

REPENTANCE

INTRODUCTION:

A. "Or do you despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance? But in accordance with your hardness and your impenitent heart you are treasuring up for yourself wrath in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, who "will render to each one according to his deeds": eternal life to those who by patient continuance in doing good seek for glory, honor, and immortality; but to those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness - indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, on every soul of man who does evil, of the Jew first and also of the Greek; but glory, honor, and peace to everyone who works what is good, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For there is no partiality with God."

-Rom. 2:4-11

Repentance Is a Universal Necessity

Repentance is a universal necessity. The first call to repentance under John the Baptist was essentially directed to the people of Israel. Paul noted, "From the offspring of this man [David], according to promise, God has brought to Israel a Savior, Jesus, after John had proclaimed before His coming a baptism of repentance to all the people of Israel" (Acts 13:23-24). Thankfully, God's full plan was broader, for in the Great Commission, the Savior said:

"Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and rise again from the dead the third day; and that repentance for forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in His name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem." (Luke 24:46-47)

While in Joppa, Peter had a vision of a great sheet let down from heaven which was filled with all kinds of four-footed animals and crawling creatures of the earth and birds of the air (Acts 10). While reflecting on this vision, Cornelius, a Gentile centurion, came asking Peter to accompany him to a meeting with a group of non-Jews. Peter went with Cornelius, having been prepared by the vision to broaden the call to repentance and to open the door of the church to Samaria and the uttermost parts of the earth. While Peter was speaking to the group, the Holy Spirit fell upon those who were listening, as He had earlier at Pentecost in Jerusalem. From that time, repentance and faith were declared as a universal necessity.

We need to face the very sobering truth that, "Were God's pardon to extend beyond the limits of the repentance, and to embrace the presumptuous or careless offender, the bounds of right and wrong would be utterly confounded, and 'the Judge of all the earth' cease to do right."

In light of these elementary facts, anyone can reason out the conclusion:

"Being then the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Divine Nature is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by art and thought of man." Sadly, this was done for a very long time, but Paul warns, "Therefore having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is now declaring to men that all everywhere should repent, because He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead" (Acts 17:29-31).

Richard O. Roberts

B. The record makes it clear: Paul "did not shrink from declaring" everything that was profitable to souls. He taught "publicly and from house to house, solemnly testifying" to Jews, Greeks, and all others who were listening, "repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ." (Acts 20:18-21). Tragically, the example of the apostle Paul has not been followed in successive generations. Now there are millions of church members who know nothing experientially of repentance, and billions in the world who do not even know the significance of the word.

This universal necessity of repentance is carefully and plainly addressed in the first three articles of the section of the Westminster Confession of Faith called "Of Repentance unto Life":

① Repentance unto life is an evangelical grace, the doctrine whereof is to be preached by every minister of the gospel, as well as that of faith in Christ.

② By it, a sinner, out of the sight and sense not only of the danger, but also of the filthiness and odiousness of his sins, as contrary to the holy nature and righteous law of God; and upon the apprehension of His mercy in Christ to such as are penitent, so grieves for, and hates his sins, as to turn from them all unto God, purposing and endeavoring to walk with Him in all the ways of His commandments.

③ Although repentance be not rested in, as any satisfaction for sin, or any cause of the pardon thereof, which is the act of God's free grace in Christ; yet is it of such necessity to all sinners, that none may expect pardon without it.

True repentance does not stand alone but is always linked with true faith. True faith does not stand alone but is always linked with true repentance.

To repent and not believe would be a travesty indeed! Try to imagine a person turning from sin and self - to nothing! Indeed, this is the very issue Jesus addressed in His parable of the man out of whom a single demon was cast. Notice the text: "Now when the unclean spirit goes out of a man, it passes through water-less places, seeking rest, and does not find it. Then it says, 'I will return to my house from which I came'; and when it comes, it finds it unoccupied, swept and put in order. Then it goes, and takes along with it seven other spirits more wicked than itself, and they go in and live there; and the last state of that man becomes worse than the first. That is the way it will also be with this evil generation" (Matthew 12:43-45).

Faith without repentance is equally unthinkable. It is impossible to believe when you are going in the wrong direction. How can someone who is going his own way go God's way? How can a person who is utterly committed to sin, the flesh, and the devil be utterly committed to Jesus Christ and righteousness? It is necessary to turn *from* in order to turn *to*. Repentance and faith are different sides of the same turning. In repentance, we turn from sin and self; in faith we turn to Jesus Christ our Righteousness. Neither repentance nor faith is meritorious; repentance is the fulfillment of negative duty; faith is the fulfillment of positive duty; the merit is in Jesus Christ and His death, burial, and resurrection.

Paul addressed the relationship between repentance and faith, declaring, "John baptized with the baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in Him who was coming after him, that is, in Jesus" (Acts 19:4). He made an unbreakable connection between the two when he told the elders of the church at Ephesus that he did not shrink from declaring to them anything that was profitable, and that he taught publicly and from house to house, "solemnly testifying to both Jews and Greeks of repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ" (Acts 20:21). Bishop Hall stated it precisely: "Never will Christ enter into that soul where the herald of repentance hath not been before Him."

Both Peter and Paul knew the connection between repentance and eternal life. In explaining what happened during his visit to Cornelius, Peter acknowledged, "Well then, God has granted to the Gentiles also the repentance that leads to life" (Acts

11:18). Paul succinctly said, "For the sorrow that is according to the will of God produces a repentance without regret, leading to salvation; but the sorrow of the world produces death" (2 Corinthians 7:10).

There is also a link between repentance and the knowledge of the truth, without which none can be saved. Paul advised Timothy to be "kind to all, able to teach, patient when wronged, with gentleness correcting those who are in opposition, if perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth" (2 Timothy 2:24-25).

Both repentance and faith are mandatory to salvation. You must turn from your sin in order to turn to Jesus Christ. You cannot turn to Christ unless you have turned from your sin. Repentance and faith belong together. Any attempt to separate them is a grievous mistake.

Sinners who love both their sins and themselves find it very pleasant to be told that God loves them just the way they are. It is delightful for them to be informed that it is only their sin that God despises. But statements of this sort only represent human traditions and are a long way from biblical truth. A thorough study of God's Word will make this clear. Few errors have done more damage and contributed more greatly to the decline of true religion than this one. The massive neglect of faithful teaching and preaching on the mandatory nature of true repentance is immediately linked to this fundamental error. The paucity of genuine conversions to Jesus Christ is the expected fruit of such heresy.

The book of Romans is very adamant about God's hatred and wrath against the unrepentant: "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness" (Romans 1:18). "But because of your stubbornness and unrepentant heart you are storing up wrath for yourself in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God" (Romans 2:5). "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated" (Romans 9:13). "What if God, although willing to demonstrate His wrath and to make His power known, endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction? And He did so in order that He might make known the riches of His glory upon vessels of mercy, which He prepared beforehand for glory, even us, whom He also called" (vv. 22-24).

Forgiveness of sins is certainly conditional. Christ Himself was very explicit on this matter: "If therefore you are presenting your offering at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your offering there

before the altar, and go your way; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and present your offering" (Matthew 5:23-24).

We know that repentance and forgiveness are linked. Following His resurrection, the Lord Jesus appeared to a group of His followers, ate with them, and said, "These are My words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things which are written about Me in the Law of Moses and the prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.' Then He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, and He said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and rise again from the dead the third day; and that repentance for forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in His name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things" (Luke 24:44-48). It is tragically absurd for anyone to suppose that they will go to heaven without having their sins remitted. There is no forgiveness of sins apart from repentance, and there is no eternal life apart from forgiveness. Thus to suppose that one can be saved without repentance is a most grievous error.

