

Take a moment to consider your answers and discuss them with a friend before moving on.

1. Is there anything like a sinner's prayer in the Bible?
2. Is the goal of evangelism to get someone to pray a prayer or to make disciples? (see Matt 28:19-20)
3. Following Acts 2, the day of Pentecost (normal Christianity began on that day). Is there any Christian in the New Testament who had not expressed faith, repentance, and been water and Holy Spirit baptized?
4. In the Biblical norm, how long did it take for someone to receive water and Holy Spirit Baptism?
5. How old does a person have to be before they can; believe, repent, be water and Holy Spirit Baptized?

These questions troubled me and what I saw in the Bible disturbed me even more. Here are my reflections.

1. **Is there anything like the sinners prayer in the bible?** You and I know that God responds graciously to humble sincere prayer and yet it is clear that no-one was ever led to Jesus using such a mechanism in the Bible, nowhere do people ask Jesus into their hearts or say a one sentence prayer where they generally ask forgiveness for all their sin. Wherever people responded with faith and repentance they were baptized, buried in a watery grave and received the Holy Spirit. No one doubted their salvation because they physically obeyed God, the Holy Spirit was active washing away un-confessed sin and filling them with Power. In Acts chapter 2, on the day the church began Peter stood up and boldly proclaimed who Jesus was and that He had died for their sins. The crowd BELIEVE and so they ask Peter

"Friends, what shall we do?" Peter said, "Turn back to God! Be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ, so that your sins will be forgiven. Then you will be given the Holy Spirit. This promise is for you and your children. It is for everyone our Lord God will choose, no matter where they live."

“Repentance Then and Now”

Friends, when I open the Word of God and exegete its contents at Whangarei or somewhere else, I sense a real responsibility to speak the truth, to let the Bible speak for itself rather than colour what is before me with politically correct, ear tickling rhetoric. Like all of you I am sure, I love God and I love people, and if you and I truly love the congregations we minister to, then we can't water down what is in here.

Hebrews 4:12

For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.

If you boldly preach what the bible says; not what is politically correct. The Holy Spirit will change lives! If you don't preach the whole bible, and you try to make what is in here a nice story where we just love everybody, then you will end up with a form of Christianity that has no power. The world doesn't need another club where we sing songs about God and just love each other. The world needs to see the supernatural reality of God. The primary way people begin to experience God's power is when they hear the Bible preached uncompromisingly.

Robert Hall once said “It is your duty, not to bring down the gospel into a conformity with them (being the congregation), but to change them into a conformity with the gospel.”

If there was one thing in our generation that I believe is woefully lacking in modern preaching it's a call to repentance. People who will tell seekers and believer alike that sin is sin, that God is Holy, that God is also a judge, that heaven and hell are realities. I was looking at Matthew 25 again the other day where we read of the parables about the return of Jesus. The parable of the talents, the sheep & the goats and the ten virgins. Friends they clearly teach that Jesus is returning soon, not as the babe of Bethlehem or a lamb to be slain but as the judge of the world and people will be cast out into outer darkness for eternity unless they repent of their ungodly behaviour and follow the Lord. Judgement is

coming unless they repent of the Luke-warm, people pleasing, vomit pending, culture of this age and do life God's way.

A.W Tozer once said "A whole generation of Christians have come up believing that it is possible to 'accept' Christ without forsaking the world."

There is a list of sins mentioned in 1 Corinthians 6: 9 & 10 that is essentially repeated in Galatians 6: 19-21 and then again in Revelation 21:8 Paul and John writing to the churches in Corinth, Galatia and Asia Minor says

1 Corinthians 6:9-10

⁹ Or do you not know that wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor men who have sex with men^[a] ¹⁰ nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.

I have been amazed when I have talked to people who have been 'in church' most of their lives and I say to them that if you are involved in sexual intercourse outside of marriage the bible calls that immorality or fornication and you will not inherit the Kingdom of God. These people often look at me like stunned mullets. Are you sure? I haven't heard that before.

Friends if you love people, then preach repentance.

Think for a moment about the topic of repentance then and now. How different was the preaching of Jesus and the apostles on this topic to what is often preached in the west on this topic today.

What was the first message Jesus delivered after he emerged from the temptation in the wilderness? **Matthew 4:17 records *From that time Jesus began to preach, and to say, Repent; for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.***

Jesus called people to repent even before He called them to believe

¹⁴ After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. ¹⁵ "The time has come," he said. "The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!"

The Lord said that He had not come to call the righteous, but sinner to repentance (Matt 9:13)

When Peter stood up to preach to the masses on the day of Pentecost the bible tells us that they were pricked in their hearts and said, what shall we do to get right with God and the first thing that Peter said to them was 'repent' (Acts 2:38). That is tell God specifically what it is that you are sorry for and are turning from.

Paul speaking to the Athenians on Mars Hill, a people group not unlike our generation said to them that the first thing that they needed to do, that God commands all men everywhere is to 'repent' (Acts 17:30).

