

Repentance from Dead Works

Hebrews 6:1-10

NOTE: Repentance from dead works is the second of the six principles of the doctrine of Christ (Hebrews 6:1-2). We study the others in additional lessons.

Since we are to be ready to give every person “a reason of the hope that is in [us]” (I Peter 3:15), we need to be able to answer “why” we believe in and teach repentance. We will present several verses of Scripture; I recommend that you familiarize yourself with each of them.

Repentance is actually the first step of action that we take toward salvation from sin. Mental belief or faith precedes repentance; it is an inward work that produces or causes us to repent. Repentance is an action-filled step known to God, to us, and to others—a private and often public step that brings about positive results in our lives. Because we have a sinful nature and have committed sinful acts, it is essential that we repent and turn to God.

DEFINITION OF REPENTANCE

Webster’s Dictionary states that repentance means “to feel sorry or self-reproachful for what one has or hasn’t done; to feel so contrite over one’s sins as to change, or decide to change one’s ways.”

The Bible uses two words for repentance—study them closely:

1. *Metamellomai*—is a Greek word meaning to regret, to care afterwards, to be sorry for.

2. *Metanaeo*—is a Greek word meaning to think differently, to change one’s mind, purpose, or opinion.

II Corinthians 7:8-10 uses both terms in the original Greek. There, Paul referred to a letter he had written to the Corinthians. He told them that he did not have a change of mind about the letter, although he regretted that he had to write it.

- “I do not repent” (verse 8) means he had not changed his mind (see definition 2).
- “Though I did repent” (verse 8) means he did feel regret or sorrow (see definition 1).
- “Repentance to salvation” (verse 10) means a change of mind (see definition 2).
- “Not to be repented of” (verse 10) means that we should never feel sorry that we have repented unto salvation (see definition 1).

“The sorrow of the world worketh death,” while “godly sorrow worketh repentance” (II Corinthians 7:10), i.e., it causes us to change our mind and direction. This type of sorrow or repentance is “not to be repented of,” i.e., we are not to regret or feel sorry about changing our ways.

Merely feeling sorry for or regretting something we have done wrong is not “repentance from dead works.” We must have more than a feeling of sorrow in order to be saved. It must be a godly sorrow so deeply felt that it produces a change of mind, attitude, and direction in us. Many feel sorrow and regret when they are caught or exposed. This is not repentance, because nothing changes. Repentance produces change.

Judas repented (Matthew 27:3), but his repentance was only regret, not a change of mind. God repented (Genesis 6:6), meaning, in this context, that He was grieved that He made humans, but there was no change of mind. Parents may punish their child

and feel sorry that they had to do so, but have no change of mind or opinion on the matter.

When we study every verse of Scripture about repentance in its context, or in relation to its background, then we will understand its meaning.

DEFINITION OF REPENTANCE

Repentance from dead works means turning from, repenting of, and changing our minds about the works or actions that produce spiritual death, or separation from God, in our lives.

- Sin entered the world by one man and death by sin—both physical and spiritual death (Romans 5:12-21).
- Sin when it is finished brings forth death (James 1:15).
- The wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23).
- We who were dead in trespasses and sins God has quickened, i.e., made alive (Ephesians 2:1).
- God has quickened us who were dead in sin (Colossians 2:13).
- The blood of Christ purges our consciences from dead works (Hebrews 9:14).
- Works of the flesh will produce spiritual death (Galatians 5:16-21).

Sin, as we can see, works not only physical death in our lives but spiritual death as well. Salvation brings life to the soul now and eternally if we continue in salvation. We must repent of these dead works, or death-producing works, if we are to find life. Let us study the following examples.

Jacob

In his return to Bethel (“House of God”), he commanded the members of his household to do three things (Genesis 35:1-3):

1. “Put away the strange gods from among you.” This is a type of removing anything from our lives that separates us from God. (See Judges 10:15-16.)
2. “Be clean.” This is a type of cleansing ourselves from the filthiness of the flesh and spirit. (See II Corinthians 7:1.) We can accomplish this by heeding the Word of God. (See Psalm 119:9; Isaiah 1:16; John 15:3.)
3. “Change your garments.” This is a type of laying aside the garments of sin and being clothed with salvation. (See Job 29:14; Isaiah 61:10; I Peter 5:5; Revelation 3:18.)

Nineveh

This vast city of Assyria repented at the preaching of Jonah the prophet. (See Jonah 3:5-10; Matthew 12:41.) Notice what the people did:

1. They fasted. Both humans and beasts did without food for three days, thereby expressing their genuine contrition.
2. They turned from their evil way. This is the essence of true repentance.
3. They turned from the violence that was in their hands. As a result, God saw their repentant spirit and spared them.

Nebuchadnezzar

Daniel explained true repentance to this king (Daniel 4:27):

- “Break off thy sins by righteousness.”
- “And [break off] thine iniquities by shewing mercy to the poor.”
- “If it may be a lengthening of thy tranquillity.”

