

Bible Study # 101
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Hebrews 6 Series—Doctrine # 1: Repentance from Dead Works

We're going to be getting into our new series this evening. I want to focus in on the doctrines in Hebrews chapter 6. The Apostle Paul makes the statement, as he is writing a letter to people who primarily were long-time church members—old-time Christians—people who had been around a long time. Many of these, to whom the book of Hebrews was addressed, had very likely been converted on the day of Pentecost recorded in Acts 2, or in the time right after that. So, by the time Paul was writing, many of the people who were recipients of this letter had been in the Church for thirty years or more, and the tendency of human beings is to grow weary of well doing. It can be very helpful to read the book of Hebrews from a standpoint that it is addressed to old-time members.

Notice what Paul says.

Hebrews 5:10-14, “[Christ] called by God as High Priest ‘according to the order of Melchizedek,’ of whom we have much to say, and hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing. For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God [the starting point of the Word of God]; and you have come to need milk and not solid food [KJV, “strong meat”]. For everyone who partakes only of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. But solid food [KJV, “strong meat”] belongs to those who are of full age, that is, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.” Now, we get to judgment. You see, discerning good and evil is judging. We use our senses to discern good and evil. The Bible is our criteria, and as we live and go through life, we have opportunity to gain experience using our mind to apply the principles of Scripture to different things with which we come in contact.

Paul is saying, ‘Look, you’ve been around a long time. You ought to be in a position to help and instruct others. You ought to be teachers, but actually, I’m faced with a situation where I have to come back, and you need to be taught over, again, the first principles—the starting point—of God’s Word.’ He’s correcting them because they had let it slip.

On the Sabbath, we noticed in Hebrews 2:1-3 about neglecting so great a salvation and letting slip the Word that God has given to us. Here, in Hebrews 5:10-14, was the result of that. They had been around long enough to where they should have been able to help others that were just coming in, yet they needed to go back over the basics. They needed to go back to what was like milk rather than strong meat.

A baby has to grow and their digestive system has to mature to be able to handle strong meat. You don’t say to a newborn babe, ‘Well, kid, here’s a steak. Dig in.’ Number one, he can’t chew it. Number two, even if he can chew it, his digestive system can’t handle it. This is used as a spiritual analogy to us. What can we spiritually digest? Paul is saying, ‘You ought to be able to handle strong meat and I find myself having to go back to the basics.’

Hebrews 6:1, “Therefore, leaving [going on from] the discussion of the elementary principles of Christ, let us go on to perfection, ...” That’s what he wished to be focusing on; that’s where the attention needed to be. Paul was saying, ‘What we really need to be talking about is how to go on to perfection.’

There are six foundational doctrines. The seventh doctrine is “go on to perfection.” That’s the one mentioned first. The other six are the foundation for going on to perfection—going on to develop to completion and maturity as a Christian. Paul is saying, ‘I have to go back to the basics with you. We need to be able to go on from the starting point.’

Verses 1-2, continuing, “...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.”

Let’s look at these doctrines one by one. **The first part of the foundation (first doctrine) that is mentioned is “repentance from dead works.”** What is “repentance from dead works”? It is the starting point of the foundation. It is important that we make sure our foundation is solid. Let’s notice. This expression is used one other place.

In Hebrews 9:11, it talks about Christ becoming a High Priest.

Hebrews 9:12-14, “Not with the blood of goats and calves, but with His own blood He entered the Most Holy Place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption. For if the blood of bulls and goats and the ashes of a heifer, sprinkling the unclean, sanctifies for the purifying of the flesh, 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?”

Dead works are something that have to be purged from our conscience in order for us to serve the living God. Dead works were purged by the sacrifice of Christ. Dead works are called “dead works” because they are works that end in death. They are works that produce death. That is an important concept to understand. There are things that lead to life and there are things that lead to death. *Repentance from dead works involves a turning away from the works that lead to death.*

What leads to death? Let’s go back to the book of Romans.

Romans 6:23, “For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.” The wages of sin is death. So, dead works are works that end in death. In other words, they are the works of sin. The wages of sin is death.

Romans 3:23 tells us, “for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God...”

What is sin?

I John 3:4, (KJV), “...sin is the transgression of the law.”

Dead works are works that end in death. Dead works are the works of sin. They are the transgression of God’s law. They end in death and they have to be turned from. We have to make a change of direction in our lives. A lot of professing Christianity places its emphasis on “you have to believe.” We’re told that the starting point spiritually is turning from dead works. We have to turn from the way that leads to death.

