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REPENTANCE FROM DEAD WORKS

Therefore leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection; not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works...

REPENTANCE IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

We do not find the concept of repentance taught as clearly in the Old Testament as it is in the New Testament. However, as with all Bible doctrine, the Old Testament, in a number of scriptures does make it very clear that, in all ages, and amongst all people, God requires repentance before there can be any reconciliation between Himself and sinful man.

Two Hebrew words are used to convey the idea of repentance. Both of them show that God requires a personal decision to forsake sin and to enter into fellowship with Himself.

God makes it clear that it is men who ought to repent. We read in Numbers 23:19, "*God is not a man that he should lie; neither the son of man that he should repent.*" We see that it is the sons of men, and not God, who ought to repent.

We read in 1 Samuel 15:29, "*And also the strength of Israel will not lie nor repent: for He is not a man, that He should repent.*" men should repent. It is their *duty* to do so. If they neglect to repent they will perish. But God has no need to repent for in Him there is no sin.

Solomon interceded on behalf of Israel, when he dedicated the temple. He prayed, "*If they sin against thee, (for there is no man that sinneth not,) and deliver them to the enemy ... if they shall bethink themselves ... and repent ... saying, We have sinned, and done perversely, we have committed wickedness; and so return unto thee with all their heart, and with all their soul ... then hear ... and forgive.*" (1 Kings 8:46-53.) We see here that Solomon defines repentance as *returning to God* with all the heart, and all the soul.

We see Job, who contended with the Almighty to instruct him, and reproving God, saying, "*I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear: but now my eye seeth thee. Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes.*" (Job 42:5-6.)

In Jeremiah 8:5-6 we read, "*Why then is this people of Jerusalem slidden back with a perpetual backsliding? They hold fast deceit, they refuse to return. I hearkened and heard, but they spake not aright: no man repented him of his wickedness, saying, What have I done? everyone turneth to his course, as the horse rusheth into the battle.*" Repentance, we see, according to Jeremiah, is forsaking deceit, *returning to God*. It is saying, "What have I done?"

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We read again in Jeremiah 18:11, "*Thus saith the Lord; Behold, I frame evil against you, and devise a device against you, return ye now every one from his evil way, and make your ways and your doings good.*"

Ezekiel also writes, "*Thus saith the Lord God, repent, and turn yourselves from your idols; and turn away your faces from all your abominations.*" (Ezekiel 14:6.) And again, "*Repent, and turn yourselves from all your transgressions, whereby ye have transgressed; and make you a new heart and a new spirit: for why will ye die, O house of Israel?*" (Ezekiel 18:30.)

Perhaps the best scripture to illustrate repentance is the one found in 2 Chronicles 7:14, "*If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land.*"

Repentance then, is turning from our wicked ways. But it is

more than this. It is also turning to God and relying on him. And so we read in Isaiah 44:22, "*I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, thy transgressions, and, as a cloud, thy sins: return unto me; for I have redeemed thee.*" Here we have the English word *return* used for the Hebrew word which means *repentance*.

Perhaps the greatest example of national repentance in the Old Testament, is the story of Nineveh.

Jonah is sent to this great city to proclaim its doom. "*Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown,*" was the message of the prophet. (Jonah 3:4.) The Bible tells us of the result. There was a humbling of the entire nation before God and we read, "*God saw their works*" (of repentance) and He spared them.

Thus we see that God works to one end always, whether he deals with Jew or with Gentile: His purpose is always to bring men to *repentance*.

REPENTANCE IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

When we look at the New Testament, the theme from the beginning of the ministry of John the Baptist throughout is that "*God is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.*" (2 Peter 3:9.)

The English word *repent* is the translation of μετανοεω (metanoëo) and μεταμελωμαι (metamelomai), the verbs, and μετανοια (metanoia - noun). *Metanoia* and *metanoëo* are derived from two Greek words, *meta* (after) and *noëo* (perceive). (*Nous* in the Greek is the *mind*, the seat of perception.) We see thus, that *repentance* means to change one's mind afterwards, and, in the New Testament, the change is *always for the better*.

John the Baptist, who was the herald of the Lord Jesus Christ, came with a call to Israel to repentance. His message to Israel was, "*Repent ye: for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand.*" (Matthew 3:2.)

