

H. A. IRONSIDE ON REPENTANCE

Acts 20:21 (NASB)

21 solemnly testifying to both Jews and Greeks of repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.

THE DEBATE

The “Lordship Gospel” versus the “Lordless Gospel” debate has raged for a long time. There are essentially three KEY questions in the debate: 1) Does saving faith embrace Christ as BOTH Lord and Savior or just Savior? 2) Does saving faith involve a change of mind about sin called REPENTANCE? And, 3) Does saving faith result in a transformed life?

Those of us who hold to a “Lordship” view affirm that Christ must be believed on for **WHO** He is as Lord as well as for **WHAT** He has done in His finished work on the cross. We further affirm that inherent in believing in Christ for WHO He is involves a change of mind with regard to sin called repentance.

Finally, if the faith is real in the heart it will show in the life. It is all a work of **GRACE**. It is only by the Holy Spirit that one can say that Jesus is Lord (1 Cor. 12:3). God grants repentance (Acts 11:18). One who claims to know Christ but does not have a resulting pattern of obedience is a “liar” (1 Jn. 2:3-4).

A FUNDAMENTAL DISAGREEMENT

Unfortunately, many people involved in this discussion don’t really realize the background of this debate in terms of FUNDAMENTALISM. In the early days of the FUNDAMENTALIST movement in our country there was a strong advocate of the Lordship view of repentance by the name of H.A. Ironside (1876-1951). On the other side was a man named Lewis Sperry Chafer (1871-1952). These men were friends who respected each other but they disagreed strongly on the issue of REPENTANCE. In response to this debate Ironside wrote a book entitled “***Unless You Repent***” which was originally published in 1937 by the American Tract Society. In the introduction Ironside writes:

“Fully convinced in my own mind that the doctrine of repentance is the missing note in many otherwise orthodox and fundamentally sound circles, I have penned this volume out of a full heart.”

This book in recent years was reprinted by Gospel Folio Press. At the back of the book there is “A Brief Historical Sketch” by John A. Bjorlie that provides the context in which Ironside wrote against what has become known as “Easy Believism.”

Chafer was a disciple of C.I. Scofield (1843-1921). Scofield’s Study Bible and Chafer’s Systematic Theology had great influence on the Fundamentalists of their day. In the “appendix” to the book “Unless You Repent” John Bjorlie says, ***“It could be said that this book on repentance was written to keep Chafer honest.”*** (p. 149). Again, on page 151 Bjorlie says:

“The importance of this snatch of history for us today is to see that from the start there were two very different views on this vital topic at the roots of the fundamentalist movement. The one view, championed by C.I. Scofield and later systematically taught by Lewis Sperry Chafer, seems to almost dread using the word “repent” and handles the topic similar to the way in which a donkey eats thistles -- very carefully. Ironside did not speak on repentance with the guarded hesitancy of a man unsure of his footing. ... He [Ironside] was called the Archbishop of Fundamentalism, and if anyone was in a position to see the drift of the evangelical church, he was.

When you compare the forceful Bible teaching of H.A. Ironside in this book to the cursory explanations in Chafer’s *Systematic Theology*, it tells a story on its own. Those who minimize the place of repentance in their preaching, or worse, banish it altogether, are left with very scant standing ground after reading this book.”

Those who don’t preach “REPENTANCE” need to be called to REPENTANCE and H.A. Ironside was a man of conviction and courage who did that very thing in his day – but he did it with a tone of love and exhortation. This emphasis is still needed TODAY!

2 Peter 3:9 (NKJV)

9 The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.