**Counselling for baptism**

by Robert G Morton

Be very careful about who you baptize and when. It is best to be cautious and go very slow.

Make sure you’ve taken the time to get to know them, their background, religious experience, and how they came in contact with us.

Don’t counsel people for baptism in groups. Spend time with each one individually. Their very salvation in involved. Find out if they have ever approached one of God’s ministers before about baptism. Why weren’t they baptized then? Don’t proceed until you’re satisfied. Phone or write the minister involved if necessary.

**How much knowledge is required before baptism?**

Repentance is not based on knowledge. Satan has knowledge but he’s not ready for baptism.

[Matthew 28:19-20](https://biblia.com/bible/kjv1900/Matt%2028.19-20)

The doctrines and commandments and way of life are to be taught after baptism. However, they must know what sin is and they must understand the sacrifice of Christ.

[Hebrews 11:6](https://biblia.com/bible/kjv1900/Heb%2011.6)

Are they totally convinced God does exist, that the Bible is His inspired Word and that this is God’s Church? Have they really proven it for themselves? Spend time on this with second-generation Christians who grew up in the Church.

[Romans 14:1-6](https://biblia.com/bible/kjv1900/Rom%2014.1-6)

They don’t have to be perfect. The Sabbath is the test commandment though. There’s only one reason anyone would begin keeping the Sabbath—to obey God. Mr. HWA has baptized people who were smoking and eating unclean meats, but whom he knew from their attitudes, would yield to the truth when they came to understand
it.

There is no set routine for Baptism counseling, but the following guidelines should help:

**Find out why they want to be baptized**

People want baptism for various reasons—to be accepted by the Church, to salve a guilty conscience, “because God commands it”, “because it’s necessary for salvation”, “so I can receive God’s Spirit”. Make sure they understand the right reason for baptism and that they want it for the same reason the Bible says they should want it.

[Acts 2:37](https://biblia.com/bible/kjv1900/Acts%202.37)

These men realized they were under a penalty of death—that they had God’s blood on their hands. They needed salvation from death forever. Are they throwing themselves on God’s mercy? Is this the reason they want baptism?

[Acts 2:38](https://biblia.com/bible/kjv1900/Acts%202.38)Baptism is for the remission of sins. The purpose of baptism is not so we can get God’s Holy Spirit. It’s to wipe away our guilty past, remove the penalty of eternal death. The gift of God’s Spirit doesn’t even come at baptism. It comes with the laying on of hands following baptism.

Unless an individual understands the purpose of baptism, they probably aren’t ready yet. Invariably, they will express a desire for God’s Spirit which is a good desire. Explain to them that God can’t place His Spirit in an unrepentant mind.

**Help them understand the role of the minister**

Make them realize that the purpose of coming to the ministry is not to ‘get checked out’ for baptism. Help them to understand that only three people know what they’re thinking and whether or not they’ve repented—God, Jesus Christ and themselves. Show them why God and Christ won’t make the decisions for them—that the ultimate decision to be baptized is theirs!

They must decide because only they can correctly analyze their minds to see if they’re repentant. The purpose of the ministry is to help them correctly analyze their own mind. We can ask them questions, expound the Biblical passages dealing with baptism, use analogies so they can search their own minds—but the ultimate decision must be theirs.

If we see they’re not ready, we’ll do them the service of telling them, explaining why and what they’ve got to do about it. But we don’t decide for them.

Get them away from the idea that somehow they’ve got to convince us they’re ready. Explain that they are responsible for their own salvation—that we are there to help, serve and advise—that no minister is ever going to make the most important decision in their lives for them.

**Have them explain what repentance means to them personally**

Most people’s understanding of repentance is superficial. Unless the minister fully understands it and has deeply repented himself, he won’t be able to really help another individual see it and understand it.

[Matthew 12:34](https://biblia.com/bible/kjv1900/Matt%2012.34) “Out of the abundance of the heart…”

Get them talking, explaining, expressing themselves. Don’t look for pat answers — look for understanding. Repentance is not knowledge, it is an attitude of mind. People need to know they’ve sinned and had an attitude of hostility towards God’s Way. Has the rebellion against God and His Laws gone? Has he a completely submissive attitude? Does he abhor himself? Is he willing to change in accord with the instruction of the Bible?

The minister must be able to discern their attitude. Ask God for a discerning mind so you can serve them and help them understand.

**Why are they sorry?**

Are they broken up and sorry? Ask them “Why?” Keep asking “Why?” People are generally sorry because they’ve hurt themselves, hurt others, hurt God. Do they understand who got hurt the most? How have their sins hurt God?

Go through the example of David’s repentance with them. Most people seeking baptism make the mistake of comparing the depth of sorrow they feel with the depth of sorrow David obviously felt. People are different emotionally. Some physically, mentally and psychologically cannot experience the depth of emotion David did. They need to be broken up and sorry for the
same reason David was—not necessarily the same amount.

Help them understand why David was sorry. He realized an animal sacrifice wouldn’t wipe out his sins ([Psalm 51:16](https://biblia.com/bible/kjv1900/Ps%2051.16)). Who was going to have to pay the penalty? Who was going to get hurt the most? Who was David praying to? His God was the One who was going to have to suffer and bleed and die for what he’d done! David was the one who wrote Psalm 22. He knew what it
meant.

Are they sorry and broken up because their sins killed Jesus Christ? Get them to carefully analyze their own mind and compare it with the way the Bible says they should feel. Remind them the decision must be theirs. Ask them do they really feel deep down they have been sorry for the same reason David was.

If they say “No” or if they express doubt or if they didn’t quite see it that way before, ask them if they want more time to fast and pray about it. It’s not wrong to tell them they need more time, but if they do, try to get them to see it for themselves and make the decision to wait longer for themselves.