The one who followed John, none other than the Lord Jesus, came with an identical message. He said, "*The time is fulfilled, and the Kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the Gospel.*" (Mark 1:15. Also Matthew 4:17.)

The Lord Jesus also sent out the Twelve to preach. They were to proclaim the same message, which John the Baptist and the Lord Jesus Christ had preached, for we read, "*And they went out, and preached that men should repent.*" (Mark 6:12.)

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The result of this preaching was not very encouraging. John the Baptist reproved Herod because of what he was doing. He told him that it was sinful to have his brother's wife. (Mark 6:18.) It was because of this that Herod imprisoned John. We read that "*Herod feared John, knowing that he was a just man and an holy, and observed him; and when he heard him, he did many things, and heard him gladly.*" (Mark 6:20.) But, sad to say, Herod claved to his sin. All John's preaching was to no avail. Not only did Herod behold John at Herodias' instigation, he never ever broke his association with this wicked woman. Even when he was exiled by the Roman Emperor, Caius Caligula, on a charge of treason, Herodias accompanied him.

Jesus said to his disciples when he sent them out to preach repentance (Mark 6:11), "*And whosoever shall not receive you, nor hear you, when ye depart thence, shake off the dust under your feet for a testimony against them.*" This forewarned them that the message that they were commissioned to preach, that of repentance, was not going to enjoy universal success.

That the Lord Jesus encountered resistance to the call to repentance is very evident. In Matthew 11:20-21 we read as follows, "*Then began he to upbraid the cities wherein most of his mighty works were done, because they repented not: Woe unto thee, Chorazin! Woe unto thee, Bethsaida! for if the mighty works, which were done in you, had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes.*" Indeed, Jesus said, if Sodom had had such a divine visitation, it would still have been standing.

Luke records the same words in Luke 10:13, and says further in Luke 11:32, "*The men of Nineveh shall rise up in the judgement with this generation, and shall condemn it: for they repented at the preaching of Jonas; and, behold, a greater than Jonas is here.*" (See also Matthew 12:41.)

Luke records the occasion when some came and told Jesus of the Galileans, whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. Jesus replies, "*Suppose ye that these Galileans were sinners above all the Galileans, because they suffered such things? I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish. Or those eighteen, upon whom the tower in Siloam fell, and slew them, think ye that they were sinners above all men that dwelt in Jerusalem? I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.*" (Luke 13:3-5.)

There is much, which the Lord would teach us here, but we will look at only one truth presented here, the truth that *all men need to repent.*

In whatever circumstances we may find ourselves, whether we die violently or peacefully, it matters not. Indeed many of God's choicest saints have died violently.



What does matter is this: that we have repented of our sin and returned to God who desires this, above all else, in the lives of men and women.

Indeed, so great is God's desire to see men repent that the Lord Jesus told the story of a shepherd who lost *one* out of *one hundred* sheep. He tells us that he goes out to seek for it till he find it, and then calls on his neighbours to rejoice with him. Jesus then says, "*Likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance.*" (Luke 15:7, 10.) There is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repents, and the joy is manifested in God who loved us so much that he sent the Lord Jesus to die for us.

One of the sad incidences in the New Testament is the one recorded in Luke 16:19-31. We see the Lord Jesus tell about the rich man and a beggar named Lazarus. When the rich man learns that there is no means whereby he can gain relief in Hades, he asks Abraham to send Lazarus to testify to his brothers so that they will not come to the place of torment. They

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will repent, he says, if someone returns from the dead to warn them. Not so, says Abraham. If they do not give heed to Moses and the prophets, they will not listen and be persuaded even though someone rose from the dead.

We need only look at the reaction of the Pharisees when another person named Lazarus rose from the dead. There was no long queue of persons desirous of hearing what he had to say. We read, "*The chief priests consulted that they might put Lazarus also to death; because that by reason of him many of the Jews went away and believed on Jesus.*" (John 12:10-11.)

Now the Lord Jesus had sent his disciples out to preach repentance long before his passion and death. He renews his commission to them after his resurrection saying, "*Thus it is written, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day: and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. And ye are witnesses of these things.*" (Luke 24:46-48.)

REPENTANCE IN THE ACTS

The first message ever delivered to men after the Lord rose from the dead was preached by Peter on the day of Pentecost. Great conviction came upon all who heard and they cried out, "What shall we do?"

