

Repentance—The First Elementary Principle of Christ Sin, Salvation, Sanctification

The greatest move of God, the greatest revival to date, started in the first century with these words:
“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”

Matthew records:

“In those days John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea, ‘Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.’ For this is he who was spoken of by the prophet Isaiah when he said, ‘The voice of one crying in the wilderness: Prepare the way of the Lord; make his paths straight’” (Matthew 3:1–3).

And when John was imprisoned, Jesus Himself picked up the very same message:

“When Jesus heard that John had been put in prison, he withdrew to Galilee... From that time on Jesus began to preach, ‘Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near’” (Matthew 4:12, 17).

For our conversation it is important to note that Jesus’ call to repentance started before He called His first disciples (Matthew. 4:18). It is the foundation for following Him.

Later Paul echoed the same theme:

“I have declared to both Jews and Greeks that they must turn to God in repentance and have faith in our Lord Jesus” (Acts 20:21).

When John the Baptist, Jesus, and Paul preached this message, their Jewish hearers knew exactly what was meant by *kingdom* and *repentance*. But few Christians today truly understand.

Repentance From What?

This is why Hebrews presses the issue. Before listing the elementary principles, the writer does not simply say “repent”—he specifies:

“Therefore let us leave the elementary doctrine of Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God...” (Hebrews 6:1).

That phrase—*repentance from dead works*—is almost entirely misunderstood in Gentile churches. Repentance from what? Most assume it just means “repenting from bad behavior.” But to a Jewish audience, steeped in Torah and temple sacrifices, it meant something far deeper: turning from both rebellion and empty religious performance, because neither could produce righteousness apart from Messiah.

Without understanding what we are repenting from, repentance gets watered down into something sentimental or optional. And without repentance, everything else collapses. Salvation gets reduced to a decision. Sanctification becomes an afterthought. And the church loses its very foundation.

How Jesus and the Apostles Understood Sin and Forgiveness

1. Categories of Sin in Scripture

In both Old and New Testaments, sin is not treated as a flat, one-size-fits-all category. The Torah, in particular, distinguishes between:

- **Unintentional sins (sins of ignorance)**
 - Hebrew: חטאת (chatta’ah)
 - Covered by the sin offering (Leviticus 4).
 - Example: You accidentally touched something unclean or broke a command without knowing it.
- **Intentional / high-handed sins (with a “raised fist”)**
 - Hebrew: בְּיָד רָמָה (b’yad ramah) = “with a high hand” (Numbers 15:30–31).

- These were not covered by sacrifice.
- The person was considered to have despised the Lord's word. The result: they bore their guilt, and in some cases, were cut off from Israel.

This Jewish understanding sits in the background of the New Testament.

2. Dead Works

So what are “dead works” in Hebrews 6:1?

- **Works of the law done without faith**
 - Things performed outwardly but with no inward life (Romans 9:31–32).
 - Example: Pharisees keeping ritual washings, but their hearts were far from God (Mark 7:6–9).
- **Religious activity that cannot deal with intentional sin**
 - Under Torah, the sacrifices could only cleanse outwardly, temporarily, and only for *unintentional* sins.
 - They were “dead works” if trusted for righteousness. They pointed forward to Christ, but could not remove guilt (Hebrews 10:1–4).
- **Sinful acts flowing from the flesh**
 - Anything not rooted in repentance and faith is dead. Even good deeds, if done apart from Christ, are dead works (Isaiah 64:6).
 - Doing something that you know is against what the Lord has told you. It might be right for everyone else, but the Lord has made clear, it is not right, or OK, for you.

Thus, repentance from dead works means turning away from false reliance on religious performance and acknowledging that only Christ's sacrifice covers sin — including intentional, willful sin.

