

Repentance From Dead Works

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We are commanded to repent from sin generally, but the specific thing from which we must repent, isolated in **Hebrews 6:1**, is **'dead works' (KJV)** or **'acts that lead to death' (NIV)**.

Heb. 6:1 Therefore leaving the elementary teaching about the Christ, let us press on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of **repentance from dead works**

As will be explained in this study, dead works include both **'acts'** and **'attitudes'**. They include both **behaviours** and **beliefs**. Attitudes lead to acts and belief informs behaviour. So, in repenting from certain acts or works, demands that we first **repent from wrong thinking**, especially wrong doctrine (beliefs), which may be popular but inaccurate. From 'dead works' we are called upon and commanded to 'repent' - which essentially means to 'change the mind', including a change of 'mindset'.

WHAT ARE DEAD WORKS?

What are 'dead works' referred to in Hebrews 6? Note that the specific reference is not to SINFUL or WICKED works but to DEAD works. These "dead works" are the so-called "good works", either **moral/ethical or ceremonial**, which people engage in in order to gain acceptance with God or to make progress in some spiritual respect.

Generally, dead works refers to the following:

- Belief in and reliance on any 'religious' practice or 'good works', instead of faith in Jesus Christ as the ONLY requirement for salvation or restored relationship with God. This includes human effort as good works to earn salvation, as opposed to simple belief in and acceptance of Jesus Christ as your Lord and Saviour.
- Related to the point above: Proudful attempts at Self-Justification through the observance of certain works or expressions of obedience.
- Any engagement in the natural or physical, not empowered by God's grace, but empowered by your own human effort and toil, as the singular qualifying factor to advance spiritually in some respect, or to recruit, incite or earn a response from God.
- The belief in and observance of any practice or the loyal holding on to something, which is obsolete and redundant in a specific season of God.
- The pursuit of any activity with great zeal, as a primary focus of your life, when this activity is not within God's will and purpose for your life.
- The use of verbal formula, without there being a personal belief in it and/or no subjective obedient experience of it.

- Engaging in an act of obedience to God’s Word, but with the wrong motivation or improper attitude.
- Hypocrisy - Acting contrary to the truth already revealed to you.

The points above will now be discussed.

LITERAL INTERPRETATION AND PROPHETIC IMPLICATIONS OF ‘DEAD WORKS’

Before discussing the range of applications of ‘dead works’ as cited above, let us first isolate its primary biblical meaning.

First, what does the Greek usage of ‘dead works’ imply?

Work = ergon = Work, i.e., deed, act, action, something doneⁱ.

‘Dead’= nekros = Inactive in respect of doing right; Destitute of life, force or power, inactive, inoperativeⁱⁱ

‘Work’ is **anything ‘done’** i.e. some activity or behaviour (by implication a mindset also). The one who observes this work deems it to be relevant, therefore acceptable to God, and thus substantially valid enough to get His favourable attention or powerful response.

DEAD WORKS? ‘Dead’ implies that this ‘work’ is just that, viz. ‘DEAD’. It is **lifeless, bereft and deprived of any spiritual life and thus will not be regarded by God as valid, relevant nor get His favourable response**. Men can perform dead works, but these works mean absolutely nothing at all, generating no life or power, but results in exactly the opposite - they produce only ‘death’.

The only other reference to ‘dead works’ in the Bible is found in **Hebrews 9:13,14**. An important hermeneutical principle for interpreting the scriptures is that one scripture will explain another. Hebrews 9:13,14 therefore will help us understand ‘dead works’ in Hebrews 6:1.

Heb. 9:13,14 For if the **blood of goats and bulls** and the ashes of a heifer sprinkling those who have been defiled sanctify for the cleansing of the flesh, how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God, **cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?**

The Hebrew believers in Christ were drifting back into Judaism, where ceremonial rituals of the Old Testament were still practiced – specifically the blood of animals was still offered to

atone for sin. Because Jesus, the spotless Lamb, died for our sin, there was no need for these blood sacrifices any longer. The Cross of Christ rendered the Old Testament system of animal blood sacrifice ineffective and obsolete. Some false teachers still, however, advocate the practice of animal sacrifices. The writer of the book of Hebrews calls these practices 'dead works'.

After the death of Jesus on the cross, there was no longer any need to engage in blood sacrifice to atone for sin. To do so, however seriously and sincerely, would be to engage in 'dead works'. Although blood sacrifices are spiritual or religious in nature, their ardent observance, even with a heart of pristine purity, would have NO EFFECT spiritually - NO EFFECT in producing a positive response from God toward the person practising it. As the Greek term for dead works cited above indicates, these acts would be 'INACTIVE' in respect to doing right, AND have 'NO FORCE or POWER'. While it is 'operative' in the natural, it is inoperative in the realm of the spirit. While it is 'active' in the natural, it is 'inactive' in the realm of the spirit. While it may seem that there is 'life' and vitality attendant with the act in the natural, it is 'destitute of life' in the realm of the spirit.

