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Repentance and Baptism

Dear Friends

Practical Christianity – putting Christianity into practice. How should a Christian live? What defines a Christian? How do you become a Christian? What is being a Christian all about? These are some of the questions that we will be answering. Commencing of course with the beginning of the journey. Our talk is titled Repentance and Baptism. What is repentance? At a basic level in our own language to “re- pent” to think again. Our simple understanding of repentance is to feel or express sincere regret or remorse about one's wrongdoing or sin. Which begs the question - what is sin? For that, we have to turn to the Bible which defines what is right and wrong. What is the Bible definition or understanding of repentance? What does it really mean? It is more than just regret; it indicates a change of direction. For example, three times Ezekiel gave his people the warning from God: 14:6 Repent! *Turn from your idols and renounce all your detestable practices!* again in chapter 18:30: *Repent! Turn away from all your offenses,* once more in 33:11 *Turn! Turn from your evil ways.* Each time the word used in Hebrew for repent is *shoob*, and is often used, but not often translated as repent. Other times it is used in passages like this in Isaiah 1:16-17: *"Take your evil deeds out of my sight! Stop doing wrong, learn to do right! Seek justice, encourage the oppressed. Defend the cause of the fatherless, plead the case of the widow."* What we can see quite quickly that Biblical repentance is more than simply feeling regret, but also a conscious decision to turn to God, a turning that goes beyond sorrow and contrition.

In order to make any decision, especially one which is a change of direction, there is a need to be informed, to make an informed decision. It is not a wise thing to change your mind, and then later change it back again, because you didn't find out the situation properly. So friends, repentance of the Biblical type is only worth talking about if we know what we have to repent from, and change to. To make that decision we must have knowledge. Once we have the knowledge, the next step is to understand it. That is once we have been informed of the gospel of the Bible is to test it in our own mind. Examine it, hold it up to scrutiny. Compare it to former beliefs, and other ideas, how does it hold up. Does it make sense? Understanding knowledge is key. So many people in this day and age just trot out data they have cut and paste from Google, or repeat what someone else has said without really understanding what they have said. Once you understand something, then follows belief. Once you know something is true because you have tested it, and checked it, you believe it, that is very simple to grasp. We can all agree with that. It becomes a problem when people accept information without looking it up or getting to grips with it themselves. As time goes on, though they might be convinced by the persuasive arguments of other people, when those people are no longer around, the conviction fades, because you yourself are not sure of the arguments yourself, you haven't thought it through yourself. That is why it is so important to stand on your own two feet when it comes to understanding and believing the gospel. Ultimately it will mean that your repentance and change of life will not be lasting, if you have not confirmed the facts in your own mind properly.

There are a lot of times in life when we can get away with just repeating or recycling information or facts discovered or articulated

by other people. For example, at work, we undertake projects often using accumulated knowledge of a whole industry, and very often what we are talking about, or trying to sell, or manage, we do not understand. It is just the way the world works. However, many of those real - life situations where we recycle knowledge without understanding it, is because often it doesn't matter, the outcome is not relevant to us other than we ensure a quality of service or product is delivered. However, when it comes to a life changing decision, is it not the case that we ensure we know all the ins and outs of the matter?

Take for example if we had to have major surgery, on the National Health Service which meant either complete recovery or possible death, we would read up and understand the prognosis, the implications, you would surely understand all the long medical words, and then when you have balanced up in your mind the logic and odds for survival, you would finally put your signature to the consent form allowing the surgeon to begin his work. It is no different with regards to your salvation, because we are all suffering from an incurable disease, except for one drastic operation that we can undertake, after which means a complete change of life, change of habits, change of character even. Why is it then with this life changing decision people are prepared to be hoodwinked by back street quacks and shrinks, people purporting to be qualified doctors of theology, without looking up and understanding or checking the instructions? Similarly, how is it possible after the operation to carry out the surgeons' instructions on changing your lifestyle in order to have an extended life, if you haven't listened to what he had to say, or read his instructions for yourself? You would be crazy. But it is exactly what people do. There is no point in going through with the life changing exercise with regards to spiritual matters, which relate

to life and death, if you are not prepared to devote time and energy to understand exactly what you are embarking upon. So, having agreed upon this, and established the need to make these things personal, we can begin to appreciate that repentance cannot be coerced or forced upon people. It is a reaction of the knowledge of the truth of the gospel upon the hearts. I can't make you repent, nor can you make me repent. It only works if we do it ourselves of our own volition, and not as a result of copying others, or going along with the crowd, or because it seemed a good thing to do at the time.