When the apostle Paul is facing king Agrippa in Acts 26; even in front of this most powerful man who can take Pauls life at any point; Paul tells Agrippa that all people everywhere need to repent, turn to God and do works that give evidence to the genuineness of their repentance.

I always look forward to assembly each year. 2013 was no different. The venue and the hospitality and the fellowship were awesome. So many people commented in the Baptist that it was a good assembly with a good robust, Baptist like debate on whether Baptist ministers could officiate at a same sex marriage. Personally I couldn't disagree more. The bible is very clear on what it costs to be saved, that we must lay down, burry in a watery grave our old life and to live Gods way. As Baptists we all affirm that the bible is our highest authority on all matters practical and spiritual. To me it felt like our movement had made a huge shift to try to blend a little with our culture rather than to set up a new counter culture as the church is called to do. I felt that our fear of man began to usurp our fear of God. I felt the Holy Spirits grief and physically sick.

Following assembly I spoke to a man I love in his mid-80's who I have never pastured to before. I shared with him what had happened and my amazement that we have moved so far away from our Baptist roots as a bible believing movement. What he said to me also shocked me. He said maybe the only way to reach these people that God loved was to keep the truth from them for a time then when they are secure in fellowship

with us maybe they will get it. That is the exact opposite to what was preached by Jesus and the apostles. Jesus preached repent and believe. The apostles preached believe and repent and be baptized. How can a man who has been to church all his life not see how God works, what the scriptures teach?

It's a bit like inviting all the local kids to your street to get free food and games and activities. And even though you know that your street is a busy, thoroughfare for speeding trucks you never tell your kids to stay off the road. That's not love. That's the way of a people pleasing world. No power will follow people who take this approach to the bible.

Friends, preachers, people who have the opportunity to help people encounter a real and loving God. Please preach repentance to the unsaved and the saved alike. My experience has always been this, that when people truly repent, they dig a well in their hearts that the Holy Spirit can fill. If a person doesn't repent, if there isn't a heartfelt, specific turning from sin, they experience a powerless form of Christianity. It's a tiny well. Now I am sure that I am not allowed to dig holes in the chapel floor so let me illustrate things this way. A Christian life where there is no heart-felt turning from sin out of reverence for a Holy God creates a small space for the Holy Spirit to move (hold up small pot). However a Christian life where faith begins with genuine repentance and genuine repentance is practiced throughout creates a huge reciprocal for the Holy Spirit to fill and empower (hold up giant pot).

Two quick stories in closing: The first involving salvation and the second involving a Christian.

Every week I have 4-7 people serving at the church their community hours as directed by the corrections department. It's a win, win because we cannot afford cleaners and maintenance people and about ½ of our PD workers get to experience God personally. I had just spent 5 minutes with this young man and was walking across the stage over the baptismal pool to show him his list of jobs for the day. As we crossed the stage he said to me; I believe that I had to do PD work at this church because God wants you Russell to baptise me.

So I said to him; awesome but there are two pre-requisites to baptism, to becoming a normal Christian: Firstly faith in who Jesus is and what He has done for you and repentance. And so we began to talk and I discovered that he had been watching Christian programs on TV and people like Joyce Meyer had made a lot of sense. That he had been to a local Pentecostal church once and to church unlimited twice. On the second occasion that he had been to church unlimited he had responded to the alter call, prayed the 20 second magic prayer and been given material to take home. He was amazed that he had been so genuine but nothing had really changed.

And so I asked him. Do you live with a partner? Yes, he said he had a girlfriend that he had been living with for six years and they had a 5 year old son. I told him, those that practice immorality will have no part in the kingdom of heaven. If you want to be a Christian don't sleep with her again until you are married. Repent and stop sinning. I then asked him if he got drunk or stoned occasionally. Again he said yes. I said you need to stop that today and ask for God's forgiveness. This guy had been told that he was a Christian and yet had never been told what it would look like to die to self and follow Jesus. He had been offered this degree of repentance (hold us a tiny pot plant pot). His girlfriend thought he was mad, crazy, a part of a cult. But I baptized him in water and the Holy Spirit the next day on the basis of his faith and repentance. He instantly and radically experienced Gods power. He was instantly a new man. 4 months later the church gave him a free wedding, his relatives stood and said one after the other; wow, we see a great new man. His partner began coming to church. On his wedding day he and I prayed for a cousins healing and both she and her partner broke down as they felt the power of God. He has led one cousin to the Lord and is discipline him and has been bringing another one to my sons' men's group. He is a no compromise Christian who hears the voice of God and has faith like a rock. Why did that happen? Because someone loved him enough to tell him the truth and God did the rest.