Let’s notice.

Galatians 5:16, “I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh.”

Verse 18, “But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.” We’re going to see what “if you are led by the Spirit you are not under the law” means in just a second. A lot of people want to read that verse and say, ‘See, you don’t have to keep that old law. You don’t have to keep that old Sabbath and those old holy days. You’re not under the law.’ That’s not what that means at all.

Notice, hold your place and let’s go back very quickly to Romans 3.

Romans 3:31, “Do we then make void the law through faith? Certainly not! On the contrary, we establish the law.” Trusting God, faith in God, doesn’t make void the law. That doesn’t do away

with the law. ‘Do we make void the law through faith? God forbid! We establish the law.’

Notice back in Galatians 5.

Galatians 5:18, “But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.” That means, as we’re going to see as we come down, that the law exacts a penalty. If you are not led of the Spirit, you’re following the way of the flesh, and you are under the law—you’re under the penalty of the law, and the penalty of the law is death. Christ came to redeem us from the curse of the law (Galatians 3:13). What’s the curse of the law? The curse of the law isn’t keeping the law. That’s crazy! God didn’t give His law as a curse.

Romans 7:12, Paul says, “...the law is holy, and the commandment holy and just and good.” The curse of the law is the death penalty. The wages of sin is death. That’s a pretty good curse. Christ came to redeem us from the curse of the law. He was made a curse for us (Galatians 3:13). He died in our stead. He redeemed us from the penalty that the law exacts.

Galatians 5:18-21, it says, “But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law. Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, licentiousness, 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.”

The Kingdom of God is something that must be inherited, and those who are practicing the works of the flesh cannot inherit it. If we’re led by the Spirit, we’re not following the works of the flesh.

The starting point of the foundation as a Christian is to turn from dead works.

Let’s notice in Galatians 6.

Galatians 6:8, “For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life.” It has to do with a direction of life.

We are told to turn from dead works—works that are the result of following the pulls of the flesh, works that we produce in our lives by just doing what comes naturally, by responding and reacting just the way we naturally, normally feel, just following the pulls and the physical desires that occur to us. That’s the way of the flesh. If we follow the way of the flesh, we’re following the way that leads to death. Following the way of the Spirit is contrary to the pulls of the flesh.

Following the Spirit is based on the pulls and influences of God's Spirit and is in accord with the Word of God as revealed in the Scriptures.

Let's notice a little more.

II Corinthians 7:1, "Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God."

As a response to the promises of God, we must do something. What we must do is clean up. We must clean up on the inside and the outside the filthiness of the flesh and of the spirit. Filthiness of the flesh is what you're *doing* and filthiness of the spirit is what you *are* on the inside. We must 'perfect holiness.' We must go on to completion of the holiness of God—the holy, righteous character that God is developing in us.

The starting point is repentance from dead works—a turning away from the ways of the flesh, the ways that lead to death—the works that are the works of sin.

Ephesians 2:1, "And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins..."

We were as good as dead. Why? —Because of what we had done. That's why they're called dead works. We had done something. The works are what you do, and we were as good as dead because of what we had done. What we had done was sin. Sin is the transgression of the law. We've all sinned and come short of the glory of God, and the wages of sin is death. We were in a heap of trouble. We were continuing to follow and practice the ways that led us into death. But now, "you He made alive."

The Holy Spirit is the guarantee of our inheritance (Ephesians 1:13-14). It is the evidence that God is going to come back and finish what He started.

Ephesians 2:1-2, "And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins, in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience..."

In times past, we were just like everybody else. We were following the direction of life just like everybody else. We walked according to the course of this world.

Paul had our conduct in times past.

Verse 3, "among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others."

We were part of the world. We talked like the world; we acted like the world; and we fit in with

the world. This is our world; this is our society. We'd still be a part of it if God hadn't taken the initiative in our lives to open our minds to understand His truth. When God takes the initiative to open your mind to understand the truth, you have to do something, and what you have to do is to respond to God's initiative.

The starting place of that response is to turn from your ways and go God's way. You have to turn around and go the other way. "Repent" means "to turn." It's sort of like going down the street and, all of a sudden, you realize you're heading in the wrong direction and you make a u-turn. You realize you've been going west and you need to go east. So, you quickly make a u-turn and you're heading back the other way. That's what we have to do in our lives. We turn from wicked works. We repent from dead works. We saw in Romans 6:23 that the wages of sin is death. We saw in I John 3:4 that sin is the transgression of the law.

