

Chapter 2

Repentance from Dead Works

Repentance is more than just simply turning away or ceasing to do something. It is a change of heart and attitude toward that something, not just fearing the consequences of wrong-doing. One must come to recognize that they are wrong, and their path is unproductive and dead before God. Religious profession, conduct, opinions, and cherished goals are all moving away from God. It is mandatory to turn around, completely turn around, before any contact can be made with God.

Repentance is fundamental to a relationship with God, both in our time and in past times as well. Repentance is a fundamental principle in the old and new testaments. It is the one thing **God** expects of anyone who intends to walk with Him. Before repentance can become a fact, the Gospel must first be preached and believed. One repents because they are ready to turn from sin and serve God. The Psalmist put it this way *am ready to halt, and my sorrow is continually before me. For I will declare mine iniquity; I will be sorry for my sin*". (Psa.38:17-18)

Dead Works are first and foremost 'SIN'. *"All have sinned and come short of the glory of God"*. (Rom. 4:23) Second, they are the works of the flesh, or conduct that separates man from God as a result of a corrupt and fallen nature. Third, they are religious ordinances that do not produce life (I.E. observing the Law or those meaningless rituals so deeply embedded in the practice of religion).

The ministry of John the Baptist begins with *"Repent, the Kingdom of God is at hand"* (Matt.3:2) and Jesus began His ministry with "Repent and believe the Gospel" (Mark 1:15) Jesus ends his ministry with *"Repentance and remission of sin should be preached in HIS NAME among all nations beginning at Jerusalem"* (Luke 24:47)

Repentance means to change one's mind and purpose; to turn around reversing one's direction. It carries the sense of regret and remorse for the lifestyle one has lived. Repentance is a change of heart and attitude toward the things practiced that are offensive to God. In other words the practice of what one comes to know as sin. True repentance reproduces fruit as an evidence of the change made. In practical terms, the things (lifestyle) one once loved is now hated and the practices of the past are forsaken. There is a recognition of the depraved sinful condition before God and one is willing to make a complete break with the past to serve Him. The attitude of the penitent sinner is: 'Lord, I am all wrong and you are all right. I am willing to forsake my way to walk in your path'.

Many coming from other Christian beliefs to accept the Apostolic Doctrine still carry with them residual opinions from their past religious experience and do not always forsake them totally. Until there is complete submission to God's way, these opinions will hinder growth, resulting in spiritual weakness and the loss of many benefits God promised. No one can prosper with a divided mind.

Isa. 55:7 lays the basis for repentance. *"Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord and He will have mercy upon him; and to our God for He will abundantly pardon"*. Forsaking is the key to repentance. To be sorry is one thing, but to forsake produces a change of heart and attitude. Isaiah speaks further that God's thoughts and ways are not like our thoughts and ways. His ways are far superior to ours. One must forsake the past because their values of good does not measure up to God's values. If repentance is to be a fact, then one must come into the knowledge of a better way before they will change.

Job, despite the good report from God (Job 1:1,8) had a flaw and when confronted with God and His knowledge had to admit, *"Behold, I am vile, what shall I answer thee? I will lay my hand on my mouth. Once I have spoken, but I will not answer: yea, twice, but I will proceed no further"*. (Job 40:4-5) He then concludes *"Wherefore I abhor myself and repent in dust and ashes"*. (Job 42:6)

Repentance is from 'Dead Works' Just what are dead works? Dead works are works without life and can produce no life (godliness, righteousness and holiness). It is impossible for things without life to bear fruit. Dead fruit trees remain dead summer and winter. In the garden Adam first sinned by choosing to disobey God's command not to eat of the fruit of the tree of the 'knowledge of good and evil'. Only one law to be obeyed, but Adam failed and as a result became an independent entity, separated from God. The sin of disobedience became deeply embedded in his nature, a nature he passed on to all his posterity. Only God can produce life and being separated from him generates death. Adam's sin passed the sentence of death on us all. Man is unprofitable to God in man's natural state. In the process of Adam's sin, two conflicting wills came into being. The will of God and the will of man. As long as these two wills are in conflict, opposing each other, there can be no peace between man and God. Since God's will is sovereign, then man **MUST SURRENDER** his will. The first step toward any reconciliation with God is repentance or a change of heart. Man must yield to God by turning from himself:

Both sin and the works of the flesh must be rejected if indeed repentance is to be a fact. But just to reject sin is not enough. One must turn to Him who can produce life in these dead members. (Eph.2:1-2) Life is not generated from man, but from God to man.

