

God's Spirit and Man's Will



The Decision is Yours (Part 5)
by Derek Prince

It's good to be with you again as we draw near to the close of another week. Our theme this week has been "The Decision is Yours."

In my talk yesterday, I focused on one specific decision of vital importance in the life of each one of us, the decision which is called in the Bible "repentance." And I explained the nature of this decision. First of all, I pointed out that it's not an emotion, it's a decision. First, it's an inner decision that's the meaning of the Greek word for "to repent" to change your mind. Then, when you've changed your mind, it's carried out by an outward turning around in the opposite direction to which you've been going. Repenting is really going through a 180-degree turn. You've been walking away from God, His will and purpose; you stop; you turn around; you face God and you say, "God, here I am. Tell me what to do next." That's repentance. The inner decision followed by the outward turning.

And I pointed out how central the message of repentance is to the New Testament. John the Baptist came preaching the message to prepare the way for Jesus. Repentance prepares the way for God to move in our lives. Then when Jesus came preaching His first command was "Repent and believe the gospel." You cannot truly believe until you've first repented. True faith only comes after repentance.

Then repentance is the first requirement for salvation. On the Day of Pentecost, when the crowd of convicted sinners said, "What shall we do?" Peter stood up and the first word he said was "Repent," then be baptized. Repentance determines our destiny for time and eternity.

In my talk today, I'm going to deal with the inner mechanics of making such a decision. As repentance or the other decisions we've spoken about earlier. That is, I'm going to speak about the interaction between God's Spirit and man's will. And I want to point out to you that the initiative for all right decisions is with God. In his last fallen condition, man cannot do anything right or good purely of himself. The first initiative, the first prompting, must come from God. What's important in our lives is how we respond to God's initiative.

This is brought out very clearly in a verse in the Book of Lamentations where Jeremiah the prophet cries out to God:

> "Turn thou us unto thee, O Lord, and we shall be turned; renew our days as of old."

First of all, Jeremiah says, "God, you turn us. Until you turn us, we can't turn. The initiative is with you, God. But if you turn us, then we will decide to respond and to turn back." I pointed out that in Hebrew the normal word for repentance is the word for "to turn" or "to turn back" which is used there in two different forms. So, Jeremiah says, "God, it all depends on your mercy. Unless you turn us, we can't turn. But if you have mercy on us and turn us, then we will respond and turn back to you."

At such times our response is critical. You see, we do not know how long God will continue to move upon us. And when God ceases to move upon us, then we can no longer make the decision merely by our own human will or effort.

That's how it was in the days before the flood that came in the days of Noah. The whole earth was wicked and corrupt before God and at a certain time God said this, in Genesis 6:3:

> "Then the Lord said, 'My Spirit will not content with man forever…'"

God said, "My Spirit is there striving with the wicked, pleading with them to repent, to turn back to Me, to change their way of doing things." And He said, "I'm going to continue pleading with them but not forever. There'll come a moment when I withdraw My Spirit and then they'll no longer be able to repent." How important it is that when God pleads we respond. That we do not trespass on His grace and assume that He'll go on pleading forever.

In the book of Hebrews we have the example of Esau. This is what it says in Hebrews 12:16 and 17.

> "See that no one is sexually immoral, or is godless like Esau, who for a single meal sold his inheritance rights as the oldest son. [You see, Esau's sin was that he despised the riches of the promises of God and he just gave it up for a single meal because his stomach was empty. Then the writer goes on:] Afterward, as you know, when he wanted to inherit this blessing, he was rejected. He could bring about no change of mind, though he sought the blessing with tears."

In other versions, that's translated, "he found no place of repentance." You see, that version brings out the fact that to repent is to change your mind. He could bring about no change of mind "though he sought the blessing with tears." He still wanted the blessing, but he couldn't bring about a change of mind. Why? Because when God does not plead with us, when God's Spirit does not move us and motivate us to make the right decision, left to ourselves we cannot do it. It seems that Esau had gone too far. He'd done something from which there was no way back. He could find no way to change his mind. He wept. He sobbed. He cried. He was very emotional. If emotion would have done the job, he would have got by. But you see, repentance is not emotion. It's a decision of the will, it's a changing of the mind, it's a turning back. And we have to say to God, each one of us, as Jeremiah said, "Turn us, O Lord, and we will turn. But Lord, if you don't turn us, we cannot turn by ourselves."