The writer of the book of Hebrews spends a great deal of time pointing out to his readers the deficiencies of the once relevant practices of the Old Testament Mosaic system of sacrifices, which now are redundant, obsolete and inconsequential. They were once powerful and full of life, but are no longer. To engage in them, once the new principle had replaced them, would be to engage in actions that God does not REGARD nor RESPOND to. It is from these practices, now called 'dead works', that the Hebrew believers are to REPENT, i.e. acknowledge their error in continuing to practise something irrelevant, confess their sin in this regard, and then FORSAKE it, never to return to it.

The Greek scholar, Zodhiates, describes 'dead works' as follows:

*The phrase dead works refers to either acts (especially religious) **not borne from faith and spiritual life, hence fruitless and sinful, or it refers to the external ceremonies and rituals of the OT which, standing in contrast to their NT realities and antitypes, are impotent and transitory.**ⁱⁱⁱ*

Contextually, dead works are **practices, activities, behaviours and mentalities that have no spiritual power or effect in the realm of the spiritual or supernatural. They are not consistent with the specific requirements of God for a particular season in God. In fact, God views them seriously because dead works deny the divine or accurate position, mentality or activity. 'Dead Works' refuses to acknowledge or express confidence in that which is accurate and emphasised by God in a given season as the valid and right thing.**

Belief in and observance of **dead works creates an environment in which DECEPTION abounds**, because by holding on to the inaccurate, obsolete position, dead works presents an **alternative to others who may be seduced into error**. Hence the **‘works’ are described as ‘dead’** (nekros) - lifeless, having no force or power - no spiritual significance, weighted-ness nor impact. They are literally **‘works that lead to death’**, i.e. spiritual death or separation from God (see **NIV**).

Note that the verse above says that **‘the CONSCIENCE’** must be **‘cleansed from dead works**. Those Hebrews who practised blood sacrifices did so because their conscience did not allow them to do otherwise. In this regard, the conscience either confirms or disconfirms truth. Where the conscience rejects something valid, **it needs cleansing through the act of repenting** - changing your mind on an issue and expressing that tangibly in what you do (or not do).

APPLICATION OF DEAD WORKS: Dead Works could also include the following:

1. Good Works Done to Earn Salvation Apart from Simple Faith in Jesus Christ

The Hebrew believers were observing animal sacrifices as a means of attaining a state of righteousness before God. They were disregarding simply believing in Jesus Christ by faith and His atoning blood, as the means by which sins are forgiven and relationship with God established. **DEAD WORKS are any works done to earn right standing with God, apart from accepting and believing in Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour, and the power of His blood to cleanse you from all sin.**

No amount of good deeds can earn or merit God’s forgiveness of you in order for you to be reconciled to Him relationally as His son or be saved. To be restored to God requires simply that you believe in Jesus Christ, God’s Son, as your Lord and Saviour, confessing your sin to Him.

Acts 16:30,31 “Sirs, what **must I do to be saved?**” They said, “**Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household.**”

Rom. 10:9,10 that if you **confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved**; for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation.

Titus 3:5 **He saved us, not on the basis of deeds, which we have done in righteousness, But according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit**

Eph. 2:8,9 For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; **not as a result of works, so that no one may boast.**

John 6:28,29 Therefore they said to Him, “What shall we do, so that we may work the works of God?” Jesus answered and said to them, “This is **the work of God**, that you **believe in Him** whom He has sent.”

Once you are saved, you will then engage in good works, not to earn salvation, but as a result of your salvation. These good works - or expressions of obedience to God’s Word - will now prove that you are indeed saved. But they become expressions of your righteousness.

Eph. 2:10 For **we are His workmanship**, created in Christ Jesus **for good works**, which God prepared beforehand so that **we would walk in them**.

We receive the gift of righteousness by the expression of our faith (belief) in Christ Jesus and His sacrificial atoning work on the Cross.

Phil. 3:9 and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from *the* Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which **comes** from God on the basis of faith,

Now saved, we grow in practical righteousness through our obedience to the principles of God’s Word, which teaches us how to live righteously. This will include good works, which is often a general term denoting outward practical ‘obedience’ to God’s Word - and will also include, for example, kind or charitable deeds. **These works are good works that ultimately bring honour to God our Father, and not to us doing the work.** They testify of the nature and kindness of God expressed through us. When we do good works of this nature, God gets the glory, and not us. If we seek to receive glory and honour from these kind deeds we do towards men, then these good works, from Heaven’s perspective, become ‘dead works’, forfeiting any associated Divine blessing upon them.

Matt. 5:16 Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may **see your good works**, and **glorify your Father who is in heaven.**

Our expressions of obedience and all other good works provide evidence that indeed our faith is genuine, thus we are justified both by our faith and subsequent works.

James 2:21,22 Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up Isaac his son on the altar? You see that **faith was working with his works**, and as a result of the works, faith was perfected.

