

GOD'S PLAN OF SALVATION: AN EXPLANATION OF THE INVITATION TO TRUST IN JESUS CHRIST

When the apostle Paul met with the Ephesian elders in Acts 20, he reminded them in vv20-21 of the character and content of his previous ministry among them –

“. . . how I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and teaching you publicly and from house to house, solemnly testifying to both Jews and Greeks of REPENTANCE TOWARD GOD AND FAITH IN OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST.” (emphasis added)

Paul made it clear to those who heard him that day and to all of us, that in order to partake of God's plan of salvation we must exercise repentance toward God and faith in Jesus Christ. The explanation I will share with you in this segment will help you to understand that relationship which exists between repentance and faith, and why both are necessary in experiencing God's plan of salvation. Before I take you to the passage of Scripture which provides us with insight into this two-fold requirement; here is a clarification regarding the misconception which surrounds the concept of repentance. It is typically expressed as a change of behavior; of the need to “clean up your act” in order to be worthy of salvation. That is not true in more ways than one. It is not true since no one will ever be “worthy” of God's plan of salvation. This is why it is offered to us as a free gift of God's grace to be received by faith in Jesus Christ. It is also not true linguistically. The word for repentance in the Greek language of the New Testament is “metanoia.” It refers to a change of mind which can and should result in a change of behavior. John the Baptist refers to that cause and effect relationship as “the fruit of repentance” in Luke 3:8-14. This brings us to the passage that will help all of us to better understand the relationship between repentance and faith, found in Isaiah 53:6, where we read the following –

“All of us like sheep have gone astray, each of us has TURNED TO HIS OWN WAY; (emphasis added) but the Lord has caused the iniquity of us all to fall on Him.”

In the above declaration, the prophet describes the human race, not just the nation of Israel, as having turned its back on God; like sheep that have gone astray. This is the posture of someone who has not yet experienced God's plan of salvation. If Isaiah 53:6 describes you, then be certain of this: God loves you. He sent Jesus Christ to die for you on Calvary's Cross, in order to pay the penalty of your sin. The invitation is open to you right now. It's as if Jesus Christ, the one and only risen Savior of the world is standing with arms open wide, inviting you to come Him in faith; trusting in what He has accomplished for you through His death and resurrection on your behalf. But your current posture won't allow for that. You have turned your back on Him.

In order to come to Him, you must have a turn-about-face with Him. So that in facing Him, you can come to Him in faith, putting your trust in Him and Him alone for your salvation. This is why repentance is a necessary part of the process in experiencing God's plan of salvation. There must be a change of mind which causes you to turn from your current position of having turned your back on God. Why? Because no one “backs into” the Kingdom of God. You must turn from having gone astray and away from God; changing that posture, facing your Savior, and coming to Him in faith alone, trusting in Him alone, for the free gift of God's gracious salvation. This is the change of mind, the repentance, which God requires of us all. More on the specifics of that, next.