The answer came straight back, "Repent, *and be baptised every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost..*" (Acts 2:37-38.)

Again, after the healing of the man at the gate called Beautiful we hear Peter, "*Repent ye therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord.*" (Acts 3:19.)

The word *converted*, which translates the Greek *ἐπιστρέφω* (epistrepho) means to *turn*. *Epistrepho* occurs 39 times in the New Testament. Perhaps the word's meaning is best illustrated in Luke 22:32 where Jesus, after having told Peter that Satan has asked for him to sift him as wheat, (Let us remember that the Devil sifts to get rid of the wheat, God sifts to get rid of the chaff), says, "*I have prayed for thee that thy faith fail not: and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren.*" It is also used of Jairus' daughter in Luke 8:55, "*And her spirit came again, and she rose straightway.*"

Thus we see that repentance must be followed by turning or conversion to God. If we turn away from sin, (repentance) we must turn to someone (God).

After being set free from prison by an angel, Peter and John, in obedience to the angel's instructions, which were to "*Go, stand and speak in the temple to the people all the words of this life,*" preached to the multitude. On being arrested again they reply, "*The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom ye slew and hanged on a tree. Him hath God exalted with his right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel.*" (Acts 5:30-31.)

We see from this scripture that repentance is a gift. It is not something that we can do whenever we like but when God calls us to repentance, and we obey and repentance is granted to us. That it is not something we

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can do ourselves at will is very clear from the next scripture to be considered.

Peter had been summoned by divine agency, to go to the household of a Roman Centurion of the Italian band, named Cornelius. At God's behest he preached the Gospel to this Gentile household, and, while Peter was yet preaching, the Holy Ghost fell on all them, which heard the Word. Peter then baptised them. He was called to account by some at Jerusalem for what he had done at Caesarea, and so he told them all that had transpired, to which they answered, "*Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life.*" (Acts 11:18.)

Paul in his address to the Stoics and Epicureans of Athens ends on this note, "*And the times of this ignorance God overlooked; but now commandeth all men everywhere to repent.*" (Acts 17:30.) Thus we see that repentance is not only a gift granted by God, it is also a command of His to all men everywhere.

There are many who are full of remorse but they never sorrow to repentance.

Speaking of his ministry the apostle Paul says, "*I kept back nothing that was profitable unto you, but have showed you, and have taught you publicly, and from house to house, testifying both to the Jews, and also to the Greeks repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ.*" (Acts 20:20-21.) Thus repentance, which we have seen is a change of mind, must be exercised toward God.

Speaking before King Agrippa, Paul relates his own experience of conversion on the Damascus road, and of the commission given him to preach to the Gentiles. He says, "*I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision: but showed first unto them of Damascus, and at Jerusalem, and throughout all the coasts of Judea, and then to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn [epistrepho] to God, and do works meet for repentance.*" (Acts 26:20.)

We are reminded of the words of John the Baptist, who said, "*Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance: and think not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father.*" (Matthew 3:8-9)

Repentance, we shall see, must be followed by works, which will prove that the experience was a genuine one.

REPENTANCE IN THE EPISTLES

We read in Romans 2:4, "*Or despisest thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance?*"

We see here that men need to be *led* to repentance. They do not arrive there of their own volition, but God's goodness leads them to the place where repentance is possible.

Paul writes to the Corinthians and says, "*Now I rejoice, not that ye were made sorry, but that ye sorrowed to Repentance: for ye were made sorry after a Godly manner, that ye might receive damage by us in nothing. For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of: but the sorrow of the world worketh death.*" (2 Corinthians 7:7-10.)

There is a sorrow, which falls short of what God requires. The English word remorse would be the word, which best describes this sort of sorrow. There are many who are full of remorse but they never sorrow to repentance. We have just to look at the case of Judas Iscariot to see this other kind of repentance for we read, "*Then Judas, which had*

betrayed him, when he saw that he was condemned, repented himself, and brought again the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and the elders, saying, I have sinned in that I have betrayed the innocent blood." (Matthew 27:3-4.)

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He realised that he had sinned, but there was no Godly sorrow here but only, as Paul says so aptly in second Corinthians, "*The sorrow of the world.*" The word used for repentance in this passage is a different one, which is used only six times in the N.T.* The Greek word *metamelomai* means to *regret*. Truly the sorrow of the world worketh death, but Godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation.