Good works practised to earn salvation without faith in Jesus Christ are dead works, but good works, as a result of salvation by faith in Jesus Christ, are acceptable works of faith.

2. Works of Prideful Self-justification and Self-righteousness

Isaiah 64:6 For all of us have become like one who is unclean, And all our righteous deeds are like a filthy garment; And all of us wither like a leaf, And our iniquities, like the wind, take us away

The Pharisees exhibited self-righteous pride, placing themselves as more important and above the people. This is captured in the comparison Jesus made between the Pharisee and the Publican (tax collector) who prayed in the temple:

Luke 18:9-14 And He also told this parable to some people who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and **viewed others with contempt**: “Two men went up into the temple **to pray**, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood and was praying this to himself: ‘God, I thank You that **I am not like other people**: swindlers, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I pay tithes of all that I get.’ But the tax collector, standing some distance away, was even unwilling to lift up his eyes to heaven, but was beating his breast, saying, ‘God, be merciful to me, the sinner!’ I tell you, this man went to his house justified rather than the other; for **everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but he who humbles himself will be exalted.**”

All the religious works done by this Pharisees would be ‘dead works’. They are performed based on a desire for heightened acceptance with God, and simultaneously are used to bolster a prideful mindset. Further, these ‘works’ are used to highlight the deficiency in others. We must never do our perceived ‘good’ to accentuate the perceived ‘bad’ in others. Never seek to endorse your own acceptance with God by highlighting the degree to which others are alienated from Him. If our spiritual state is to be compared to any standard, it must be compared to God Himself. We are to perfect holiness in the FEAR OF GOD - and not in fear or comparison to any person.

2 Cor. 7:1 Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit, **perfecting holiness IN THE FEAR OF GOD.**

Never permit pride to enter your heart where you attempt to rationalise and so justify your disobedient state by comparing your state to others, whom you deem are ‘greater’ sinners’ than you. Never establish the right-ness of your state by exposing the wrong-ness in others, with a view to belittling them.

3. Dead works would also include human accomplishments of note or progress in any respect, which are used or relied upon to establish your credibility in the minds of men or God Himself.

There are two issues which are inextricably linked, viz. **IDENTITY** and **DESTINY**. **IDENTITY** refers to **who we are** and **DESTINY** refers to **what we do**. A healthy identity determines how you pursue destiny. Who you are will literally determine what you do. Never seek to pursue **FUNCTION** before focussing on your internal **NATURE**. If you seek to establish an identity based on functionality, you will forever be 'performance' oriented, i.e. you will seek to **DO** to establish who your **ARE**. But when your **IDENTITY** as a **SON OF GOD** is already firmly entrenched, then you can effectively engage in **DESTINY**, because what you now **DO** flows out from who you **ARE**, as you are not trying to establish who you are by what you do.

At His baptism, the Father affirmed Jesus as **HIS SON**.

Matt. 3:16,17 After being baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending as a dove and lighting on Him, and behold, a voice out of the heavens said, **"This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased."**

From this point onwards, Jesus embarked upon three and a half years of successful ministry, executing His destiny. His identity as 'SON' was the basis from which He **SPOKE** and **PERFORMED**. People who seek an identity from what they do, always require the applause of men to validate their person and their work. Often these people will engage in **WORKS**, even works within the will of God for their lives, but with the wrong motivation, to establish their credibility or reputation. These folks often have the uncontrollable need to always publicly reference what they do in company or on social media platforms, in a bid to raise their ranking or rating in the minds of men.

It is my view that such works performed in this context would equate to dead works. These works will not have the attendant regard or support from God, because they are designed to bring honour and glory to the individual and not ultimately to God Himself. These works will be destitute of spiritual life, force and power, and cannot be used by God in ways to advance His agenda. When men see our 'good works', they must glorify God and not us (Matt. 5:16).

Paul counted all of his multiple and noteworthy achievements in life in the flesh as rubbish ('dung' - KJV), that he might know Christ. Not once did he use nor rely upon these to determine or entrench his spiritual identity as God's son, nor his function as an apostle of God. In Philippians 3:1-4, Paul warns against an obsession with external things, accomplishments or indicators of spirituality, by which we seek to establish or increase our spiritual reputation in order to make accelerated progress in respect to our destiny in Christ.

Take your time to read through Paul's referencing of this here below, and note the potential hindrance that such external 'things'/'works' pose to really knowing Christ in a meaningful and ever-deepening way.

