

REPENTANCE: A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

“If the professed convert distinctly and deliberately declares that he knows the Lord’s will, but does not mean to attend to it, you are not to pamper his presumptions, but it is your duty to assure him that he is not saved.”

- *Charles Haddon Spurgeon*

CHAFER AND IRONSIDE ON REPENTANCE

Both Lewis Sperry Chafer (1871-1952) and H.A. Ironside (1876-1951) were **KEY** leaders (and good friends) in the development of “FUNDAMENTALISM”. Both were godly men that were greatly used of God. However, on the issue of repentance they had divergent views, and that diversity of thought continues to be reflected in the conservative theological circles of our day. The debate over “Easy Believism” (Chafer) versus the need for repentance (Ironside) continues to this day.

CHAFER SAID:

“The conclusion of the matter is that, while covenant people are appointed to national or personal adjustment to God by repentance as a separate act, there is no basis either in reason or revelation for the demand to be made that an unregenerate person in this age must add a covenant person’s repentance to faith in order to be saved. ... When entering upon this phase of study, it is first necessary to eliminate all portions of the New Testament which introduce the word *repentance* in its relation to covenant people.” --

Chafer, SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY UNABRIDGED - Vol.

3, p. 376 & 377

IRONSIDE SAID:

“Only recently the statement was made by one who should have known better: ‘Repentance is Jewish. Jews could repent because they were in covenant relation with God and had violated that covenant. But Gentiles have never known such a relationship. They are dead sinners. Therefore they cannot repent until after they are born of God.’ This is a choice bit of ignorant exposition that would be laughable, were it not so dangerous.” --

Ironside, UNLESS YOU REPENT, pg. 45

[**Note:** We don’t know who Ironside had in mind, but it certainly has application to Chafer’s words.]

CHAFER SAID:

“From this overwhelming mass of irrefutable evidence, it is clear that the New Testament does not impose repentance upon the unsaved as a condition of salvation.” -- **Chafer**, SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY UNABRIDGED - Vol. 3, p. 376

IRONSIDE SAID:

“True, forgiveness is by faith, but there can be no faith without repentance, and no repentance without faith. What God hath joined together, let no man put asunder.” -- **Ironside**, UNLESS YOU REPENT, p. 39

THIS IS THE BACKGROUND FOR WHAT JAMES MONTGOMERY BOICE SAID:

“The Dallas school [Dallas Theological Seminary] speaks of repentance, but because it does not want to acknowledge a need for behavioral change, it redefines repentance to mean only a ‘change of mind’ concerning who Jesus is, irrespective of any reference to sin.”

-**Boice**, WHATEVER HAPPENED TO THE GOSPEL OF GRACE?, p. 143

[**Note:** I would not necessarily color all related to Dallas Seminary with this brush.]

THIS EXPLAINS WHY JOHN MACARTHUR SAID:

“Chafer could rightly be called the father of twentieth-century no-lordship theology. He listed repentance and surrender as two of ‘the more common features of human responsibility which are too often erroneously added to the one requirement of *faith* or *belief*.’”

-**John MacArthur**, FAITH WORKS, p. 228

BOTTOM LINE: Saving faith involves REPENTANCE which is a change of mind with regard to **both** SIN and CHRIST. This is an indissoluble package as Ironside so aptly stated. The NATURE of a true saving faith is consistent throughout the ages even though the revelation of God was progressive (cf. Hebrews 11). A true saving faith is a change-of-mind (repentant) kind of faith.