
Chapter 7

Repentance from Dead Works

Repentance was introduced in Unit 1 as turning from sin and self-rule toward God (Mark 1:15; Acts 20:21). Hebrews adds the phrase “repentance from dead works” (Hebrews 6:1; 9:14). This includes turning from sinful deeds that produce death and from religious works treated as a way to earn righteousness before God.

One of the first truths a Christian must learn is that works do not save. We are justified through faith in Jesus Christ, not by deeds that place God in our debt or prove that we deserve acceptance (Romans 3:20-28; Ephesians 2:8-9; Titus 3:5).

Even after hearing the Gospel and trusting Christ, a believer may continue thinking that human effort helps obtain righteousness. This feels natural because pride wants to contribute something to the rescue. Paul repeatedly corrects that idea in Romans: Abraham was counted righteous by faith rather than works, righteousness is received through Christ, and grace cannot be mixed with works as its basis (Romans 4:1-5; 5:17; 10:1-4;

11:6). Good works follow salvation as its fruit, but Christ does not need our assistance to complete the salvation He provides (Ephesians 2:10; Hebrews 10:10-14).

What Are Dead Works?

Works can be called dead when they arise from spiritual death, serve sin, or cannot give life (Ephesians 2:1-3; Romans 6:21). The deeds of the flesh are destructive even when culture excuses them (Galatians 5:19-21). Christ cleanses the conscience from dead works so that believers may serve the living God (Hebrews 9:13-14).

Dead works may also include religious efforts used to establish our own righteousness. Paul had impressive religious credentials, yet counted them loss in order to be found in Christ with righteousness through faith (Philippians 3:4-9). Good deeds cannot erase guilt or place God in our debt (Romans 3:20; 4:4-5; Titus 3:5).

Picture two people standing before God. One points to obvious sins and admits the need for mercy. The other points to church attendance, generosity, knowledge, and discipline as reasons God should accept him. Their lives may look very different, but neither person can be justified by presenting a record of works.

The first must turn from rebellion; the second must turn from self-righteousness. Both need the righteousness God gives through faith in Christ (Luke 18:9-14; Romans 10:1-4).

Repentance Produces a New Direction

Repentance does not mean that a person instantly understands every sin or never struggles again. It means the rule of life has changed. The repentant person stops defending rebellion, agrees with God, and turns toward obedience (Proverbs 28:13; Acts 26:20; 1 John 1:9). When the Holy Spirit exposes further areas, the believer continues to confess and turn (Psalm 139:23-24; Revelation 2:5).

Fruit Does Not Purchase Forgiveness

John the Baptist called for “fruits worthy of repentance” (Luke 3:8). Zacchaeus demonstrated repentance by changing how he treated money and making restitution (Luke 19:8-10). The fruit did not buy salvation; it showed that grace had changed his direction. Biblical repentance avoids both legalism, which tries to earn grace, and empty profession, which claims grace without turning from sin (Ephesians 2:8-10; Titus 2:11-14).

KNOW THE WORDS

WORD	PLAIN MEANING
Dead works	Sinful or self-righteous deeds that cannot produce spiritual life or acceptance with God (Hebrews 6:1; 9:14).
Conviction	The Holy Spirit's exposure of sin and truth, leading a person toward Christ rather than mere shame (John 16:8-11).
Confession	Agreeing with God about sin and bringing it into the light (Proverbs 28:13; 1 John 1:9).
Restitution	Making reasonable amends for harm where possible, as fruit of repentance rather than payment for salvation (Luke 19:8-10).

THINK IT THROUGH

Q Is Repentance a Work That Earns Salvation?

No. A work that earns salvation would give us merit before God or make Him owe us a reward. Repentance does neither. Repentance is the sinner's surrender to the truth: agreeing with God about sin, abandoning self-rule, and turning to Christ for mercy. God's kindness leads us to repentance, and He grants the opportunity to repent, yet He also commands every person to respond (Romans 2:4; Acts 11:18; 17:30). Repentance does not clean us up so that we deserve Christ. It comes with empty hands to receive what

Christ alone provides. Like faith, repentance is a necessary response to the Gospel, not the cause or price of salvation (Mark 1:15; Ephesians 2:8-9; Titus 3:5).

WATCH FOR COUNTERFEITS

Legalism turns repentance into endless self-punishment, an attempt to earn acceptance, or submission to human rules that God did not command (Colossians 2:20-23).

Hyper-grace is not simply belief that God's grace is abundant. It is a label for teaching that separates grace from continuing repentance, confession, obedience, and holiness. Some versions claim that because future sins were already forgiven, a believer never needs to confess sin or turn from it, and biblical warnings are dismissed as legalism. This confuses the basis of salvation with the life salvation produces. We are saved by grace rather than conduct, but the grace that forgives also trains believers to reject ungodliness and live holy lives (Romans 6:1-2; Titus 2:11-14; 1 John 1:7-2:2; Jude 4).

DECLARATION OF FAITH CONNECTION

This chapter supports these Church of God convictions:

- All have sinned and repentance is commanded for all and necessary for forgiveness (Romans 3:23; Luke 24:47).
- Justification and the new birth are received through faith in Christ, not earned by dead works (Romans 5:1; Titus 3:5-7).
- Holiness is God's standard for His people (1 Peter 1:15-16).

PUT IT INTO PRACTICE

Ask God to search your heart (Psalm 139:23-24). Confess any known sin, receive His promised cleansing, and identify one concrete act of obedience or restitution (1 John 1:9; Luke 3:8).

TALK IT THROUGH

1. What two kinds of activity can be described as dead works?
2. How is repentance different from self-punishment?
3. Why does repentance produce fruit?
4. What is the difference between fruit and payment?

5. How do legalism and false grace both distort repentance?

FIVE DAYS IN THE BIBLE

Day 1: Turn and Live — Ezekiel 18:21-32

Notice God's call, human responsibility, and His desire.

Day 2: A Broken and Contrite Heart — Psalm 51

Identify confession, cleansing, and renewed obedience.

Day 3: Repentance with Fruit — Luke 3:1-14

Write how repentance affects ordinary life.

Day 4: Lost and Found — Luke 15:11-24

Observe the son's turn and the father's welcome.

Day 5: Cleansed to Serve — Hebrews 9:11-14

Write what Christ's blood cleanses and what that enables.