Phil. 3:1-17

- 1 Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord. To write the **same things *again* is no trouble to me, and it is a safeguard for you.**
- 2 Beware of the dogs, beware of the evil workers, beware of the **false circumcision;**
- 3 for we are the *true* circumcision, **who worship in the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh,**
- 4 although I myself might have **confidence even in the flesh.** If anyone else has a mind to put confidence in the flesh, I far more:
- 5 circumcised the eighth day, of the nation of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the Law, a Pharisee;
- 6 as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to the righteousness which is in the Law, found blameless.
- 7 But **whatever things were gain to me,** those things I have *counted as loss for the sake of Christ.*
- 8 More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the **surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord,** for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but **rubbish** so that I may gain Christ,
- 9 and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from *the* Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which **comes** from God on the basis of faith,
- 10 **that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death;**
- 11 in order that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.
- 12 Not that I have already obtained *it* or have already become perfect, but I press on so that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus.
- 13 Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of *it* yet; but one thing *I do*: **forgetting what *lies* behind and reaching forward to what *lies* ahead,**
- 14 I press on toward the **goal for the prize of the upward call of God** in Christ Jesus.
- 15 Let us therefore, as many as are perfect, have this attitude; and if in anything you have a different attitude, God will reveal that also to you;
- 16 however, let us keep living by that same *standard* to which we have attained.
- 17 Brethren, join in following my example, and observe those who walk according to the pattern you have in us.

4. **Dead works also incorporates only observing a measure of truth in your time/era, when a more accurate expression of truth you subscribe to has been revealed or made available to you.**

Belief or doctrine must be established by apostles (and prophets). To remain doctrinally relevant and accurate, will demand connection to and relationship with authentic apostles of Christ.

The early church devoted themselves daily to apostle's doctrine.

Acts 2:42 They were continually **devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching** and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.

It is to apostles and prophets that REVELATION is made known. Apostles have the task of receiving and communicating revelation or doctrine to the church.

Eph. 3:4,5 By referring to this, when you read you can understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, which in other generations was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been **revealed to His holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit**

Apostolic doctrine or teaching is then the foundation upon which the church is built.

Eph. 2:19-22 So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God's household, having been **built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets**, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone, in whom the whole building, being fitted together, is growing into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit.

The doctrine of the apostles is what all other ministries must build on. This doctrine also seeks to portray and build the nature of Christ into every son of God.

1 Cor. 3:10,11 According to the grace of God which was given to me, **like a wise master builder I laid a foundation**, and another is building on it. But each man must be careful how he builds on it. **For no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ**

Through authentic apostolic ministry, you will constantly be fed relevant truth, or 'proceeding word' - also called 'present truth'.

Matt. 4:4 But He answered and said, “It is written, ‘Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God.’”

Man must live by every **PRO**ceeding Word of God, i.e. not the past **PRE**ceeding Word, but the current **PRO**ceeding Word. We must connect with what God is saying NOW. This is what Peter referred to as ‘present truth’, i.e. the truth which is ‘presently coming to you’.

2 Pet 1:12 For this reason I will not be negligent to remind you always of these things, though you know and are established in the present truth. (NKJV)

God’s truth is progressively unfolding to us through time. It is important to remain current with the ‘proceeding Word’ of God. There are certain fundamentals of our faith which are unalterable and will forever abide and remain relevantly true to every generation. Yet, God is also revealing new things from His Word, thereby giving more accuracy and effectiveness to our role as sons of God in His church in the earth today. At one point in time, God instructed Moses to “strike the rock”, in order for water to flow. Moses obeyed and water flowed. At a later time, God instructed him to “speak to the rock”. Moses disobeyed and struck the rock, as he did on the first occasion. Water still flowed and the need of the people for water was met, but Moses displeased God. He fell out of favour with God and was permitted to only see the Promised Land but not to enter it. God’s voice at one time, “strike the rock”, was not relevant to Moses in another time when the instruction changed to, “speak to the rock”. This highlights the importance of remaining plugged in to the present speaking of God on any matter. God’s principles in His word never change, but the expression and application may. For example, circumcision of the flesh as a sign of covenantal connection to God was valid in one season, but now its relevant application relates to a circumcision of the heart or a cutting away of carnal or sinful fleshly behaviour.

An Aside: Israel was happy with their leader Moses, when the second time, he struck the rock instead to speaking to the rock. But God was not happy with him. The people’s need for water was met, but Moses, without the people knowing, dishonoured God before them. The people were so need-fixated, they did not realise that in their midst, a serious principle was being violated by their leader. Being need-focused can cause you to disregard important biblical principles. We must live principle-centred lives, not need-centred lives. *“When you are faced with a need, it is easy to bow to the wrong spirit.” (Thamo Naidoo)*

There are also some aspects of so called ‘truth’ which has, in the past, being misrepresented or at times are total lies altogether. There is a need to bring correction to these. Holding onto these truths and their associated behavioural patterns would be dead works, from which we must repent. To remain stagnant at one point in time where certain beliefs are strongly held on to, when God, through the ministry of apostles and prophets, unveils a more accurate

truth, would be to hold onto something irrelevant that would make your functionality powerless and ineffective.

The measure of revelation you are accustomed to will set limits on the experiences which that truth affords. Appollos taught **ACCURATELY**, knowing only the doctrine of John, but after being upgraded to 'present truth' by Aquila and Priscilla, he taught the way of the Lord **'MORE ACCURATELY'**. This **'MORE ACCURATE'** truth opened a new sphere of effective function for him.