God has chosen to be merciful to hell-deserving sinners by providing an atonement for their sins. The benefits of this atonement are freely provided and yet are conditioned upon repentance and faith.

The atonement makes the need of repentance very clear. There is something very distressing about coming to the rescue of a family member by putting up enough money to bail them out of an oppressive debt, only to have them carelessly plunge into debt again. Generally, debts are paid by others not that they might once more be quickly accumulated but that the debtor might be forever relieved of their burden.

"Consequently, King Agrippa, I did not prove disobedient to the heavenly vision, but kept declaring both to those of Damascus first, and also at Jerusalem and then throughout all the region of Judea, and even to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, performing deeds appropriate to repentance."

{ Acts 26:19-20 }

It is evident that the repentance with which many persons are content is not the repentance that God Himself requires. The apostle Paul made this clear in insisting that the repentant must perform deeds appropriate to repentance. He warned that there is a repentance that leads to death as well as a repentance that leads to eternal life.

To stake one's eternal well-being on an error that could be readily avoided is the ultimate in human tragedy. Please do not let this happen to you.

Much of what is deemed repentance is nothing other than self-preservation. (Multitudes who have been caught in sin have tried to lessen its consequences by repentant-like behavior.) Others who find themselves in dangerous and even frightening circumstances have vowed to repent if their lives are spared. While it is possible to be moved toward repentance through fear and self-preservation, they are not one and the same, and only infrequently does one lead to the other. It is highly dangerous to confuse either fear or self-protection with Christian repentance.

Genuinely repentant people are unwilling and unable to favor certain sins while avoiding others. For the repentant, all sin is abhorrent and must be turned from as quickly and as fully as the grace of God makes possible. Real believers know there is no such thing as selective repentance. Any attempt to practice it reduces repentance to myth.

Repentance is not something that is accomplished in a moment of time. It cannot be described as "once done, forever accomplished." Both repentance and faith must be ongoing. True repentance is not a single act but a continual attitude.

It is very common to hear someone describing repentance as a past accomplishment, saying things like, "I repented when I was eighteen years old," or, "You don't need to worry about me, I am all right with God. I repented twelve years ago." If someone comes to me with a report about repentance sometime in their past, I want to cry out, "So what? Who cares what happened years ago?" It is never enough to say, "I repented." You must be able to say, "I am repentant." Day in and day out, month after month, year after year, unceasingly, I live as a repentant person. I live in the spirit and attitude of repentance."

PENANCE A FALSE DOCTRINE

It has been the practice of certain ecclesiastical bodies to require penance of their followers. Generally the term *penance* refers to acts of self-castigation produced by a sorrow for sin. By the fifteenth century, the Roman church had formalized a sacrament of penance consisting of contrition, confession, and satisfaction on the part of the penitent, and absolution by the priest. It was specifically intended as a means by which the baptized Catholic, who had sinned after baptism, could satisfy the Roman notion of God's justice by working out the penalties assigned him by the priest. Amazingly, the Douay-Rheims Roman Catholic translation of the Bible erroneously

uses the word “penance” in place of “repentance.” This has led multitudes to a completely false view of what God requires of them. (Imagine the Lord Jesus saying, “Unless you do penance you will all likewise perish!”)

The concept of penance is by no means limited to those who view it as a sacrament. The idea of earning God’s favor has a very broad appeal. Thus penance has become a widely practiced religious dogma. Multitudes erroneously believe that in acts of self-castigation and devotion they are repenting.

Penance falls short of repentance in many ways. It tends to focus on the external or outward issue of what the sinner has done rather than on what the sinner is. It is frequently aimed toward the ecclesiastical body rather than toward God. It tends to elevate the priest as the absolver of sin more than Christ. It deals with the past more than the future. It often diverts attention from the real needs of the soul to some relatively inconsequential acts. Thus you can have “penitent thieves” whose penance consists of paying part of their loot to the church, and “holy men” whose garments are alive with vermin they cultivate to mortify the flesh.

Penance, at best, is only a theory. It has no biblical foundation. There is no teaching in the New Testament supporting it. It was rejected by Martin Luther and others among the Reformers. They insisted that good deeds were the fruit and consequence of repentance through faith. They abhorred the notion that acts of self-castigation could be the price with which people purchased or the merit by which they deserved the salvation that comes from God. They were convinced that contrition in itself, no matter how perfect, could never merit God’s grace.

(It can be dogmatically declared that the concept of purchasing divine blessing or paying for sin by any human acts whatsoever has no place in biblical Christianity.)

Certainly the gifts and graces of God cannot be purchased with money, Isaiah the prophet called out, “Ho! Everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and you who have no money come, buy and eat. Yes, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. Why do you spend money for what is not bread, and your wages for what does not satisfy? Listen carefully to Me, and eat what is good, and let your soul delight itself in abundance. Incline your ear, and come to Me. Hear, and your soul shall live” (Isaiah 55:1-3). Simon the Sorcerer can be held up as a pathetic example of a man who sought to acquire divine blessing by money (Acts 8:14-24). Paul declared, “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast” (Ephesians 2:8-9). In the last invitation of the Bible, we are told, “And the Spirit and the bride say, ‘Come!’ And let

him who thirsts come. Whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely” (Revelation 22:17).

Then He opened their understanding, that they might comprehend the Scriptures. Then He said to them, “Thus it is written, and thus it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day, and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.”

Luke 24:45-47

The whole tone of Scripture lends itself to a proper understanding of repentance. (The great natural gulf that exists between the Creator and the created proclaims loudly the need for repentance.) The changeable nature of mankind over against the immutability of God demonstrates the propriety of repentance. Our self-aggrandizing nature demands repentance. Our tendency to play about on the surface of eternal issues makes true repentance all the more urgent. The all-seeing eye of God guarantees the impossibility of hiding anything from Him, especially sin. Even our noblest efforts at religion can be nothing better than works of death. Every failure in repentance robs heaven of one of the joys that rightfully belongs there.

There is neither need nor room for speculation about repentance. The fundamental truths - the maxims - about repentance are evident.

John Bunyan portrayed this powerfully in *The Pilgrim's Progress*.¹⁴ The follower of Christ may sometimes come to a “Y” in the road, where an uncertainty grips him: *Ought I go left or ought I go right?* Indeed, he may make the wrong choice and find himself in Doubter’s Castle or the Slough of Despond - to use Bunyan’s descriptions. Still, there is a very great difference between losing time on a byway and turning back again to join the masses on the broad road leading to destruction. The truly repentant press on, through thick and thin, when the way is easy and when it is exceedingly rough, over mountains and across valleys as dark as the shadow of death. Through fire, pestilence, drought, and turmoil, they press onward in repentance and faith. Their eyes are on the celestial kingdom, and their focus is on the King Himself. Nothing can keep them from completing their journey and kneeling before their King on His throne of righteousness.¹⁵

WHAT IS SIN?

What is sin? According to Richard Trench's *Synonyms of the New Testament*, eight different terms are used to describe sin:

1. The missing of a mark or aim, falling short.
2. The passing over or transgression of a line.
3. Disobedience to a voice.
4. Falling when one should have stood upright.
5. Ignorance of what one should have known.
6. The diminishing of that which should have been rendered in full.
7. Non-observance of a law.
8. Discord in the harmonies of God's universe.

