Clagett** (1610-1663) wrote the book, *The Abuse of God’s Grace*. He addressed the problem in his day. He wrote of these false teachers that Jude had identified:

Certain men, rotten-hearted professors of the Christian name, had crept into their assemblies unaware (v. 4). These men were ordained to so wicked a frame of heart and life as would bring them under certain condemnation. They were “ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness, and denying the only Lord God, and our Savior Jesus Christ.” When pickpockets creep and crowd into throngs of people, there is a need to look after one’s watch and money; so invaders and abusers of the precious and saving reports of the gospel call for heedfulness...

---

<sup>1</sup> Thank you, Warren Ojala.

To summarize, these monsters of men, unworthy of the name of Christians, these reproachers of the gospel, transfer the grace of God—in its favor, spirit, graces, and doctrine of God’s blessed gospel—from the high end God intended it, that of holiness and righteousness, into wanton looseness and a daring license to sin.

2

That repentance from sin and coming under subjection to Jesus Christ is necessary for salvation is testified throughout the Scriptures. Consider the message of John the Baptist to the Jewish crowds in the wilderness of Judea.

In those days John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea, <sup>2</sup>and saying, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!” <sup>3</sup>For this is he who was spoken of by the prophet Isaiah, saying:

“The voice of one crying in the wilderness:  
‘Prepare the way of the Lord;  
Make His paths straight.’”

<sup>4</sup>Now John himself was clothed in camel’s hair, with a leather belt around his waist; and his food was locusts and wild honey. <sup>5</sup>Then Jerusalem, all Judea, and all the region around the Jordan went out to him <sup>6</sup>and were baptized by him in the Jordan, confessing their sins.

<sup>7</sup>But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said to them, “Brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? <sup>8</sup>Therefore bear fruits worthy of repentance, <sup>9</sup>and do not think to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father.’ For I say to you that God is able to raise up children to Abraham from these stones. <sup>10</sup>And even now the ax is laid to the root of the trees. Therefore every tree which does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. <sup>11</sup>I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. <sup>12</sup>His winnowing fan is in His hand, and He will thoroughly clean out His threshing floor, and gather His wheat into the barn; but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.” (Matt. 3:1-12)

The Lord Jesus gave the same message and warning to the people who stood before Him. We read in Luke 13:1ff that He spoke of the necessity of repentance of sin in order to escape perishing under the wrath of God.

There were present at that season some who told Him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. <sup>2</sup>And Jesus answered and said to them, “Do you suppose that these Galileans were worse sinners than all other Galileans, because they suffered such things? <sup>3</sup>I tell you, no; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish. <sup>4</sup>Or those eighteen on whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them, do you think that they were worse sinners than all other men who dwelt in Jerusalem? <sup>5</sup>I tell you, no; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish.” (Luke 13:1-5)

How then, do these false teachers deal and address this biblical emphasis on repentance, in that they teach you do not need to do anything, but only believe? They twist the meaning of “repentance”. The Greek word translated as repentance in our English Bibles is *metanoia* (μετάνοια). This is a compound word which is the combination of a noun preceded with a preposition. *Noia* (*voia*) is the Greek word for “mind”; *meta* is the preposition meaning “change” or “turn.” *Metanoia*, or repentance, means to change your mind. To repent is to cease thinking and living in a sinful manner and to turn toward God to think and live according to the will of God. But those who deny that repentance means to turn from sin teach that the Greek word, *metanoia*, simply means a change of mind as to who you understand and believe Jesus to be. Before becoming a Christian, you did not believe that Jesus was God incarnate, but after you had repented—changed your mind—you then understood and confessed that Jesus Christ is the second person of the glorious Trinity. They teach, therefore, that repentance

---

<sup>2</sup> Nicholas Claget, ed. By Don Kistler, **The Abuse of God’s Grace** (The Northampton Press, 2021, orig. 1659), 1, 4. The subtitle reads, “Revealed in the Kinds, Causes, Punishments, Symptoms, Cyres, Differences, and Cautions, with Practical Application, Proposed as a Reasonable Check to the Wanton Libertinism of the Present Age.”

does not speak of you turning from your sin, but of changing your mind of who you thought Jesus Christ to be. In effect they make “repentance” to be identical with “faith” itself. But that repentance speaks of turning from sin is clear from the Scriptures.