Let's go to Acts 2:38, which is the starting point of what Peter preached. The people were pricked in their hearts and asked him what they should do (v. 37).

Acts 2:38, "Then Peter said to them, 'Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.'" Peter told them to repent—to turn from sin, to turn around.

Repentance from dead works is the starting point in the foundation. Until we turn from our wicked works, until we turn from dead works, we haven't even started on the right path. The foundation begins with repentance from dead works.

Let's go back to the book of Colossians.

Colossians 1:12, "giving thanks to the Father who has qualified us [made us fit, suitable] to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in the light." God is the One who has made it possible for us to partake of the inheritance.

Verse 13, "He has delivered us from the power of darkness..." We were under the power of darkness, the ruler of the darkness of this world, Satan the devil. Our minds were deceived. There was a veil over our understanding. We were entrapped, ensnared and entangled in our sins and in the deception of Satan. We could not free ourselves.

Verse 13, "He has delivered us from the power of darkness and translated [transferred] us into the kingdom of the Son of His love..."

Our citizenship, loyalty and allegiance has been transferred. Now, our citizenship is in heaven;

we're not *in* heaven. The kingdom is going to be brought down from heaven to earth. But we're ambassadors to Christ (2 Corinthians 5:20). He is in heaven right now. Our citizenship is there. Our city is the New Jerusalem.

In ancient times, citizenship was based on the city of the origin of your ancestors, of your family. The concept of citizenship was something that grew up in the Greek world. Even after someone had been removed and lived elsewhere, they considered themselves a citizen of Athens or a citizen of wherever.

God has transferred our citizenship to where now our citizenship, allegiance and loyalty is to the Kingdom of God.

Remember back in Hebrews 11.

Hebrews 11:15, "And truly if they had called to mind that country from which they had come out, they would have opportunity to return."

Verse 10, 'they waited for a city that has foundations whose maker and builder is God—the New Jerusalem.' That's where our citizenship resides. We're not going to heaven. The New Jerusalem is going to come down from God out of Heaven to the earth (Revelation 21:2). That's why we don't take part in the political/military affairs of this society. Our citizenship is no longer here. Our citizenship has been transferred.

Colossians 1:13-23, "He has delivered us from the power of darkness and translated [transferred] us into the kingdom of the Son of His love, in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins. He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by Him [by Christ] all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist. And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence. For it pleased the Father that in Him all the fullness should dwell, and by Him to reconcile all things to Himself, by Him, whether things on earth or things in heaven, having made peace through the blood of His cross. And you, who once were alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now He has reconciled in the body of His flesh through death, to present you holy, and blameless, and irreproachable in His sight—if indeed you continue in the faith, grounded and steadfast, and are not moved away from the hope of the gospel which you heard, which was

preached to every creature under heaven, of which I, Paul, became a minister."

We were enemies. We were alienated—cut off from God. We were "enemies in our mind by wicked works"—the works of death, dead works—which separated us from God. We were alienated from God. It started in our minds. It didn't start with what you did with your hands or said with your mouth. The problem—wicked works—started in the mind.

Christ died to pay the penalty. We have to respond to that by turning from dead works.

Notice in Acts 20.

Acts 20:21, "testifying to Jews, and also to Greeks, repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ." Repentance is toward God. Sin is ultimately against God. When we repent of wicked works, when we repent of dead works, our repentance is toward God. We repent; we turn toward God. The repentance is a turning. We turn around toward God. It has to do with a direction in life that is traveled. A starting point of our spiritual foundation has to do with a reversal of the course of your mind—a change in life with a change of direction.

Let's go back to Ezekiel 14.

Ezekiel 14:5-6, "that I may seize the house of Israel by their heart, because they are all estranged from Me by their idols." "Therefore say to the house of Israel, 'Thus says the Lord God: 'Repent, turn away from your idols, and turn your faces away from all your abominations.''" We see that repentance has to do with turning ourselves away from that which separates us from God. Sin separates us from God and interferes with our relationship with God. Idolatry is singled out here because idolatry involves having another god before the true God. It involves having an image that interferes with the knowledge of who and what God is.