These eight terms are all drawn from the standards that God Himself ordained and placed in the New Testament. When we sin by missing the mark, it is God's mark that we miss. When we transgress or pass over a line, it is the line that God has drawn. It is His voice that is disobeyed, His standard we let down when we fail to stand upright, His precepts of which we are ignorant, He ordained requirements that we diminish, His law that we fail to observe, and His universe that we treat discordantly.

All sin is against somebody. Sins are often against more than one but never less than one. Without any exception, all sin is against God, and in most instances of sin there is at least one other person who is sinned against.

DAVID AND NATHAN

"Then David said to Nathan, 'I have sinned against the Lord.' And Nathan said to David, 'The Lord also has taken away your sin, you shall not die. However, because *by this deed you have given occasion to the enemies of the Lord* to blaspheme, the child also that is born to you shall surely die" (vv. 13-14).

Weigh these four violations of God that Nathan pinpoints:

1. David, who long knew and loved the law of God, violated God's word by breaking it with flagrant sin.

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MANUSCRIPT

- CONFESSION -

1. Confession of sin must be without ulterior motive. Confession was not ordained by God as a means of heading off the consequences of sin or of gaining some selfish end.
2. Confession of sin must be freely made, being prompted by the Spirit of God and the desire of the heart to be right with both God and man. Confession that is coerced by others or driven by external pressures has no validity.
3. Confession of sin demands a willingness to assume appropriate levels of blame for the evil done; it must not be invalidated by blaming others for your own personal sin.
4. Confession of sin must be definite and must not degenerate to vagaries such as, "If I have done anything wrong, please forgive me." You have done wrong! Candidly admit that wrong.
5. Confession of sin must be particular. Sins are committed one by one and must be confessed the same way.
6. Confession of sin must be full and complete. The all-seeing eye of God has noted every one of your sins. Do not offend Him by confession only a portion of them.
7. Confession of sin must include acknowledgment of all the aggravations that have worsened your sins. Sins can be made more heinous by the circumstances under which they occur. For instance, a sin committed by one who knows better is more aggravated than a sin of ignorance; a Pharisee-like sin cloaked in religious garb is an aggravated sin.
8. Confession of sin must expose the roots, not merely clip the branches.
9. Confession of sin must be without excuses, self-justification, or explanations.
10. Confession of sin must be accompanied by feelings appropriate to the circumstance: shame, remorse, or tears, for instance.
11. Confession of sin must include a demonstration to turn completely and forever from that sin and not to keep appearing in confession as a repeat offender.

12. Confession of sin must be made by the sinner himself. None of us have the power to confess other people's sins in their place. No mother can effectually confess the sins of her children for them. No wife can confess the sins of her husband. No pastor can confess the sins of his people in their place. Every individual must confess his or her own sins.

PUBLIC CONFESSION OF SIN

Normally, the breadth of the confession of sin is determined by the generally accepted rule, "A sin should be confessed as widely as the influence of that sin has spread." Because all sin is against God, it must be first and foremost confessed to Him. But many sins directly affect others and thus even private sins often require public confession. The issue is succinctly stated in the Westminster Confession of Faith: "As every man is bound to make private confession of his sins to God, praying for the pardon thereof; upon which, and the forsaking of them, he shall find mercy; so he that scandalizeth his brother, or the Church of Christ, ought to be willing, by a private or public confession, and sorrow for his sin, to declare his repentance to those that are offended, who are thereupon to be reconciled to him, and in love to receive him."

1. Public confession must be cautiously made so as not to provoke others to sin.
2. Public confession must be prudently given so as not to shame any who might be affected by the sin. Imagine the devastation to a wife if she were to learn in a public setting of her husband's infidelity.
3. Public confession must be carefully and honestly made in such a way that the person confessing is not placing the guilt of his personal sin on others.
4. Public confession must be sincerely given and not mischievously used as a means of getting even or venting rage.
5. Public confession must be shamefully made, demonstrating true remorse and repentance.
6. Public confession must be adequately made, leaving no question concerning what you are confessing or what you are going to do about it.

7. Public confession must be justly made, not indicting others but opening acknowledging your own sin.
8. Public confession must be humbly made, without rancor or evil speaking.
9. Public confession must be cautiously made, lest you say more than you mean and can demonstrate to be true by your ongoing repentance.
10. Public confession must be soberly made, lest you offend God by making light of evil or lessen the conviction of sin in others.

THE UNREPENTANT

“You have no part or portion in this matter, for your heart is not right before God. Therefore repent of this wickedness of yours, and pray the Lord that if possible, the intention of your heart may be forgiven you. For I see that you are in the gall of bitterness and in the bondage of iniquity.”

(Acts 8:21-23)

Because both repentance and faith are gifts of God, should you assume that there is nothing for you to do unless or until these gifts are given to you? Absolutely not. Christ has already died for you. Everything necessary to your exercise of repentance, faith, and entrance into eternal salvation is already provided. You must rouse yourself from your apathy and do what you can. For “the righteousness based on faith speaks thus, ‘Do not say in your heart, who will ascend into heaven? (that is, to bring Christ down), or ‘Who will descend into the abyss? (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead). But what does it say? ‘The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart that is the word of faith which we are preaching, that if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you shall be saved; for with the heart man believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation. For the Scripture says, ‘Whoever believes in Him will not be disappointed.’ For there is no distinction between Jew and Greeks; for the same Lord is Lord of all, abounding in riches for all who call upon Him; for ‘Whoever will call upon the name of the Lord will be saved’ (Romans 10:6-13).

Every moment you live in an unrepentant state you continue to grieve the God who has made you and to dishonor the Christ who died in your place on the cross. I

urge you to move rapidly from where you are to where you belong. Please remember that late repentance is better than no repentance at all.

The Bible does not treat repentance as an option. God commands all people everywhere to repent. Repentance is a duty imposed on each of us as well as on everyone everywhere by our Creator. Unfortunately, many are not duty-oriented and therefore they rebel at the mere thought of being told what they must do. Some, when they do finally shoulder the responsibilities of a duty, are determined to do no more than is absolutely necessary. Can repentance be approached with a bad attitude and still be accomplished?

REPENTANCE INVOLVES THE WHOLE PERSON

Some have defined repentance as a change of mind, but when the Bible calls for repentance, it calls for more than that. True repentance involves a change of the entire person's mind (intellect), emotions (affections), and will (purpose).

God created us as intelligent beings, able to love, obey, and serve Him. But the curse that fell upon Adam because of his sin, and through Adam to each of us, brought spiritual death. This death was not cessation of existence but separation from God. Since the fall of Adam, people are born into the world not as children of God but as children of the Evil One. The conduct of every one of us has proven that we, like our father the devil, are sinners. If we were children of God, we would be perfect even as He is perfect.

Genuine repentance involves a change of mind. But what is meant by this "change of mind?" Does it suggest that if a person once thought favorably of sin, repentance would mean he now thinks of sin unfavorably? Or could we assume that if an unrepentant person thought little of God, the change of mind would result in his thinking much more of God? Clearly, the change of mind that is a part of repentance goes much deeper than this.

In his epistle to the Romans, Paul makes statements concerning the mind that are alarming. In the first chapter he declares, "And just as they do not see fit to acknowledge God any longer, God gave them over to a depraved mind, to do those things which are not proper, being filled with all unrighteousness, wickedness, greed, evil; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, malice; they are gossips, slanderers, haters of God, insolent, arrogant, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, without understanding, untrustworthy, unloving, unmerciful; and, although they know the ordinance of God, that those who preach such things are worthy of death, they not

only do the same, but also give hearty approval to those who practice them” (Romans 1:28-32). Who is being described in this passage? Extraordinary perverts, or people all around us? Certain things are clear from the context.

