



The Sacrament of Repentance: A Divine Ordinance for Restoration

An Exposition from the
Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church

A Turning Back to God: The Meaning of Repentance

- ❖ The term Repentance is derived from the Ge'ez word 'nessihā' (ነሰሐ), meaning to regret, be sorry, and turn back.
- ❖ It is the sacrament performed to remit any sin committed after Baptism.
- ❖ Therefore, regular repentance is a necessity for every person to receive forgiveness directly from God and be renewed in His grace and blessing.

“It is known that even if a person's life on earth is but one day, they will sin and commit many transgressions during that time.”



The Divine Foundation: Established and Taught by Christ



Our Savior Jesus Christ is the one who founded, commanded, and taught the Sacrament of Repentance.

“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near.”

As God who became human, Christ is the only one with the inherent authority to forgive sin. He came to earth for this purpose and ‘forgave all.’



The Authority to Forgive: A Sacred Commission to the Apostles

After establishing His authority, Christ bestowed it upon His disciples, making them “possessors of the authority.” This was given in two key moments:



The Power to Bind and Loose

“Truly I tell you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.”

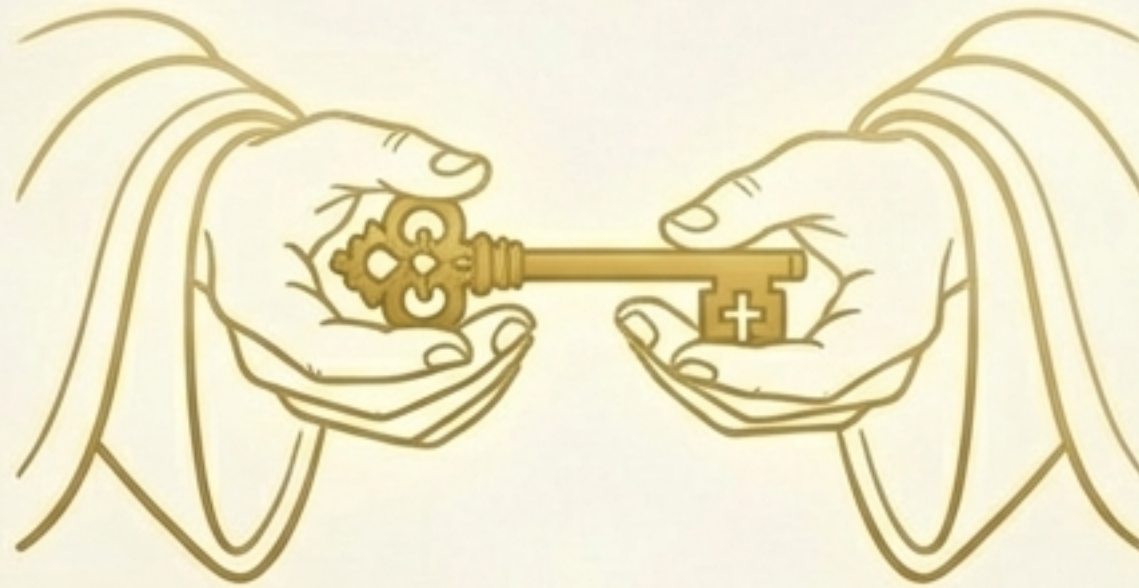
The Post-Resurrection Mandate

“Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.”



The Priest's Role: Christ's Earthly Agent in Absolution

The sacrament is performed by Bishops and Priests, who act as the “agents of Christ.”



This structure echoes the Old Covenant (*Orit*), where Levitical priests had authority to remit sins. Christ affirmed this when he healed a leper and commanded him: “Go, show yourself to the priest.”

The authority given to priests is so profound that “the heavenly King confirms what the earthly priest decides.” This authority was “not given to the angels.”

The Twofold Act: Inner Repentance & Outer Confession



Repentance (*The Inner Act*)

- Definition: To be sorry and grieve for all sins and mistakes.
- Core Sentiment: Crying out in sorrow, “how could I sin like this and displease my God?” and making a firm resolution to refrain from sin in the future.



Confession (*Nuzaaze*) (*The Outer Act*)

- Definition: To appear before the priest, accusing oneself and speaking the sin without shame.
- Requirement: The sin must be confessed fully, including its “initial cause and manner of execution.”

The Threefold Presence in the Place of Confession



The Penitent: The individual present to accuse and blame oneself, seeking mercy.



God: The invisible Third Party, who is present between them to hear, see, and grant forgiveness.



The Priest: The visible agent of Christ, present to hear the confession and administer the sacrament.

The penitent must confess with the firm belief that God is present and listening as they speak to the priest.

The Prerequisite for Forgiveness: A Contrite and Forgiving Heart

A person's transgression is remitted only under specific conditions:



True Regret: They must regret and grieve their sin.



