

Is Repentance Necessary for Salvation?

It is true that there are numerous Bible verses that speak of the promise of salvation, with no mention of repentance. These merely say to "believe" on Jesus Christ and you shall be saved (Acts 16:31; Romans 10:9). However, the Bible makes it clear that God is holy and man is sinful, and that sin makes a separation between the two (Isaiah 59:1,2). Without repentance from sin, wicked men cannot have fellowship with a holy God. We are dead in our trespasses and sins (Ephesians 2:1) and until we forsake them through repentance, we cannot be made alive in Christ.

The Scriptures speak of "repentance unto life" (Acts 11:18). We turn from sin to the Savior. This is why Paul preached "repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ" (Acts 20:21). The first public word Jesus preached was "repent" (Matthew 4:17). John the Baptist began his ministry the same way (Matthew 3:2). Jesus told His hearers that without repentance, they would perish (Luke 13:3).

If belief is all that is necessary for salvation, then the logical conclusion is that one need never repent. However, the Bible tells us that a false convert "believes" and yet is not saved (Luke 8:13); he remains a "worker of iniquity." Look at the warning of Scripture: "If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth" (1 John 1:6). The Scriptures also say, "He that covers his sins shall not prosper, but whoso confesses and forsakes them [repentance] shall have mercy" (Proverbs 28:13). Jesus said that there was joy in heaven over one sinner who "repents" (Luke 15:10). If there is no repentance, there is no joy because there is no salvation.

When Peter preached on the Day of Pentecost, he commanded his hearers to repent "for the remission of sins" (Acts 2:38). Without repentance, there is no remission of sins; we are still under His wrath. Peter further said, "Repent . . . and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out" (Acts 3:19). We cannot be "converted" unless we repent. God Himself "commands all men everywhere [leaving no exceptions] to repent" (Acts 17:30). Peter said a similar thing at Pentecost: "Repent, and be baptized every one of you" (Acts 2:38).

If repentance wasn't necessary for salvation, why then did Jesus command that repentance be preached to all nations (Luke 24:47)? With so many Scriptures speaking of the necessity of repentance for salvation, one can only suspect that those who preach salvation without repentance are strangers to repentance themselves, and thus strangers to true conversion.