First, the passage is describing persons upon whom the wrath of God is revealed from heaven.

Second, this wrath shows itself in God’s turning such persons over to their own degrading passions.

Third, God does this because, “even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God, or give thanks” (Romans 1:21). Instead, they “exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator” (v. 25).

Fourth, who does such things? Every unrepentant person! In refusing to repent, they place higher priority upon themselves, the created, than upon God, the Creator.

Fifth, not every person has already reached the greatest possible depth of corruption. Indeed, some, because of their natural inclinations toward less heinous sins, may never be as thoroughly rotten as possible. Yet, by their insistence on the rights of all individuals to do as they please, and by their refusal to censure those who love iniquity, they give hearty approval to those who practice such things.

The “I wills” of genuine repentance are demanding:

“I will turn from my sins.”

“I will submit to the Lord Jesus Christ.”

“I will comply with all the demands of my King.”

“I will forsake all to follow Him.”

“I will love Him with all my heart, soul, strength, and mind.”

“My commitment to Him is through flood, fire, persecution, and trials of any and all kinds.”

“My vow will endure until I breathe my final breath.”

REPENTANCE IS REQUIRED OF ALL SINS

“Men ought not to content themselves with a general repentance, but it is every man’s duty to endeavor to repent of his particular sins, particularly.” Sins are committed one by one and need to be repented of in the same way.

While it may be somewhat arbitrary, it is not uncommon to divide sins into three major classes.

First, sins of aggression against God and others, which consist of violations of God's laws. These are sometimes denominated "sins of commission."

Second, sins of neglect, in which things that ought to have been done are left undone. These are frequently called "sins of omission."

Third, sins that are inward or secret, where it might be supposed that there is no victim except the sinner himself.

God demands repentance in all these realms.

SINS OF COMMISSION

True repentance must include all sins of commission. All violations of the law of God, known and unknown, demand repentance. We have frequently heard the saying, "Ignorance of the law is no excuse." We know that if we drive at fifty-five miles per hour through a heavily populated area, we are speeding even if we see no posted speed limit. While a person may think of himself as less guilty because he saw no signs, law enforcement agents cannot be expected either to overlook the offense or to lessen the penalty because of the driver's ignorance.

The law of God is readily available even if it is largely neglected. Every violation of it, whether purposeful or careless, is sin and must either be repented of or charged against the offender forever and ever.

We are correctly informed that "everyone who practices sin also practices lawlessness; and sin is lawlessness" (1 John 3:4). The bible makes no special allowances for smaller sinners, nor does it demand greater severity of punishment for bigger sinners. The justice of God is exactly that, Sin is sin, and all sin will be righteously judged. "For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles in one point, he has become guilty of all" (James 2:10). This may not be your idea of the right way to do things, but it is God's way, and no level of protest is going to alter this essential fact. You either repent of every sin or you are as guilty as if you had broke every single law of God.

True repentance must include all sins of omission. Not only does the Bible list many things that we must not do, it also details a great many things that are required of us.

Any neglect whatsoever of these required things is sin. Let me mention just seven of these urgent requirements:

“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength” (Mark 12:30).

“You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (Mark 12:31).

“Seek first His kingdom and His righteousness” (Matthew 6:33).

“You shall worship the Lord your God and serve Him only” (Luke 4:8).

“Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice” (Philippians 4:4).

“Pray without ceasing” (1 Thessalonians 5:17).

“Pursue peace with all men, and the sanctification [holiness] without which no one will see the Lord” (Hebrews 12:14).

Obviously, each of these positive commands are duties laid on every single one of us. Failure to practice each of these requirements and all the others laid out in the Bible is sin. (Repentance is profoundly lacking if it does not include heart determination to constantly practice each of these precious opportunities of fulfilling God’s will and purpose for our lives.)

These sins of omission include both sins of neglect, such as neglecting Christ, your soul, your family, His church, prayer, and your Bible; and sins of failure, such as missing opportunities of doing good to widows and orphans, making the best possible use of your time, and redeeming your opportunities for ministry.

James provides a clear summary word on this subject: “To one who knows the right thing to do, and does not do it, to him it is sin” (James 4:17).

True repentance must include all the inner and secret sins of the heart. There are sins that appear to have no external manifestations and that appear to affect no one other than the sinner himself. This, of course, is only partially true, for while the sin may be unknown to others, it is always against God Himself and usually adversely affects at least one other person.

Moses recognized the problem of secret sins and acknowledged to God, "Thou hast placed our iniquities before Thee, our secret sins in the light of Thy presence" (Psalm 90:8). David knew the same heart problem and asked, "Who can discern his errors? Acquit me of hidden faults" (Psalm 19:12). He also acknowledged, "Behold, Thou dost desire truth in the innermost being, and in the hidden part Thou wilt make me know wisdom" (Psalm 51:6). Anyone who seeks to keep his sins secret needs to be warned that, "Nothing is hidden that shall not become evident, nor anything secret that shall not be known and come to light" (Luke 8:17). It is much wiser to repent of all secret sin now than it will be to wait until all such sin is publicly displayed before the entire world at the final judgment.

All of us are in frightful danger of stopping short of full repentance. One might suppose that, having already repented a great deal, they have repented enough. This is anything but true, however, for repentance must never cease.

R.C.H. Lenski claimed, "Dead works are scarcely crimes and flagrant breaches of law but rather are formal, empty, false, legal observances and self-invented works whereby men would stand before God." There are numerous classes of dead works that require repentance.

Religious acts performed in the hope of gaining merit with God are dead works. Any act that proceeds from a heart that has not been made alive by the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit and that is not motivated by faith and love, but that is relied upon to bring the doer into right relationship with God or to earn him some place, favor, or position before God is nothing other than a dead work. Many common religious practices can fall under this heading. Think of some very sobering facts in this regard:

A decision to accept Christ may be nothing more than a dead work. People are not saved by what they do but by what God does. He must regenerate; He must give repentance and faith. Some plant, others water, but God alone gives the increase (1 Corinthians 3:6-8).

Worship, in many instances, is a dreadful dead work. The Scriptures frequently describe persons who go through the motions of worshiping God but whose hearts are far from Him. Worship is not nearly so much what you do as what you are.

A FINAL WARNING

A final warning is appropriate. It is the warning of the apostle Peter that I urge you to heed; "For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but cast them into

hell and committed them to pits of darkness, reserved for judgment; and did not spare the ancient world, but preserved Noah, a preacher of righteousness, with seven others, when He brought a flood upon the world of the ungodly; and if He condemned the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah to destruction by reducing them to ashes, having made them an example to those who would live ungodly thereafter; and if He rescued righteous Lot, oppressed by the sensual conduct of unprincipled men (for by what he saw and heard that righteous man, while living among them, felt his righteous soul tormented day after day with their lawless deeds), then the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from temptation, and to keep the unrighteous under punishment for the day of judgment, and especially those who indulge the flesh in its corrupt desires and despise authority" (2 Peter 2:4-10a).

GOD COMMANDS REPENTANCE

1. Matthew 3:1-3: "In those days John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea, and saying, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!' 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."

2. Matthew 4:17: "From that time Jesus began to preach and to say, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.'"