Firm Resolve: They must believe and resolve that they will not commit such transgressions in the future.



Forgiveness of Others: They must “leave all their grievances against others, forgive those who wronged them, and come before the God who forgives.”

Because they have forgiven and come, God will also forgive them.

The Mystical Nature: Visible Ministry, Invisible Grace

How a person receives forgiveness is a mystery (sacrament); it is “neither seen nor examined.” We believe it is remitted by the word of God, the priest’s authority, and prayer.



The Visible Ministry

The penitent appears before the priest, weeping and confessing. The priest wears his vestments, listens, and prays for remission.

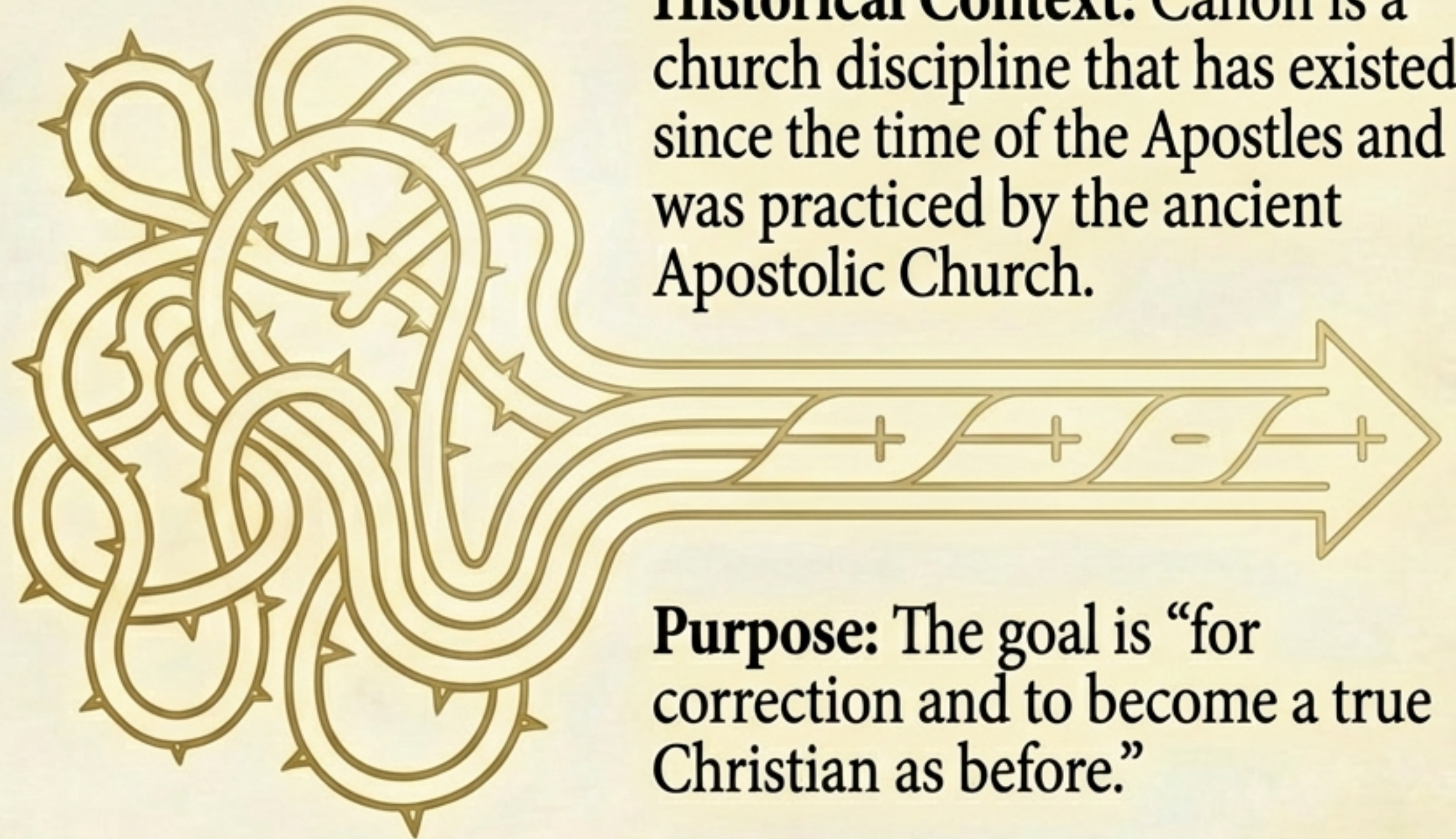
The Invisible Grace

The penitent is cleansed from sin.
Their lost grace is restored.
Their divine sonship is renewed.



Canon (*Qānoona*): The Lawful Path of Correction

Definition: *Qānoona* means “to put the penitent person on the lawful path.” It is the penalty or discipline given when a discipline given when a person returns to the Christian path through repentance.