Paul, speaking to Timothy about the manner in which a servant of God must fulfill his ministry, says that the servant of the Lord "*must not strive but be gentle unto all, apt to teach, patient, in meekness instructing those that oppose themselves; if God will peradventure give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth.*" (2 Timothy 2:25.)

We have the awful fate of an apostate described in Hebrews 6:6 . Where a person has renounced the light and deliberately rejected the Lord Jesus after having received and believed on him, it is impossible to renew such to repentance again. Where there is a deliberate turning away from truth there is always the danger of apostasy. As I understand it, the person who is an apostate has committed blasphemy of the Holy Spirit. They have kept on sinning willfully and have done *despite to the Spirit of Grace*. (Hebrews 10:29.) The word *despite* translates the Greek word *ἔνυβριζω* (enubrizo) which occurs only here in the New Testament. The word means "To use wanton insult towards any one."

Let us remember that those who have arrived at this state do not have any desire to repent, and God will not force any one of His gifts upon any one, least of all to those who have manifested rebellion of such a nature. In Esau we again see a man whose sorrow was not of a Godly sort. Esau was a fornicator and a profane person and all his weeping avail him naught. (Hebrews 12:17.)

We are glad that Peter has made it so clear that *God is not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance*. (2 Peter 3:9.)

In the Revelation we see the Lord Jesus Christ, as the Head of the Church moving amongst the seven lampstands. We find here that five of the seven assemblies are not what they ought to be. And so we find the call goes out to Ephesus, Pergamos, Thyatira, Sardis and Laodicea to *repent*.*

The great judgements of the Revelation have no effect upon the wicked for we are told in Revelation 9:20-21; 16:9; 16:11 that they *repented not*.

How much we need to be like to the man's son who said to his father, "I will not," but afterward he repented, rather than like the son who never obeyed. (Matthew 21:28-32.) It was after the Lord Jesus had told this parable of the man and his two sons that He said to the chief priests and elders, "*Verily I say unto you, that the publicans and the harlots go into the Kingdom of God before you. For John came unto you in the way of righteousness, and ye believed him not: but the publicans and harlots believed him: and ye, when ye had seen it, repented not afterward that ye might believe.*" (Matthew 21:31-32.)

The awful sin of these religious leaders was not only that they refused to acknowledge their sinfulness, and repent when they heard the preaching of John the Baptist, but,

* Matthew 21:29,32; 27:3; 2 Corinthians 7:8; Hebrews 7:21.

* (Rev 2:5; 2:16; 2:21; 2:22; 3:3; 3:19.)

when they saw what his ministry was accomplishing in the lives of the publicans and harlots, they still remained adamant in their refusal to do the will of God.

This portion of the Scriptures makes it very clear that, in the telling of the parable of the two sons, Jesus was likening the Scribes and rulers to the second son who had said, "I go," but did not go, while the sinful publicans and harlots were likened to the first son who had said, "I will not," but afterwards went.

In applying this parable to the preaching of John concerning repentance, the Lord Jesus also makes it clear that repentance is a demand made by God of all society. As Luke records it, "*All the people that heard him (John), and the publicans, justified God, being baptised with the baptism of John. But the Pharisees and lawyers rejected the counsel of God against themselves, being not baptised of him.*" (Luke 7:29-30.) Had they submitted to John's Baptism, they would have been acknowledging their need of repentance, for John's Baptism was a baptism of repentance.*

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It is small wonder that the Lord Jesus said to his disciples when he taught them, "*I say unto you, that except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the Kingdom of Heaven.*" (Matthew 5:20.)

EXAMPLES OF THOSE WHO REPENTED

Perhaps one of the best examples of repentance in the Old Testament is the case of Manasseh the son of Hezekiah. The record of his wickedness is detailed in 2 Kings 21:1-21. Here we read, "*Manasseh seduced them (Israel) to do more evil than did the nations whom the Lord destroyed before the children of Israel.*" (v 9.)

But God allowed Manasseh to be carried away captive in fetters to Babylon. We read, "*When he was in affliction, he besought the Lord his God, and humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers, and prayed unto him: and was entreated of him, and heard his supplication, and brought him again to Jerusalem into his kingdom. Then Manasseh knew that the Lord he was God.*" (2 Chronicles 33.)