The word 'repent' or its derivative, first appears in Gen.6:6 where it is used by God to express His grief at the depraved, wicked and evil condition of Man. God changed I-Es mind toward man and purposed to destroy him. The life Savior of the human family was Noah who found grace in the sight of God. Noah was different from the rest of his generation. His faith and actions pleased God. If man is not 'grieved' over his wrongdoing, then any change will be meaningless and insincere.

Sin is the fulfillment of our will and no matter how good our works of righteousness may be, it is impossible to generate live things from dead resources. *"In me, (that is in my flesh) dwelleth no good thing"* (Rom.7:18) In fact Isaiah 62:6 declares our (man's) righteousness is as "filthy rags", repugnant and contemptible.

The Apostle Paul describes the works of the flesh as " — *the motions of sin, which were by the law, did work in our members to bring forth fruit unto death*". (Rom.7:5) The law revealed God's purpose for man and provided a knowledge of what sin was. (Rom3 :20). However the law made no provisions to deliver from the bondage of sin. The law revealed and condemned at the same time but offered no help. The law held captive those who were under its dominion, but with the advent of Christ and His shed blood, an atonement for our condition was provided at last. All mankind can turn to Jesus Christ for deliverance and escape the slavery caused by sin. (Rom.7:6) For this deliverance to become a reality, one must choose to leave sin and accept deliverance. Those under the law lived by a system of 'self-help — will power' which did not produce anything but dead works. There was no basic change in their nature having to repeat the Atonement Sacrifice year after year. Paul, the staunch religious man that he was, came to realize his religious background as a Pharisee was *counterproductive* to good works and was willing to "*count it all loss for Christ*" (Phil. 3:3-9) After his encounter with Jesus on the road to Damascus, Paul realized his need to change. It was evident to him that, contrary to his good intentions, he did not please God.

Sin, as we commonly think of sin, was not the issue. The issue was Paul's righteousness based on keeping the letter of the law as opposed to God's righteousness through Jesus Christ. It was his will against God's will. (It's hard to kick against the pricks.) It was his practice against God's practice and finally, the boasting of his life against the life of Christ. When Paul realized that his life under the law was insufficient, he readily repents and places his faith in the 'works and power of Jesus Christ'. He emphatically declares that "*We have no confidence in the flesh*" (that is his heritage), because putting trust in the flesh would only produce dead works. (Phil 3:3-9) This is true today for many who profess Christianity. They hide behind religious fidelity to a doctrine of their choice. They boast of values of morality, honesty, integrity and good works, not knowing that without Christ in their life (filled with the Holy Ghost), all their good works will not bring them life. Good works do not come from self,' but are the product of Christ in us (Eph.2:10)

Finally works of the flesh, the product of one's nature, are listed in Ga1.5:19-21. Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, emulation, wrath, strife, sedition's, heresies, envying, murder, drunkenness, reveling and such like are totally unproductive. They are without life, degenerating unto death and eternal damnation. See the following scriptures. Rom.1:18-2:3 / 1 Cor.6:9-10 / Rev.21:8 are a few of the dead works from which one must repent.

The summary of dead works can be listed as follows:

1. Sin -- the open rejection and disobedience to God's laws (word).
2. Religious practices that do not bring reconciliation with God and are the product of our self-will.
3. Works of the flesh -- those actions which are the product of a fallen, depraved and sinful nature.

Let us now examine some of the important factors of repentance.

