

Acts 26:20 (J. Wilson Smith) 54499

Christian Truth: Volume 30, Deep Plowing: Present Day Evangelism

Article from <https://bibletruthpublishers.com/bible-truth-study-bible/btsb>

There was nothing superficial in the gospel of Paul. His preaching was always searching. It did not skim the surface nor heal the hurt slightly by saying, "Peace, peace," when there was none. It did not call for a mere profession of faith nor a dead intellectual assent; no, it laid the conscience bare, and put its finger on sin. It dealt not only with overt acts of evil, but with the corrupt nature from which they sprang. It left no stone unturned. It was influential and resulted either in its deliberate rejection as a thing intolerable, or in its reception as a thing precious beyond comparison. It was either a warrant of death or "the power of God unto salvation." This is true of the gospel as such always; but in Paul we find the fullest and most abundant testimony to Christianity, and therefore it is well to refer to him as our model.

Thus in Acts 26:20 we have a summary of his method and mode of work. He "showed first unto them of Damascus, and at Jerusalem, and throughout all the coasts of Judea, and then to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance." This is doubtless a fair sample of his style.

Three weighty truths burdened his soul and lay at the bottom of his preaching -

Repentance

Turning to God

Works meet for repentance

And these three truths, observe, were urged by him everywhere and on all classes. Unto them of Damascus first, where he first saw the light, and where in the Jewish synagogue he preached that "Jesus is the Son of God"; then at Jerusalem, not yet finally judged, but having at least a semblance of God's favor and privilege; then in Judea; and last to the Gentiles, ignorant of God and given over to sin. Everywhere and always the same appeal comes from his lips for the simple reason that one response is incumbent on all.

Repentance lies at the bottom of all true religion. "Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish" (Luke 13:3), said the Lord when on earth.

You may as well expect to see a house without a foundation as a saved soul without repentance. Such a thing does not exist.

Granted that "all have sinned," then all must repent. Granted that "there is none righteous," then all must repent.

It is an absolute necessity. It is a thing that cannot be avoided, nor can a substitute for it be found. Each one must for himself own his personal guilt and judge his evil condition, although repentance, however deep, is not our Savior, but Christ Jesus our Lord.

Repentance implies self-judgment in the presence of God. It is a change of mind in reference to myself, to others, and to God—such a change of mind that humbles me in the dust, putting me in my true and proper place before Him. I say then, like the prodigal, "I have sinned against heaven, and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son."

Oh, the unbounded value of this full admission of total demerit! If absolutely necessary, it is also profoundly blessed; if deeply humbling, it is also divinely elevating. It puts the soul right with God; it anticipates and averts His judgment of it, and acknowledges His holiness by a true confession of its own guilt.

But is there merit in repentance? None. It is one of the activities of faith—the initial, dawning activity of the Spirit of God as He operates on the conscience. It is the repudiation of all merit. Else why called repentance? An eternal difference exists between repentance and "doing penance"—the one is self-condemnatory, but the other is self-exalting. The one is seen in the offering of Abel, the other in that of Cain.

Turning to God is an act of the soul that, though subsequent to repentance, is yet prior to the production of works meet for it. It is the outward and upward glance of faith that lets in the sunshine. It is the completion of repentance—the obverse of the coin—while the works are the music of its ring and the witness of its genuineness. "Turning to God" is confronting a living Person.

Philosophy turns you to a thing, perhaps a good thing. It may make a drunkard turn to temperance, an impure man to chastity; but Christianity turns you, whatever you are, to God. Yes, to God, and to nothing short of God. If thus brought to God, works meet for repentance are natural.

Works meet for repentance. In these works we find the fruit growing on the tree. Anyone can tell that the tree lives and is healthy because of the crop it is bearing. Its life is developed in fruit. If there were no fruit, the fruit tree had better be cut down as a cumberer of the ground. But there is fruit. It is the necessary evidence of the life. The fruit does not produce the life, but the life the fruit. You might decorate the tree with fruit, but that would not give it life.

Further, if the tree be corrupt, the fruit is corrupt too; but the good fruit declares the nature of the tree to be good also.

Legality was once quite widespread, but levity is fast gaining ground as legality disappears, and preaching that pleases the ear is preferred to that which deals with sin. It is well, therefore, to listen to the words of the Apostle to the Gentiles, and to be reminded of that repentance, that turning to God, and those works meet for repentance, that threefold testimony which he preached so faithfully in his day.

clickbible.org