Another excellent case in the O.T. is that also of a king, but this time a Gentile ruler. Nebuchadnezzar, filled with pride exclaimed, "*Is not this great Babylon that I have built for the house of the kingdom by the might of my power, and for the honour of my majesty?*" (Daniel 4:30.) The story of what happened to him is then recorded in Daniel chapter 4. After seven years his reason returns to him and he exclaims, "*Now I Nebuchadnezzar praise and extol and honour the King of Heaven, all whose works are truth, and his ways judgement: and those that walk in pride he is able to abase.*" (Daniel 4:37.)

There are many examples in the New Testament but the example of Zaccheus is one of the most outstanding. After Jesus had entered his house he came forth and said, "*Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor; and if I have taken any thing from any man by false accusation, I restore him fourfold.*" (Luke 19:8.) Notice that he did what the rulers of the Jews consistently refused to do. He acknowledged the Lordship of Jesus Christ by addressing him as "Lord". He brought forth fruit worthy of repentance. (Matthew 3:8; Luke 3:8.)

* Matthew 3:11; Mark 1:4; Luke 3:3; Acts 13:24; 19:4

No wonder then that Jesus says, "*This day is salvation come to this house, forasmuch as he also is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man is come to seek and to save that which was lost.*" (Luke 19:9-10.)

One of the most dramatic conversions in the N.T. is that of the apostle Paul. It is in the record of his conversion, that we see the vital part that God plays in bringing the sinner to his senses, and so to salvation.

Paul was already under conviction as he journeyed to Damascus, for the Lord Jesus says to him, "*Why persecutest thou me?*" Paul queries, "*Who art thou Lord?*" The Lord replies, "*I am Jesus whom thou persecutest.*" (Acts 9:4-5.) Luke writing about this encounter in Paul's address to King Agrippa says, "*I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision: But showed first unto them of Damascus ... that they should repent and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance.*" (Acts 26:20.) Paul could not have encouraged others to do this had he not had the same experience himself.

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THE QUESTION OF WORKS

DEAD WORKS

We read the awful words of the Lord Jesus, addressed to people who claim to have done "*Many wonderful works in thy name.*" (Matthew 7:22.)

He says, "*Depart from me, ye that work iniquity.*" (Matthew 7:23.)

How is it possible for someone to think that they are doing wonderful works in the name of the Lord, only to find out that they have been doing works of iniquity?

The answer is that it is vital for us to do the will of the Father. What is the will of the Father? We have seen that God commands all men everywhere to repent. (Acts 17:30.) Until men have complied with this requirement, all their works, no matter how good they may think them to be, are dead works. It is iniquity to trust in works as a means of justification, as it entails a rejection of the great work of the Lord Jesus Christ, which He accomplished for men on the cross, at such a terrible price for himself.

It is vital for us to do the will of the Father

There is a solemn warning given by the Lord Jesus to the multitude and to his disciples. He tells them to observe all that the scribes and Pharisees bid them to observe, but, he says, "*Do not ye after their works: for they say, and do not.*" (Matthew 23:3.)

This warning does not mean that the rulers of the Jews did not do *any* works, but that they did not do the kind of works that God looks for. Let us not ever think that God does not require works. Let it be most emphatically stated that God does require works. It is the kind of works that is the issue at stake. God wants *good works*, which stem from a regenerate heart and He utterly rejects *dead works*, which stem from an unregenerate heart. James was absolutely correct when he stated that "*Faith without works is dead.*" (James 2:20.)

God wants good works, which stem from a regenerate heart

Jesus now tells his followers why they are not to do the kind of works, which were done by the Pharisees. He says, "*All their works they do for to be seen of men.*" (Matthew 23:5.) If we do like these men we will not receive any reward from our Father who is in heaven. (Matthew 6:1.)

It is awfully possible for us, even if we are saved through faith in the blood of the Lord Jesus, to walk according to the principles which governed the Jewish leaders. Such endeavour is undoubtedly "Wood, hay and stubble", and it will be consumed at the Judgement seat of Christ. We, as believers therefore, must not only repent of our dead works, but, once we are saved, we must be careful to maintain *good works*, and not lapse back into doing *dead works*.

Dead works will not save the person who is lost and is trusting in those works for salvation. Nor will dead works bring any reward to the believer who indulges in them.

