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## WHAT IS REPENTANCE? – Part 1

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*“I thought that after I was baptized, my life would change. It wasn’t long though until I was back into my old habits and lifestyle.”*

Have you ever heard this statement? Though not often vocalized it is a statement that too often becomes the reality of young Christians, especially those who were not brought up in a Christian home. Some seem to genuinely believe that simply being baptized will cause a transformation – that it will do more than bring one into contact with the saving blood of Christ, but that it will, by itself, change one’s will and therefore one’s direction in life. When baptism fails to do what some Christians believe it should, too often these Christians become discouraged and sometimes even fall away. They are not alone in this misguided belief – among the relative few in the religious world that teach baptism for any purpose beyond a rite of initiation there is a belief that the act of baptism either has an almost mystical transforming power or brings one into contact with such power.

Baptism was never designed with such an end in mind. While baptism is the line dividing those inside Christ and outside Christ (Galatians 3:27) – those saved and those lost (Mark 16:16, 1 Peter 3:21) – and while it brings one into contact with the death of Christ where His blood was shed (Romans 6:3, 4; John 19:33, 34), the act of baptism itself was never intended to be God’s means for changing the lives of Christians. Ideally, baptism is an act that is produced by a heart that has already used those means – the means of repentance.

### ***Researching God’s Command to Repent***

Repentance is possibly one of the most misunderstood commands in God’s plan of salvation. Unfortunately, some of the blame for this misunderstanding falls on the shoulders of every teacher or preacher who has ever explained repentance by saying, “It’s when you turn from evil and start doing good.” That repentance is not the act of turning is plainly taught in scripture: Peter commanded, “Repent therefore and be converted” (Acts 3:19 – “converted” in the NKJV translated literally would be “turn again,” as it appears in the ASV). Repentance, as understood in the Biblical sense, precedes turning and is in fact not a physical action at all.

The word repent comes from two Greek words: the first, a preposition variously translated but generally denoting some kind of change or transfer and the second, a verb meaning, “to think” (itself taken from the verb form of the word, “mind”). Literally translated, the word repent would instead appear as Strong renders it, “To think differently.” Thayer gives the sense of the word by defining it as, “To change one’s mind.” This translation fits perfectly with the usage of the word even in our English text. Consider Paul’s statement to the men of Athens: “Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent” (Acts 17:30). Ignorance is not an action but a state of mind, and repentance is given as the answer to it – basically, Paul was saying, “Stop being ignorant! Change your mind!”

Though repentance can be short lived (see, for instance, Simon the sorcerer – Acts 8), the purpose of God commanding all men everywhere to repent was to produce in each man a proper platform of belief. God knew that if a man truly changes his mind, his actions will also change. Though said of a wicked man speaking lies, Solomon’s statement applied generally is altogether true: “As he thinks in his heart, so is he” (Proverbs 23:7). Christ later said, “But those things which proceed out of the mouth come from the heart, and they defile a man. For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies” (Matthew 15:18-19). Sin originates in a heart that is defiled; repentance causes a person to change his heart. Transforming our lives is only possible when we renew our minds (Romans 12:1, 2).