Acts 18:24-28

Now a Jew named Apollos, an Alexandrian by birth, an eloquent man, came to Ephesus; and he was mighty in the Scriptures. This man had been instructed in the way of the Lord; and being fervent in spirit, he was speaking and teaching accurately the things concerning Jesus, being acquainted only with the baptism of John; and he began to speak out boldly in the synagogue. But when Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they took him aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately. And when he wanted to go across to Achaia, the brethren encouraged him and wrote to the disciples to welcome him; and when he had arrived, he greatly helped those who had believed through grace, for he powerfully refuted the Jews in public, demonstrating by the Scriptures that Jesus was the Christ.

A more accurate understanding, embracing and practise of present truth will result in a greater release of faith, an enhanced spiritual life, more precise and exact expressions of obedience, and greater degrees to which God can use you. Note in the scriptural text above, Apollos' understanding and ambit of functionality is upgraded. Previously, he was unable to 'demonstrate by the Scriptures that Jesus was the Christ' because he only knew 'John's baptism', a phrase indicating he only knew John's teachings or doctrine. To hold onto a former understanding of truth when a 'more accurate' understanding has been presented by God, is to hold onto 'dead works', which is lifeless and powerless.

Examples :

1. If you held a conference on the power of **animal sacrifices** the week after Jesus died on the cross, you would be engaging in 'dead works'.
2. If you preach **circumcision of the flesh** as a requirement for righteousness today, this too is dead works, because whilst God through Abraham initiated circumcision, its expression and application has now shifted to a circumcision of heart from sinful carnality.

3. Keeping and observing any principle or behaviour prescribed by the Old Covenant **practice of the Sabbath** is obsolete and dead works, because Christ, the Person, has become our Sabbath or rest. Rest is not in a day; rest is in a person, Jesus Christ.
4. Thinking that the nation of Israel is God's 'time-clock' for the end times is erroneous. This erroneous position fails to accept the fact that the Church of God, comprised of every nation in the earth, is the true 'Israel of God' (See addendum for a brief treatment of this expansive subject).
5. The use of vestments and clerical apparel to indicate spiritual authority is spiritually inaccurate.
6. The belief that there are literal 'mansions' in Heaven is dead works. This resulted from an inaccurate understanding of John chapters 13 and 14.

.... and the list goes on and on ...

Consider Also:

To take this one step further, literally any 'spiritual practice' or mindset could be construed as 'dead works' if it bears no relevance to God's current demand in the 'era/season' or even 'moment' in which it is done.

Also, it could very well be relevant and accurate in reference to God's current purpose and will, but if INAPPROPRIATELY or UNTIMELY administered, it could result in no spiritual life being imparted.

5. **The pursuit of any activity with great zeal as a primary focus of your life, when this activity is not within God's will and purpose for your life, is dead works.**

The Apostle Paul is viewed by many as one of the most strategic apostles ever used by God. He wrote much of the New Testament. The mystery of God, Christ and the Body of Christ was revealed to him, amongst other important spiritual truths and principles by which the present church is meant to operate in.

Paul, before the surrender of his life to the Lordship of Christ, was known as Saul of Tarsus. He persecuted the early church with unbridled passion. This he did with intense zeal and fervour. But God's plan for his life was apostleship to His church, especially in the non-Jewish world. Saul was sincerely convinced that his persecution of the church was in fact in God's will, and by doing so, he was preserving the religious traditions of the Mosaic Covenant in which he was reared. His boast as a man in the flesh was that he was a Pharisee, a Hebrew of the Hebrews, and as concerning the law, blameless.

Phil. 3:4-7 although I myself might have confidence **even in the flesh**. If anyone else has a mind to put **confidence in the flesh**, I far more: circumcised the eighth day, of the nation of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the Law, a Pharisee; **as to zeal, a persecutor of the church**; as to the righteousness which is in the Law, found **blameless**. But whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ.

These boasts never facilitated his knowledge of Christ, and he recognised that although they were gain to him by natural appraisal, he would gladly set them aside as loss, for the sake of knowing Christ by faith.

He was sincere in his efforts to snuff out 'Christianity', killing and persecuting followers of Christ, referred to as the people of the 'Way'. He was sincere, but he was sincerely wrong. In order to re-align him to God's original plan for his life, God had to confront him in a dramatic fashion en route to his mission to Damascus to persecute believers.

Acts 9:1-6

- 1 Now Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest,
- 2 and asked for letters from him to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any belonging to the Way, both men and women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem.
- 3 As he was traveling, it happened that he was approaching Damascus, and suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him;
- 4 and he fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?"
- 5 And he said, "Who are You, Lord?" And He said, "I am Jesus whom you are persecuting,
- 6 but get up and enter the city, and it will be told you what you must do.