It is fundamental that before one will *repent*, they must first be condemned and come to know they are wrong and out of step with God. They must hear something. What? The Gospel of Jesus Christ delivered by God's messengers, the ministry. *"For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher — Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God"* (Rom.10:13-17) To hear the message that condemns is not enough. The message **MUST BE BELIEVED IN THE HEART AND OBEYED**. See Rom. 16-18

Some things we will cover in the teaching of repentance are:

1. **Why does one need to repent?**
2. **Attitudes that prompt repentance.**
3. **Examples of repentance found in the Bible**
4. **What is man's condition that requires repentance?**
5. **The fruit of repentance.**
6. **Signs of repentance**
7. **What methods does God use to persuade men to repent.**

WHY DOES ONE NEED TO REPENT?

Man needs to repent in an effort to reverse the death sentence imposed on him from the garden transgression. God imposed the sentence of death and only God can reverse it. (Mark 2:5-11) By repentance man proves to God his sincerity and desire to please and serve Him. To forsake man's way and live God's way is an acknowledgment that man's way is wrong, and God's way is right.

Repentance is God's commandment. *"And at the time of this ignorance God winked at; BUT NOW COMMANDETH ALL MEN EVERYWHERE TO REPENT"*. (Acts 17:30) There is no way man can hide from God or escape the judgment of God until he repents (Job 34:21-23) Man needs to repent in order to live and not die. God threatens to judge man, but conditions this threat by opening a door of escape. By offering a reprieve, *"— I will judge you, O house of Israel, everyone according to your ways, saith the Lord God Repent, and TURN yourselves from all your transgressions; so iniquity shall not be your ruin, — why will you die O house of Israd For I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth, saith the Lord God; wherefore TURN yourselves and live"*. (Ezek. 18:23,30-32) / 2 Pet.3:9)

ATTITUDES THAT PROMPT REPENTANCE:

"The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and contrite heart, O Gory thou wilt not despise". (Psa. 51:17 / Psa.34:18 / Isa 66:2) Part of man's nature is to justify himself in an effort to minimize his wrongdoing. When a man is honest before God, he will acknowledge the guiltiness of himself and glorify God's righteous. The attitude is, 'Lord I deserve whatever comes to me, but let your mercy and grace help to lift ' me out of my condition'. Too many show sorrows over their transgression because they were caught, not because they are remorseful for doing wrong. The spirit must be broken, the self-justifying spirit, humbling oneself in the presence of God. David's attitude expressed in Psa. 51:3-4, is an example of the attitude every repenting sinner must show. *"For I acknowledge my transgressions: and my sin is ever before me. Against thee, thee only, have 'sinned, and done this evil in thy sight: that thou mightest be justified when thou speakest, and be clear when thou judgest."* The one important attitude

that will impress God is one's *"readiness to halt"* (Psa.38:17). Until one is ready to forsake their way, there is no response from God. Job put his hand on his mouth to show his contriteness and God blessed him. Finally, one of the best examples of a repentant attitude in the New Testament is found in Luke 18;9-14. Jesus gave a parable exposing those who were prone to 'justify themselves'. A Pharisee went to the temple to pray and 'informed' God how good he was by pointing out all his exemplary conduct. Next to him was a publican, a sinner in the eyes of this self- righteous Pharisee. *"And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift so much as his eye to heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful unto me a sinner. [Jesus responds] I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other: for everyone that exalteth himself shall be abased,- and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted":* (Vs 13-14) From this parable the great lesson of humility is driven home and anyone who really wants a relationship with Christ must come down from their 'mountain of self- justification and contritely kneel at the feet of Jesus.

EXAMPLES OF REPENTANCE FOUND IN THE BIBLE:

One of the examples of repentance found in the Old Testament is in the Book of Jonah. When the King of Nineveh, along with the people of the city, heard the short message preached by Jonah five things happened.