Repentance from sin in turning to Christ is necessary in order to receive salvation. Not all faith is saving faith. Only that faith that leads to repentance from sin and turning to God in obedience to Jesus Christ the Lord is saving faith. That this is so, is very clear from the Holy Scriptures. Again, John the Baptist had declared to his generation,

<sup>8</sup>Therefore bear fruits worthy of repentance, <sup>9</sup>and do not think to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father.’ For I say to you that God is able to raise up children to Abraham from these stones. <sup>10</sup>And even now the ax is laid to the root of the trees. ***Therefore every tree which does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.***” (Matt. 3:8-10)

Unless a man repents of sin, turning to the Lord Jesus Christ in faith, he will not inherit salvation, but God will consign him to everlasting punishment.

It is important for us to understand the nature of repentance and how it is associated with saving faith. Sometimes in Scripture the command to ***repent*** is given in order to be saved. In other cases the sinner is called upon to ***believe*** the gospel so as to be saved. And then there are also places in which both the command to ***repent*** and to ***believe*** are both declared, as we read in Mark 1:15: “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel.” Saving faith and repenting of sin go hand in hand. They occur at the same time. We might say that to repent of sin and turning to the Lord Jesus is saving faith in action. When someone truly believes the gospel of Jesus Christ, he does so by turning from sin and submitting unto Jesus Christ as his Lord and Savior.

As we consider what it is to come to Christ for salvation, it is very important for us to understand this matter of repentance. What is repentance? Let us begin by recognizing that...

### **A. Repentance is not penance.**

***Biblical teaching of repentance should not be understood as doing penance.*** Repentance is taught everywhere in the Bible; penance is taught nowhere in the Bible. Those who prescribe penance teach that there is something that a person must do in order to appease God. Penance is viewed as making satisfaction to God for one’s own sin through things he does. The direction of a Roman Catholic priest after confession to do or say something repeatedly in order to obtain or seal God’s forgiveness is penance. That practice is foreign to the gospel. It denies the full satisfaction of God’s holiness that Jesus Christ provided, when He died on the cross for the sins of His people. Jesus called out from His cross, “It is finished.” “It is not finished” is the belief of those who say that there is something more you must do in order to satisfy God’s justice with respect to your sin. They say that penance “means a more complete payment of the debt which the sinner owes to God.” The Bible teaches, the gospel announces, that Jesus Christ paid all that was required for all of the sins of all of His people.

We are commanded in the Scriptures to repent. We are never commanded in the Scriptures to do penance. Repentance, simply, is fully ***turning oneself from serving sin to submitting to God and doing His will.*** It is the act of “turning away” from “your iniquities.” Peter’s words are recorded in the next chapter of Acts in which he declared to Jewish Christians, “To you first, God, having raised up His Servant Jesus, sent Him to bless you, in turning away every one *of you* from your iniquities” (Acts 3:26). That speaks of their repentance.

### **B. The nature of true repentance**

True repentance includes the following elements.

**1. With true repentance there is a real awareness and acknowledgement of *personal* sin.** Often times when evangelism is conducted, this is not a matter that is driven home to the conscience of the hearers. It is not enough for a person to acknowledge that he is a sinner just like everyone else are also sinners. He must come to

see and to believe deeply, “It is *Me, My* sin, Lord.” True repentance takes place when a person becomes aware of his own sin before the Lord.

**2. With true repentance there is a sense of one’s *guilt* because of his sin.** When one repents of his sin, he feels the just condemnation of God upon himself for his sin. He does not see his sin as a minor matter, but that it is a terrible affront to God’s law that warrants his condemnation. He understands that his sin is an exceeding egregious crime that is worthy of God’s wrath. He sees his sin as exceedingly sinful and he recognizes that he has no basis of plea before God for forgiveness. He comes to know that if forgiveness is to be given him by God, it must be only due to the free and voluntary exercise of God’s mercy, that He is free to bestow or withhold.

**3. With true repentance there is a sense of *shame* due to one’s sin.** This is different than guilt. Guilt is a sense of condemnation. Shame is the feeling of utter disgrace due to sin. There are some who teach that you are never to experience shame or guilt, that God in His grace has provided such a perfect sacrifice in Christ that guilt and shame are never to be experienced, and that if a preacher leads people to experience guilt and shame over sin, then he is a false teacher. But if you have not experienced a sense of guilt--just condemnation-- and a sense of shame concerning your sin, you have not received forgiveness of sin. If our sin caused Christ to be treated as guilty and caused Him to suffer shame, it should certainly do that in us. Adam and Eve sensed great shame in the nakedness of their sin, and we should feel no less. A shameless man is a non-Christian man.

