

As to Repentance

by John Nelson Darby

Repentance is God's claim upon people, and it is essential to preach it in Christ's name, as a call to return to God and to judge ourselves before Him.

Scripture: Isaiah 5:4, Matthew 4:17, Mark 1:15, Luke 24:47, Acts 17:30, Romans 2:4, 1 Corinthians 11:3, 2 Corinthians 7:10, 1 John 1:9, Revelation 2:28

Topics: "God's Grace", "Repentance"

Description

John Nelson Darby emphasizes the critical nature of repentance in the Christian faith, arguing that it should not be seen merely as a preliminary step to faith but as a vital response to God's claim on our lives. He asserts that true repentance involves a deep self-judgment in the presence of God, recognizing our state as sinners and the necessity of turning to Christ for salvation. Darby warns against a diluted message that omits the call to repentance, as it undermines the seriousness of God's judgment and the urgency of His grace. He highlights that while God loves us, His call to repentance is essential for true reconciliation with Him. Ultimately, Darby calls for a preaching that balances God's grace with His righteous claim on humanity, urging all to repent and believe in the gospel.

Transcript

This is a more important question.

In Luke 24:47 you have that "repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem." There can be no question about that, but what has enfeebled preaching among ourselves and others is, there has been such a sense that repentance is preliminary to faith.

We are all apt to topple over from one side to another, and so the true place of repentance has become obscured, and its presentation enfeebled.

This is mischievous for the reason that the claim of God is left out or enfeebled by it.

God is now gathering His own in haste, if I may so speak; the Lord is coming, and woe be to us if we say He delays His coming.

God is gathering out hurriedly the joint heirs, and, as of old, so now it is, "save yourselves from this untoward generation"; that was when Jerusalem was going to be destroyed.

He now calls upon "all men everywhere to repent: because he hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained."

Repentance is God's claim upon people, and if in preaching I merely say, 'God loves you, and you are a poor sinner, here is grace for you' (and that I surely would say), and then leave repentance out, it is leaving the man's conscience out.

Ques. What is repentance?

The judgment we have passed upon ourselves, and all that we have done, and have been, in God's presence under grace.

Even now, as under grace, there may be a legal repentance.

But if it is put before faith, it unsettles the whole ground we stand upon before God; it is then something that I am doing in my own heart, and that won't do. When I preach repentance, therefore, I must preach it in Christ's name, and so I said, "under grace."

As I get to God, I see what I am in true light, more and more clearly every day. It is infinite love, that, where sin abounded, grace did much more abound; but if I carry God's message to others, I must carry God's claim, and I say, if you don't repent and turn to God, you will be lost.

10 Yet if I call on people to repent, in the name of Christ, they must believe in Christ in order to repent. As a man you have to say to God and what state are you in before God?

If your heart is not changed, what have you that is at all fit for God?

But if I call upon a man to be in God's presence with God's claim upon him, and that in grace - perfect grace - then if he returns, he returns to God. Repentance ought to be preached as God's claim upon man, but as putting in that claim in the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ.

God calls on all men to repent, but if they do not, they must come under judgment.

You cannot have your eye open on the Lord Jesus Christ, and not hate yourself as a sinner.

Ques. Why is mention made of the "morning star," in Revelation 2:28?

It shows that Thyatira is at midnight.

In Thyatira there are two ways of judging; the one is what He begins with, and the other is the coming of the Lord. As in Isaiah 5, God asks, "What could have been done more to my vineyard, that I have not done in it; wherefore, when I looked that it should bring forth grapes, brought it forth wild grapes?" So He will break down its wall, and it shall be trodden down.

Or, take up Adam, and say, is that what God made you? Have you answered to it?

Whether it is the world, or Jews, or the church as a dispensation for the time, it can be judged so.

But on the other hand I can say, Christ is coming, are you ready for Him?

In the three primary churches the Lord had spoken of the possibility of going back to the former condition, but to Thyatira (which I do not doubt gives us a true picture of Rome), He gives time to repent, and He says that she does not repent, so she is going to be punished, and therefore it is that this church is the first that goes down to the Lord's coming.