God makes it abundantly clear that the exclusion of works as a means of justification, is bound up with the boastfulness of man.

Paul shows how we are, "*Justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.*" (Romans 3:24.) That God's grace alone redeems us, who have sinned, and fall short of the glory of God, is stated by Paul, as the antidote to boastfulness. "*Where then is glorying (or boasting)? It is excluded by what manner of law? of the works? in no wise; but by a law of faith. For we reckon a man is justified by faith apart from works of law.*" (Romans 3:27-28.)

Notice that the A.V. consistently uses the definite article before "Law" whereas it is totally absent in most places. Paul is not arguing here about the Law of Moses but about the moral law that so many people endeavour to keep as a means of finding justification with God. All who do such are trusting in "dead works".

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Concerning Abraham, Paul writes, "*If Abraham were justified by works, he hath whereof to glory; but not before God. For what saith the scripture? Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness.*" (Romans 4:2-3.) Paul goes on to say, "*But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness.*" (Romans 4:5.)

On the surface, there appears to be disagreement between Paul and James who wrote, "*But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead? Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar? Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect?*" (James 2:20-22.) But there is no clash between these two men, for, writing to the Hebrews Paul says, "*By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac.*" (Hebrews 11:17.) The work of Abraham followed after his faith and was thus, good works, which spring from faith, and not dead works.

In view of the fact that we are told that faith without works is dead, we need to have a look at the scriptures to see what kind of works are being referred to here.

GOOD WORKS

Good works are very different from the works men do to try and earn salvation. They stem from, and are the result of, salvation, but are not the *means* of salvation.

This question of works exercised the multitude that followed the Lord Jesus, after he had fed them. As Jesus exhorts them not to labour for the bread that perishes, they ask him, "*What shall we do, that we might work the works of God?*" (John 6:28.)

The answer comes and is so unambiguous, "*This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent.*" (John 6:29.) Thus all good works will proceed from this initial good work of God, which is faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

This is the beginning, and all good works are but a continuation of the work of God in us, for Paul writes to the Philippians, "*Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you (salvation) will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ.*" (Philippians 1:6.)

Now good works are the natural result of a life that has been restored to fellowship with God. In his talk on the laws of the kingdom, Jesus said in the Sermon on the

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Mount, "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father which is in heaven." (Matthew 5:16.) Thus we see that good works will glorify God. They will never draw men's attention to the individual, but always to God.

The trouble with Israel was that they sought to find justification with God by the works of the law. It is in this connection that Paul writes to the Romans and says that there is a "remnant (in Israel) according to the election of grace." (Romans 11:5.) He continues, "And if by grace, then it is no more of works: otherwise grace is no more grace. But if it be of works, then it is no more grace: otherwise work is no more work." (Romans 11:6.)

*"The fire shall try every man's
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PAUL ON GOOD WORKS

We will see that Paul stresses good works as the result of a life that is surrendered to God. He makes it clear that if believers do not lay up a good foundation they will suffer loss.

With regards to those who are saved, Paul writes that there is a time coming when the saint's work is going to be tried and *every man's work* shall be made manifest. The fire shall try every man's work *of what sort it is*. If any man's work shall be burned he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire. (1 Corinthians 3:13-15.)

It is evident that there will be many Christians whose work will not be up to God'S standard. There are many believers who do not walk as they ought to walk. It is earlier on in this same passage of scripture that Paul says to the Corinthians that, "Whereas there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are ye not carnal, and walk as men?" (1 Corinthians 3:3.)

As we have said before, dead works will cause the sinner to lose eternal life. A true believer, who is carnal, will produce similar works to those produced by the unsaved. These works, classified as wood, hay and stubble by Paul, will lose the believer all hope of reward.

We see that good works then, are not optional luxuries, but vital requirements to the spiritual wellbeing of the child of God.

Concerning the giving of believers, Paul writes and says that those who sow sparingly will reap sparingly, whereas those who sow bountifully will reap bountifully. A man, says Paul, must give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly, or of necessity, for God loves a cheerful giver. (2 Corinthians 9:6-7.) Then in verse 8 of the same chapter he continues, "And God is able to make all grace abound toward you; that ye, always having all sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work."