The lesson that I want to draw from what I've been saying is this: We cannot afford to harden our hearts when God is pleading with us. I'd like to read a passage from Psalm 95, verses 6-11:

> "Come, let us bow down in worship, let us kneel before the Lord our Maker; for he is our God and we are the people of his pasture, the flock under his care. [Then he continues and this is the vital passage:] Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as you did at Meribah, as you did that day at Massah in the desert, where your fathers tested and tried me, though they had seen what I did. For forty years I was angry with that generation; I said, 'They are a people whose hearts go astray, and they have not known my ways.' So I declared on oath in my anger, 'They shall never enter my rest.'"

You see, when we come into God's presence, as the psalmist says, "let us bow down in worship, let us kneel before the Lord our Maker," then very often we hear His voice. And then the psalmist warns us: "if you hear his voice, don't harden your heart" respond, do whatever the Lord is prompting you to do. Make the right decision.

And then the psalmist takes the example of the Israelites who came out of Egypt but died in the wilderness. Why? Because they hardened their hearts. When God spoke to them, they did not make the right decision. They did not turn. Two place names are mentioned: Meribah and Massah. And those are places in the journey through the wilderness where Israel did not believe that God could provide water out of a rock. Even though they did not believe, God still provided the water but

the fact that they did not believe sealed their own destiny. It didn't change God's faithfulness to provide the water but it sealed their destiny.

Notice the result of their hardening their hearts or the results: two vital results. First, they provoked God's anger. Second, they missed God's rest. And the same thing can happen in the life of each one of us if we do not respond rightly when God speaks. When God speaks the most terrible thing we can do is to harden our hearts. If we continue to harden our hearts and reject the tender prompting of the Lord, the voice of the Holy Spirit, there'll come a time when God will no longer prompt, when God will no longer speak. He'll say of us as He said of the men before the flood, "My Spirit will not always contend with man. I've done all the speaking I can do. From now on, he's left to himself." And left to ourselves we cannot make the right decision. The only time we can make the right decision is when God Himself pleads with us and prompts us to do it. And you see, if we continue to harden our hearts, God's judgment can come very suddenly, very unexpectedly, in a moment. This is what the book of Proverbs says. Proverbs 29, verse 1:

> "He that being often reproved hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy."

That's a fearful thought. If God continues to speak and we continue to harden our hearts, there'll come a point when God will speak no longer and it may be that our life will be snuffed out in a moment without any possibility of returning.

My dear friend, if God is speaking to you and pleading with you, I want to challenge you, I want to urge you, do not harden your heart, respond, make the right decision, make it while He is still speaking to you. May God bless you.

Our time is up for today. I'll be back with you next week at this same time Monday through Friday. Next week I'll continue with this theme, "The Decision is Yours."

My special offer this week is my book, The Baptism in the Holy Spirit. This book explains the special supernatural experience which is the door to a fuller spiritual life. My book provides you with the key which will enable you to open this door and to enter through it. That title again, The Baptism in the Holy Spirit. Also my complete series of talks this week on "The Decision is Yours, Part 1" is available in a single, carefully-edited cassette. Stay tuned for details.

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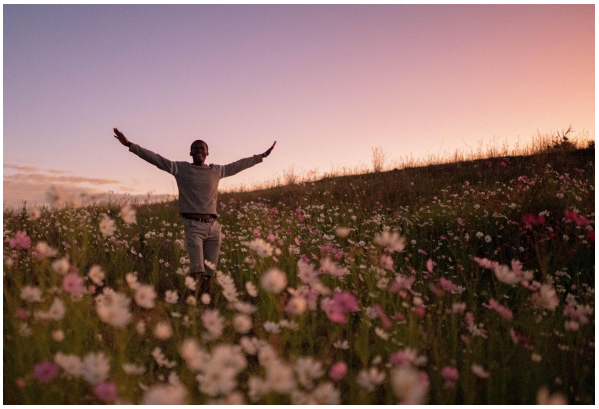

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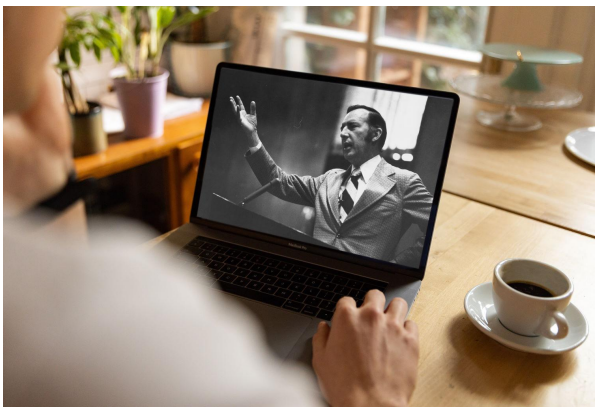

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