When you get the judgment of the whole body of the professing church as thus corrupt, then you have, "Hold fast till I come." The kingdom and the heavenly glory will then take the place of the corrupt church.

11 Ques. You get the morning star again at the end of the Revelation?

The end of the Revelation forms no part of the prophecy.

Before He enters on prophecy, you get the Lord's coming and then, "Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father; to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever." Although earthly things are going to be spoken about, Christ's coming in grace calls out the church's feelings towards Himself.

And again, at the close of the book, He calls out the affections of the church. In the beginning, by what He has done; at the end, by what He will do when He comes again.

Ques. Under what circumstances is confession made to man, as well as to God?

If I have wronged another, I confess it to him. If I go wrong and find someone more spiritual than myself, or if I get my heart engaged with anxieties and it is burdened, and I know a person who is really spiritual and has the mind of Christ, I may go and open my mind to him; but do not go to one not spiritually minded.

Ques. What is the difference between "crucified with Christ," and "I am crucified with Christ"?

None at all; because the "I" there is the old man.

Ques. Then how does "I" live?

You have three "I's" in Scripture, and, in terms, they are contradictory. "Nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me." Then have I no flesh in me? Yes, indeed, and that is another "I." It is plain enough for people's consciousness.

There is no crucifying of the new life of Christ in me, but the crucifixion is of the flesh.

Ques. What does it mean by God repenting that He made man?

In speaking thus of God, it is just human language that is employed.

Ques. What of "repentance to salvation not to be repented of"?

That should be "not to be regretted."

Ques. Did any know that they were "lost" in the Old Testament?

God never told people they were lost, until Christ had died to save them.

12 There were two trees in the garden of Eden, the tree of life and the tree of responsibility; man took of the latter, and is lost. The law takes up the same question, but it puts the accomplishing of the

responsibility before the enjoyment of life. But when I come to Christ, I find Christ has met all the responsibility; that is settled, and life is given.

In the Old Testament, wherever God wrought, the repentance was real, but they had no thought of asking, "What must I do to be saved?"

The young man asked, "What shall I do to inherit eternal life?" The Lord in His answer does not say "eternal life," but, "This do, and thou shalt live." The law referred to particular acts, and they could go and get their consciences cleared, by a lamb, or a kid, or a goat; it was a general clearance for a need. But repentance in the Old Testament referred to the same thing as in the New.

The judgment, too, of sin was according to the measure of the rule given.

The measure of sin is not the duty of man; but the measure of judgment is, for men will be judged according to their works

The question now is not whether I have done what a man ought to do; but it is, am I such that I can go to where God is? and that is a very different thing.

Ques. Repentance could not occur until a soul was quickened, could it?

Or they may go together. If I believe, there is a reflex action and I repent. To be convicted is not the same; the law might convict. Sins and my state are two distinct things. The law may convict me of my sins. But suppose I go and preach to a person anything you please, the law or Christ, and suppose he does not believe what I say, will he be converted or anything else? Rather will he say, "Did you ever hear such nonsense?" and off he goes.

Ques. What of "Repent ye, and believe the gospel"?

If they did not repent they would not get into the kingdom, for it was the kingdom that was preached. And supposing he did not believe that the kingdom of heaven was at hand, he would not repent.

I have often said when preaching the gospel, God is now revealed. He never was revealed before. You might have thunderings and lightnings, but they were the signs of His power, while He was behind a veil and would not be revealed, but sent out to man a rule of what man ought to be.

13 But now we have God revealed in Christ, abundantly in the cross, in every shape, but God revealed; and the moment I get that, I must have all that God is.

God is light, and God is love; and whenever a person is brought to God, the power of light and the power of love are both acting. In the poor woman in the city, that was a sinner, her whole heart is trusting Christ; the love has made the light precious to her, and she comes in, in that way.

Ques. What should be preached in order to produce repentance?

It is always preaching Christ, but the claim of God must come in; the law may come in; but the full thing would be Christ.

Ques. What of Paul's preaching at Athens?

He defends himself, and appeals to their consciences; but that was not his preaching, it was his defence or apology.

Ques. Sometimes there is a fear of urging repentance on souls, lest it might be regarded as leading them to do something for themselves?

Scripture is plain, "God commandeth all men everywhere to repent."