Isaiah

One of Israel's greatest prophets gave insight into repentance (Isaiah 55:6-7):

- Seek the Lord and call on him.
- Let the wicked forsake his way.
- Let the unrighteous forsake his thoughts.
- Let him return to the Lord.
- The result of this type of repentance is that "God . . . will abundantly pardon."

WORKS WORTHY OF REPENTANCE

As the Scriptures reveal, there are some things a person will do that demonstrate true repentance. One manifest token of repentance is restitution. This could entail (but is not limited to) restoring stolen things to the proper owner, paying for damages caused to others, and mending damaged relationships through a confession of wrongdoing.

In the following verses *meet* means suitable, proper, fitting, appropriate, worthy, and becoming.

"Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance" (Matthew 3:8).

"Repent and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance" (Acts 26:20).

"Bring forth therefore fruits worthy of repentance" (Luke 3:8). The word *worthy* in this verse means the same as *meet* in Matthew 3:8.

Paul enumerated many wonderful things that will happen to a person who turns to God for salvation. (See Acts 26:18.)

SCRIPTURE REFERENCES ON REPENTANCE

Memorizing the following verses of Scripture will help you to witness to others about repentance.

Add other helpful verses to your notes.

"Repent ye, and believe the gospel" (Mark 1:15).

"The Lord is . . . not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (II Peter 3:9).

"The goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance" (Romans 2:4).

"But now [God] commandeth all men every where to repent" (Acts 17:30).

"God peradventure will give them repentance" (II Timothy 2:25).

"Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish" (Luke 13:3).

"Godly sorrow worketh repentance" (II Corinthians 7:10).

"Then Peter said unto them, Repent . . ." (Acts 2:38).

"I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance" (Mark 2:17).

"And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations" (Luke 24:47).

"Repent ye therefore, and be converted" (Acts 3:19).

"God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life" (Acts 11:18).

THE RESULTS OF REPENTANCE

God's Word is clear about repentance. When we truly repent, we get results: ***God forgives us!***

"God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you" (Ephesians 4:32).

“And you . . . hath he quickened . . . having forgiven you of all trespasses” (Colossians 2:13).

“Him hath God exalted . . . for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins” (Acts 5:31).

“In whom we have . . . the forgiveness of sins” (Colossians 1:14).

SEVEN WORKS OF REPENTANCE

Along with aspects of repentance, the following seven things happen when we truly repent (II Corinthians 7:9-11). We offer only brief comments here; study them further.

1. **Carefulness**—a watchfulness lest we sin.
2. **Clearing**—freeing ourselves of guilt.
3. **Indignation**—a hatred of sin.
4. **Fear**—of God and sin’s results.
5. **Vehement Desire**—to be righteous and to obey God’s Word.
6. **Zeal**—in working for God and His cause.
7. **Revenge**—in the sense of acknowledging justice and the punishment of sin.

PARABLES

Take time to read the four parables mentioned here. They teach great lessons on repentance from four different perspectives, showing that it involves a change of mind, heart, and direction.

1. **Parable of two sons**—(Matthew 21:28-32).
2. **Parable of the lost sheep**—(Luke 15:1-7).
3. **Parable of the lost coin**—(Luke 15:8-10).
4. **Parable of the prodigal son**—(Luke 15:11-32).

Repentance is the first positive step toward God on a sinner’s part. As good and necessary as repentance is, however, salvation is not complete at repentance. We must go on to be baptized in water in the name of Jesus Christ and to receive the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38).

REPENTANCE FOR THE SAVED

After we are born again there will be times of failure, mistakes, and sin. We must deal with sin and wrongdoing in our lives just as we did before salvation—by repentance. We are to be overcomers, to live free from sin, and to live above sin. In reality, we often come short of our goal. Nevertheless, we are not to continue in sin or commit sins over and over. The following passages of Scripture instruct us on how to handle the failures caused by the weakness of our flesh.

- When Job prayed for his friends, God accepted his prayer for them and turned the captivity of Job, i.e., He made him prosperous again (Job 42:1-10).
- There are ways to be reconciled to our brother (Matthew 5:23-34).
- We can learn how to handle trespasses against us (Matthew 18:15-17).
- When we confess our sins, God forgives and cleanses us (I John 1:7-9).
- Confessing and forsaking sin bring mercy (Proverbs 28:13).
- If we sin we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous One (I John 2:1-2).
- In prayer we are to ask for forgiveness (Matthew 6:5-15).

God still rules in the heavens and will forgive those who repent, whether they are saints or sinners.

Nothing can supersede or replace repentance in our lives. It is God’s command, our duty, and our privilege. Joy comes to the heart of the repentant sinner, to the life of observers, and to the angels of heaven (Luke 15:7).

Whatever may happen to us in life, we must always keep a repentant and forgiving spirit alive in our hearts.