

Foundations 4a Repentance from Dead Works

Hebrews 6:1-3 Therefore, leaving the discussion of the elementary principles of Christ, let us go on to perfection, not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, of the doctrine of baptisms, of laying on of hands, of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment. And this we will do if God permits.

The Gift of Righteousness is by Grace (freely given) through Faith in Jesus

The Book of Hebrews was written to Jews who were familiar with the Jewish system of laws and sacrifices. A common mindset among the Jewish people, at the time of the writing was that men were justified by keeping the law. Men had a tendency to rely on their own works for justification before God. The New Testament clearly reveals that no one can “earn” God’s forgiveness by his or her “works”. The gift of righteousness is freely given through faith in Jesus Christ. Attempts to justify ourselves by our works are called “dead works”.

The Lord Jesus paid the highest price (His own blood shed on the cross) to freely forgive and justify any and all who will repent and trust Him. We are to repent from trusting our own “dead works” and to rely completely upon the Lord Jesus for His free gift of righteousness.

Repentance -

To ‘repent’ is to “change your mind” and therefore change your direction. Repentance is “turning around and going the other way”. It is choosing to forsake what is untrue/wrong and embrace what is true/right.

The Good News of Jesus Christ begins with repentance

Mark 1:14b-15 Jesus came to Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, and saying, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. *Repent*, and believe in the gospel.”

We are justified by faith apart from works

Ephesian 2:4-9 But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.

Acts 13:39 By Him (Jesus Christ) everyone who believes is justified from all things from which you could not be justified by the law of Moses.

Romans 4:2-8 For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. For what does the Scripture say? “Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.”

Now to him who works, the wages are not counted as grace but as debt. But to him who does not work but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness, just as David also describes the blessedness of the man to whom God imputes righteousness apart from works:

“Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven, and whose sins are covered; Blessed is the man to whom the Lord shall not impute sin.”

Titus 3:4-7 But when the kindness and the love of God our Savior toward man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior, that having been justified by His grace we should become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.

Ephesians 1:7 In Him (Jesus) we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace.

Different Kinds of Dead Works

1) As mentioned above, “good” works done as an attempt to “earn forgiveness” or justify ourselves before God are “dead works”. We are to humbly and freely receive the gift of righteousness by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

2) Sinful works are dead works. This includes all the sins listed in the Bible. They are dead works because “the wages of sin is death” (Rom. 6:23).

A few lists of sins are found in the following passages:

1 Cor. 6:9-10 Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God.

Galatians 5:19-21 Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told you in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

Colossians 3:5-9 “Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness (materialism), which is idolatry. Because of these things the wrath of God is coming upon the sons of disobedience, in which you yourselves once walked when you lived in them. But now you yourselves are to put off all these: anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy language out of your mouth. Do not lie to one another, since you have put off the old man with his deeds”

3) Some “dead works” are works that may appear to be good outwardly but are done by mere human inspiration and/or human energy. They are not initiated or executed by the life and power of the Holy Spirit. These dead works occur when we are not “abiding” in the Lord as He commanded in John 15:4-5:

“Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me. I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing.”

Abiding in Christ involves spending time alone with the Lord, allowing His Word to remain in our hearts . As we stay in communion with Him and keep His commandments, His life and grace fills us.

1 John 3:24 Now he who keeps His commandments abides in Him, and He in him. And by this we know that He abides in us, by the Spirit whom He has given us.

When we are abiding in Christ, we are inspired, led and empowered by His indwelling Spirit. This causes our works to be “of Him, through Him and to Him” (Romans 11:36). Since our works are then done in union with Him they will remain with eternal fruit (Joh 15:16).

Neglecting to abide in Christ, our connection with Jesus, the Vine, is hindered. This results in un-anointed works. They are done in the soul and/or fleshly energy and have no eternal fruit. In fact, these kinds of dead works are worse than no works at all because they are counterproductive to the kingdom of God. We must repent, especially, of doing any ministry this way.

Repenting of these kinds of dead works involves regularly humbling ourselves before the Lord. We recognize that apart from Him we can do nothing. He is our life (Colossians 3:4). We hold Jesus as our “first love”, spending quality time in His Word and in prayer. By abiding in Him, His life in us brings forth fruit that glorifies God and remains eternally (Philippians 1:11).

John 15:5 *I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing.*

Let us be established in this truth of “repentance from dead works” that we may go on to full maturity in Christ. May we never try to “pay for” or “earn” the gift of righteousness. Let us stand firm in the righteousness that is freely given and freely received by faith in Jesus. May we repent from doing work “for” God in our own fleshly/soulsh energy and instead “abide in Christ” so that His indwelling Spirit brings forth the works that have eternal fruit.