Thus in our giving, we must give in the right spirit, out of love towards God, and, as we see in the gospels, the motive must be right. Our left hand *must not know what our right hand doeth*. (Matthew 6:3.) Thus, if we give with the right motive and in the right spirit, God will cause each of us to have abundantly to use for every good work. It is in true

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stewardship of that which is entrusted to us, that we can do the *works of God*.

In the parable of the unjust steward recorded in Luke 16:1-13 that the Lord Jesus says, "*I say unto you, make to yourselves friends by means of the mammon of unrighteousness (money, wealth); that, when it (mammon) shall fail (as one day, it most surely will), they (the friends made by means of the mammon of unrighteousness) may receive you into everlasting habitations.*" The Lord then continues, "*He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much.*" (Luke 16:10.) We need to be faithful in this if we would have the Lord commit the true riches to us. (Luke 16:11.)

Then Paul, in writing to the Galatians, says that they are to restore their erring fellow believers in a spirit of meekness, considering themselves, lest they also be tempted. (Galatians 6:1.) They are to bear one another's burdens and so fulfill the law of Christ, taking care not to be puffed up with their own importance. There is no room in the Christian life for self assurance and pride. Indeed, Paul says, "*Let every man examine his own work until it stands the test, and then he will have grounds for boasting with reference to himself alone, and not with reference to someone else.*" (Galatians 6:4.) There is not only the need to examine ourselves, whether we be in the faith, (2 Corinthians 13:5) we need also to examine our works and see that they are good works in the truest sense of the Scriptures.

In his prayer, which he makes known to the Colossians, Paul writes, "*That ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God.*" (Colossians 1:10.)

It is fruitfulness in good works that God looks for in his people. When they are brought forth, one is walking worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing.

Good works are works of faith, for Paul says to the Thessalonians, "*We ... remember without ceasing your work of faith, and labour of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ, in the sight of God and our Father; Knowing, brethren beloved, your election of God.*" (1 Thessalonians 1:2-3.)

Then he writes to them later saying, "*Now our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God, even our Father, which hath loved us, and hath given us everlasting consolation and good hope through grace, comfort your hearts, and stablish you in every good word and work.*" (2 Thessalonians 2:16-17.)

That good works are works wrought in us through the power of God is evident, for we read in Hebrews 13:20-21, "*Now the God of Peace make you perfect in every good work to do his will, working in you that which is well-pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ..*" It is a question, then, of the Lord doing His will in us and through us, which makes us perfect in every good work.

Paul tells Timothy that the foundation of God "standeth sure, having this seal, the Lord knoweth them that are his." This is the experience of every true believer. They are built upon the foundation, which is the Lord Jesus, and they are known of God.

Then Paul says that in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and silver, but also of wood and earth. Some of these vessels have honourable uses and other have dishonourable uses. Some vessels are used on the table, or to place food in, whereas others may be used to wash feet or, perhaps, to wash the floors of the house with.

A man needs to purge himself of the things that prevent him from being a vessel unto honour. In purging himself he becomes a vessel unto honour, sanctified, and meet for the master's use, and prepared "*unto every good work.*" (2 Timothy 2:19-21.)

While the believer can bring forth works, which are displeasing to God, the unbeliever can never bring forth works that are acceptable to Him. Paul writes in Titus, "*Unto the pure all things are pure: but unto them that are defiled and unbelieving is nothing pure; but even their mind and conscience is defiled. They profess that they know God; but in works they deny him, being abominable, and disobedient, and unto every good work reprobate.*" (Titus 1:15-16.)

Thus we need to recognise that men may profess to know Christ, but in works they deny Him. Sad to say, the works of a believer may also bring reproach on the name of Christ.

The Lord Jesus "*Gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works.*" (Titus 2:14.)

And again Paul says, "*This is a faithful saying, and these things I will that thou affirm constantly, that they which have believed in God might be careful to maintain good works. These things are good and profitable unto men.*" (Titus 3:8.)

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PETER ON GOOD WORKS

We close this study by looking at the words of Peter, "*If ye call on the Father, who without respect of persons judgeth according to every man's work, pass the time of your sojourning here in fear ... not redeemed with corruptible things ... but with the precious blood of Christ..*" (1 Peter 1:17-19.)

Our works will all be judged, so "*Let us learn to maintain good works for necessary uses, that we may not be unfruitful.*" (Titus 3:14.)