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Coming To Baptism

by James McBride

When we reach the point of baptism each of us has faced a variety of life experiences. Some have a "record". Others have been "religious since mother's knee". Some were christened, or baptized as an adult. Some have never had any religious training or experience. Some have been associated with other churches And others have never darkened a church door. You then come to believe that change is needed. *What do you do?*

The Scriptures teach a twin action: "Repent, and be baptized" (Acts 2:38). The baptism bit is usually easy. But - do we understand what's meant by "repentance"?

A New Beginning

Note first that baptism is "the bottom of the ladder" of the Christian life. It is a new beginning. When you step out of the water and have the laying-on of hands (to receive God's Spirit) you are a new life - a spiritual embryo, if you like. God's Spirit has united with your spirit to form a new creature. You are a "babe in Christ". And you have much to learn! You need to "grow".

So, what God will seek from you as a mature Christian after years of experience is *not* what He expects from you at baptism! Thankfully, God doesn't reveal the specific trials ahead of a new Christian. But the way He wants us to live as Christians - the evidence that we are truly converted - is clearly explained in Scripture!

Repentance

We can't be saved by any personal works of righteousness. It is of grace, of God's mercy, out of His love for us. So why echo the question of Acts 2:37: *What must I do?* The key, as Peter answered, is repent! Christianity is a way of life, and we are expected to "live by every Word of God" (Matthew 4:4), and that will mean *a radical change* in our daily walk.

Let's look at some of these changes.

God has called you to offer you His salvation. In His goodness He leads you to repentance. He uses the circumstances of your life to induce a godly sorrow - a deep contrition for your sin and for your sinful nature. Such sorrow can be triggered by ill-health, by loss of someone close, by reverses, simply by a general after your

baptism! dissatisfaction with your life. But whatever it is, you begin to seek, and follow, God's way. *To seek and to follow* is repentance. Repentance is not a "feeling". It is *action!* It is a turning to God's "narrow way". It is willing obedience.

And you can't leave obedience till after your baptism!

When God begins to call you, it is His Spirit that is working with you. You are not alone, for the the Holy Spirit is with you, prompting you to obedience. It is for you to turn those prompts into action! You show your submission to God by a changed lifestyle, by starting to produce good fruit. *And you start before baptism.*

Check List

This article is not meant to be a substitute for counsel with a competent counselor of the Church. You ought to discuss baptism fully, and indeed baptism, for your sake, shouldn't be carried out unless you do! Here, however, is a "check list" to summarize key parts of what the counselor wants you to understand.

Not surprisingly, there are ten areas of your life to make a start on before baptism. Unless you are committed to them God won't give you His Spirit. They are signposts to the life in Christ. God expects you to take your first steps of obedience before giving you His Spirit. Like any parent, He does not look for maturity from a babe - but you have to take those first steps as evidence of commitment! Let's look at them briefly.

- Determine to put God, His Word and His work first in your life. ***Have you made this commitment?***
- Realize that true religion is of the spirit and not dependent on the physical - e.g. religious symbols, pictures, buildings. ***Are you looking to God for salvation and not to your deeds or religious trappings?***
- All our service to God ought to reflect His revealed Word. If it's contrary to Scripture, if it does not carry God's imprint - discard it. It is "vain worship", and *idolatrous*. This applies, for example, to many "Christian" traditions. It applies also to religious "holy days". Only those revealed in Scripture are acceptable

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to God - see Leviticus 23. ***Have you begun to observe God's Holy Days, and renounced traditional Christian holidays like Christmas, Easter, Saints' Days?***

- God requires positive worship from us each week on His (7th day) Sabbath - not Sunday -, coupled with Coming To Baptism cessation of our normal business activity. ***Do you now and observe God's weekly seventh-day Sabbath?***
- Our Christian life is marked by recognition of God's pattern of family life. Be on good terms with your family. ***Have you taken steps (e.g. forgiveness) to be reconciled to your parents and your children?***
- Be reconciled, also, to all those to whom you have any animosity. Failure to forgive means we inwardly harbor murderous thoughts. ***Have you searched your heart for hatred, begun to control anger and to love even your enemies?***
- Determine to discipline yourself to purity of thought: check that what you read, what you view. Do what is godly, and according to God's Word. Adultery, fornication, homosexuality, transvestitism, lesbianism etc. are sin. God requires His people to be chaste, and faithful within marriage. ***Have you abandoned all unlawful personal relationships?***
- Be industrious, respectful of the property of others, and generous in all your good deeds. ***Are you following only legal occupations, honest in your dealings - e.g. with your employer and the taxman - and God?***
- Honesty and compassion should become constant companions. ***Are you helpful and supportive to your neighbor, willing to overlook his faults and to serve him?***
- Be thankful for what you have, and don't desire what's not yours, nor what you can't afford (e.g. consumerism, gambling), nor what's harmful to your body (e.g. smoking, alcohol, drugs). All are forms of idolatry! If necessary get professional help to conquer such habits. If, however, you are actively trying to be rid of them, but have not yet succeeded, it need not stop you from being baptized. ***Are you actively trying to conquer harmful habits?***

I repeat - you must be committed to this outline. But God knows our weakness, and does not expect maturity or perfection of a babe!

A False Conversion?

The above is a brief summary of how we should begin to live *before* baptism. Repentance means we voluntarily submit to this way of life. Unless committed to these ten commandments we are not truly repentant. They are "seeds" that we plant before baptism. As we mature in Christ they bring forth an abundance of godly fruit.

If we are not so committed *our baptism is a sham*.

It will result in a "false conversion" in which we worship Jesus Christ *in vain* (see Matthew 7:15-28 - especially vv.21-23). Dangerously, we will be lulled into a false security, assuming we are "saved". Multiple millions follow this path of lawlessness, and led by false shepherds become blinded to the beautiful way of life revealed through God's Law. Such may indeed have sorrow for their sin. They see in Jesus Christ the forgiveness of that sin. But by false teachings they are then led to resist God's holy and perfect and righteous Law! That resistance is carnal, and spells death.

Obedience to God is *not* "salvation by works". It is an expression of our submission to His lordship and sovereignty. Joyful obedience to God's *torah* (i.e. instruction) - as expanded in all of Scripture - is one sign that we are truly being converted. No-one can expect to be converted, can expect God to give His Holy Spirit, can be sure of salvation unless they first "bring forth fruit meet for repentance"

Can you be in the Kingdom, some ask, without keeping the Sabbath? Or if you are an adulterer? Or worshipping falsely? The wrong questions! Rather we ought to ask, Will God graciously and freely give His Holy Spirit to someone who refuses to obey His revealed Word? Clearly - ***no!***

Remember: God will give His Holy Spirit - without which we are none of His, without which there is no salvation (Romans 8:9) - *only* to those who have become so truly sorry for their sin that they are changing their lifestyle according to the way of life revealed in His Word. Only then, and wholly by His grace and mercy, do we enter His Family as new-born babes in Christ.

Are you prepared to be baptized?

[If you would like to counsel about baptism we will be happy to arrange to discuss this vital step with you. Please call us at 1-800-611-8080]

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