In 2 Corinthians 2:7 *For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of: but the sorrow of the world worketh death.* This illustrates what we are attempting to explain, that the repentance required from God must be genuine, sincere, and not flippant. Take for example Acts 2:37-38 *Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do? Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins...* What happened here, is that they were pricked in their hearts. Their consciences had been pricked. They were personally affected by the message of the gospel that they had heard. The knowledge of the Bible had been with them a long time. These people here were Jews, who knew the Old Testament, the law and the prophets. But they didn't understand it. Now many of them understood the message, and now, its power had an effect on the consciences. They were obviously concerned. What shall we do? It is the realisation, of guilt. Peter had explained that they were partly responsible for the death of Jesus Christ. They were unhappy about this, and wanted to put it right. Peter's answer: *Repent.* The Greek word is *metanoieo* and again it means a change of mind. It is used many times in the New Testament. For example: In

Mark 1:4 -5 *John did baptize in the wilderness, and preach the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins. And there went out unto him all the land of Judaea, and they of Jerusalem, and were all baptized of him in the river of Jordan, confessing their sins.* Again, repentance to precede baptism, and repentance this changing of the mind, and we see here how it involved a confession of sins. Again, this confession of sins, means that there must be an appreciation of failure, of a breach between us and God, our consciences pricked. We have done wrong. Need to put it right. The admission or confession of sin is not necessary to go to a priest, but to confess our sins in prayer to God, Jesus Christ is the High Priest in heaven, so there is no need for any other intermediary. It is our conscience that needs to be cleansed, it is our relationship with God that needs to be fixed. An example of such a confession is shown in Psalm 51:1-4, and we can see the intensity of true repentance, and the understanding, the admission of a bad conscience and the desire to be clean again. *Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy lovingkindness: according unto the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. For I acknowledge my transgressions: and my sin is ever before me. Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight: Hide thy face from my sins, and blot out all mine iniquities.* Verse 10- 12: *Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from thy presence; and take not thy holy spirit from me. Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation.* This reveals a penitent heart. Someone who can clearly see the truth of God's word, versus the selfish lazy and sinful way of man. He hates being the selfish lazy sinful one, and wants so much to be right with God. We can see an example here of repentance. But it is not a flash in the pan. Godly sorrow said Paul, is not to be repented of. If we really do appreciate the truth of the Gospel of the

Kingdom of God and the things concerning the name of Jesus Christ, and it makes sense to us, and we claim to believe it, what next? Surely it can't just remain a theory? How would we compare to this man, here, King David repenting for his heinous crimes which he had committed? Are we better than he? Maybe we might think he was so bad, murderer, adulterer, liar, and so on. But God does not grade sin, to him, he hates all sin. As the prophet Habakkuk reminds us: 3: *He is of purer eyes than to behold evil, and cannot not look on iniquity:* We are no worse and no better than David in that sense. But of David, God described him as a man after mine own heart. He is listed among the faithful in Hebrews 11. He is quoted many times by the Lord Jesus and the Apostles. Why if he had done such wicked things? Because he showed great and continued humility. He believed and acted upon the belief. True repentance is then in itself an act of faith. We are allowing the power of the gospel, to transform us, and the gospel shows that we are like is not very nice. Not very nice at all. Our conscience is being transformed, and if we are sincere, we will be humble and admit that work needs to be done on our character. A change of mind, and a change of direction not just temporarily but permanently is required. If you know in your heart that the Gospel is true, it is the realisation that you have to be honest. With yourself. If you are a true and honest person, then you are the type of person God can work with. **Are you that type of person?** Remember when Paul was on the road to Damascus, he was a murderer, guilty of the deaths of many disciples who followed Jesus. But he was so zealous and enthusiastic, because he was covering something up. He felt guilty, he knew something was not right and he wanted it to be put right. He thought that by fixing other people would do the trick, but no. On the road to Damascus he saw a blinding light, which threw him down to the ground, and he heard a voice, Saul, Saul why are your persecuting me. It is hard for

