

# REPENTANCE FROM DEAD WORKS

## Introduction

This series is taken from this verse in Hebrews:

Therefore, leaving the discussion of the elementary *principles* of Christ, let us go on to perfection, not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, of the doctrine of baptisms, of laying on of hands, of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment. And this we will do if God permits. ([Hebrews 6:1-3 NKJV](#))

The writer names six elementary or foundational principles that are necessary for us to lay in our life before we can move on into maturity.

The first foundation stone is “Repentance From Dead Works”. To fully understand this we need to break it down into two pieces: repentance and dead works. Once we understand the pieces, we will understand what it means when we put them together.

## Repentance

First, let's define repentance. The Greek word used in the scriptures is “*metanoein*” and means “*to change one's mind*”. It is a decision; not an emotion. In military terms, repentance would be an “about face”.

John the baptist, as the forerunner of Jesus, came with a message of repentance and performing a baptism of repentance.

John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. ([Mark 1:4 NASB](#))

As John's ministry came to a close and Jesus began His ministry, the first message that Jesus preached was to repent and believe the gospel.

Now after John had been taken into custody, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of God, and saying, "**The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.**" ([Mark 1:14-15 NASB](#))

In the Scriptures, repentance always precedes true faith. Faith alone is an empty profession. Many profess faith but have never practiced true repentance. Today's Church message of “only believe” was not the message of Christ. His was “repent and believe”. Repentance comes first.

This pattern is followed throughout the New Testament: Luke 24:46-47--repentance and then remission of sins; Acts 2:38--repentance, then baptism and remission of sins; Acts 20:21--Paul preached repentance and then faith. If we want to achieve New Testament results with our conversions

then we need to follow this same pattern--repent and then believe.

## Command of God

The reason that God has commanded men to repent is because He has appointed a day of judgment when the world will be judged by His righteous standards.

"Therefore having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is now declaring to men that all people everywhere should repent, because He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead." (Acts 17:30-31 NASB)

Jesus gave us only one option when it comes to repentance:

And Jesus said to them, "Do you suppose that these Galileans were *greater sinners than all other Galileans because they suffered this fate?* "I tell you, no, but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish. "Or do you suppose that those eighteen on whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them were *worse culprits than all the men who live in Jerusalem?* "I tell you, no, but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish." (Luke 13:2-5 NASB)

Repentance is the first great dividing line or separation for people. According to Jesus if one doesn't repent, he will perish. It is as simple as that—no “ifs”, “ands”, or “buts” about it.

We tend to think of repentance as “sorrow” or “being sorry”; but, emotion is not repentance. The Scriptures make it plain that there are two types of sorrow: one that is godly and leads to repentance and another that is worldly sorrow and leads to death.

I now rejoice, not that you were made sorrowful, but that you were made sorrowful to *the point of repentance*; for you were made sorrowful according to the will of God, so that you might not suffer loss in anything through us. For the sorrow that is according to the will of God produces a repentance without regret, leading to salvation, but the sorrow of the world produces death. (2 Corinthians 7:9-10 NASB)

We have both an Old Testament and a New Testament example of sorrow that doesn't produce true repentance. The Old Testament example is Esau and the story is told in Genesis chapters 25 through 27. This is interpreted for us in the book of Hebrews.

that *there be* no immoral or godless person like Esau, who sold his own birthright for a *single* meal. For you know that even afterwards, when he desired to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no place for repentance, though he sought for it with tears. (Hebrews 12:16-17 NASB)

We need to remember that God doesn't promise us more than one opportunity, even though, out of His mercy He may do so. Esau sold his birthright and was unable to repent, that is, change his mind, even though he had great regret and remorse about his actions. God did not choose to grant him repentance. We should pay attention to this, especially in our day of “cheap grace” and the idea that we can repeatedly sin and God will continue to forgive.

The New Testament example is Judas, who betrayed Jesus.