- 1. They HEARD the message, that is they gave earnest heed to it.**
- 2. They BELIEVED the message. To them it was a true message *and* published it abroad.**
- 3. They ACTED on the message by humbling themselves with fasting and sackcloth.**
- 4. They CRIED out to God for mercy and help.**
- 5. They TURNED from their evil way.**

When God saw their WORKS, that they truly repented, God changed His mind by giving the city a reprieve. (Jonah 3:4-10) One of the best New Testament examples is found in Luke 15:4-32, which relates the story of the Prodigal Son. *"When he came to himself"* was the

key that turned him about. It was not until the young man was stripped of all his resources and self-respect, that *he* saw the futility of his lifestyle and was ready to halt'. He does not return home proud and arrogant, but humbled and 'not worthy' to be called his father's son.

WHAT IS MAN'S CONDITION THAT REQUIRES HIM TO REPENT?

Before repentance can be preached, first it is needed to be known, man's condition? The universal condition of all men is depravity, deceitfulness and desperate wickedness. (Jer.17:9) "*The way of man is not in himself it is not in man to direct his own steps*". (Jer. 10:23) "*There is none righteous, no not one*" and "*All have sinned and come short of the glory of God*". (Rom.3 :10,23) These scriptures, and many others, describe in graphic detail man's condition and his need to repent. Since man does not have the ability to help himself, let alone his brother, he must turn to the only one who can deliver from his dilemma. Society has invented self-help methods which may work to change actions but does not change natures. Only Jesus Christ can change a person from evil to good. Titus 3:3-8 describes man's before and after condition. The past is one of dead works while the new life of the present is one of good works, pleasing to God. Before one seeks for life, they must first realize they are dead and need to be resurrected (spiritually). Death has for man three stages. The first stage is separation from God, spiritually dead. When Adam ate the fruit of the forbidden tree, he died by being separated from God. It did not affect his body activity, but his sin cut off his relationship with his creator. As a result of Adam's sin, man inherited the same condition and is born "*Dead in trespasses and sins*". (Eph.2:1-3) He will remain spiritually dead until quickened by the life that comes from Christ. The life one lives in *sin* is filled with 'dead works' (Heb.9:14) Turning to life requires one to turn from sin. The next stage of death is the grave, when this body sun'enders the spirit that made it active. The last and final stage is eternal judgment and the damnation of hell. The Book of Revelation terms this stage as the "Second Death". (Rev.20:14)

The "motions of sin" are sinful actions prompted by a sinful nature. (Rom.7:5-14) While living in sin one is free from righteousness. Our righteousness is as filthy rags and worthless before God. (Rom.6:12-22)

THE FRUIT OF REPENTANCE

John Baptist said in his ministry "***Bring forth fruit worthy of repentance***" Paul taught the works that prove repentance. What is the fruit to be produced? The new converts in Acts 19:18-19 destroyed all their sinful items. If one has truly turned away from sin, the tools of sin are no longer needed. To keep them around is to face temptation that one may not be able to master. Pour the alcohol down the drain; throw the cartons of tobacco into the fire; pick up your clothes and leave the 'sweetheart's house'; leave the dens of iniquity and straighten up your act. Job said, "I abhor myself" (Job 42:6); and "***I will not justify myself***". (Job 9:20) This is one fruit many find difficult to produce, for it is human nature to find a scapegoat and blame one's wrongdoing on someone else.

Lastly, God uses the ministry to preach the Gospel to all men, teaching, "***That repentance and remission of sin should be preached in His name*** —". (Luke 24:47) Paul's defense before King Agrippa was his commission from Jesus Christ to preach the Gospel to the Gentiles, "***That they should repent and turn to God*** [from idols] ***and do works meet for repentance***". (Acts 26:20 / I Thess. 1:9)

The final message that Jesus left the Apostles was that they were to teach "***Repentance and remission of sins was to be preached in His NAME***". (Luke 24:47). Repentance here is a "real change" of mind and attitude toward sin itself and its cause (not just its consequences) which will affect one's total life conduct and relationship before God. Repentance is not just regret or remorse. When one repents, they turn to God ***TO DO HIS COMMANDMENTS!***

One is not ready to be baptized until they have fully believed and repented of their sin and are ready to turn to serve God before whom they express faith.

Having taken the second step, Repentance from Dead Works, one is now ready *for* the next step on the staircase of the Principles of the Doctrine, **FAITH TOWARD GOD.**