3. The Jewish Shock of the Gospel

Here's why Hebrews is so radical:

- Every Jew knew Torah sacrifices covered unintentional sin, but not willful sin. For deliberate rebellion, there was no sacrifice, only judgment.
- But in Christ, even the sins for which the Torah offered no sacrifice can be forgiven — because He is the better sacrifice, once for all (Hebrews 9:14; 10:10–14).
- That's why David's cry in Psalm 51 is so desperate: “You do not delight in sacrifice, or I would give it.” He knew intentional sin (adultery and murder) had no atonement in the law — yet he cast himself on God's mercy.

4. Why This Matters for Us

- Repentance is the doorway. Without repentance, even religious zeal is just “dead works.”
- The cross goes further than Torah. What the law could not cover — intentional, high-handed rebellion — Christ's blood cleanses when we repent and believe.
- Sanctification depends on this foundation. If believers don't grasp the seriousness of sin (especially intentional sin), they will treat grace as cheap and sanctification as optional.
- Repentance: From Scripture to church history, one truth stands out: every true revival begins with repentance.

In short: Hebrews 6:1–2 begins with repentance from *dead works* because only by leaving behind both deliberate sin and empty religion can a believer truly enter into salvation and sanctification.

Salvation and Sanctification: Walking It Out Daily

One of the great errors of our time is the way we blur categories that Scripture keeps distinct. Salvation, sanctification, and discipleship are often spoken of as if they were the same thing. This confusion has left many believers disoriented, and it played no small role in the collapse of IHOPKC. To move forward, we need to recover what the apostles actually taught.

Salvation: A Completed Work, A Continuing Journey

Paul is clear: *“For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast”* (Ephesians 2:8–9). At the moment we place our trust in Christ, salvation is secure. We are justified—declared righteous before God—by grace alone. Nothing can add to or subtract from Christ’s finished work.

But salvation is not simply an event; it is also a journey. Paul immediately adds: *“For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them”* (Ephesians 2:10). In other words, salvation begins at the cross but is lived out in daily obedience. That is why Paul tells the Philippians: *“Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you”* (Philippians 2:12–13). We are not earning salvation—we are living it out, step by step, in cooperation with the Spirit.

Daily Discipleship

Jesus framed salvation as a daily walk. *“If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me”* (Luke 9:23). Daily discipleship is the heartbeat of the Believer’s life: repentance, faith, obedience, and surrender. This is why Scripture warned Believers against dullness of hearing (Hebrews 5:11) and urged constant vigilance: *“Examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith”* (2 Corinthians 13:5).

Two Dimensions of Sanctification

To understand this daily walk, we must recover the biblical teaching on sanctification. The New Testament speaks of sanctification in two distinct ways:

1. **Positional Sanctification (Past, Completed Work)**
 - At the moment of salvation, every believer is set apart as holy in Christ.
 - *“But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God”* (1 Corinthians 6:11).
 - *“We have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all”* (Hebrews 10:10).
 - This never changes. It is rooted in Christ’s finished work and cannot be undone.
2. **Progressive Sanctification (Present, Ongoing Work)**
 - While we are already holy in position, we must grow in holiness in practice.
 - *“For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from sexual immorality”* (1 Thessalonians 4:3).
 - *“Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth”* (John 17:17).
 - Here the Spirit works in us daily, conforming us to Christ. This is where obedience, discernment, and maturity take shape.

Why the Distinction Matters

Collapsing the categories of positional and progressive sanctification creates confusion about salvation and holiness. A believer who fails in progressive sanctification—that is, who lives carnally or immaturely—may feel as if they have lost salvation. In truth, their position in Christ has not changed, but their growth, fellowship, and fruitfulness are hindered.

This is why phrases like *“fallen Christian”* muddy the waters. A true believer who stumbles remains sanctified positionally but is unsanctified in practice. A wolf or false apostle, by contrast, was never sanctified at all. Without this distinction, churches mislabel leaders, misapply Scripture, and mismanage discipline in the body of Christ.