**4. With true repentance there is a *sorrow* over personal sin.** It is inward sorrow, a remorse for having ever committed it. This is in contrast to a sorrow or fear merely for sin’s consequences. This sorrow is not simply a sorrow for having committed the sin itself, Judas Isacariot was sorry that he had sinned, but *it is sorrow before God*. When one becomes aware of sin and God’s attitude toward sin and His work through Christ in dealing with sin, the repentant sinner feels great sorrow before God. Not only has his sin deeply grieved God, but his sin was a cause of Christ’s terrible shame and infinite suffering as the sin-bearer. There is sorrow for having committed it, but it is a sorrow that involves remorse for the pain it placed upon the Lord Jesus who bore it upon His cross.

**5. With true repentance there is a desire and effort toward *restitution*.** This is the effort to undo the offense before others, making restitution if need be, to vindicate the ways of God and bring Him glory. Zacchaeus is a wonderful example of this desire for restitution. We read of his commitment to the Lord upon the Lord being very gracious toward him: “Then Zacchaeus stood and said to the Lord, ‘Look, Lord, I give half of my goods to the poor; and if I have taken anything from anyone by false accusation, I restore fourfold’” (Luke 19:8). He had been a thief, and he had oppressed the people over whom he had power. He would undo what he had done unto them, if he could.

**6. With true repentance there is *confession* of sin.** There is an owning of personal responsibility. When one truly repents, he makes no excuses. He does not lessen his guilt; rather if it were possible (but it isn’t), he would magnify his guilt. Again, Zacchaeus could be cited. He stood and confessed his sins to Christ, but it was in the hearing of others. When John baptized in the Jordan he did so while they were confessing their sins.

**7. With true repentance there is a confession of *specific* sin.** Yes, there is a keen recognition of the pervasiveness of sin in one’s entire being, but it is generally specific offences which makes the matter known. These specific offences are recognized and acknowledged by the one who repents. The gravity of one sin will often reveal to him the all pervasiveness of sin in him, and seeing this, he turns from it.

**8. With true repentance there is a *hatred* of sin in all its forms wherever it is detected.** The non-Christian may grieve over certain “sins”, but these are *outside* of themselves. They hate “sins” which run counter their understanding of what is right and wrong--things they may identify as crimes against the environment, sins of intolerance, or prejudice. But generally these are sins outside of themselves. And it is frequently only the sins of others that they hate. With respect to themselves all their behavior and attitudes are justified. All are somewhat like the immoral woman of Proverbs, which reads,

This is the way of an adulterous woman:  
She eats and wipes her mouth,  
And says, "I have done no wickedness." (Pro 30:20).

We are all like that to various degrees, until God moves us to repent of our sins. When one becomes a Christian, having repented of sin, he adopts the same view of sin that God has--he has a hatred of it. He hates it in himself, and he hates it in others. He grieves over what he does and he grieves over what others do.

This is important. There is something defective somewhere if we do not hate sin. If we are not grieved by immorality in all its forms, if an overheard blasphemy does not cut us to the heart, if an off-color joke does not offend our sensibilities, but rather appeals to our sense of humor, there is something amiss within us.

**9. With true repentance there is a cessation--a turning-- from doing those former sins.** Now this is not the time to speak of sins of which we repent, which come back upon us, sins to which we frequently succumb, and this is not the time to speak of the besetting sins of true Christians. That needs addressing, but it is another topic for another time. What we are saying here is that when one repents of sin, he deals with sin. It is not merely a confession of sin without the intention or resolve to turn from it.

**10. With true repentance there is a turning to God and His Son Jesus Christ.** Repentance is not just turning from sin, but it is turning to God. In fact, the apostle Paul emphasized this aspect of repentance to the elders of the church at Ephesus in Acts 20:

<sup>18</sup>And when they (the Ephesian elders) had come to him (Paul), he said to them: "You know, from the first day that I came to Asia, in what manner I always lived among you, <sup>19</sup>servicing the Lord with all humility, with many tears and trials which happened to me by the plotting of the Jews; <sup>20</sup>how I kept back nothing that was helpful, but proclaimed it to you, and taught you publicly and from house to house, <sup>21</sup>testifying to Jews, and also to Greeks, *repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ.* (Act 20:18-20)

Now before we move on from this description of *true repentance*, it is important to stress this: although all of the elements stated above must be present in true repentance, the degree to which these things are experienced varies greatly from individual to individual. Some feel these things very acutely, so as to be almost consumed by them. Others, however, do not experience them as acutely; nevertheless, they are all present. The bottom line is this. It is not that you have felt these things acutely, but that you have repented of sin in truth; that is, *you have turned from serving sin and are you are now submitted to God and seeking to do His will from the heart.*

### **III. All people everywhere are to repent of their sins.**

#### **A. Repentance and the non-Christian**

We are to command all people everywhere to repent of their sins. This is the message we proclaim to both Christians and non-Christians. All people everywhere must repent. As Paul declared to the gentile crowds of Athens, "The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent" (Acts 17:30).