After Jesus speaks to him, making it plain that in persecuting the church, he is in essence persecuting HIM. Saul, now blinded, is instructed to go to the city and await further instructions. Here he prays and fasts for three days, not drinking any water, nor taking any food.

Acts 9:9 And he was three days without sight, and neither ate nor drank

Ananias, a disciple of the Lord living in Damascus, is instructed by God to go to Saul, pray for him to receive his sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit, and to tell him how he will suffer for the Lord and bear God's name before the Gentiles, Jews and Kings (rulers). This tantamounts to Saul's conversion and an understanding or unveiling of the Apostolic call on his life. From

this point onwards he **immediately** proceeds to testify and teach that Jesus is the Christ. His life and purpose is changed and re-ordered forever (See Acts 9:10-22).

Saul was an extremely zealous persecutor of the church. God simply re-directed this zeal toward him becoming one of the greatest proponents of the church. This was effected within the context of him fasting. Fasting creates the ideal framework within which God may reorder priorities and direct fervent, but misplaced desire, toward an endeavour or activity that is squarely in the centre of His plan for your life. Zeal without discernment, knowledge or wisdom accomplishes little or nothing at all concerning God's purposes.

Rom. 10:1,2 Brethren, my heart's desire and my prayer to God for them (*i.e. Israel*) is for their salvation. For I testify about them **that they have a zeal for God, but not in accordance with knowledge.**

How much more powerful is it when passionate zeal is combined with accurate knowledge. There are many who are ardently zealous in holding dogmatically to a point of view or doing spiritual exploits, yet this attitude or activity could be far removed from what God would deem accurate or relevant. Saul was fighting and seeking to destroy the very thing God was trying to build. He was operating contrary to God's will, yet self-deceived that he in fact was doing God a great favour by persecuting the church. This is true of many believers today. They oppose God's move, truth, purpose, methodology, etc. because it challenges longstanding traditions held in the mind.

I urge the reader to consider the remote possibility that perhaps you may be convinced that in rejecting something you construe as 'not-God' or false, according to your judgement, that in fact you may be dismissing something that is authentically true and in God's will. I have the prophetic sense that God in this present season is redirecting sincere and fervent oppositions to His truth, plans, ways, etc. by some who think they are rightly doing so as an expression of faithfulness to God. Even if you feel you do not fit this category, may I encourage you to consider fasting with this prayerful objective: "Father, channel all my diligence, zeal, passion, etc. toward more accurate and exact expressions of thought, behaviour, function and purpose". This could relate to your life personally, your calling, or the corporate purpose of God attendant with your household of faith. May God fine-tune our zeal and enthusiasm in spiritual activity. May we all experience this as we come to sharpness in all we earnestly do for God.

Moses instinctively sought to rescue an Israelite being flogged by an Egyptian (See Exodus 2:11-25). He killed the Egyptian and had to flee for his life. This zeal for justice and protection was within him. It was a reflexive response within him, yet he embarked upon it without being thoroughly prepared by God, and not being informed of God's way or methodology of doing it. After spending 40 years in the wilderness under the fathering of Jethro, and personally encountering the Lord, he returns to Egypt and is able to deliver, not just one or two Israelites,

but the entire nation in one single night. God harnessed his zeal and coupled it with sufficient personal preparation and empowerment, and the results were phenomenal. May you experience this too as you seek God by prayerful fasting.

6. Activity Not at all Reflective of the Nature of Christ

James and John wanted to call fire down from Heaven to consume a Samaritan village for the rejection of Jesus. Jesus had to stop them and chided them, indicating that they were functioning by a spirit not reflective of Himself.

Luke 9: 51-56 (NKJV)

- 51 Now it came to pass, when the time had come for Him to be received up, that He steadfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem,
- 52 and sent messengers before His face. And as they went, they entered a village of the Samaritans, to prepare for Him.
- 53 But they did not receive Him, because His face was set for the journey to Jerusalem.
- 54 And when His disciples James and John saw this, they said, **“Lord, do You want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them, just as Elijah did?”**
- 55 But He turned and rebuked them, and said, **“You do not know what manner of spirit you are of.**
- 56 For the Son of Man did not come to destroy men’s lives but to save them.” And they went to another village.

It is possible to think that a particular intended action is indicative of your devotion to Christ, but may be motivated by a spirit or nature that is unlike Christ. Your intended action would be ‘dead works’.

Job 26:1-4 Then Job responded, “What a help you are to the weak! How you have saved the arm without strength! “What counsel you have given to one without wisdom! What helpful insight you have abundantly provided! “To whom have **you uttered words?** And **whose spirit was expressed through you?**

Job is talking to Bildad in response to his inaccurate appraisal of Job and his trial (see Job 25:4). This opinion was not original to Bildad, as it mirrored the same thoughts expressed by Eliphaz in Job 4:17-19 and 15:14-16. Hence, Job is correct by asking him the question “Whose spirit was expressed through you?” The spirit of Eliphaz was being expressed through Bildad, and this opinion was inaccurate.