About two months ago I had a young man come and see me regarding his pornography problem. It's an issue we all face in ministry. This guy

was new to RBC but had grown up in a good Brethren church. He was going onto porn sites multiple times per day. I sat down with him, warned him of the danger, taught him how to cut off or pluck out the temptation, talked about porn filters, accountability, how to take thoughts captive and replace them with things that are pure and holy and worthy of praise. God even told him as we prayed what was the cause of the problem. As I prayed a demon left him and his eyes looked notably different. But I was worried for him as there had been no genuine repentance. A month later I preached from Joshua 7 on Achan's sin. How sin, even though Jesus has become our Achan, sin still hurts those around you consequentially. He came forward at the end of the service to confess his sin to someone on the prayer team. For the next two days he felt the conviction of the Holy Spirit and continued to repent of his sin. I knew then that week that this guy was going to be OK. His faith and relationship with the Lord has come alive since that day.

Friends, you and I have the privilege and responsibility to expound this God breathed book sentence by sentence. If you love people and fear God, please tell them the whole truth. Don't preach so that people will pat you on the back and affirm you for your clever rhetoric. Preach the Word in season and out of season. Call sin sin, call God holy, call heaven, heaven and Hell, hell. Love them enough to tell it like it is.

Please don't preach the way of modern preachers saying maybe this sin is OK or that sin is a grey area. Love them enough to preach the way Jesus did. To preach the way the apostles did. Call seekers and Christians alike to repent and live holy lives so they too can have a real, life changing encounter with God.

2. Is the goal of evangelism to get someone to pray a prayer or to make disciples?

There are two great commissions in the Bible but Matthew 28 is best known. Consider these words carefully.

Matthew 28:19-20 Contemporary English Version (CEV)

Go to the people of all nations and make them my disciples. Baptize them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and teach them to do everything I have told you. I will be with you always, even until the end of the world.

Mark 16:16-20 Contemporary English Version (CEV)

Anyone who believes me and is baptized will be saved. But anyone who refuses to believe me will be condemned. Everyone who believes me will be able to do wonderful things. By using my name they will force out demons, and they will speak new languages. They will handle snakes and will drink poison and not be hurt. They will also heal sick people by placing their hands on them.

The goal is to make disciples, yes you share the gospel and baptise people, but the focus is always long-term when we are talking about evangelism.

3. **Following Acts 2, the day of Pentecost (normal Christianity began on that day). Is there any Christian in the New Testament who had not expressed faith, repentance, and been water and Holy Spirit baptized?**

Answer. No. In fact I am certain if the apostles of old visited our churches and found us calling folk 'Christians' and 'church members' who were living in sin (e.g. unmarried with partners, drunkards etc.), not water or Holy Spirit baptized they would be shocked and amazed.

4. **In the Biblical norm, how long did it take for someone to receive water and Holy Spirit Baptism?**

Answer. With the exception of Paul's water baptism which didn't take place for 3 days after his conversion experience, mainly because people were too scared to go and talk to him, people who believed and repented were baptized, that same moment, that very hour, in the middle of the night.

5. **How old does a person have to be before they can; believe, repent, be water and Holy Spirit Baptized?**

I wrestled with this for years. Psychologists used to say a person cannot make a lifelong commitment until they are 18. Now they tell us a person's brain is not properly formed and unwise until 25 years old. I don't think that we should take our guidance on spiritual matters from Psychologists! For years I took note of what I had heard Dr James

Dobson say, that if a child is raised in a Christian home they should be given the opportunity/ freedom to be baptized from 7 years forward. I have now baptized three 6 year olds. The one that rattled my theology and helped me the most was Joanne. Joanne, her brother and her educated parents were raised Buddhist in Thailand. Over months our Inclusion team leader Bev and I would visit the family, answer questions and enjoy their company. God gently led them all to Jesus, if they looked at other paths things turned to custard. The whole family began praying together 'before' making their commitment to Jesus. When Joanne's parents said that they together with her older brother Steve wanted to be baptized, they wanted to die to self and live for Jesus I was stoked. Then mum said that Joanne wants to get baptized too. Heck. I wasn't sure what to do and I am scared of quenching the work of the Holy Spirit in children and so I emailed the elders for advice. The next day Joanne's mum phoned me. She wanted to share with me what young Joanne had said to her that morning. "Mum, I had a dream. I saw each one of us with Jesus. He held us in His arms and said that He would always be with us."

After years of wrestling over this question I have come to a place where I cannot see how any person can separate water and Holy Spirit Baptism from conversion. They didn't in the bible. If someone asks me how old do I have to be baptized; I hear the question this way in reality "how old do I need to be a Christian and to join God's family?"

The answer to that has nothing to do with age and everything to do with faith in Jesus and repentance.

Sometimes it takes months and years of talking with folk to bring them to a place of belief in whom Jesus is and what He has done for them. Sometimes I have folk who take an equal amount of time to decide to repent i.e. to confess their sins to God and turn away from them, but if I baptise them in water and the Holy Spirit immediately after faith and repentance are realized I have found that over 90% continue on with God for life.

I had months to work these questions through. It was uncomfortable! And if you are thinking, this is different, this is weird, and could Russell possibly be a heretic? I encourage you to just hang in there. Give yourself time to research and mull things over.