3. Mark 1:15: "saying, 'The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel.'"

4. Mark 6:2: "And when the Sabbath had come, He began to teach in the synagogue. And many hearing Him were astonished, saying, 'Where did this Man get these things? And what wisdom is this which is given to Him, that such mighty works are performed by His hands!'"

5. Luke 13:3-5: "I tell you, no; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish. 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? I tell you, no; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish."

6. Acts 2:38: "Athens 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.'"

7. Acts 3:19: Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord.”
8. Acts 8:22: “Repent therefore of this your wickedness, and pray God if perhaps the thought of your heart may be forgiven you.”
9. Acts 17:30-31: “Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent, because he has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead.”
10. Acts 26:20: “but declared first to those in Damascus and in Jerusalem, and throughout all the region of Judea, and *then* to the Gentiles, that they should repent, turn to God, and do works befitting repentance.”

CONFESS

Confession.

The Hebrew *yada* and Greek *homologeō* (plus derivatives and related concepts) convey the idea of confession, acknowledgment, and praise of God’s character and glorious works, often with expression of man’s confession of faith in God and in His Son, Jesus Christ; also man’s admission to God of his sins and wicked works.

In the Old Testament, one acknowledges and praises God’s name: “We give You thanks, and praise Your glorious name” (1 Chron. 29:13; cf. Ps. 145:1). Also the very person of God is praised: thanks is given to God Who is good (Ps. 106:1), Whose name (and therefore person) is holy (97:12; 99:3), great, and awesome (99:3). Exalted above all, God is praised as God of gods and Lord of lords (136:2-3) and the God of heaven (136:26). He is praised for His works of creation (89:5; 136:4-9) and providential acts to His people (136:10-24) and creatures (36:25). A believer’s true commitment to God is implied in such praise.

In the New Testament, emphasis is placed on the personal acknowledgment of Christ: “Whoever acknowledges Me before me” (Matt. 10:32) and particular acknowledgment of Him as Savior and Lord (Rom. 10:9; cf. Phil. 2:11). This confession of Christ includes acknowledging Him in His deity as the Son of God (Matt. 16:16; 1 John 4:15) and in His humanity as incarnate in the flesh (1 John 4:2, 2 John 7).

The Bible also teaches that one is to confess his sins to this sovereign God. In the Old Testament Levitical sacrifices, this is portrayed when the worshiper confesses

his sins over the head of the sacrificial animal (cf. Lev. 1:4; 16:21) which is a picture or type of Christ, the Lamb of God (John 1:29) bearing the sins of His people (Isa. 53:6; 1 Cor. 5:7). The Old Testament also emphasizes the great confessions of Israel's sins (Ezra 10:1; Neh. 1:6; 9:2-3; Dan. 9:4, 20). Personal confession is seen in David's acknowledgment (Ps. 32:5).

Confession of sin is also emphasized in the New Testament (Matt. 3:6; Mark 1:5), and with it is connected the promise of forgiveness of sins (1 John 1:9; cf. Matt. 6:12), a forgiveness based solely on the death of Christ (Eph. 1:7). That confession of sin, an acknowledgment that forgiveness is possible only through Christ the risen Lord, God uses as an instrument in bringing the sinner to salvation (Rom. 10:9-10). This is to be a sacrifice of praise to God (Heb. 13:15). Although confession of sin is to be made to God alone (Luke 18:13), on occasion believers are encouraged to share their confession with one another (James 5:16).

Faith in God Involves Right Belief about God. The word *faith* in ordinary speech covers both credence of propositions ("beliefs") and confidence in persons or things. In the latter case, some belief about the object trusted is the logical and psychological presupposition of the act of trust itself, for trust in a thing reflects a positive expectation about its behavior, and rational expectation is impossible if the thing's capacities for behavior are wholly unknown. Throughout the Bible trust in God is made to rest on the belief of what He has revealed concerning His character and purposes. In the New Testament, where faith in God is defined as trust in Christ, the acknowledgment of Jesus as the expected Messiah and the incarnate Son of God is regarded as basic to it.

Confessing God

(All the creeds, confessions of faith and doctrinal bases that have ever gained currency in the church have defined theism along the lines already sketched.)

If we say we believe in God, we are saying something about ourselves as well; that we are creatures wholly dependent on God the Creator for our existence, our continuance, our circumstances and our destiny.

Although such scepticism must seem unjustified to mainstream Christians, who believe that God has openly revealed Himself to mankind in creation, in history, in the Bible and above all in Jesus Christ, it is certainly true that faith in God will change the way we think of ourselves. If it is 'God-with-a-capital-G', the God of the Bible, whom we confess, we shall know ourselves not only as creatures but also as sinners, condemned by God's holiness yet called to salvation in and through Jesus Christ.

IV. IN ORDER TO RECEIVE GOD'S GRACE, MAN MUST CONFESS.

A. Confession of Faith.

B. Confession of Sin.

1. Matt. 10:32-33: "Therefore whoever confesses Me before men, him I will also confess before My Father who is in heaven. But whoever denies Me before men, him I will also deny before My Father who is in heaven."
2. Luke 12:8-9: "Also I say to you, whoever confesses Me before men, him the Son of Man also will confess before the angels of God. But he who denies Me before men will be denied before the angels of God."
3. Acts 8:34-37: "So the eunuch answered Philip and said, 'I ask you, of whom does the prophet say this, of himself or of some other man?' Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning at this Scripture, preached Jesus to him. Now as they went down the road, they came to some water. And the eunuch said, 'See, here is water. What hinders me from being baptized.' Then Philip said, 'If you believe with all your heart, you may.' And he answered and said, 'I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.'"
4. Rom. 10:9-10: "that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation."
5. Rom. 14:11-12: "For it is written: 'As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to Me, and every tongue shall confess to God.' So then each of us shall give account of himself to God."
6. Rom. 15:9: "and that the Gentiles might glorify God for His mercy, as it is written: 'For this reason I will confess to You among the Gentiles, and sing to Your name.'"

7. Phil. 2:11: "and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."
8. 1 John 1:7-10: "But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin. If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us."
9. 1 John 4:2-3: "By this you know the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God, and every spirit that does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is not of God. And this is the spirit of the Anti-Christ, which you have heard was coming, and is now already in the world."
10. 2 John 7: "For many deceivers have gone out into the world who do not confess Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an anti-Christ."
11. Rev. 3:5: "He who overcomes shall be clothed in white garments, and I will not blot out his name from the Book of Life; but I will confess his name before My father and before His angels."
12. 1 Pet. 1:17-22: "And if you call on the Father, who without partiality judges according to each one's work, conduct yourselves throughout the time of your stay here in fear; knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold, from your aimless conduct received by tradition from your fathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot. He indeed was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you who through Him believe in God, who raised Him from the dead and gave Him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God. Since you have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit in sincere love of the brethren, love one another fervently with a pure heart."

13. 1 Pet. 2:9-10: “But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; who once were not a people but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy.”

BAPTISM, BAPTIZE

[bap'tizm, bap tiz'] Both these words have their root in the Greek “bapto,” meaning to immerse, dip, or plunge under water; to wash; the words are sometimes used metaphorically, as a baptism of blood, of fire, of the Holy Spirit. Baptism was not an invention of Christianity; both Judaism and the pagan mystery religions recognized the natural symbolism of ceremonial washings and utilized baptism as a rite of initiation into their circle. Baptism first appears in the New Testament in the narratives concerning John the Baptist. John’s preaching ushered in the Messianic Age; as he spoke of the imminent breaking in of the Kingdom of God, urging his hearers to “flee from the wrath to come,” crowds were “baptized of him in the river of Jordan, confessing their sins” (Mark 1:5). His baptism was symbolic of and accompanied by repentance. Jesus Himself was baptized of John, making clear the continuity between their ministries. The effect of John’s preaching was so widespread that his baptism was still being administered thirty years later in Alexandria and Ephesus (Acts 18:25; 19:1-7).

