

Repentance From Dead Works



Foundations (Day 64)
by Derek Prince

In Hebrews 6:1 repentance is defined as "repentance from dead works"; in Acts 20:21 it is defined as "repentance toward God." This means that, in the act of repentance, we turn away from our dead works and face toward God, ready to hear and obey His next command.

The phrase "dead works" includes all acts and activities that are not based upon repentance and faith. It includes even the acts and activities of religion – even of professing Christianity – if they are not built on this basis. It is in this sense that Isaiah cries out:

> "And all our righteousnesses are like filthy rags." (Is. 64:6)

There is no reference here to acts of open sin and wickedness. Even those acts which are done in the name of religion and morality, if they are not based on repentance and faith, are not acceptable to God. Charity, prayers, church attendance, every kind of religious rite and ordinance – if they are not based on repentance and faith – are merely "dead works" and "filthy rags"!

There is one other fact about scriptural repentance which must be emphasised. True repentance begins with God and not with man. It originates not in the will of man but in the free and sovereign grace of God. Apart from the working of God's grace and the moving of God's Spirit, man left to himself is incapable of repentance. For this reason the psalmist cries out for restoration.

> "Restore us, O God... and we shall be saved!" (Ps. 80:3,7)

The word translated "restore us" means literally "cause us to turn back." Jeremiah uses the same word in Lamentations 5:21.

> "Turn us back to You, O Lord, and we will be restored."

Unless God first moves man toward Himself, man cannot of his own unaided will turn to God and be saved. The first move

is always made by God.

In the New Testament Christ expressed the same truth.

> "No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him (John 6:44)."

The supreme crisis of every human life comes at the moment of the Spirit's drawing to repentance. Accepted, this drawing leads us to saving faith and eternal life; rejected, it leaves the sinner to continue on his way to the grave and the unending darkness of an eternity apart from God. The Scripture makes it plain that even in this life it is possible for a man to pass "the place of repentance" – to come to a point where the Spirit of God will never again draw him to repentance, and where all hope is lost even before he enters the portals of eternity.

It is fitting to close this study with the words of Christ in Luke 13:3 (repeated in verse 5).

> "Unless you repent you will all likewise perish."

Christ was speaking of men who died in the very act of performing a religious rite; that is, a company of Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their own sacrifices. While carrying out their sacrifices in the temple, these men had been executed by order of the Roman governor, and their blood had been mingled on the temple floor with that of their sacrifices. Yet Christ tells us that these men perished; they went to a lost eternity. Even their religious act of sacrifice in the temple could not save their souls, because it was not based on true repentance.

The same is true of the religious ceremonies of many professing Christians today. None of these religious activities is any substitute for true repentance. Without such repentance, Christ Himself said, "... you will all likewise perish" (Luke 13:3).

Devotional

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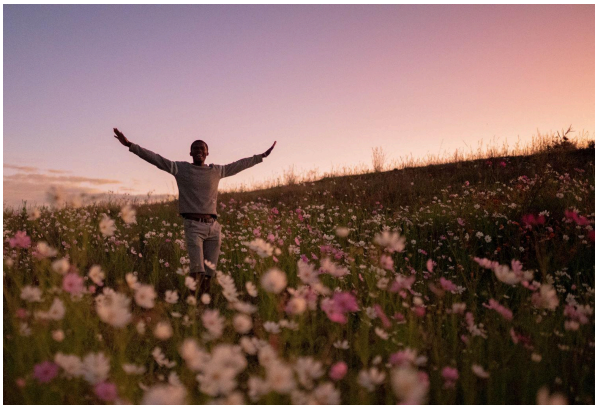

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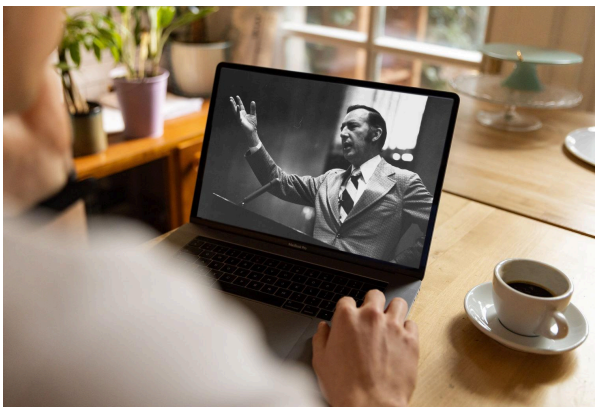

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