The Scriptural Warning: Sins That Exclude from the Kingdom

Alongside positional and progressive sanctification, the Apostle Paul repeatedly warned that certain sins—if practiced without repentance—will prevent a believer from inheriting the Kingdom of God:

- *“Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will*

inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God” (1 Corinthians 6:9–11).

- *“Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God” (Galatians 5:19–21).*
- *“For you may be sure of this, that everyone who is sexually immoral or impure, or who is covetous (that is, an idolater), has no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God” (Ephesians 5:5).*

Notice: Paul does not say such people lose eternal salvation—rather, they lose inheritance in the Kingdom, the Messianic Era.

The Distinction Between Salvation and Kingdom Inheritance

- Eternal Salvation is a gift of grace, received through faith in Christ. It is secure because it is grounded in His finished work (Ephesians 2:8–9; John 10:28–29).
- Kingdom Inheritance is a matter of reward, responsibility, and participation in Christ’s reign during the Messianic Age (Millennial Kingdom). It is connected to faithfulness, obedience, and holiness in this life (2 Timothy 2:12; Revelation 20:4–6).

Thus, a believer may be saved, yet disqualified from reigning with Christ if they persist in unrepentant sin. Paul makes this plain:

“If anyone’s work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire” (1 Corinthians 3:15).

Why This Matters

- Progressive sanctification prepares us for Kingdom inheritance. Daily obedience, holiness, and maturity determine our role in Christ’s coming reign.
- Unrepentant sin may cost us inheritance. A believer living carnally does not lose salvation, but risks losing reward, authority, and joy in the age to come.
- This gives eternal weight to present choices. What we do in this life echoes into the Messianic Age and beyond.

This is why Paul urged believers to live soberly: *“If we endure, we will also reign with him” (2 Timothy 2:12).*

Tied to the Elementary Principles of Christ

To fully understand this, Paul’s warnings must be connected to two of the elementary principles of Christ listed in Hebrews 6:1–2:

- Resurrection of the Dead — not all believers will be raised to the same glory or reward. Paul distinguishes between those who shine like stars and those who are saved “as through fire” (1 Corinthians 15:41–42; 3:15).
- Eternal Judgment — this includes not only the judgment of the wicked but also the judgment seat of Christ (2 Corinthians 5:10; Romans 14:10–12), where every believer will give account for their works.

Salvation is secure, but inheritance of the Kingdom is conditional.

The Kingdom and the Messianic Age

The Kingdom of God is both present and future. Today it is a spiritual reality; tomorrow it will be a visible reign when Messiah rules the nations. To “inherit the Kingdom” means more than being saved—it means sharing in Christ’s authority during His Messianic reign.

- *“If we endure, we will also reign with him” (2 Timothy 2:12).*
- *“The one who conquers, I will grant him to sit with me on my throne” (Revelation 3:21).*

- *“Then the kingdom and the dominion and the greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven shall be given to the people of the saints of the Most High” (Daniel 7:27).*

Progressive sanctification, then, is not merely about personal holiness here and now—it is preparation for Kingdom inheritance in the age to come.

The Lesson for Today

IHOPKC illustrates this confusion. Many, not all, mistook outward activity—prayer meetings, prophetic words, emotional worship—for the evidence of sanctification. But activity without “walking out your salvation” is what Hebrews 6 calls “dead works.”

Without grounding in the apostle’s teaching or doctrine (Acts 2:42) and daily discipleship, believers lacked discernment. They were sanctified in position but stagnant in practice, and thus vulnerable to deception, by a leader who himself did not fully, or rightly, understand sin, salvation and sanctification.

The way forward is not to abandon the hope of revival or the pursuit of spiritual gifts, but to return to the foundation. We must hold fast to the grace of salvation, walk it out daily through obedience, and pursue both positional confidence and progressive growth in sanctification.

Anything less will leave the church immature, unskilled in the Word, and unable to distinguish good from evil (Hebrews 5:14).

Blessings,

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