#### **1. Again, repentance is essential for salvation.**

It might seem unnecessary to declare that a non-Christian, if he hopes to have salvation, must repent of sin. But this needs to be stressed these days. For there are many who call themselves evangelical who say otherwise. They say that it is wrong to command unbelievers to repent of sin, rather they are to be told only "to believe" what Christ has done on their behalf. Here are the words from a popular study Bible that teaches this error:

Salvation is conditioned solely on faith in Jesus Christ... Through the ages other requirements in addition to faith have been *wrongly* added (emphasis mine). Some of these are: *surrender to the lordship of Christ.*

Christ must be Lord in the sense of Jehovah in order to be a qualified Savior (Rom. 10:9), but Christ's personal lordship over the individual's life is not a condition for salvation. It should be a consequence of salvation and is a condition for dedication in full discipleship... **Repentance**: this is a valid condition for salvation when understood as a synonym for faith. It is a false addition to faith when understood as a prerequisite, requiring the cleansing of the life in order to be saved.

Did you notice that he defined discipleship (what he calls "full discipleship, whatever that means) as something different and in addition to becoming saved? This is error. Here he also said faith and repentance are synonyms. He is wrong.

In contrast to what Ryrie and classical dispensationalists like him teach, consider the words of **Charles Spurgeon** penned over a century ago:

There must also be *a willingness to obey the Lord in all His commandments*. It is a shameful thing for a man to profess discipleship and yet refuse to learn his Lord's will upon certain points, or even dare to decline obedience when that will is known. How can a man be a disciple of Christ (i.e. A true Christian) when he openly lives in disobedience to Him?

If the professed convert distinctly and deliberately declares that he knows his Lord's will but does not mean to attend to it, you are not to pamper his presumption, but it is your duty to assure him that he is not saved. Has not the Lord said, "He that taketh not up his cross, and cometh after Me, cannot be My disciple"? Mistakes as to what the Lord's will are to be tenderly corrected, but anything like willful disobedience is fatal; to tolerate it would be treason to Him that sent us. Jesus must be received as King as well as Priest; and where there is any hesitancy about this, the foundation of godliness is not yet laid.<sup>3</sup>

And so, between Charles Ryrie and Charles Spurgeon, we have two different gospel messages. Ryrie taught that no one is to be told to turn from sin and submit to Jesus as Lord in order to be saved—"believe only." Spurgeon and historically reformed Christians have taught that saving faith entails total surrender to Jesus Christ the Lord in order to be saved by grace through faith alone. This reformed persuasion is what is biblical is what is consistent with our own Baptist Confession of Faith of 1689.

Now we have tried to point out before why there is confusion in this matter and so we will not do so here other than saying this: there is a confusion between the basis of our justification before God--which is faith alone--and the demands of the gospel--which are repentance from sin to God, faith in the Lord Jesus, persevering in faith and obedience through life. All of which the Scriptures set forth as essential to salvation.

If there is any doubt about these matters consider the following citations from Scripture:

**Luke 5:31, 32.** "And Jesus answering said unto them, 'They that are in health have no need of a physician; but they that are sick. I am not come to call the righteous but *sinner to repentance*.'"

**Luke 24:46, 47.** "And he (Jesus) said unto them, 'Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer, and rise again from the dead the third day; and *that repentance and remission of sins* should be preached in his name unto all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem.'"

**Acts 2:38.** "Then Peter said to them, '*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.'"

**Acts 5:30, 31.** "The God of our fathers raised up Jesus whom you murdered by hanging on a tree. <sup>31</sup>Him God has exalted to His right hand to be Prince and Savior, *to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins*."

**Acts 8:22:** "*Repent* therefore of this your wickedness, and pray God if perhaps the thought of your heart may be forgiven you."

---

<sup>3</sup> Charles Spurgeon, **The Soul Winner** (Eerdmans, 1974), p. 38.

