

2. Repentance from Dead Works

a) Key Scriptures

Hebrews 6:1 (A.V.)

John 16:13-15

John 14:23-24

Ephesians 2:10

b) Introduction

The first call to the sinner is 'repent from sin'. The first call to the born again Christian is 'repent from dead works'.

(N.B. The New International Version of Hebrews 6:1 uses the phrase 'acts that lead to death'. This is better translated in the Authorised Version as 'dead works', therefore, in this teaching unit we will use the phrase 'dead works'.)

c) Repentance

Let us remind ourselves of what repentance is. Repentance may be defined as a change of mind and attitude leading to a change of action (2 Chronicles 7:14).

Charles Finney said, "Repentance implies an intellectual and hearty giving up of all controversy with God upon all and every point. It implies a conviction that God is wholly right, and the sinner is wholly wrong, and a thorough and hearty abandonment of all excuses and apologies for sin."

Repentance is seeing foundations in our lives that are unstable and giving them up for God's foundations. It is not a negative thing, but rather a true foundation in itself, necessary to receive the blessings of God and to press on to maturity in God. In fact, if the blessings of God are received into lives that do not have this foundation of repentance laid, it can result in a falling away from the truth that has been received.

d) What Is True Repentance?

Repentance is not just a mental acceptance of truth or just worldly sorrow but it is:

(i) Godly sorrow for sin

True repentance is a sorrow not just within oneself, or towards another person, but first and foremost it is true sorrow towards God. We need to see sin as God sees it (Psalm 38; 2 Corinthians 7:10)

(ii) Confession of sin (Psalm 32:5; 1 John 1:9)

(iii) A willingness to give up sin (Proverbs 28:13)

(iv) Having a hatred of sin (Ezekiel 20:43-44)

(v) Repentance includes restitution (Luke 19:8; Leviticus 6:1-7)

Repentance is not simply a 'once only' act, but an attitude of heart basic to our on-going relationship with God.

e) Dead Works

A dead work is anything we ever do which is not initiated by God. 'Dead' means 'void of life'. A dead work is anything which is devoid of the life of God. If it is not initiated by God, it will not be energised by God. It is anything done at the wrong time, or with the wrong motive (the only right motive is to do all to the glory of God). It is anything started on a good idea, or anything which is not working.

There are two categories of dead works:

(i) Everything that we did before we were converted

This includes the sins or works of the flesh (Galatians 5:19-21) and the works of the devil (1 John 3:8). It even includes church attendance and going through the traditional forms and ceremonies in order to merit the smile or favour of God. Our acceptance with God is only on the basis of the Saviour's finished work. His work alone justifies us (Ephesians 2:8-9; 2 Timothy 1:9; Titus 3:5). Once we have received the Saviour's finished work, our conscience is purged from dead works in order that we might serve the living God (Hebrews 9:14).

(ii) Everything that is void of the life of God in our service for God

Examples from Scripture include:

- The church at Sardis which had a reputation for being alive but actually was dead (Revelation 3:1-2).
- David numbering the fighting men of Israel and 70,000 died because he put his trust in the wrong thing (2 Samuel 24:10),
- Moses killing the Egyptian; which was false zeal (Exodus 2:11-12).

We must follow the example of Jesus who did no dead works. He did nothing of Himself but only what the Father showed Him to do (John 5:19, 30; John 7:16; John 8:28; John 14:10).

We have no excuse for doing dead works in our lives as disciples of Jesus. Jesus said, "I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Counsellor to be with you for ever - the Spirit of truth." (John 14:16). The Spirit of truth comes to live within us when we become disciples of Jesus, and Jesus promised, "When He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on His own; He will speak only what He hears, and He will tell you what is yet to come. He will bring glory to me by taking from what is mine and making it known to you." (John 16:13-14).

So many Christians stay as spiritual babies because they would rather take and not give. They are not willing to have the discipline of life to wait upon the Lord for Him to show them what to do through His Word and in prayer. Many may even hear God, but are unwilling to step out in faith in line with what they hear (Romans 10:17). God is looking for those who will grow in maturity in Him. He is looking for spiritual fathers, people that others can look to and imitate because of their faith, obedience and godliness (1 Corinthians 4:15-16). God will not expect us to run before we

can crawl. He knows and loves us and will take us on at a pace we can cope with. We need to fully yield our lives over to our loving heavenly Father and trust Him, looking to Him for direction and guidance and obeying Him when He asks us to do something for Him. Removing dead works prepares the way for good foundations so that we can go on building towards maturity. Then we will not stay as spiritual babies but will grow and learn how to know what God would do in any situation, and beyond this, we will actually do as He asks us. We do not do this alone, as we have the Holy Spirit to help us every step of the way. We need to build relationship with Him, the Counsellor, and learn to trust Him.

f) Questions and Discussion Points

1. Are there any dead works in your service for the Lord that you need to repent of?
2. Are there any areas in your life that you know are not what God wants and yet you're still hanging on to them?
3. Why could a lack of repentance in any area of our lives lead to a falling away from a truth God has revealed to us and that we have received?
4. Why do we need to have a hatred of sin? Discuss.
5. Why did Zacchaeus do what he did in Luke 19:8?
6. Why are so many Christians still like spiritual babies, always asking and taking but never giving? Discuss.
7. Are there any disciples of Jesus that you know that you could imitate? Why did you choose these people? (Hebrews 13:7; Hebrews 6:12).

g) Summary and Application

1. Repentance is an 'about turn' in our attitudes and actions.
2. We need to see things as God sees them.
3. Dead works are anything done which is not initiated by God and so is devoid of the life of God.
4. We need the foundation of repentance from dead works to be established in our lives in order to press on to maturity in God.
5. As disciples of Jesus we have no excuse for doing dead works because we have the gift of the Holy Spirit living within us.
6. We must follow the example of Jesus who did no dead works because He only did what His Father in heaven showed Him to do.
7. God wants us to be mature disciples of Jesus, not spiritual babies.