Never just tell someone he’s not ready and send him away. This is not more than an exercise in futility for them. If they’re not ready, help them to see it for themselves.

Help them to understand. Always explain what they must do.

**Do they abhor themselves?**

It’s difficult for people to repent of themselves and see the need to bury themselves totally. If they say they feel this way, ask them “Why?” Again, help them analyze their attitude and mind. Ask “Why did you sin?”. Do they really realize they sinned in the past because they wanted to? Let them talk.

Use the example of Job to illustrate what God says their attitude should be. Do they hate themselves because God says they’re evil and deceitful and desperately wicked? Or, can they see it for themselves? There’s a big gap between repenting of what we are because of what God says we are and repenting of what we are because we can see ourselves how rotten, deceitful, filled with vanity, selfishness, and greed we are.

Do they really see the need for God’s Spirit and for overcoming? Give them examples and illustrations to compare their minds with. Give them the greatest opportunity to see for themselves if they’re ready or not.

What about fruits?

[Matthew 3:8](https://biblia.com/bible/kjv1900/Matt%203.8)

With brand new people, where you doubt their repentance, you may want to give them time to bring forth the fruit of repentance. The Sabbath is the number one test commandment. You can also use any of the other commandments, they may not know if there is any doubt.

Never let them leave you without their full understanding of why you think they need more time. If there is any doubt in your mind or theirs as to whether or not they’re ready, have them wait. Baptism is an act of faith.

**Have they counted the cost?**

[Luke 14:25-30](https://biblia.com/bible/kjv1900/Luke%2014.25-30)

Take them through this. Make sure they have counted the cost. Do they realize they have been bought with a price and their life will not be their own?

Explain the meaning of [Romans 6:1-15](https://biblia.com/bible/kjv1900/Rom%206.1-15)—that baptism is a burial and so far as the Law is concerned, they die with Jesus Christ at baptism and the penalty of the Law is satisfied. After that Christ lives His life in them and they must follow whatever His Spirit and His Word direct.

**Help them to understand why they’re being called now**

Show them that this is a worldwide Work with the greatest commission ever given to a group of human beings. Teach them that God isn’t calling people now just to give them salvation.

If they don’t see and understand their responsibility to support this great Work mentally, spiritually, physically and emotionally—if they want baptism just so they can have personal salvation—if they don’t want to be a part of what God is doing— they’re not ready for baptism.

**Let them make the final decision**

Don’t take the decision out of their hands at the end by telling them they’re not ready. Ask them if they think they’re ready. If it’s obvious they are, say to them that you can’t see any reason why they shouldn’t be baptized. Ask them for their decision. This will help them to realize salvation is between them and God and that they can’t play games with Him—that no minister is going to make decisions of faith for them.

Explain the Laying on of Hands to them. Help them to see that the act of baptism also represents their total willingness to submit to God and His personal rule over their lives and that the Laying on of Hands represents the first extension of the government of God through human instruments into their lives—that if they are going to be a part of God’s government forever, they must be willing to live under the government now. Show them how the Laying on of Hands invests them personally with the responsibility of doing a job through that government—of being a part of this Work.

**The baptism formula**

The following is the baptism formula written out years ago by Mr. Herbert W. Armstrong for the ministers:

“Have you repented of all your sins?”

“Do you accept Jesus Christ as your personal Savior?”

“What is your full name?”

“Then (full name) as a result of your repentance, and because you do accept Jesus Christ as your personal Savior, your Lord and Master, your present High Priest in heaven and your soon-coming King, I now baptize you into the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and I do this in the name of (by the authority of) Jesus Christ for the remission of your sins. Amen”

This can be varied slightly or added to slightly when you are baptizing a number of people together and you don’t want to sound repetitious. However, all the points given should be mentioned each time you baptize anyone.

**Rebaptism for those previously baptized by God’s ministers**

Be super-cautious about whom you rebaptize and when. Some people become discouraged over their spiritual growth or human weaknesses and decide, on their own, that they do not have God’s Holy Spirit. They realize they aren’t able to live a perfect Christian life so they feel that their baptism was not valid. Sometimes they will come to this conclusion after a strong sermon that condemns them.

The first thing to determine when someone comes doubting their former baptism is: Are they just weak? Do they want an excuse for their sins, weaknesses, and shortcoming by saying, “I don’t have God’s Spirit.”?

Ask if they have been praying effectively and regularly. Are they studying the Bible every day? When was the last time they fasted? In many cases, people have become lax in prayer, study, and fasting and are not growing as they should. This has nothing to do with their original baptism. It’s a matter of their present spiritual condition.

If they’re not praying, studying, fasting regularly, don’t discuss the subject any further with them until they are and have been doing so for a number of weeks.

There are cases when people didn’t really repent and need to be rebaptized. If at all possible, send them back to the same minister who originally baptized them. Always counsel people for rebaptism with another experienced minister present if at all possible.
The key question is whether or not they really understood repentance and had repented before they were baptized. Were they counseled in a group or did the individual spend time by himself being counseled for baptism? Did the minister ask him about his faith in Jesus Christ as his personal Savior? Make them explain how they felt about repentance. Were there any dramatic changes in their lives prior to baptism when they were preparing for it?

After baptism, what difference did they notice in their relationship with God? Were they able to pray more effectively? Were they able to study more effectively? Did they notice a difference in their ability to overcome basic character weaknesses? Did they feel totally surrendered to God and His Word? Look for the fruits in their life.

If you determine the individual had not repented and needs to be rebaptized, start from scratch and go through the whole baptism procedure. Don’t assume that because they’ve come to the right conclusion about their former baptism, they are now ready to be baptized. Be super-cautious about rebaptizing anybody. Seek advice from a more experienced minister if you are unsure.