Ques. How would you define repentance?

The definition that it is merely change of mind is not enough; that would reduce it entirely to faith; but it is the soul judging itself before God - the eye turned inward, not outward, by the Spirit of God.

Ques. What is God's repentance? How do you reconcile such scriptures as when it says: "It grieved him at his heart"?

I don't reconcile them; I believe them. If you speak about God, you must always speak imperfectly. But just because God had not changed He judges the state of the man who has. It is constantly used about God, in that sense, because God Himself does not change.

Ques. What did you mean by preaching the claims of God?

Preaching them in grace, of course, but God has perfect claim on my whole being in connection, now, with the cross of Christ.

Even as Creator He has, but, now, there is a double claim, through the gift of His Son.

14 I have broken away from God, and I have listened to the devil; and I must come to God and own it.

Ques. In what sense is Christ "head of every man"? Do they belong to Him?

Certainly; and He will judge them accordingly. Adam was the natural head of every man but Christ has bought "the field" or world.

In that verse (1 Cor. 11:3), "the head of every man," man is a little distinct from the woman.

Ques. But the woman is to "guide the house"?

Oh, yes.

Ques. Would that verse authorise a mother in praying with her sons?

If they remain as children under her hand, of course, she may; but if they are emancipated, in my judgment she had better let it alone.

It may require spiritual judgment in any given case.

Ques. Is the anointing in contrast with the sealing?

In contrast! The anointing is the sealing. The gift of the Holy Ghost is the anointing, and is the sealing, and is the earnest. You may distinguish them a little as to effects, but not as facts. Christ was anointed with the Holy Ghost, and "him hath God the Father sealed." The Holy Ghost gives me the knowledge of all these

things.

Ques. May a wife pray with her husband?

That is just as the husband likes when they are alone with God.

Ques. What is the difference between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of heaven?

When the King was here, the kingdom of God could be said to be present, but, for that very reason, the kingdom of heaven was not come; the kingdom of heaven could not come until He went away. When the kingdom of God shall be set up in power, it will still be the kingdom of heaven. When He comes again, it will be the kingdom of God according to Mark and Luke, and will be the kingdom of heaven according to Matthew. The moral force of it is the great point of difference.

Ques. How is it different from the church?

The church is God's assembly, and, viewed in its heavenly place of association with Christ, it is the body of the Head. The kingdom is the sphere of government. The church is very distinct as God's house, the Spirit of God makes it His habitation; but it is the body of Christ, united to Him, the Head, in heaven; a wholly different thing. Government is the great thought in the kingdom; but grace is the thought in the church; that which God calls, that which He elects.

15 Ques. The kingdom of heaven and the great house, are they coextensive now? Could they be applied to the same sphere?

They are distinct thoughts. The great house is a comparison drawn from the ruin of that which professes to be the church of God; all kinds of corruption and wickedness have been brought in where God's Spirit is, where God dwells.

Ques. Does the sphere of the kingdom of the heavens now go beyond the professing church in its present state?

When you compare things, you must have something to compare with; what is there to compare between a kingdom and a house?

The kingdom of heaven is the kingdom of God when the King is in heaven; it is, too, the kingdom of God even in His absence. Kingdom of God is the universal form, but it may be in different states and shapes, because the King is in heaven, but it is all the kingdom of God.

Ques. Could you speak of the kingdom of God, before Christ came?

They were waiting for it.

Ques. Could you say that any of old were in the kingdom of God?

Certainly not, that would lose the idea of a kingdom that God would set up.

Ques. Can the kingdom of God get wrong?

The kingdom of heaven could.

I believe antichrist is the second beast.

There are the three characters of Christ - prophet, priest, and king. When Satan is cast down from heaven, his anti-priestly character is gone, he can't accuse any more.

The second beast has two horns, and is an anti-king. The anti-prophet character, the prophet, is seen in the other beast, and this anti-prophet character abides, when the two others are given up.

16 Ques. Do you find the first half-week in the Revelation?

What goes on then, you do; until you come to the little book, you get a certain time elapsing, which is before the half-week.

Ques. What is "that good thing" Paul committed to Timothy?

The truth of the gospel, I suppose.

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