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SPIRIT OF LIFE MINISTRIES INTERNATIONAL  
BIBLE SCHOOL SECOND EDITION  
SESSION 37: PRINCIPLES OF THE DOCTRINE OF CHRIST  
PART 2 –REPENTANCE FROM DEAD WORKS AND FAITH TOWARD GOD

Repentance from Dead Works **Heb. 6:1-3** – *“Therefore leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection; not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works, and of faith toward God, 2 Of the doctrine of baptisms, and of laying on of hands, and of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment. 3 And this will we do, if God permit.”*

### **Introduction**

The Bible teaches us that repentance is essential to salvation (**Act 3:19**). Unless a person repents of his sins and believes in the Lord Jesus Christ, he cannot be saved. However, this doctrine is not readily accepted by all Christians, and is coming under attack today. There are some Christian writers who have either questioned the need to repent or have redefined what repentance means.

1. There are still yet others who would question the need for born again Christians to repent of their sins when they trespass against God. They would argue that repentance merely describes the changing of the mind, and the warning to Christians to turn away from sin in repentance is to ask Christians to be sin-conscious which, they wrongly claim, is displeasing unto God.
2. A wrong understanding of the doctrine of repentance will have far reaching implications in the Christian’s life. It will affect the way he prays, how he views sin, how he deals with sin, his attitude and approach in worship. It will affect the whole Christian walk. Seeing that this is such an important doctrine, we must seek to understand what the Bible teaches us regarding this doctrine.

### **Background**

1. With a strong Jewish tone, the book of Hebrews was most likely written to Jewish Christians to encourage them to persevere in the faith. Some of these Christians could have endured persecution or great trials of their faith. Some could also have been tempted to return to Judaism. This epistle was then an encouragement and a warning to these Christians to not depart from their faith. The writer of Hebrews encouraged his readers by drawing their attention to the excellency and superiority of Christ above their Jewish ways.

2. Another unique feature of this epistle is the five warning passages which are applications of the truths of Christ's superiority. Context from **Hebrews 1:3 – Hebrews 5:10**, the writer of the book of Hebrews has been arguing for:

A. The superiority of the Lord Jesus Christ. He has shown that Christ is the supreme revelation of God (**Heb 1:1-4**).

B. Christ is also shown to be superior to the angels (**Heb 1:5-2:18**).

Some ministries (including Joseph Prince) argue against the need for self-examination during the partaking of the Lord's Supper. He would claim that repentance is merely the changing of mind to believe the good news of God's grace. He also preaches against godly sorrow.

C. Christ is superior to Moses (**Heb 3:1-4:16**).

From chapters 5 through 7, Christ is argued to be superior to Aaron. In the midst of this argument, the writer paused and issued the third warning in this epistle. As he argued for the superiority of Christ to Aaron, he compared the priesthood of Aaron and the priesthood of Christ. He showed that because Christ's priesthood is after the order of Melchizedek, Christ is superior. However, he had to stop in the middle of his line of argument because of the lack of understanding of the readers. He then rebuked the readers for their lack of spiritual maturity and encouraged them to go on from the foundational truths of the doctrine of Christ to a more complete understanding of the doctrines of Christ.

3. The problems of immaturity were identified:

A. The Christians were dull of hearing (**5:11**)

B. They were not growing (**5:12**)

C. They were unskillful in the word of righteousness (**5:13, 14**).

D. They still had to be taught the first principles of the oracles of God and were still using milk. (**5:13-14**)

4. The “first principles” (v.12) describe the elementary things of God’s truth. These principles are like the first letters of the alphabets that you will learn when you are learning a new language. This showed how basic their understanding of the things of Christ was. It is compared to the using of milk. They are still unable to partake of solid food. While the Bible is an open book, where its truth is free for all to partake, there are portions of the Bible which may be compared to “milk.”

A. The first principle doctrine is the doctrine of salvation. Without salvation all other doctrines that pertain to maturity would be a closed book. A person who is not saved is still dead in sin and he needs to be first firmly anchored in his salvation. This is what these first principle doctrines are referring to.

B. But there are also portions of the Bible which would require one to apply skill and diligence for the maturing of the believer’s life and witness for Christ. These are “meat” portions which have also been described by the Apostle Peter as **“things hard to be understood”** (2 Pet 3:16). Having rebuked them for their immaturity – i.e. where they were still unsure of their knowledge of the many aspects of their salvation – the writer then went on to encourage them to grow.