Baptism has been viewed in many different lights with regard to its nature and efficacy. Although it is not possible in this article to treat each of these views fully, they may be summarized as follows: (1) that baptism is for the remission of sins and therefore essential to salvation; (2) that it is a public avowal of fealty to God; (3) that it is a sign and seal of the ingrafting into Christ and the accompanying spiritual benefits, that is, an outward sign of an inward spiritual grace; (4) that it is an ordinance for admitting men into discipleship, a sign of initiation, leading to final deliverance from all evil; (5) that it is a symbol of regeneration given only to those who exhibit signs of the new life in Christ; and (6) that it is a symbol of purification.

In Acts of the Apostles and the epistles of Paul, baptism is frequently mentioned in connection with conversion, as a natural step in the acceptance of the gospel message. Baptism is into Christ or His name, signifying union with Him; this union involves sharing in His death, burial, and resurrection, of which baptism is an obvious symbol. Two of the verses which emphasize the significance of baptism are Acts 2:38 and 22:16. Baptism is also closely connected with the gift of the Holy Spirit (John 3:5, Acts 2:38, 1 Cor. 11:13).

Baptism is the great New Testament sign of what God does for a person who comes to belong to Jesus Christ. The water declares that our sin is washed away, that we are identified with Jesus who died to evil and rose to a new life, that the Spirit is poured out on us. In baptism a person is welcomed into the Christian community.

Christian Baptism

Jesus did not baptize during His ministry. He was Himself baptized by John as a sign of His identification with sinners. But after Pentecost, the Christian church invited believers in Jesus to be baptized.

Peter made his appeal on the day of Pentecost: 'Each one of you must turn away from his sins and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ . . . and you will receive God's gift, the Holy Spirit.' Most probably people who came forward for baptisms were baptized in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit,' perhaps confessing that 'Jesus is Lord'. Some Christians think that baptism always involved 'total immersion' in water; others that we cannot know how much water was used.'

The New Testament tells us that baptism declares four complementary truths:

Death to the old life. Water suggests the washing away of sin. Going down into the water expresses dying to the old, sinful way of living. Coming up out of the water suggests a new life with a new Master.

The gift of the Spirit. Through the Spirit, God comes to live among His people. The Spirit joins Himself to those who turn to Jesus and becomes the new power for living. A Christian is a new creation.

Entry into the church. Because they belong to Jesus, Christians are members of the church, 'the body of Christ'. And so they join this fellowship of those who love Jesus.

Humanity's most basic questions revolve around the two fundamental issues of *meaning* and *existence*, and they are closely linked together. If this life is all there is, then I may grab what meaning I can from passing moments and events, but in the end it will not amount to much. My life will pass with everything else into everlasting darkness.

The Christian conviction is that Jesus has 'passed through' and made sense of life. He has transformed our existence through His life, death and resurrection, and the new life of the Spirit that He gives to all who come to Him.

The Christian has a hope, which breaks the hopelessness of existence. This hope has certain basic ingredients:

God's life transforms our existence. Our natural existence is God-given and is for us to enjoy and use properly. To live fully as human beings, we need not only food, clothing and other material things, but also spiritual fulfillment. If life shrinks to enjoyment of material things only, it gives at best passing happiness. The Christian faith proclaims that in Jesus life may be lived at its highest and fullest.

Jesus is eternal life. This life is not our natural right. It is part of God's nature and can only be for us a gift. Jesus said, 'I am the life', and this is a constant New Testament theme, especially in John's Gospel. The life that Jesus gives through a relationship with Him is eternal life; it is a relationship, a way of life, that reaches beyond the death of the body.

Eternal life begins now. The Pharisees believed in 'eternal' life, but it was something given to certain fortunate people after death, or at the resurrection of the body. Jesus' teaching is that eternal life begins here and now and is a present reality as well as a future hope. There is thus a continuity between life now and life to come. This life begins when a believer accepts Jesus' offer of salvation and is given the Holy Spirit, and it is deepened as the Christian encounters the risen power of his Lord.

Paul wrote from prison to the Philippian Christians: "For me to live is Christ and to die is gain." Death would not introduce him to eternal life, as if for the first time, because he already knew Jesus Christ in the present. But death was a door that would usher him into unbroken fellowship with Jesus.

A Christian can be sure of eternal life. Most of us are apprehensive about the experience of dying. But the Christian hope conquers ultimate fear. The fear of death is a paralyzing fear to modern people, who lack a sure knowledge of God, and so are agnostic about life beyond the physical realm.

Tomorrow makes a poor substitute for eternity. The New Testament speaks of the Holy Spirit being given as a 'guarantee' of our inheritance, a sort of down payment of what we will fully receive in heaven.

Through the gift of the Holy Spirit, there are foretastes in our experience of our ultimate calling as children of God. These echoes include: the desire to serve God, an awareness of His presence, the overcoming of temptation through His power, the desire to worship. In these and many other ways, the Holy Spirit confirms to our hearts that we are children of God. This all gives us firm ground to stand on in the uncertainties and pains of life.

Christian assurance, we must note, is not based on our own subjective experience, but on God's promise that we *are* sons and daughters of God. 'He who comes to me,' said Jesus, 'I will never cast away.' Though we may sometimes feel God is distant, His promise is our guarantee that He will not let us down.

JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH

In the New Testament, many metaphors are used to express the reality of Christian salvation. Descriptions such as new birth, new creation, passing from darkness to light and from prison to freedom, all dramatically express the difference being a Christian makes.

One metaphor, used only by Paul, is 'justification by faith'.

The term is borrowed from the law courts of the first century. The judge hears an accusation against a person, and declares the accused 'justified.' 'Not guilty' or 'innocent' are simply not strong enough to express what the judge means. He is really saying, 'You stand before this court as one who is in the right.'

How are we justified?

If grace is the foundation of justification, then surely faith is the means by which justification becomes the Christian's possession. Because of what sin is, we cannot earn salvation from it. This can only be accepted as a *gift*, because it is bought at the price of Jesus' death.

Where then do good deeds come in? Certainly not as a way of justifying ourselves before God. 'I go to church,' says someone, 'and do good to others. Surely these Christian things will be to my credit?' This is a very common belief. But if it were true, it would question the very point of Jesus' death. Why should God go to the extreme length of sending His Son to the cross if people are justified by their own good deeds? This is not to deny the importance of a good life, but good works are the *fruit* not the *root* of justification.

In the Bible there is scarcely a word which has a more varied and a richer meaning than the word 'faith.' If you have faith in someone, you trust in that person's character. So, in the Bible, faith rests in the character of God. He keeps His promises to men and women; He can be trusted.

The basis of New Testament faith is the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. If people 'believe' in Jesus, they trust in the *fact* of what Jesus has done for them. And so even faith is not the most fundamental thing in a person's salvation; what comes first is God's faithfulness, both in promise and in action. Human beings' faith is in response to God's initiative.

Trust and commitment.

Especially in Paul's letters and in John's Gospel, we find that faith means trusting our whole life to God. The modern word 'commitment' comes very close to this.

The New Testament seldom says merely 'believe . . .', but rather 'believe in' (literally 'into') God or Jesus. What is required is not just assent to an idea, but humble acceptance of what God has done.

