

Dead Orthodoxy

Disputing God's Dependability

Martin Luther became a MONK when he entered the Augustinian Order in 1505.

The Reformation began on October 31, 1517 [498 years ago this Saturday past], when the German monk known as Martin Luther nailed his 95 Theses to the Castle Church door in Wittenberg, Germany.

The truth of Luther's first thesis would reverberate throughout his lifetime, even finding expression in his last words.

His first thesis reads, "When our Lord and Master Jesus Christ said "Repent," he intended that the entire life of believers should be repentance."

Almost 30 years later, on February 16, 1546, Luther's last words, written on a piece of scrap paper, echoed the theme of his first thesis: "We are beggars! This is true."

Luther reiterated with his last breath what he proclaimed with his first thesis; we ought to be continually asking, even begging, for the forgiveness that comes through Christ's life, death, and resurrection.

God's people in Malachi's time were questioning God's dependability as a covenant partner. They were encountering difficult times through spiritual and economic hardships. They responded in disobedience and unfaithfulness.

In this dispute over God's dependability Malachi presents to God's people how this situation can be remedied; how God can provide for them both spiritually and materially. And the word which best describes the remedy is: REPENT!

Malachi 3:6-12 ESV

[6] “For I the LORD do not change; therefore you, O children of Jacob, are not consumed. [7] From the days of your fathers you have turned aside from my statutes and have not kept them. Return to me, and I will return to you, says the LORD of hosts. But you say, ‘How shall we return?’ [8] Will man rob God? Yet you are robbing me. But you say, ‘How have we robbed you?’ In your tithes and contributions. [9] You are cursed with a curse, for you are robbing me, the whole nation of you. [10] Bring the full tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. And thereby put me to the test, says the LORD of hosts, if I will not open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you a blessing until there is no more need. [11] I will rebuke the devourer for you, so that it will not destroy the fruits of your soil, and your vine in the field shall not fail to bear, says the LORD of hosts. [12] Then all nations will call you blessed, for you will be a land of delight, says the LORD of hosts.

Context – the truth of the situation

THE TRUTH: God’s people question his dependability

God’s people remain unfaithful, disloyal, and unloving:

[7] From the days of your fathers you have turned aside from my statutes and have not kept them. Return to me, and I will return to you, says the LORD of hosts.

TURNED ASIDE, NOT KEPT, RETURN

Their questioning of his dependability is seen in their lack of belief that he will provide for them as promised in the covenant

God’s example is tithing:

[8] Will man rob God? Yet you are robbing me. But you say, ‘How have we robbed you?’ In your tithes and contributions. [9] You are cursed with a curse, for you are robbing me, the whole nation of you. [10] Bring the full tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. And thereby put me to the test, says the LORD of hosts, if I will not open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you a blessing until there is no more need. [11] I will rebuke the devourer for you, so that it will not destroy the fruits of your soil, and your vine in the field shall not fail to bear, says the LORD of hosts.

THEY DOUBTED HE WOULD PROVIDE, HENCE "TEST ME"

THE DOUBTS CONCERNING GOD'S PROVISION POINT TO A QUESTIONING OF GOD'S DEPENDABILITY AS A COVENANT PARTNER

Do we believe God is dependable and that he will provide?

Matthew 6:25-32 ESV [25] "Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? [26] Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? [27] And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life? [28] And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, [29] yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. [30] But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? [31] Therefore do not be anxious, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' [32] For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all.

DO WE BELIEVE THAT GOD IS DEPENDABLE...THAT HE WILL PROVIDE?

ONE OF THE THINGS OUR ANXIOUSNESS MAY INDICATE IS THAT WE QUESTION GOD'S DEPENDABILITY.

What do you get anxious about?

Content – the truth for Malachi's audience

THE TRUTH: *God is dependable as seen in his provision*

God is dependable:

[6] "For I the LORD do not change;

THIS IS POINTING TO GOD'S DEPENDABILITY NOT HIS IMMUTABILITY

EVIDENCE IS THAT THEY ARE ALIVE; HE IS STEADFAST IN HIS LOVE TO HIS COVENANT PEOPLE

"...God's unchangeableness is the reason for Israel's continued existence"

God's actions demonstrate his dependability as a covenant partner

Their dire situation was itself evidence of his covenant dependability:

*their being
cursed meant
that God
was dependable*

[9] You are cursed with a curse, for you are robbing me, the whole nation of you.

Deuteronomy 28:15-19 ESV [15] "But if you will not obey the voice of the LORD your God or be careful to do all his commandments and his statutes that I command you today, then all these curses shall come upon you and overtake you. [16] Cursed shall you be in the city, and cursed shall you be in the field. [17] Cursed shall be your basket and your kneading bowl. [18] Cursed shall be the fruit of your womb and the fruit of your ground, the increase of your herds and the young of your flock. [19] Cursed shall you be when you come in, and cursed shall you be when you go out.

God's dependability is also seen in his willingness to return to his people:

Therefore, God says return to me so he can provide for his people both spiritually and materially:

[7] ... Return to me, and I will return to you, says the LORD of hosts.

RELATIONSHIP

This is a spiritual provision . . . But they want to know how:

[7] ... But you say, 'How shall we return?'

God gives them an example:

[8] Will man rob God? Yet you are robbing me. But you say, 'How have we robbed you?' In your tithes and contributions. ... [10] Bring the full tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house...