In the New Testament, covetousness is equated with idolatry (Colossians 3:5) because that is certainly one of the prime forms of idolatry. Idolatry has to do with worshiping the creation more than the Creator. Idolatry has to do with worshiping—giving devotion, loyalty and allegiance to (that's what worship is)—the works of man's hand rather than the Creator of all that is. Idolatry is devotion, allegiance and loyalty to something that man has produced. It can be a work of art—anything from a picture or image—or everything in a more general sense. It's a devotion to man's creation rather than man's Creator. We have to turn from that. The source of so many wicked works is ultimately a devotion to what man has created rather than a

devotion to the One who created all. Repentance from dead works involves a turn toward God and away from idols.

Ezekiel 18:30-32, “Therefore I will judge you, O house of Israel, every one according to his ways,” says the Lord God. ‘Repent, and turn from all your transgressions, so that iniquity will not be your ruin. Cast away from you all the transgressions which you have committed, and get yourselves a new heart and a new spirit. For why should you die, O house of Israel? For I have no pleasure in the death of one who dies,’ says the Lord God. ‘Therefore turn and live!’ Repent and turn yourselves from all your transgressions.

The starting point to a relationship with God is repentance from dead works. If we’re going to have a relationship with God, we have to make a turnaround. Jesus Christ came to save us *from* our sins, not *in* our sins.

There are many fundamental errors that worldly Christianity makes. There are several, but one of those fundamental errors is the idea that the law is not that important.

The law is the means by which we respond to God. Repentance is not our initiative; it’s God’s initiative (Romans 2:4). The law is our response. They want to label us and say, ‘Well, you seek salvation by works.’ No! No, we seek death by works. The wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23). We are to repent of wicked works. We are to repent of dead works. We are to purge the works that lead to death. God took the initiative to make that possible in our lives. We have to respond.

Daniel brings it out in his prayer, confessing the sins of Israel.

Daniel 9:13, “As it is written in the Law of Moses, all this disaster has come upon us; yet we have not made our prayer before the Lord our God, that we might turn from our iniquities and understand Your truth.”

Do you see what we have to do—our response to God? We must “turn from our iniquities.” We must turn from our lawlessness. We must turn from our sins and understand the truth today. It is our response toward God. It is a response to the law of God. God’s law is the way of righteousness. We wouldn’t know right from wrong. What would be the basis of judgment?

A lot of people in the world have a misconception of what’s right. They don’t know what love is. They say, ‘I just feel like God wants me to do this. I’m unhappy over here with my wife, and my neighbor’s wife looks pretty good. Since I’m sort of interested in her and

she’s sort of interested in me, I just feel like God would want me to be happy. I don’t think God would want me to be unhappy. I’m unhappy with my wife, and I think I’d be happy with my neighbor’s wife. She’s unhappy with her husband, and she’d be happy with me. God will understand and He just wants us to be happy. Since I don’t think God wants me to be unhappy, I’m going to go ahead and do that.’

Now, what’s wrong with that? What’s wrong with that reasoning? Well, God says, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ He didn’t say, ‘You shall not commit adultery unless you think it’ll make you happy to commit adultery.’

Romans 7:7, Paul said, “...I would not have known sin except through the law.” ‘I wouldn’t have known what sin was.’ People have the criteria, but they look around and then think, ‘Well, you know, I think that this will make me happy or that will make me happy.’ There’s no basis of discerning what is right from wrong if we don’t have the law.

Notice Romans 7.

Romans 7:6, “But now we have been delivered from the law,” Now, someone put a period there, and you say, ‘Oh, okay, we don’t have to keep the commandments anymore.’ That’s not what it says. It says, “...we have been delivered from the law, having died to what we were held by [We were under the penalty of the law; we were delivered from the penalty the law exacts.], so that we should serve in the newness of the Spirit and not in the oldness of the letter.” It’s not enough to just keep the letter of the law; you go beyond and keep the spirit of the law. Christ magnified the law (Isaiah 42:21).

Romans 7:7, “What shall we say then? Is the law sin? Certainly not! On the contrary, I would not have known sin except through the law. For I would not have known covetousness unless the law had said, ‘You shall not covet.’” Paul said, ‘I wouldn’t have known it was wrong to lust unless the law said, “Don’t covet,” so I looked at the law. The law is the way by which I know sin. It’s the only way that I have of defining what’s right and wrong.’ Otherwise, you just use your own human feelings and emotions, and you know what happens. “I would not have known sin except through the law.”

Proverbs 14:12, it says, “There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death.”