An inaccurate expression may be communicated through you and this could be as a result of the impartation of a dominant thought impressed upon your spirit by someone else, who has negatively or wrongly influenced you. In this regard, you must ensure that you are not led

into adopting an erroneous position that could lead to the observance of behaviour which could be dead works.

7. The use of mere verbal 'formula', without there being a personal belief in it and/or a subjective obedient experience of it.

Sceva, a Jewish High Priest, and his seven sons attempted to cast out a demon from a man, using a verbal formula, "I adjure you by Jesus whom Paul preaches" (Acts 19:13). They tried to mimic the spiritual authority of Paul, who performed many mighty works in Jesus' Name. The demon in the man indicated to them that it knew Jesus and Paul, but not them.

Acts 19:15 And the evil spirit answered and said to them, "I recognize Jesus, and I know about Paul, but who are you?"

The demonically possessed man then stripped them of all of their clothing, wounded them and sent them running out of the city of Ephesus, where this occurred. Sceva and his seven sons did not believe in Jesus Christ. They did not exercise faith in Christ for salvation. He was a HIGH PRIEST, still functioning in the Old Covenant of Moses and the law, and upholding all of its ceremonial rituals and requirements. Sceva and his sons had no personal and subjective experience with Jesus Christ, and therefore could not use HIS Name to exert authority over the realm of the demonic. He unsuccessfully attempted to cast a demon from a man. His 'work' was a 'dead work'. It lacked spiritual power and authority. The stripping of Sceva and his sons symbolically denotes the stripping of spiritual authority. It is not advisable to master spiritual language denoting or suggestive of a particular level of spirituality, but when tested, lacks the attendant spiritual power. You become powerless spiritually when your behaviour is divorced from your proclamation or when you possess no personal and subjective experience in the things you purport to be proficient in.

Another reason why Sceva was unsuccessful is that he and his sons engaged in exorcism for a living. Whilst this is not overtly stated in the Bible, it is implied. They earned their keep from this. So the motivation was money and not sincere love for the people they were intending to deliver.

8. Engaging in an Act of Obedience to God's Word, but with the Wrong Motivation or Improper Attitude.

External expressions of obedience to God's Word are no guarantee that they would receive God's acceptance or blessing. It all depends upon the motivation of the expression of obedience. That we do the right thing in and of itself is not good enough. We must do the right thing for the right reasons. Our attitude of heart must be rightly motivated for its actions to be acceptable to God.

Consider King Amaziah: He did the right thing with the wrong heart.

2 Chron. 26:4

NASB: He did right in the sight of the Lord, yet **not with a whole heart**.

NJKV: And he did what was right in the sight of the Lord, **but not with a loyal heart**.

AMP: He did right in the Lord's sight, but **not with a perfect or blameless heart**.

Good works performed with wrong motivation or improper attitude becomes dead works. This may lead to disfavour with God, and if you remain unrepentant from these works, it could lead to spiritual death. The good you do could 'kill' you spiritually if you do it for the wrong reasons.

9. Hypocrisy - Acting Contrary to the Truth Already Revealed to You.

Any form and expression of hypocrisy would be 'dead works', since the behaviour or associated works performed would lack God's favourable regard and blessings. Essentially, hypocrisy refers to 'acting' outwardly in a pretentious manner that is opposite to and in contradiction of what is believed or held inwardly as true.

Hypocrite = hupokrités = One who acts pretentiously, a counterfeit, a man who assumes and speaks or acts under a feigned character.^{iv}

The Greek adjective for hypocrisy is hupokrisis^v. The latter part of the word, 'krisis' relates to 'crisis'. A hypocrite is a person who has an identity crisis. They are one thing but pretend to be something else. They believe one thing but act out something different. They teach one thing, but behave oppositely to what is taught. There are few sins so directly denounced as hypocrisy. God hates hypocrisy. It is akin to 'lies'. There are few sins directly and vehemently denounced by Jesus as hypocrisy. It lacks truth and transparency. In respect of God's WORD or truth, it becomes all the more serious, because the hypocrite believes one thing, but

projects something different. This misrepresents the truth and can dilute and neutralise the power of the truth. Ultimately, hypocrisy misrepresents God Himself. Hence, God despises hypocrisy.

Peter wholeheartedly accepted that Gentiles, a term representing all nations of the earth which are non-Jewish, are together with Jews, part of the singular global and universal Body of Christ. But much later, with progression of time, Peter betrayed this internal conviction and acted in contradiction to it when he was in Galatian region. Paul had occasion to publicly rebuke him. Here is the account.