C. In **Hebrews 6:1**, he exhorted the Christians to “leave” the principles of the doctrine of Christ. The phrase “let us go on” explains what it means by the “leaving” described earlier.

1. It does not just mean to put aside or to discard, but it means to “carry on.”
2. It means to grow on from where he is. He can become spiritually stagnant where the only doctrines that he knows and understands are doctrines regarding his salvation.

D. The “principles” here is a different word from that found in **Hebrews 5:12**. Here the word describes “beginning” or “first.” These are the *first things* of the doctrine of Christ which a Christian would have learned and understood when he became a Christian. These are doctrines that make up the “foundation.”

The illustration is like that of the foundation of a building. The foundation of the building having been laid, then Christians must move on to build up the rest of the building.

5. What are these foundational truths Christians must have already grasped and understood?

They are:

- A. Repentance from dead works, and of faith towards God
- B. Doctrine of baptisms, and of laying on of hands
- C. The resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment

These doctrines are basic and foundational doctrines which Christians must understand.

## 6. The First Principle: Repentance from dead works

A. The meaning of the word “repentance:” The word “repentance” used here literally describes a “change of mind.” The question is what does this change of mind involve?

B. There is another word which the New Testament uses to describe “repentance.” It is however a different word in Greek. It literally describes a “change of care.” The emphasis is on the change of feelings and the regret which a person may experience. This is the word used to describe Judas’ repentance: **Matt. 27:3** – *“Then Judas, which had betrayed him, when he saw that he was condemned, repented himself, and brought again the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders.”*

In the Old Testament there are also at least two Hebrew words used to describe repentance. One is the word which is used to describe a changing of mind (**Ex. 13:17**); another is the word which is used to describe a turning away or a returning (**Isa 19:22; Ezek. 14:6**).

Words have no meaning outside of their context. We must therefore consider the use of these words in its proper context.

C. The nature of True Repentance:

As seen, the word “repentance” describes a “change of mind,” and a “turning away.” But what does one turn away from? **Hebrews 6:1** tells us that this repentance is from “dead works.” The phrase “dead works” occurs only twice in the Bible.

The other occurrence is found in **Heb 9:14** –“*How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?*”

1. The dead works here describes works that are useless to save a person. Unbelievers would produce works that are dead because they have no spiritual life in them.
2. In a way, these works are rooted in death because the people producing them are spiritually dead; the works are the fruits and the product of death; it is the “dead fruit” produced by one who is spiritually dead.
3. These “dead” works that the Jewish believers practiced were given by God in the OT. They would include “having to keep” the Passover, circumcision, the feasts of unleavened bread and of the booths, etc.
4. Some Jewish believers have mistakenly believed that by performing the external things of religion, they can become Christians.
5. Today, some have also fallen into the same error because they think that by doing “Christian” things they can become Christians. It is significant that these dead works are compared to “transgression” in **Hebrews 9:15**, and “sin” in **Hebrews 9:26**.
6. Because Christ has through His sacrifice purged the conscience of the believers from transgression (violation of God’s law) and sin (offences committed), He has purged their conscience from dead works.

We must remember that obeying the externals of the law is different from having the righteousness of the law written in the believer's heart.

D. Repentance from dead works, therefore, essentially involves the turning away from and the changing of one’s mind regarding sin.

1. What does it then mean to repent of one’s sin? We list 5 ingredients that must be found in repentance:

a. Hate the sight of sin

- b. Have Godly Sorrow for sin
- c. Confession of sin,
- d. Hatred for all sin
- f. Turning from sin

2. After a person has confessed his sins and has found forgiveness in Christ, there is also comfort that can be found in Christ (1 John 1:9). It is important to see that the basis of repentance is in the complete work of the Lord Jesus Christ. Christ has dealt with our sins on the cross. When we are born again, our eyes and minds are opened to the reality of sin.

a. With our conscience awakened, we have a deep hatred of our sins. That is where we cry out to Christ to save us from our sins. We must remember that our sins are dealt with in Christ; our sins were not simply ignored or glossed over. In repentance, there is a biblical view of sin; we see sin for what it is. But we also see Christ who has died for all our sins.

b. Seeing Christ taking away our sin, then there is also peace. This is also where the second part of the first pair of principle doctrine comes in – “faith towards God.”

5. A person who has repented will also bear fruits of repentance (Matt 3:8; Luke 3:8). A good example of one who has borne fruits of repentance is Zacchaeus (Luke 19). The restitution which Zacchaeus made was not that which saved him from his sins, but it is an expression of the inward working of grace he has received.

