

REPENT: CHANGE YOUR MIND ABOUT GOD

Ayaan Hirsi Ali was a Muslim who became an atheist but has recently converted to Christianity. Richard Dawkins (a famous atheist) is a friend of his and is set to publicly dialogue with him about this. Dawkins tweeted out, "Maybe there is still something for me to learn when it comes to religion."

It is an amazing reality that God-deniers can be transformed into converted believers in the Lord Jesus Christ. This radical change of mind is called REPENTANCE. It involves a fundamental change of mind about God as revealed in the person of Christ. Only the ministry of the Holy Spirit working through the Word of God can make this happen, but it does happen!

When John the Baptist, the forerunner to Christ, came on the scene, he came calling the people to repent in preparing "the way of the LORD" (Matt. 3:1-3). Receiving the LORD involves the necessary element of repentance. After the resurrection, Peter exhorted the Jews to repent "and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out" (Acts 3:19).

Jesus rebuked the people of His day saying that the people of Nineveh would rise up in judgment against this generation "because they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and indeed a greater than Jonah is here." (Mt. 12:41). The GREAT issue in view was the person of Christ and WHO He is. God told Zacharias that his son (John the Baptist) would have a special calling in that he would "turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God" (Lk. 1:16). He would do this by calling them to repentance (Mark 1:4).

After His resurrection Christ announced that "repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations" (Lk. 24:47). In Acts 5 the apostles proclaimed Jesus as the One whom God has exalted "to His right hand to be Prince and Savior" and then added, "to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins." (Acts 5:31). In Acts 14 Paul and Barnabas exhorted the people to turn from "useless things to the living God" who is the Creator of all (Acts 14:15). At Athens Paul proclaimed to them the "unknown God" and declared that in the wake of the resurrection God "now commands all men everywhere to repent" (Acts 17:23-31).

Paul summarized his message as "testifying to Jews and also to Greeks, repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ" (Acts 20:21). In sharing with king Agrippa Paul summarized his mission as declaring far and wide to both Jews and Gentiles "that they should repent, turn to God, and do works befitting of repentance." (Acts 26:20).

Paul instructed Timothy to handle himself humbly to those in opposition, “if God perhaps will grant them repentance, so that they may know the truth” (2 Tim. 2:25). Peter warned that in the last days scoffers will come on the scene willfully forgetting how God has revealed Himself in the past, but emphasizing that God is patient “not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance.” (2 Pet. 3:3-9).

In conversion we are turned from being enemies of God to those who are reconciled to Him (Rom. 5:10). We now love Him (1 Cor. 8:3), but only because He first loved us (1 Jn. 4:19). Paul said, “If anyone does not love the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be accursed.” (1 Cor. 16:22). Coming from the position of “enemies of God” to now loving Him involves a radical change of mind. Paul described the conversion of the Thessalonians in terms of having “turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God” (1 Thess. 1:9).

The coming Day of the LORD judgment is all about God’s LORDSHIP authority and the great issue in view will be repentance.

In spite of the severe judgments Revelation 9:20-21 indicates that even then many will not repent. In Revelation 16:9 as men are scorched with great heat it says, “they blasphemed the name of God who has power over these plagues; and they did not repent and give Him glory.”

Isaiah 55 begins by emphasizing GRACE and the free gift of salvation, but then it also calls on people to SEEK the LORD while He may be found and for the wicked to forsake their way. It calls on people to return to the LORD that He may have mercy on them and abundantly pardon (cf. Isa. 55:1-7). In Joel 2:12-13 God tells the people, “Turn to Me with all your heart...rend your heart and not your garments” which is descriptive of true repentance. The prophets’ ministry consistently involved a call to repentance as seen in the ministry of Zechariah:

Zechariah 1:3–4 (NKJV)

3 Therefore say to them, ‘Thus says the Lord of hosts: “Return to Me,” says the Lord of hosts, “and I will return to you,” says the Lord of hosts.

4 “Do not be like your fathers, to whom the former prophets preached, saying, ‘Thus says the Lord of hosts: “Turn now from your evil ways and your evil deeds.”’ But they did not hear nor heed Me,” says the Lord.

God has not spoken in muffled terms. He desires that all should come to repentance, for if they do not do so, they will PERISH! (2 Pet. 3:9)