you to kick against the pricks. It was Jesus Christ, who had arrested him in mid-journey, and made him face his own conscience. He was someone God could work with because he listened to that voice and obeyed it. He continued to Damascus, but walked a different road from then on, he changed direction. We all have a conscience. But we are only the type God can work with if we are honest like Saul/Paul, and allow the pricks and goads, our guilty conscience to affect us, and listen to the voice, and repent. The Apostle John tells us 1 John 1:8, 9 *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.* Paul was blinded because of the bright light. But he thought very carefully about what he had been shown. He repented, and in so doing was converted. He was convinced of the truth. He then obeyed the command of Jesus. He submitted to the waters of baptism, and immediately his blindness departed from him, and he could see clearly. It was a new start. Similarly, ourselves. Not all of us will have a Damascus moment in quite such a striking way as the Apostle Paul, but certainly the truth will work its way on our conscience gradually. How long will we kick against the pricks or ignore our conscience? Baptism is the first act of obedience. Baptism, the Bible describes is the answer of a good conscience. 1 Peter 3:21. *The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God,) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ:* The answer of a good conscience. The Scripture tells us that the first thing we must do is to submit to the waters of baptism. After much soul searching and decision making, one might think such a symbolic act a strange thing to do. Firstly, yes, it is just a symbol, in itself it does nothing physically. It does make a statement however to others looking on, and it is true it symbolises very much and as such

is the initiation ceremony if you like, the rite which will enable you to begin a life of yielding to a good conscience, obeying the Lord, being a disciple of Jesus. It is a big decision to make, as it affects the pathway you will take hopefully for the rest of your life, thus its beginning is marked in this way. So, what examples do we have? Under the Mosaic law, the nation of Israel were baptised as a nation when they crossed the red sea, and they had to keep the law to bring them to Christ. But since then Jesus has commanded that all should be baptised if they are to be his disciples Mark 16:15-16: *And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be condemned.* This is exactly what they did: Acts 2: 38: The words of the Apostle Peter: *Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission (the forgiveness) of sins, then we read that they that gladly received his word were baptized:* Paul the Apostle who was also baptised said 1 Cor. 12:13: *For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body,* It was not optional. There was and is no such thing as an unbaptised Christian. If you want to be a Christian you have to be baptised. Jesus himself ensured that disciples were baptised. We can read of this in John 3: 22. *After these things came Jesus and his disciples into the land of Judaea; and there he tarried with them, and baptized. And John also was baptizing in Aenon near to Salim, because there was much water there: and they came, and were baptized.* Jesus himself set the example and was baptised. We read of this in Matt 3:13-17. *Then cometh Jesus from Galilee to Jordan unto John, to be baptized of him.. But John forbad him, saying, I have need to be baptized of thee, and comest thou to me? And Jesus answering said unto him, Let it to be so now: for so it becomes us to fulfil all righteousness. Then he allowed him And Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straightway out of the water: and, lo, the heavens*

were opened unto him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon him:.. And lo a voice from heaven, saying, *This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.* Notice Jesus' mode of baptism, when he went straightway up out of the water. This was the River Jordan, much deeper than it is today. Not some font, with a self-proclaimed priest splashing drops of water. Nor was Jesus at 30 years of age an infant. Followers of Christ do what Jesus did. Not a self-proclaimed priest elevated by men. We have another example of new testament baptism, Acts 8:12: *But when they believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women.* We note again of course, that they were all adults, and that they believed first before they were baptised. We read on Acts 8: and read how Philip one of the disciples was guided to a Ethiopian, a rich and important man, who had evidently been studying the Bible for some time, for he felt compelled to come to Jerusalem to worship. However he did not fully understand, and need help and clarification. Philip joined him in the chariot, where he was avidly reading a portion of the scripture, and Philip we read v35 *and preached unto him Jesus.. And as they went on their way, they came unto a certain water: and the man said, See, here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized? 37. And Philip said, If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.* Again and again we can see that scripture is agreed that belief is essential before baptism. Not afterwards. v 38. *And he commanded the chariot to stand still: and they went down both into the water, both Philip and the eunuch; and he baptized him. The body of water was such that two fully grown men go down into the water.* Note the words. What is described is an immersion. Going right down into the water, fully submerged. Another example is in Acts 16: 31.-33 *And they said, Believe on the*

Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house.. And they spake unto him the word of the Lord, and to all that were in his house.. And he took them the same hour of the night, and washed their stripes; and was baptized, he and all his, straight way. It is the message of the New Testament over and over again, that he that believeth and is baptised shall be saved. Belief must come before baptism, to appreciate exactly what baptism is, what it is all about, to appreciate what is represented by baptism, and why the need to go through with it. If there is no belief, or even if there is only partial understanding, then baptism becomes just an empty senseless ritual. No, belief is absolutely crucial. We have to know what baptism is about, and know what it means before we are baptised. What we are seeing here then, in the New Testament is that baptism is a full immersion into water of spiritually mature people, who believe first, and who plainly state as such. In fact, the word baptize in the New Testament is interesting. It is a word which has simply been transferred from the Greek, and not translated as such, for the Greek word for baptise, is *baptizo*. It's root meanings are dip, immerse, submerge. It is the ceremonial version of the Greek word *bapto*, Do you remember when Jesus said that the person who would betray him would be the one who dipped his bread with him in the dish? The bread was dunked in, that was what they did. It is the same word. *Bapto*. It means to cover wholly with a fluid, make wet, to dip, it is also used to mean to stain, to dye, ie to change colour. The Old Testament equivalent is *tabal* which is mentioned 15 times in total. It again means to dip, and on one occasion the translators use the word plunge. As we have already said: Baptism is in itself a symbol. It is a physically an obvious act, that by its very nature can be witnessed by others. It involves a someone old enough to understand what they are doing. What actually happens? After you have taken the plunge so to speak, and finally made that great

decision, you need to make it clear that you want to start the new journey and start your life again, in Christ. You need to explain why you want to do this. This is why you will be asked what you believe before you are baptised. This is what the Apostle expected: Romans 10:9-10 *That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.* On that occasion you will be happy to explain the truth as you understand it in your own words, your faith in the gospel of the Kingdom of God, and the name of the Lord Jesus, your desire to be part of the family and fellowship of Christ. It means you will see the need to denounce your former bad behavior, and renounce a former selfish way of living just to yourself, it means as Peter and Paul said that you will see the need for repentance. Arrangements will be made to take you to water deep enough to submerge you. In Israel, many were baptised in the river Jordan. The Thames is rather fast flowing, cold dirty and dangerous. The Dartford lakes have a nasty algae, the point of baptism is not to be distracted, and be aware of what you are doing, which is why we ourselves prefer the comfort of a swimming pool or similar if available. Perhaps we might be self-conscious and be nervous of strangers all staring. You need to be aware that baptism typifies in part the crucifixion of Jesus, which we will see. Jesus was stripped off his clothes, and lifted up virtually naked, which he would not have relished, lifted up with hundreds maybe thousands of people staring at him, yes and laughing. So the slight discomfort and possible embarrassment is nothing compared to what he went through, and anyway, such silly thoughts will be banished from your mind, as the enormity of what you are doing comes to the forefront of your mind. You will be given a gown for your modesty. You will step down into the water, with an assistant

