




QUESTION:  
Can you please give some background  
to apparent contradictions in the Scriptures



The question with which I have been asked to deal concerns those verses in the Scriptures that present us with what appear to be plain contradictions.

Here is an example of what I mean. Recording the wickedness of the earth's early population, the Authorized Version of Gen.6: 6 states: **"It repented the LORD that he had made man on the earth and it grieved him at his heart."**

But in 1st Samuel 15:29 of the same version, the prophet Samuel is recorded as saying, **"The Strength of Israel will not repent, for he is not a man that he should repent"**, whilst the later 'Revised Standard Version' of the same verse reads, **"The Glory of Israel will not recant, for he is not a mortal that he should change his mind."**

Furthermore, in the A.V. of Mal.3: 6, God Himself says, **"I am the LORD, I change not"**, which, in the R.S.V, remains virtually unchanged, as, **"I, the LORD, do not change."** This statement is crystal clear, because the Hebrew word 'change' in this verse is 'shanan', which, in other verses, is rendered 'alter' or 'repent'.

### 1. How, then, do we reconcile these verses?

How can God be said to 'repent', when to 'repent' literally means 'to change one's mind'? I ask this because, in the New Testament, the verb 'repent' is the English translation of the Greek word 'metanoeo'.

Well, the first part of that word is 'meta', which means 'after', and the second part is 'noeo', which means 'to perceive'. Put the two parts together and 'metanoeo' - 'repent' - means 'to perceive after', and implies 'a change of mind'.

But, is not one of the characteristics of Deity *omniscience*? God is 'all-knowing', and because He knows everything He never learns anything new, and therefore never needs to change His opinion, and, therefore, can never be said to 'repent'. Psalm 55:8-9 reminds us that He says: **"As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts, than your thoughts."**

This statement reminds me of another fact, namely, that whilst the evidence of order and design that we observe in the natural world around us and the laws that operate with such regularity in our universe, surely must convince a thoughtful person that an intelligent Mind has worked - (and still is at work) - and that God *exists*, the natural world *itself* - alone- does not reveal God's *character*, or His *will*, or the *purpose* He has planned for His creation. This means that we may only understand God's *Mind*, or come to know His *will*, when He chooses to reveal Himself to us.

If we ask the familiar question, "What is God like?" we are compelled to recognize that we have no way of finding out. "Canst thou by searching find out God?" is the challenge issued in Job 11:7.

As Christians, we believe that God has revealed both His character and His will in the Bible, which we rightly call 'the Word of God'.

### 2. But, since God tells us that His ways are 'not your ways', how can we understand His actions?

In other words, what terms or expressions must God use, to enable us to understand His nature and His mind, at least *partially*? I say, 'partially', because it is utterly impossible for us to understand Him completely. Indeed, if we *could* understand God completely, we would not need Him, because, in that respect, we would be His equals.

God helps us to reach this partial understanding of His nature, His mind and His will, by using language which tells us that, just as *we* are *hurt* when those whom we love are hurt, and are *sad*, when those whom we have tried to help disappoint us, and are *pleased* when our loved ones do well, God Himself is capable of these and all other emotions.

### **3. This should not surprise us.**

After all, God created us *'in His own likeness'*; He made us like Himself. The Mormons teach that He has a body like ourselves and has arms and legs, but our likeness to God is not *physical*, but *spiritual*. He created us moral and intelligent beings, and if you read James 3:9, you will notice the use of the present tense. James says that we *'are made'* in the likeness of God. Although Man is marred by sin, he remains a moral and intelligent being, and, in that sense, retains his likeness to God.

This means that the emotions you and I feel are emotions which God Himself has made us capable of feeling, and – (dare I say it?) – *they are emotions which God Himself also feels*. He is not a cold, insensitive, distant Being who, as some so-called scientists suppose, in the beginning, *wound up* the Universe like a gigantic clock, and then left it to run down, until it stops. On the contrary, He has revealed Himself as a caring Father who remains involved with both His creation and His creatures.

Incidentally, this is one reason why I am not greatly concerned about the depletion of the ozone layer or global warming, matters about which godless and unbelieving men are so greatly concerned in these days. They leave God out of their calculations, and ignore the fact that it was God who created the 'ozone layer', and who is in control of 'global warming'! Therefore nothing will happen to our planet, or our universe, until He calls 'Time'!

### **4. We should listen to Peter!**

In fact, if our fellow-men would read the scriptures they would see that, almost 2000 years ago, through Peter, God gave clear warning about the destiny in store for the Earth, and what might well be called *'real'* global warming! Read 2nd Pet.3.

I repeat; what Peter describes does not worry me, because before that which he so graphically describes takes place, God's children will have been removed from the Earth. We should be re-assured by the knowledge that our Heavenly Father is still in control!

### **5. The use of anthropomorphic expressions does not deny God's omniscience or influence His actions**

Nor, when the Bible tells us that God *'repents'*, does it mean that He repents as we ourselves repent. Because our knowledge is limited, we naturally change our minds when we learn something that we did not previously know. But, because God knows everything there is to be known, or that can be known, the same can never be said of Him.

When we read that His behaviour changes in a way that the Bible describes as *'repenting'*, it merely means that Man's repentance and change of conduct, has made it possible for God to change His attitude towards Man, and enables Him to treat Man in a different way.

### **6. "Anthropomorphism"**

The great problem that we have to deal with is the fact that, as human beings, we can only explain God's actions in human terms, and his means that anything we say about God can never be wholly accurate.

Please remember that because the Bible is His Word, what we read in it is His own revelation of Himself, and, when He wants us to understand how He feels in any particular situation, He uses words and expressions that lead us to think about Him as though He were a human being. Indeed, we can only understand God and relate to His feelings and emotions, when we think about His actions in a human way and *describe* them in a human way.

These words and phrases that speak of God as though He is a human being are known as '*anthropomorphisms*'

For instance, God conveys His feeling about evil by saying that He '*hates*' sin. He expresses the fact that He is involved with the world which He has created when He tells us, through Jesus, that '*God so loved*' the world that He gave His only begotten Son (John 3:16). And, when we read in Genesis 6:6 that God '*repented*' that he had made man, we are meant to understand something of the *pain* He feels when men turn away from Him.

### **7. An Error of Modern Theology.**

Some modern theologians reject the notion of a 'personal God', and prefer to describe God using such expressions as '*the essence of being*', '*primeval force or energy*', etc.

I remember that about 60 years ago, the Bishop of Birmingham at the time, Dr. John Robinson, produced a book entitled, "*The Honest to God Controversy*", in which he described God in such meaningless, abstract terms, that the well-known C.S. Lewis, devastatingly said that all that Dr. Robinson's book did for him, was to conjure up "*a picture of a gigantic tapioca pudding!*"

Such terms, '*God loves*', '*God hates*', '*God repented*', etc., are '*anthropomorphisms*', and their great importance lies in the fact that they reveal that God is not a hard, cold, unfeeling, implacable, distant Being, but a Creator, who cares about His creation and His creatures. He is a *personal* Being, who possesses all the attributes of personality.

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