Faith in Jesus Christ.

Turning is one thing, but in itself is not enough. Many people like to turn over a new leaf, but this does not make them Christians.

Jesus called people “to repent *and believe the gospel.*” A person must accept Jesus as who He claimed to be, the Saviour and Lord of our lives. It means taking up His yoke. By a conscious decision, I turn my back on my old life and enter a new life based on Jesus. I become a disciple, a follower of Jesus, who learns to live His way.

In the Acts of the Apostles and the teaching of Paul, the death and resurrection of Jesus are put central in Christian conversion. If Jesus died for sinners and rose to prove it, so the Christian must die to the old nature and begin afresh through the Holy Spirit. This is expressed in baptism. Indeed, baptism in the New Testament and in the early church was in itself a symbol of conversion, in that it graphically declared a person’s rejection of the old life and entry into new life.

Looking back on the questions raised earlier, we may now be able to suggest some answers. It is clear from human experience that “sudden” conversions are rarely sudden at all. Usually they are the result of thought and exploration which have gone on for a long time. C. S. Lewis told us that he came to belief in God on top of a double-decker bus. But this was the climax of a long, painful search.

For some, conversion is a “crisis” event. But the experience of many Christians in all traditions of the Christian churches is that this discovery of faith may come through steady growth and teaching in the Christian life, without any crisis of belief or identifiable turning point.

A distinction has been drawn between ‘once-born’ and ‘twice-born’ Christians. Both are valid forms of Christian experience. And yet it remains true that awareness of need, willingness to turn, and belief in Jesus are essential to Christianity itself.

Strangely enough, the Greek word for being converted is not used very often in the New Testament, and some have therefore wrongly assumed that the idea of conversion is insignificant. Some important questions are also asked about it:

Is conversion essential before a person can truly claim to be a Christian?

Does conversion have to be sudden?

Can a person be a Christian who has not experienced a black-and-white conversion but has grown into a mature acceptance of Jesus Christ?

To give a proper answer to these questions, we must look at some factors which are always present when a person comes to faith in Jesus Christ;

Awareness of need. No one comes to faith in Jesus without a sense that something is missing in life. This can take different forms with different people. One person may be conscious of moral failure, an inability to overcome temptation. Another may be aware of a sense of frustration and futility in life. Another may come to realize that life has no meaning unless God is brought into the picture. All this shows that there are many different kinds of sin, and our longing for God finds expression in very varied ways. In the Bible, Mary Magdalene's problem was different from Paul's, and Peter's was different again. But each of them saw Jesus as the answer.

Willingness to turn. The word for this is "repentance." The word for "repentance" in Greek means to turn round or have a change of heart and attitude. Repentance involves being sincerely sorry for our sin and willing to change direction.

The prophets were a still livelier voice for God. There is always a risk that law and cult will fossilize, meaning less and less as people use them more and more. So God sent a stream of fearless men to speak out for Him as need arose: men such as Samuel, Nathan and Elijah who stood up to kings; men such as Amos, Hosea, Isaiah, and a dozen other 'writing prophets' who warned their generations of God's judgment on their worldliness.

God gave these prophets a new vision also: they foresaw the perfection of a new age to come, when a king would reign in righteousness, when God would dwell among His people, and when the nations would be drawn into His kingdom. This would be God's new day.

A hint of dawn.

For about the last 400 years of the old era, Israel was without a prophet, and was sadly conscious of the fact. But it was a pregnant silence, to be ended at the very break of God's new day. John the Baptist burst upon Israel as abruptly and urgently as Elijah. And two things gave his message a cutting edge sharper than anything ever known before;

1. His baptism for repentance. For foreign converts, this was nothing new; but for Israelites! It put them on a level with outsiders, and John declared as much: 'Don't start saying among yourselves that Abraham is your ancestor . . . God can take these stones and make descendants for Abraham!' What was more, it made the call to repentance searchingly personal. A person had to repent, not of the nation's sins, but of his own; not with routine apologies or in the privacy of his mind, but decisively and publicly, making his way through the crowd and into the river, confessing his sins.

2. His announcement of the Coming One. God's King was already among them unrecognized; His baptism would not be just with water, like John's, but with 'Holy Spirit and fire;' His presence would separate the chaff from the wheat. John called Him "The Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world." His role would be to suffer and make atonement, not only for Israel but for the world.

No other prophet had had a message like John's except as fragments of a distant prospect. It could mean only one thing. The new age had now dawned.

Jesus and the kingdom.

What John had announced was swiftly confirmed. A voice from heaven was the first to endorse it, hailing Jesus at his baptism as "my beloved Son." Afterwards Jesus began His preaching with the words: "the right time has come and the kingdom of God is near! Turn away from your sins and believe the Good News."

What did Jesus mean by this 'kingdom', a word so often on His lips? Not just the realm over which God was king, as in our use of the word. Rather, His kingly presence right among them, and His exercise of power.

Crisis. Here was an event that had overtaken them and must be faced; in fact, the event of all history.

The identity of the King. Jesus left it to others to draw the conclusion that he was the long-awaited Messiah, though in accepting this royal title he filled it with new meaning.

And then, to speak in terms of the kingdom was to speak of **the goal of world history**, the everlasting kingdom which would bring all human empires to an end.

The new people of God.

'I tell you,' said Jesus to the leaders of Israel, 'the kingdom of god will be taken away from you and given to a people who will produce the proper fruits.' That 'people' would no longer be simply (or even primarily) the earthly nation of Israel. As Paul wrote, 'We are the people (God) called, not only from among the Jews but also from among the Gentiles.' Or as John saw in his revelation vision, "They were from every race, tribe, nation and language.' To such, without distinction, would now belong the name "the Israel of God." It took time for this great fact to sink in.

Baptism is, at the same time, the confession of one's hope and confidence in resurrection with Christ - hope for the resurrection on the last day as well as the confident anticipation of it in the present work of the Spirit. Paul attributes the

believer's incorporation into Christ's body and the sealing for the final liberation of the Spirit's baptism and sealing (e.g., 1 Cor. 12:13; 2 Cor. 1:22; 5:5) not to the water rite. The "washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit" through which God "saved us" (Tit. 3:5) is most likely the shedding of Christ's blood and the work of the Spirit. Similarly in John 3:3-8; 4:14; 7:37-39; 20:22, the promised water out of which one is reborn and which provides eternal life is identified only with the Spirit.

Baptism in 1 Peter. In the framework of an exhortation to bear fearless testimony to Christ in a hostile, pagan environment, 1 Pet. 3:21 offers a definition of baptism. "Baptism . . . now saves you, not as a removal of the filth of the flesh, but as a prayer to God for a good conscience through the resurrection of Jesus Christ" (author's trans.). The polemic strikes out against a confusion of baptism with mystery cults and, perhaps, Jewish purifications as well. Baptism is neither just an external bath nor the mysterious death of the sinner. It "saves" the way faith, confession of Christ, and prayer do - not as a magic work but as a sign of liberation and gratitude. Redemption and healing are something else; they are effected by the blood and the wounds of Christ (1 Pet. 1:18-19; 2:24). Just as confession of sin (Mark 1:5; Matt 3:6; Luke 7:29) and prayer (Luke 3:21) belonged to baptism and were its very substance, faith and baptism are linked together. According to 1 Pet. 3:18-22, a confident public prayer directed to God in the name of the risen Lord corresponds to Christ's death and resurrection and with Noah's public testimony to salvation. Here baptism is explained as a petition for purification of the conscience by forgiveness and a pledge of faithful witness to God. (1 Pet. 3:21).