Romans 7:12, he says, “Therefore the law is holy, and the commandment holy and just and good.”

Verse 14, “For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am carnal, sold under sin.”

Verse 22, “For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man.”

Verse 24, “O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?” ‘Who’s going to deliver me? Who’s going to make it possible for me to turn from dead works?’

Verse 25, “I thank God—through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, with the mind I myself serve the law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin.” In other words, the flesh pulls us toward sin, but in our mind, we have made a commitment—we have made a choice—to follow the law of God.

Of course, Jesus Christ paid the penalty for sin in our stead, but we have to respond. Our response is to turn from wicked works, to turn from dead works—the works of sin that lead to death—and toward the ways of righteousness. God leads us to the paths of righteousness. God’s Spirit will lead us in the paths of righteousness (Psalms 23:3). The paths of righteousness are delineated by the commandments.

Psalm 119:172 says, “...all Your commandments are righteousness.” God’s law delineates and defines what righteousness is. Just as you wouldn’t have known what sin is without the law, you wouldn’t have known what righteousness is apart from the law.

Let’s notice what Paul says in Acts 26.

Acts 26:20, “...but declared first to those in Damascus and in Jerusalem, and throughout all the region of Judea, and then to the Gentiles, that they should repent, turn to God, and do works befitting repentance.” In other words, we should change the course of our lives. We should change the direction that we’re heading. We should change our whole set of priorities and change the whole course of conduct of our lives. We should, as it says here, “repent, turn to God, do works befitting repentance.” Replace dead works with the works of the living God. We demonstrate repentance.

Repentance is not just a matter of being sorry. It’s not just a matter of remorse and regret. The world is filled with people who are sorry. They’re sorry they got caught; they’re sorry they are in trouble. They’re sorry their whole world is collapsing around them. They may have a moment of emotional temporary remorse. They may be sincere at the moment. They’re sorry and all broken up emotionally, but that is not repentance. That’s remorse; that’s regret. It’s not the same thing as repentance. The very word “repent,” if you look it up, means “to turn.”

Repent has to do with changing. It has to do with a turning away from the works that led to death—the works of sin. It has to do with a change in the direction of our lives.

It is our response to God. When God calls, we answer. All of us were going the wrong direction when God called us. We had to turn around because we were going in the wrong direction. There’s only one right direction. There are many wrong directions. We weren’t all going in the same wrong direction, but we were all going a wrong direction. There’s one right direction. It’s not that all roads lead to God. It’s that all the roads that man have come up with lead away from God. There are a lot of different ways to get away from God, but there is one true way—the way of righteousness. We have to turn from the wrong paths and get on a different way—the paths of righteousness.

The works needed for repentance demonstrate that we’ve turned around by the change in what we’re doing. If we’ve really repented, it’s going to be evident in our lives. We’re going to try to start living a different way because now we have different motives and different desires.

Hebrews 6:1, the Apostle Paul says, “Therefore, leaving the discussion of the elementary principles [the doctrines] of Christ, let us go on to perfection [going on towards the fullness—maturity and completion—of Christ], not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works...”

The starting point is a turning away from sin. In order to do that, you have to understand what sin is. You have to understand what repentance is. It has to do with a way of life. Christianity is a way of life. It’s not just a matter of, ‘Oh, I believe in Christ.’ Well, good, but so does Satan.

James 2:19, “You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe—and tremble!”

It’s great to believe, but what do we believe and how deeply do we believe?

Verse 20, “...faith without works is dead?”

Repentance from dead works is a change of life, and that’s what God is after. God takes the initiative in our lives. He’ll take an initiative with the whole world. The world is off the track. They don’t know. We were all off track in our life. Our minds have to be open to understand. Once our minds are opened to understand, we have to respond. It’s not enough to simply know. We must act on that knowledge. That becomes the starting point of our relationship with God. We change the direction, which is a response to God—a response to the initiative that God has

made. The whole act of repentance involves an initiative that God has taken (Romans 2:4), and there is a response that we must make to that initiative. God sets before us the necessity of choosing (Deuteronomy 30:19). Repentance is a reflection of who we are because it is a turning from the works of death.

Next Bible study, we're going to focus in very specifically on faith towards God. We will focus on what is involved in that. We will focus on some specific examples and applications of it and the ways that it applies in our everyday, day-to-day lives.

With that, we'll be concluded this evening. I look forward to seeing you on the Sabbath. Have a good evening.