**Acts 11:17, 18:** “If then God gave unto them the like gift as (he did) also unto us, when we believed on the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I, that I could withstand God? And when they heard these things, they held their peace, and glorified God, saying, ‘Then to the Gentiles also has God granted *repentance unto life*.’”

**Acts 17:29, 30:** “Therefore, since we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Divine Nature is like gold or silver or stone, something shaped by art and man's devising. <sup>30</sup>Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but *now commands all men everywhere to repent*.”

**Romans 2:4** “Or do you presume upon the riches of His kindness and forbearance and patience? Do you not know that God’s kindness is meant to lead you to *repentance*?”

**2 Corinthians 7:9, 10:** “Now I rejoice, not that you were made sorry, but that you were made sorry unto repentance; for you were made sorry after a godly sort, that you might suffer loss by us in nothing. For godly sorrow *works repentance unto salvation*, (a repentance) which bringeth no regret: but the sorrow of the world works death.”

**2 Peter 3:9:** “The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some count slackness; but is long-suffering to you-ward, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should come to *repentance*.”

## **2. Repentance is an initial act that sets the soul on a path leading to glory**

Repentance is described as a “crucifying of the flesh with the affections and lusts” in Gal. 5:23. This we must strive to produce in our hearers with all the persuasion, warning, and instruction that we can impart.

By the way, here is another point, when witnessing to a non-Christian, go straight to the major sin that rules his heart. This is what the Lord did. Whether it be covetousness, pride, self-righteousness, immorality, go directly to the matter. If the chief sin be surrendered, all will likely fall.

## **3. Repentance is a gift that the Lord Jesus Christ must bestow**

We command all men everywhere to repent of sin and turn to God, but we know that only the power of God as mediated through Christ can enable people to do so. We command people to repent, and yet we also tell them to look to Christ who alone can enable them to do so. We read that the origin of repentance to in a soul is due to the grace of God. When the Jewish Christians of Jerusalem had heard that Gentiles were becoming Christians, they drew this conclusion: “When they heard these things they fell silent. And they glorified God, saying, ‘Then to the Gentiles also *God has granted repentance that leads to life*’” (Acts 11:18).

When Peter had commanded these people to repent, he was declaring that they had to abandon and reject self-rule over their lives and to submit wholly to Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. When Adam and Eve had first sinned in the garden of Eden, it was after the serpent had made this appeal to them: “God does not want you to eat the fruit of the forbidden tree, for God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.” The serpent was tempting the human race that they would become gods themselves, lords of their own lives, doing what they chose and decided to do, not what God would have them do. When Adam and Eve sinned, they became their own lords. They and all their physical descendants born into this world have been lords unto themselves. This was the cause and result of mankind’s fall into sin. This sad condition has terrible consequences. We each want to do what we want to do, and we often resent and reject any voice that tells us to do otherwise, whether it is a parent, a spouse, a boss, a government official, or God himself. The essence of sin is this, “I insist on doing my will, what I want and when I want.” But when a sinner repents upon becoming a Christian, he rejects and abandons that desire and effort (that is, when he is thinking rightly), and desires to do the will of God from his heart. The Lord in His grace has implanted the desire to love and please God, and to order his life in submissive loyalty and obedience to His king, Jesus Christ. Ultimately this is what it is to repent unto salvation.

And this way of thinking and living is to be renewed every day by the Christian. This is what our Lord meant when He said these words:

Then He said to them all, “If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me. <sup>24</sup>For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will save it. <sup>25</sup>For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and is himself destroyed or lost?” (Luke 9:23-25)

Every day the Christian is to reaffirm this commitment to this way of life. Daily he is to deny himself, essentially saying in prayer and devotion, “This day I do not insist, do not purpose to do my will, but to do Thy will.” “To take up his cross” is an illusion to the condemned man forced to pick up his cross and carry it to the place of execution. Again, it is a declaration, “I am dead to ordering my life according to my corrupt and sinful desires.” And we purpose to follow Christ, that is, throughout the day we purpose, as He gives us grace to do so, to order our thinking and acting and reacting as the Lord has taught us and is directing us through Holy Scripture, His Word to us.

## **II. Peter then declared to those who repented of their sins that they were to be baptized.**

Again we read, “Then Peter said to them, “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. <sup>39</sup>For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call.”