Historical Context: Canon is a church discipline that has existed since the time of the Apostles and was practiced by the ancient Apostolic Church.

Purpose: The goal is “for correction and to become a true Christian as before.”

The Practice of Canon: Restorative Acts for the Soul

While anciently, serious sins could lead to separation from the community (as taught by St. Paul), modern canons are temporary and beneficial disciplines.



Reading the Holy Book for a specific number of days.



Making pilgrimages to holy sites (e.g., Axum, Gishen, Waldiba, Däbrä Libanos, Ziquala).



Giving alms from one's property.

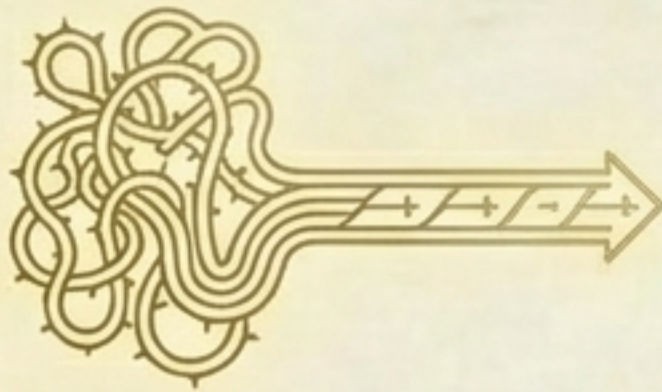


Fasting for a designated period.



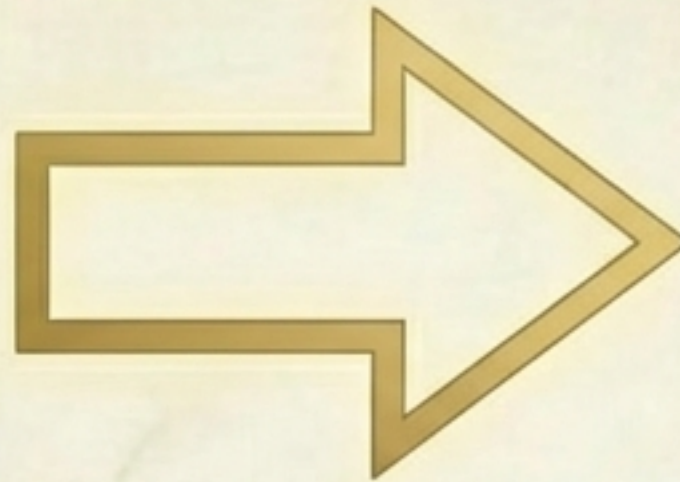
Temporarily refraining from holy things (e.g., communion).

The Goal of Canon: Full Restoration and Participation



The Process

The penitent fulfills the specific time and type of Canon prescribed by the priest.



The Result

The Final Status

After completion, the penitent becomes a participant in all the holy things from which they were restricted. They are restored as a “complete Christian” and, like everyone else in the Church, become a “partaker of all the Sacraments.”

The Transformative Power of a Penitent Heart

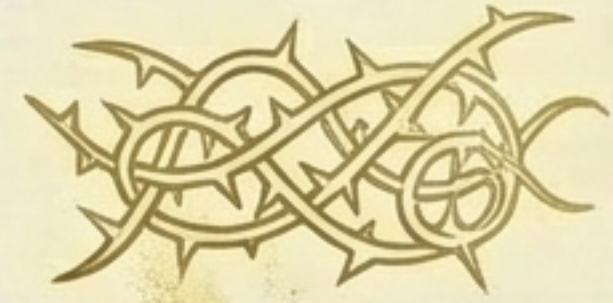
Repentance brings about a complete and profound spiritual rebirth.



Repentance makes a **harlot like a virgin.**



Repentance makes a **sinner like a righteous person.**



Repentance makes an **offender as if they had not offended.**

“Every time one sheds tears, it is like being washed with water and cleansed from defilement, and one receives the purity of the soul.”

The Benefits of Repentance: Cleansed, Renewed, Reconciled

It Cleanses.



- Washes away all sin committed after Baptism.”
- Cleanses the “stained inner self (soul).”

It Renews.



- Renews the “aged inner self (soul).”

It Reconciles.



- “Tears down the wall of sin that was between man and God.”
- Allows man and God to see each other, fulfilling Christ’s promise: “those with a pure heart shall see God.”

The Gateway to All Sacraments



Every person must strive to be renewed through the Sacrament of Repentance to receive grace.



To partake in all the Sacraments of the Church, one must first perform the Sacrament of Repentance. When a person repents and confesses their sin to the priest, they are prepared and able to proceed to any of the Church's other Sacraments according to their purpose. This is the necessary foundation for a full sacramental life.

