

The Elementary Principles of Christ (2) – Repentance

Hebrews 6:1-3

Introduction

1. Understanding the elementary principles of Christ is vital to understanding the more complex themes in scripture. This implies a greater simplicity in these matters in comparison to what is more complex.
 2. Despite the fundamental nature of the list the Hebrew writer gives, there is much confusion about some, if not all, of these topics.
 3. The importance of the foundation of **“repentance from dead works”** is demonstrated in the fact that the gospel is meant to change us dramatically. This aspect of change is contradicted and denied by many who claim to believe in the gospel.
 4. Understanding the blessing and requirement of **“repentance from dead works”** opens the door for growth to maturity in all its aspects, including holiness and deeper fellowship with God.
- I. What is repentance?
- A. Defined
 - a. Metanoia – “a change of mind” (THAYER)
 - b. “The word group conveys the idea of thinking differently, and if the change of mind involves the recognition that the previous opinion was false or bad, we get the sense of feeling remorse or regret.” (NIDNTTE)
 - c. “strictly later knowledge, subsequent correction; (1) religiously and morally, as a change of mind leading to change of behavior” (ALGNT)
 - B. Demonstrated
 - a. God grants repentance:
 - i. Through the revealing of truth to change the mind – **Acts 5:31; 11:18**
 - ii. Through longsuffering – **Romans 2:4; 2 Peter 3:9** – to give time to change the mind.
 - b. A change of mind:
 - i. **Romans 12:2** – told to renew our mind.
 - ii. **1 Corinthians 2:13-16** – having the mind of Christ through the Spirit revealed mind of God.
 - iii. **Ephesians 4:17-18, 20-21, 23** – futile mind, understanding darkened, learned Christ, taught the truth, renewed mind.
 - c. Remorse or regret:
 - i. Truth revealed by God to a mind needing change will inevitably involve remorse or regret – **Acts 2:36-38** – their mistaken mind

enlightened with truth indicates wrongdoing directed by their mistaken mind (**cf. 1 Corinthians 2:8**).

1. However, note the sequence – cut to heart, Peter called them to repent.
 2. **Acts 7:54** – cut to the heart but didn't repent.
 3. **Repentance includes remorse and regret but is not equal to it.**
- ii. Godly sorrow produces repentance – **2 Corinthians 7:8-11** – truth communicated, sorrow, produced repentance, repentance observed – **"observe this very thing"**
- d. A change of behavior:
- i. John's work:
 1. Turning hearts – **Luke 1:16-17**
 2. Preaching repentance – **Luke 3:3-6** (**cf. Matthew 3:2**) – Isaiah description understood as metaphorical, spiritual changes in the heart.
 3. Fruits worthy of repentance – **Luke 3:8, 10-14** – **"bear fruits in keeping with repentance" (NASB)**
 - a. **"Prove by the way you live that you have repented of your sins" (NLT)**
 - ii. Paul's work – **Acts 26:20** – declared that they should repent and do works befitting repentance.

II. Repentance From and Repentance To

A. **"Repentance from dead works" (Hebrews 6:1)**

- a. **"dead works"** are disputed in the text but become obvious by the same phrase later in the epistle – **Hebrews 9:14, 15, 22, 26, 28** – dead works, transgressions, remission (**"forgiveness," NASB**), sin, sins.
- b. Mind changed about sin:
 - i. That something is sinful – **1 Corinthians 6:12-20**
 1. **(vv. 12-14)** – changing the mind on the lawfulness of sexual relationship outside of marriage.
 2. **(vv. 15-17)** – changing the mind about the betrayal of relationship in sexual immorality.
 3. **(vv. 18-20)** – changing the mind about the fundamental sin in sexual immorality.
 - ii. That something sinful is worthy of death – **Luke 13:1-5** – it is sin that is worthy of the punishment, not merely some types of sin.

1. **James 2:10-12** – judgment by the law will include all that is in the law.
 2. **1 John 3:4** – sin is lawlessness.
 3. **Romans 6:23** – the wages of all sin is death.
 - c. Remorse or regret about sin – **Joel 2:12-14; James 4:7-10** – such often immediately follows the relay of information, and at times requires careful meditation and reflection.
 - d. A change of behavior about sin – **1 Corinthians 6:11; Ephesians 4:17; Colossians 3:5, 8; 1 Peter 4:3-4**
- B. “Repentance toward God” (Acts 20:21)**
- a. The phrase is indicative of the fact that biblical repentance is more than simply a change of mind, sorrow, or even a change of action – it is an activity of one seeking to repair relationship.
 - i. All that is involved in repentance from dead works is activity directed toward God.
 - ii. This is why there are fruits in keeping with repentance – both negative and positive, not doing and doing.
 - b. **Romans 6:12-14** – the radical nature of repentance is demonstrated with language of death, but it is including resurrection – the text manifests the idea of **“repentance from dead works”** but also **“repentance toward God.”**
 - c. **Ephesians 4:20-24** – learning Christ effects repentance in the honest heart, but that repentance is not simply an independent virtue, but one in response to relationship with God, and in pursuit of that relationship – putting on the new man.
 - d. **Hebrews 6:4-8** – after including **“repentance from dead works,”** the writer discusses the danger of apostasy for one who does not move on to perfection.
 - i. **(v. 6)** – why is it impossible **“to renew them again to repentance”**?
 1. Not impossible for them to repent, but for our actions/words to move them to it.
 2. They crucify Christ again...
 - ii. **(vv. 4-5)** – coupled with verse 6, indicate that there is a change, not just in relation to the past self (old man of sin), but in relation to God – His good news attracts us to Him, and away from sin.
 1. **(v. 6)** – the impossibility is due to, not merely their reembrace of sin, but their rejection of the gospel.

2. Repentance is not simply flight from sin, but pursuit of God – one without the other is robbed of power and significance.

C. “Repentance to life” (Acts 11:18)

- a. **Acts 11:18** – the reaction of the Jews who disputed with Peter after hearing the divine evidence for the gospel being presented to the Gentiles.
- b. **“to life” = “repentance that leads to life.” (NASB)**
- c. **“unless you repent you will all likewise perish.” (Luke 13:5)** – the opposite must be true – if you repent, you will have life.
- d. This is important, because it brings the understanding that sin is more than simply law violation, and repentance more than simply mental change, or even physical cessation.
- e. Repentance is to life because it is a change from what brought death – **Romans 6:23; Ezekiel 18:20**
- f. Repentance is to life because it is a departure from what separates our fellowship with God allowing us to pursue and engage in fellowship with God:
 - i. **1 John 1:5-7** – not walking in darkness, but walking in the light.
 - ii. **Ephesians 4:17-19** – the ignorant and darkened mind alienates one from the life of God, not simply in the sense of being dead spiritually, but what such constitutes – inactivity in the light with God due to walking in the darkness without God.
 - iii. I.e. repentance is not just about evading death but being freed from what causes death to be active in life with God.

Conclusion

1. Repentance from dead works is a fundamental aspect of the doctrine of Christ. If we do not understand repentance, we will have a hard time making sense of so much that God has prepared for us as His children.
2. **“Repentance from dead works”** is meant to be a foundation we build upon, leading to greater separation from the past life of sin, and more intimate involvement with the God we have turned to.