Gal. 2:11-21

- 11 But when Cephas came to Antioch, **I opposed him to his face**, because he **stood condemned**.
- 12 For prior to the **coming of certain men from James**, he used to **eat with the Gentiles**; but when **they came**, **he began to withdraw and hold himself aloof, fearing the party of the circumcision.**
- 13 The **rest of the Jews joined him in hypocrisy**, with the result that **even Barnabas was carried away** by their hypocrisy.
- 14 But when I saw that they were not **straightforward about the truth of the gospel**, I said to Cephas in **the presence of all**, "If you, being a Jew, live like the Gentiles and not like the Jews, how *is it that* you compel the Gentiles to live like Jews?"
- 15 "We *are* Jews by nature and not sinners from among the Gentiles;
- 16 nevertheless knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the Law but through faith in Christ Jesus, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, so that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the Law; since by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified.
- 17 "But if, while seeking to be justified in Christ, we ourselves have also been found sinners, is Christ then a minister of sin? May it never be!
- 18 "**For if I rebuild what I have *once* destroyed, I prove myself to be a transgressor.**
- 19 "For through the Law I died to the Law, so that I might live to God.
- 20 "**I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the *life* which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me.**
- 21 "**I do not nullify the grace of God**, for if righteousness *comes* through the Law, **then Christ died needlessly.**"

Peter regularly sat to eat with Gentile believers. When he heard certain high ranking Jewish persons, who believed in the practice of circumcision as an additional requirement for salvation, were coming from Jerusalem to visit Galatia, he withdrew from eating with the Gentiles and only associated with Jewish believers. He did this because he feared these Jews. When the Apostle Paul saw this, he rebuked Peter publicly, because he was misrepresenting

the nature Christ and the Gospel. So Peter believed one thing, but acted in contradiction to his internal belief system. By doing so, Peter was discounting that salvation is faith in Jesus Christ alone, and not by works of the law (including circumcision), and loudly proclaiming something opposite (that salvation is through works - observing the law) to everything he knew to be true.

This behaviour of Peter could be construed as a dead work, because he outwardly observes something which God rejects and does not honour with His approval. Worse still is that the outward actions communicate more loudly than what Peter espoused with his mouth. Paul appraised Peter in this instance as a hypocrite.

This is not innocent for the following reasons:

- (a) **It dilutes the truth and thus the potential attendant power of that truth.** This is all the more serious because Peter was a leading Apostle. Hypocrisy is a bad thing generally, but all the more lethal when present in a leader. This is so because the leader exerts an influence over and affects many people. Hence, Paul sharply and publicly rebuked Peter. If this was left unaddressed and uncorrected, it would have tainted the Gospel message and nullified its power and authority.
- (b) **It has an advancing and overriding effect on commitment to truth in others, who become overwhelmed by the power of the hypocrisy.** Others, including Barnabas, were 'swept away' by Peter's hypocrisy and joined him in his hypocritical posture.
- (c) **This behaviour is sin or transgression of God's truth, from which we must repent.** In correcting Peter, Paul makes this statement ...

Gal. 2:18 For if I rebuild what I have once destroyed, I prove myself to be a transgressor. **(NASB)**

Gal. 2:18 For if I [*or any others who have taught that the observance of the Law of Moses is not essential to being justified by God should now by word or practice teach or intimate that it is essential to*] build up again what I tore down, I prove myself a transgressor. **(AMP)**

To communicate, by your teaching or behaviour, that you believe something dissimilar to what you inwardly hold to, is hypocrisy. Worse still is when you practice something God rejects, whilst simultaneously teaching its opposite.

10. Works of the Flesh and of the Old Nature of Sin

Original sin is to depart from sonship toward God, our Father. As we progress toward maturity in Christ through the ongoing work of sanctification within us, we are required to repent from, forsake and overcome sinful thinking, tendencies or behaviours. Whilst these might not lead to eternal separation from God, our Father, if accommodated in our lives on a sustained basis, without a deliberate inclination within us to overcome them, it could lead to ultimate spiritual death. In this respect, these 'works of the flesh' or deeds of our old sinful nature could very well be appropriately labeled 'dead works', since they could result in spiritual 'death'. Consider the scriptural passages below which isolate very specific sinful proclivities, which we must repent from.

Ephesians 2:1-8

And you were **dead in your trespasses and sins**, in which you **formerly walked according to the course of this world**, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience. Among them we too all formerly **lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath**, even as the rest. But God, being **rich in mercy**, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in 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;

Gal. 5:19-21

Now the **deeds of the flesh** are evident, which are: **immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, envying, drunkenness, carousing**, and things like these, of which I forewarn you, just as I have forewarned you, that those who **practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God**.

Col. 3:8-10

But now you also, put them all aside: **anger, wrath, malice, slander, and abusive speech from your mouth**. Do not **lie to one another**, since you laid aside the **old self with its evil practices**, and have put on the new self who is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him

Rom. 13:11-14

Do this, knowing the time, that it is already the hour for you to awaken from sleep; for now salvation is nearer to us than when we believed.

The night is almost gone, and the day is near. Therefore **let us lay aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light**. Let us **behave properly** as in the day, not in **carousing and drunkenness**, not in **sexual promiscuity and sensuality**, not in **strife and jealousy**. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh in regard to its lusts.

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ENDNOTES

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