### **A. The mode of baptism: immersion**

Baptism is an English word that was created or invented by **William Tyndale** (1494-1536) in his first English translation of the New Testament. The Greek word for baptism is *baptisma* (βάπτισμα). The word means to dip or immerse, and was commonly used in the culture of the first century. But by the time Tyndale translated the Bible into English in the early 16<sup>th</sup> century, baptism was generally practiced by the mode of sprinkling water on the subject. For Tyndale to have translated the Greek word, *baptisma*, as immerse, or dip, it would have conflicted many who practiced baptism by sprinkling. And so, instead of translating the word from Greek into English, he transliterated the word, making *baptisma*, “baptism.”

Baptism in the New Testament is the immersing of a person who has manifested repentance from sin. John the Baptist refused to baptize anyone who had not shown forth repentance from sin. We read in Matthew 3:

But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said to them, “Brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? <sup>8</sup>Therefore bear fruits worthy of repentance, <sup>9</sup>and do not think to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as *our* father.’ For I say to you that God is able to raise up children to Abraham from these stones. <sup>10</sup>And even now the ax is laid to the root of the trees. Therefore every tree which does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. <sup>11</sup>I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. (Matt.3 :7-11)

Baptism by sprinkling or by pouring is not taught in the New Testament. Baptism conveys the idea of washing or cleansing, and one may see that in the mode of sprinkling. But baptism also portrays death, burial, and resurrection. Sprinkling does not portray that truth. When a man or woman comes to repent of sin and believe on Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, he commits to follow the Lord Jesus in faith and obedience. Initial baptism after conversion is a confession of the convert that he has died to his old, former way of life apart from Christ, having formerly lived according to his own will, and then, by coming out of the baptismal waters, he is confessing himself as having entered a new life in Christ, following Him among the people of God.

### **B. Baptism “for” the remission of sins.**

Again, Peter declared, “Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ *for the remission of sins*.” Remission means removal of sins, or deliverance from the guilt and God’s condemnation of sin. When most Christians read these words, they are troubled. They know that God forgives sinners of their sin through faith alone, and that faith is apart from works, But here it appears that one must be baptized in order to

obtain the forgiveness of sins. How is this to be resolved in our understanding? The problem lies in the wrong understanding in the clause of the meaning of the three letter word, “for.” “Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ *for* the remission of sins.” English readers interpret the word “for” as meaning, “in order to obtain.” They think it reads, “be baptized in order to obtain the forgiveness of sins.” But that is a wrong understanding of the word “for” in this verse. Here, “for” means “in the light of”, or “on account of.” To illustrate this, consider this example: “The boy went to the store *for* groceries.” Here clearly, the boy went to the store in order to obtain groceries.. But suppose we were to say, “The boy went to the store *for* his mother”? We would understand that he was not going to the store in order to get his mother, but he went to the store on behalf of his mother. The same idea is here in Acts 2:38: “Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for, or *because of*, the remission of sins.”

### C. The great benefit of baptism

Peter had said to them, “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.*” The gift of the Holy Spirit in this context suggests that the Lord will enable true disciples to fight and overcome sin. We cannot live the Christian life, conform our living to the holy standard of God’s Word, apart from the power of the Holy Spirit. God promises to give the gift of the Spirit for sanctifying grace to the ones who come to Christ in repentance and faith and submit to baptism.

### D. The candidates for baptism

Peter declared, “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. <sup>39</sup>*For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call.*”

Our reformed paedobaptist friends—those who baptize infants by sprinkling—frequently argue from this verse that not only adult believers, but their infant children are also to be subjects of baptism. They say, “See, the promise of God is to believers and their children.” But we point out to them that they fail to finish the verse; they stop reading at the comma, but the sentence continues. The promise is not to all children of believing parents, but only those children, whether Jewish or Gentile, “*as many as the Lord will call.*” Only those whom the Lord effectually calls to salvation, who give forth credible evidence that they have been called of God into a state of salvation, only they have the privilege and responsibility to be baptized.

### E. The importance of baptism

There are those who argue, since I am not saved by baptism, I do not need to be baptized. I can choose not to do so, and it will not result in any detriment to me, after all, I believe on Jesus Christ. Of course we are not saved by our baptism, but our faith is to be shown in our obedience. How can you say that Jesus Christ is your Lord and Savior, and yet though He commands you to be baptized, to confess Him openly, publicly, before the people of God, you refuse to do so? That does not bode well for your soul. You need to repent of that sin. Saving faith is shown forth in conformity to the commands of the Lord in His Word. He commands His disciples, His people, to confess Him in baptism. May the Lord help each of us fulfill our responsibility and privilege before our Lord.

\*\*\*\*\*