For it is life from God, the life of Christ. Baptism implies participation in the death and resurrection of Christ (R. 6:1-14; Col. 2:11-15; 3:1 ff.; and materially Gl. 2:19 f.; 5:24; 6:14 etc., though characteristically with no mention of baptism). The break with sin is thereby accomplished and attachment to the life of the new creation effected, yet in such a way that in this aeon the translation into empirical reality of what God has posited remains, or rather becomes, a task for the baptized.

The new life stands in firm causal connection with purification from the guilt of sin. This is particularly clear, though often overlooked, in Paul. Because God is the only source of real life, and His holiness excludes sin, the basic conception both of Paul and of the New Testament generally in relation to baptism is that of the cleansing bath (1 C. 6:11; Eph. 5:26; Hb. 10:22; cf. Ac. 2:38; 22:16). The significance of baptism thus depends on the fact that it is a real action of the holy God in relation to sinful man.

From Mt. 28:18-20 and Mk. 16:16, we may conclude from the very existence and significance of the apostolate (_____, 431) that

there was knowledge of a missionary command, or many such commands, of the risen Lord, and that in accordance with the new situation this command was understood as a command to baptize. The distinctive feature of Christian baptism is that it is administered _____ or _____,

V. IN ORDER FOR MAN TO RECEIVE GOD'S GRACE, HE MUST BE BAPTIZED.

A. Baptism is an immersion in water for remission of sins.

1. Matt. 28:18-20: "And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age'. Amen."
2. Mark 16:15-16: "And He said to them, 'Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned."
3. Acts 2:37-38: "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?' 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."
4. Acts 2:39-42: "'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.' And with many other words he testified and exhorted them, saying, 'Be saved from this perverse generation.' Then those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them. And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers."
5. Acts 8:26-40: "Now an angel of the Lord spoke to Philip, saying, 'Arise and go toward the south along the road which goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza.' This is desert.

So he arose and went. And behold, a man of Ethiopia, a eunuch of great authority under Candace the queen of the Ethiopians, who had charge of all her treasury, and had come to Jerusalem to worship, was returning. And sitting in his chariot, he was reading Isaiah the prophet. Then the Spirit said to Philip, 'Go near and overtake this chariot.' So Philip ran to him, and heard him reading the prophet Isaiah, and said, 'Do you understanding what you are reading?' And he said, 'How can I, unless someone guides me?' And he asked Philip to come up and sit with him.

The place in the Scripture which he read was this: 'He was led as a sheep to the slaughter; and as a lamb before its shearer is silent, so He opened not His mouth. In His humiliation His justice was taken away. And who will declare His generation? For His life is taken from the earth.' So the eunuch answered Philip and said, 'I ask you, of whom does the prophet say this, of himself or of some other man?' Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning at this Scripture, preached Jesus to him.

Now as they went down the road, they came to some water. And the eunuch said, 'See, here is water. What hinders me from being baptized?' Then Philip said, 'If you believe with all your heart, you may.' And he answered and said, 'I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.'

So he commanded the chariot to stand still. And both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water, and he baptized him.

Now when they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught Philip away, so that the eunuch saw him no more; and he went on his way rejoicing. But Philip was found at Azotus. And passing through, he preached in all the cities till he came to Caesarea."

6. Acts 9:15-19: "But the Lord said to him, 'Go, for he is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel. For I will show him how many things he must suffer for My name's sake.' And Ananias went his way and entered the house; and laying his hands on him he said, 'Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you

came, has sent me that you may receive your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.’ Immediately there fell from his eyes something like scales, and he received his sight at once; and he arose and was baptized. So when he had received food, he was strengthened. Then Saul spent some days with the disciples at Damascus.

7. Acts 10:47-48: “Can anyone forbid water, that these should not be baptized who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?’ And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord. Then they asked him to stay a few days.
8. Acts 16:12-15: “and from there to Philippi, which is the foremost city of that part of Macedonia, a colony. And we were staying in that city for some days. And on the Sabbath day we went out of the city to the riverside, where prayer was customarily made; and we sat down and spoke to the women who met there. Now a certain woman named Lydia heard us. She was a seller of purple from the city of Thyatira, who worshiped God. The Lord opened her heart to heed the things spoken by Paul. And when she and her household were baptized, she begged us, saying, ‘If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come to my house and stay.’ So she persuaded us.”
9. Acts 16:25-34: “But at midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them. Suddenly there was 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. And the keeper of the prison, awaking from sleep and seeing the prison doors open, supposing the prisoners had fled, drew his sword and was about to kill himself.

But Paul called with a loud voice, saying, ‘Do yourself no harm, for we are all here.’ Then he called for a light, ran in, and fell down trembling before Paul and Silas. And he brought them out and said, ‘Sirs, what must I do to be saved?’ So they said, ‘Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household.’

Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house. And he took them the same hour of the night and washed their stripes. And immediately he and all his family were baptized. Now when he had brought them into his house, he set food before them; and he rejoiced, having believed in God with all his household."

10. Acts 18:8: "Then Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue, believed on the Lord with all his household. And many of the Corinthians, hearing, believed and were baptized."
11. Acts 19:1-5: "And it happened, while Apollos was in Corinth, that Paul, having passed through the upper regions, came to Ephesus. And finding some disciples he said to them, 'Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?' So they said to him, 'We have not so much as heard whether there is a Holy Spirit.' And he said to them, 'Into what then were you baptized?' So they said, 'Into John's baptism.'

Then Paul said, 'John indeed baptized with a baptism of repentance, saying to the people that they should believe on Him who would come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus.' When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus."

12. Acts 22:12-16: "Then a certain Ananias, a devout man according to the law, having a good testimony with all the Jews who dwelt there, came to me; and he stood and said to me, 'Brother Saul, receive your sight.' And at that same hour I looked up at him. Then he said, 'The God of our fathers has chosen you that you should know His will, and see the Just One, and hear the voice of His mouth. For you will be His witness to all men of what you have seen and heard. And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord.'"
13. 1 Cor. 1:10-13: "Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment. For it has been declared to me concerning you, my brethren, by those of

Chloe's household, that there are contentions among you. Now I say this, that each of you says, 'I am of Paul,' or 'I am of Apollos,' or 'I am of Cephas,' or 'I am of Christ.' Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?

14. 1 Cor. 12:13: "For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body - whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and have all been made to drink into one Spirit.
15. 1 Cor. 15:1-4: "Moreover, brethren, I declare to you the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received and in which you stand, by which also you are saved, if you hold fast that word which I preached to you - unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received; that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures."
16. Gal. 3:26-27: "For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ."
17. Col. 2:12-14: "buried with Him baptism, in which you also were raised with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead. And you, being dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He has made alive together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses, having wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us. And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross."
18. Eph. 4:5: "one Lord, one faith, one baptism;"
19. 1 Pet. 3:18-21: "For Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive by the Spirit, by whom also He went and preached to the spirits in prison, who formerly were disobedient, when once the Divine longsuffering waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight

souls, were saved through water. 'There is also an antitype which now saves us - baptism (not the removal of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God), through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.'

B. Baptism.

1. Puts us into Christ.
 2. Puts us into the church.
 3. Puts us into the kingdom.
 4. Puts us into God's family.
 5. Knowledge, faith
Confession - Repentance
Baptism permits man to receive
 6. Mankind obeys these commands out of love for God and Christ.
- (a) He is ^{NOT} therefore working his way to heaven.
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By GOD'S GRACE



FORGIVENESS