3 TITHES PRESCRIBED BY LAW AND REQUIRED FOR FAITHFULNESS: 10% OF ALL PRODUCE HOLY TO THE LORD INTENDED FOR LEVITES, 10% FOR A CELEBRATORY MEAL, 10% EVERY THREE YEARS FOR THE POOR

THE PEOPLE HAVE BEEN ROBBING GOD AND THUS REMAIN UNDER GOD'S CURSE

God will also provide for them materially:

[10] Bring the full tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. And thereby put me to the test, says the LORD of hosts, if I will not open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you a blessing until there is no more need. [11] I will rebuke the devourer for you, so that it will not destroy the fruits of your soil, and your vine in the field shall not fail to bear, says the LORD of hosts.

GOD IS DEPENDABLE AND HE WILL PROVIDE FOR US SPIRITUALLY AND MATERIALLY

Consider – the truth to act on

THE TRUTH: God requires repentance

"The essential message of this penultimate oracle is repentance, not tithing. God wants honest and genuine worship from his people, of which tithing is but a symbol"

[7] From the days of your fathers you have turned aside from my statutes and have not kept them. Return to me, and I will return to you, says the LORD of hosts.

This OT admonition is directly applicable to us in the NEW COVENANT

What is Repentance?

Piper: "...the basic meaning of repent is to experience a change of the mind's perceptions and dispositions and purposes ... that leads to the fruits of new behavior."

Grudem: Repentance is a heartfelt sorrow for sin, a renouncing of it, and a sincere commitment to forsake it and walk in obedience.

turning of the mind/heart + action
returning in

Christianity begins with repentance [not just faith]:

Grudem: Scripture puts repentance and faith together as different aspects the one act of coming to Christ for salvation. It is not that a person first from sin and trusts in Christ, or first trusts in Christ and then turns from sin, but rather that both occur at the same time. When we turn to Christ for salvation from our sins, we are simultaneously turning away from the sins that we are asking Christ to save us from. If that were not true our turning to Christ for salvation from sin could hardly be a genuine turning to him or trusting in him

GOSPEL FAITH + REPENTANCE HELP US UNDERSTAND THE GOSPEL

R - sin - sin kills our relationship with God
F - we need to trust someone to help

Repentance [and faith] continue throughout life:

Luther: "When our Lord and Master Jesus Christ said "Repent," he intended that the entire life of believers should be repentance."

REPENTANCE: A HALLMARK OF YOUR LIFE?

TURNING FROM SIN AND TRUSTING GOD CONTINUES

~~SOME RHETORICAL QUESTIONS WILL HELP US SEE THE SIGNIFICANCE OF CHRIST TO THIS PASSAGE: WHY REPENT? WHY BE SORROWFUL FOR SIN? WHY RENOUNCE SIN? WHY COMMIT TO FORSAKING IT AND WALKING IN OBEDIENCE?~~

When was the last time?

Why? Because

Christ – the truth for us

THE TRUTH: Repentance is meaningless apart from Christ

Exodus 34:6-7 ESV [6] The LORD passed before him and proclaimed, “The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, [7] keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty...”

GOD FORGIVES!

BUT HE WILL NOT LET THE GUILTY GO UNPUNISHED! - Why REPENT IF ... ?

HOW CAN THIS BE?

Tim Keller: The conundrum of Exodus 34:6-7 is actually the tension that drives the plot of the entire Old Testament. God relates to people by way of a covenant ... Both parties swear faithfulness to the other. "You will be my and I will be your God" (Ex 6:7). Despite the many covenant ceremonies and vows, the history recorded in the Bible is an account of individuals and communities continually breaking their promise and obligations to God. We would expect that this would mean God's covenant is null and void. The people's unfaithfulness should disqualify them from God's blessing. We would expect God to simply cut them off. Yet there are numerous statements throughout the Old Testament that somehow God will nevertheless remain faithful, that he will forgive and restore ... Throughout the pages of the Hebrew Bible we face this question: Is our covenant relationship with God conditional, based on our obedience to him, or is it unconditional, based on his love for us? In the end, will his holiness and justice be more fundamental than his love and mercy, or will it be the other way around? Will he punish us or forgive us? The seeming contradiction of Exodus 34:6-7 expresses this suspenseful mystery, this great tension. How will it be solved? The authors of the New Testament point out the answer ... "God presented [Jesus] as a sacrifice of atonement, through the shedding of his blood ... He did this ... so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus" (Rom 3:25-26). Is the covenant with God conditional because God is just, or unconditional because God is our justifier? Because of the great saving work of Jesus Christ, the answer is both. When Jesus died on the cross he took our curse for our unfaithfulness, so that we could receive the blessing he earned through his perfect faithfulness (Gal 3:10-14). Jesus fulfilled the conditions of the covenant so we can enjoy the unconditional love of God. Because of the Cross, God can be both just toward sin and yet mercifully justifying to sinners.

REPENTANCE IS MEANINGLESS APART FROM THE PERSON AND WORK OF CHRIST

BUT IN JESUS WE SEE CLEARLY THE DEPENDABILITY OF GOD AS HE MAKES PROVISION FOR HIS PEOPLE FOR THEIR COVENANT UNFAITHFULNESS. IF WE REPENT, WE CAN BE FORGIVEN BECAUSE OF CHRIST'S WORK ON OUR BEHALF !!