6. A person who has sinned must bear the fruit of repentance. One manifestation of the fruit of repentance is that he will not sin the same sin again. A repentant sinner must also be prepared to bear the consequences of his transgression. In the context of the church, a repentant sinner will submit to God but also follow any disciplinary measures meted out by local church leadership to help restore his fellowship with God and with God’s people.

7. Forgiveness must not be confused with the need to face the consequences of sin. As a believer, do we still have to repent of our sins? It is wrong to think that since we are forgiven of our sins, we can live as if we have no sin even when we do sin. Christ has forgiven us of our sins, but our attitude towards sin must reflect that forgiveness that we have experienced.

8. As believers, when we sin, we must still repent of our sins (1 John 1:8-9) and turn to Christ. Our sins have all been forgiven or forgotten, but we must never lose the hatred for sin.

When a professing believer sins and has no hatred of that sin committed; if he doesn't see the seriousness of sin; it is either he is a liar and is not a truly born-again believer (1 John 1:6) or he is a born-again believer but he is disobedient or sleeping. Even as a believer, sin unconfessed and unrepented of can rob him of his joy and peace with God (Psalm 51:12). Sin can hinder his fellowship and communion with God (Psalm 66:18). 3 Other passages that describe repentance as a repentance from sin include: Isa 44:22; Jer 36:3; Acts 2:38; Acts 3:19.

### E. False Repentance

The Bible warns us of a false kind of repentance. The clearest example of a false kind of repentance is seen in the repentance of Judas Iscariot. In Matt. 27:3 we see how the Bible says that Judas Iscariot ***“repented himself.”*** Judas' repentance has the appearance of genuine repentance. Matt 27:4, 5 tells us what Judas said to the chief priests and elders: ***“Saying, I have sinned in that I have betrayed the innocent blood. And they said, What is that to us? see thou to that. And he cast down the pieces of silver in the temple, and departed, and went and hanged himself.”***

1. Notice how Judas Iscariot threw back the silver he took, notice the sorrow he expressed, and the guilt he felt. Notice even how he acknowledged his crime.

2. His was not genuine repentance because it did not drive him to Christ whom he sinned against. He simply felt miserable! Which was not enough. It may have the appearance of true repentance, but one key ingredient was missing: ***he did not turn to Christ.***

3. We see from the same example that false repentance will lead to despair and death. 2 Cor. 7:10 – ***“For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of: but the sorrow of the world worketh death.”*** The repentance of

despair will not find hope because it does not look to Christ. False repentance is outward and temporary.

4. There is no evidence or reflection of the inward working of grace. Such a person will still die in his sin and end up in hell. **Jer. 2:20** - ***“For of old time I have broken thy yoke, and burst thy bands; and thou saidst, I will not transgress; when upon every high hill and under every green tree thou wanderest, playing the harlot.”***

5. There were some who were determined and made a verbal commitment to not sin but their actions reflect otherwise.

#### F. Comfort in Repentance

**Psalm 51** is a Psalm of repentance. It expresses the struggles David experienced when he was confronted with his sin. But it also showed the quiet confidence he had in knowing that God forgives sin.

1. He acknowledged his sins before God.
2. He had no excuses or justification for his sins (v.3, 4).
3. But having confessed his sins, he found his refuge in Christ.
4. He spoke of the certainty of restoration and forgiveness (v.7-12). Notice that David did not express doubt. Many have misunderstood what repentance involves. Some may find it burdensome.

Some may think that repentance expresses itself in a depressing and frightening way; others may think that repentance must involve many sleepless nights or the shedding of many tears.

To an unrepentant sinner, the call to repentance will be a stern and solemn call; it will be frightening to him because of the hardness of his heart.

But to the repentant sinner, though he may experience sorrow initially as he comes under the conviction of sin, yet in bringing his sins before Christ, he immediately finds comfort and rest. There will be the initial shedding of tears, but these tears will be wiped away when one experiences joy of “broken bones” restored.

David then concluded this Psalm by expressing his desire to testify for the Lord (v.13) and to praise and worship God (v.19). This was an expression of the forgiveness he experienced.

Repentance from dead works is a foundational doctrine of the Christian faith. We must remember, however, that it does not stand alone, it stands together with the doctrine of ***“faith toward God.”*** Repentance involves a turning towards God, and this is the comforting truth in repentance.