Then when Judas, who had betrayed Him, saw that He had been condemned, he felt remorse and returned the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders, saying, "I have sinned by betraying innocent blood." But they said, "What is that to us? See *to that* yourself!" And he threw the pieces of silver into the temple sanctuary and departed; and he went away and hanged himself. (Matthew 27:3-5 NASB)

The King James version of the Bible says that Judas “repented himself” but, the Greek word is “*metamelein*” and means “remorse or anguish” just as the New American Standard Bible translates it. This was sorrow but not repentance.

[NOTE: for a deeper study of Judas see “[Present Truth: The Judas Factor](#)”]

Why could these two people not repent? We like to think that we can repent of anything at anytime. However, our hearts can be hardened to the point that God will not allow us to repent. Repentance begins in God as these Scriptures indicate:

When they heard this, they quieted down and glorified God, saying, "Well then, God has granted to the Gentiles also the repentance *that leads* to life." (Acts 11:18 NASB)

The Lord's bond-servant must not be quarrelsome, but be kind to all, able to teach, patient when wronged, with gentleness correcting those who are in opposition, if perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth, (2 Timothy 2:24-25 NASB)

God has to grant us repentance. That's why, as we saw earlier, that godly sorrow will lead to repentance. Esau and Judas both passed the point at which God was willing to grant repentance. That should be a warning for us.

## Requirements for Repentance

What are the requirements for repentance? Both John the Baptist and the Apostle Paul said that people should show appropriate fruit or work of repentance.

But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming for baptism, he said to them, "You brood of vipers, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? "Therefore bear fruit in keeping with repentance; (Matthew 3:7-8 NASB)

but *kept* declaring both to those of Damascus first, and *also* at Jerusalem and *then* throughout all the region of Judea, and *even* to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, performing deeds appropriate to repentance. (Acts 26:20 NASB)

The Scriptures give us a detailed picture of this process that results in performing appropriate deeds relating to repentance:

For behold what earnestness this very thing, this godly sorrow, has produced in you: what vindication of yourselves, what indignation, what fear, what longing, what zeal, what avenging of wrong! In everything you demonstrated yourselves to be innocent in the matter. (2

## Corinthians 7:11 NASB)

There are 7 things wrought in us by godly sorrow which leads us to repentance:

earnestness	literally “haste, diligence”
vindication	clean through forgiveness
indignation	over offenses allowed
fear	anticipating judgment or punishment
longing	for correction and restoration
zeal	for reformation or punishment
avenging of wrong	justice/moral judgment, vindication

## Dead Works

We all understand what work is—our job, what we do, etc. A “dead work” is work which doesn't have life in it. If work arises out of ourselves, that is, our flesh and not out of the Spirit of God, then it has no life in it and is, therefore, dead.

**"I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing. (John 15:5 NASB)**

God has already created work for us to do. He has crafted us as a worker to do the work that He ordained that we should do. If we substitute our work for His work, then the work that we do is dead work.

For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them. (Ephesians 2:10 NASB)

A dead work can have the appearance of a very good work. It is easy to see our need for repentance from sin but not so easy to see our need to repent of dead works when they appear to be good and beneficial. Many of our traditions fall into this category.

***thus invalidating the word of God by your tradition which you have handed down; and you do many things such as that. (Mark 7:13 NASB)***

Or we use humanitarian work to justify ourselves to God in an attempt to earn His favor. Works of the law, no matter how good and beneficial they might be to others, can never justify us to God. They are dead works from which we need to repent. God will not allow us to boast of our good works. They are of no use to Him.

You have been severed from Christ, you who are seeking to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace. (Galatians 5:4 NASB)

not as a result of works, so that no one may boast. (Ephesians 2:9 NASB)

We must have our conscience purged or cleansed from dead works in order to serve the living God.

how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God? ([Hebrews 9:14 NASB](#))

As our conscience is cleansed from dead works we are freed from our own works to do the works that the Lord has pre-ordained that we should do. We cannot serve Him by doing His work until we have stopped doing our works. We must change our mind; that is, repent from our own dead works in order to do the work required of us by the Lord.