just like Philip helped the Ethiopian man, and John helped Jesus. You will place your trust in the assistant who will lay you down in the water, and allow you to go under right under the water. You will be lifted up after a second or two. So what does it all mean? This act as we have said, is the first act of obedience towards God, it is our response to our good conscience. It is a public confession and demonstration that we want to be like Jesus. We have repented, we have decided we want to be a new person. We want to get into the same mindset as Jesus, we want to kill that evil thinking, the sin within us, and we want that new righteous person within us to succeed. Baptism mirrors or re-enacts the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus. When we submit to the waters of baptism, we are like Jesus allowing, permitting that old man of sin, to be killed and buried. Against our natural judgement, we submit to another, and allow the old selfish person to be symbolically killed, why an assistant gently pushes us under the water. Under water we are dead to the world, just like Jesus was for three days and nights. Jesus could not get himself out of the tomb, he was dead. God had to raise him up. So we are too lifted up out of the waters of baptism, by our helper, to appreciate the new beginning, the new birth of a new man. We are spiritually raised up out of the water by another friend. God Himself. For there is much joy in heaven over one sinner that repents. God has given us a new pathway to walk, the narrow way which leads to life everlasting. It is a new life a new birth as it were. All your past sins forgiven and forgotten blotted out. It is why Jesus said to Nicodemus, someone who wanted to understand more, he said, *except a man be born again, he cannot enter the Kingdom of God*. The apostle Paul explains this in a beautiful way in Romans 6:3-6. *Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death?. Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by*

the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection: Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin. So as Jesus went into the grave, and was raised a new man, if we believe in the righteousness and truth and mercy of God, we too, will be symbolically putting in death the old man, and it will be a new man which will rise again. We say this symbolically because in fact, after baptism, the new life begins, when we will literally be putting to death the old man, those nasty thoughts and selfish actions, and the new man of hope, love, and kindness, in short the character of Jesus will be living within us. Again: *Colossians 2:12-13. Buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead. And you, being dead in your sins, hath he made alive together with him, having forgiven you all trespasses;* Secondly, baptism prefigures our own promised resurrection, when we die, we die in hope of the resurrection, that we will rise to be judged worthy of eternal life, with Christ and all the saints forever, if we have lived the life that we promise to live at the waters of baptism. Baptism is that new start, that new birth as we have said. Spiritually we will be considered a new man or a new woman in a new family. We have put off our old life, and in joining a new family have been adopted, we have taken on a new surname, even that of Christ, *Galatians 3:27: For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ:* and we will now abide by the new family rules, and the reputation of that great Name we bear. This is the great thing about baptism. It is what God has instituted through his Son, that those who believe in Jesus, can truly be His disciples. Infant Christening mentions none of this. It is merely a church-based superstition that the church people

themselves cannot even explain to their congregations. The whole weakness of the ceremony is exposed, for under church practice, when someone wants to show their commitment to Christ, They are what is known as confirmed. This is just a parody. They wouldn't have to be confirmed at all, if they were baptised properly in accordance with Christ's own command. As a result they are never baptised, but have been deceived. As a result, they have not obeyed Christ, but think that they have. They cannot be forgiven their sins. It is a terrible deception. Without baptism we cannot be washed from our past life. This is what Paul the Apostle again explains to us.

Hebrews 10:22 Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water. Baptism is a figure of being washed.

Coming out, cleansed from a former way of life. But it cannot end there. True believers do not just simply go back to their old way of life as if nothing has happened. Remember what the word baptizo means, coming from the root *bapto*, which means to dye, to stain.. Before baptism, we are grubby little individuals. Maybe a bit harsh for some, but I was. By submitting to the waters of baptism, we are submitting to an ongoing process of washing, of brain washing, allowing the water of the Word to change our mind, to stain us white again, to dye us a brilliant white, free from the scarlet splotches of sin. 1 Corinthians 6:11 *And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God. As far as God is concerned we are reconciled, made at one again with God, part of the Divine family.* All those years of indecision, of living with guilt, and a bad conscience, of being selfish and just thinking of yourself, all the time when we were living, and not knowing the point of life. Now all gone. The life of purpose, direction and hope has begun. The journey on that strait and narrow path is underway. To carry the

cross of Christ and live as he did, putting away those bad thoughts words and deeds, knowing that God is faithful to forgive us our sins. It means that once you are baptised, as a child of God, he will guide you, care, help, nurture and protect you, he wants you to win, to succeed, he has called you, and you will have answered him. He will never leave you or forsake you, and the life everlasting that helped you choose life will be yours if you keep to the way of life you have agreed. So what remains to be done? There is water available, what hinders us to be baptised? Listen to your conscience, listen to God, and obey him.