

**Acts 17: 29-34; “God Commands All Men to Repent”, Sermon #65 in the series –
“Laying the Foundations”, Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall on
August 22nd, 2021, in the Morning Worship Service.**

The apostle Paul is still speaking to the Epicurean and the Stoic Philosophers in the Areopagus. And he is attempting to instruct them concerning the great mistake in their thinking, that there is more than one true and living God. He is showing them that it is a great sin against God when a person worships idols instead of God Himself. He has proclaimed to them that God is a God who can be known. He has proclaimed to them that God is the God who has made us. He has told them that God is a God who is very near to each one of us. And now, at this point in his message, Paul will set forth to these men God’s will for them, and for all men; that is, that God has commanded all men everywhere to repent. It is this statement that I would like us to look at, at this time.

Let me give you the 4 questions which relate to repentance, which come to us from these verses. 1st – What does Paul mean when he says – God has overlooked the times of ignorance? 2nd – What is this repentance which God commands? 3rd – According to Paul, why is it necessary that all men everywhere repent? And 4th – What is the proof that God will judge the world in righteousness, through our Lord Jesus Christ? In answering these questions, I hope that each of you will ask yourself whether you personally have repented. If you have repented, you will have the assurance that you have eternal life and you can look forward to the Day when Christ will return.

1st of all – What does Paul mean when he says that the times of ignorance, God has overlooked?

In the New King James Translation verse 30 says – “These times of ignorance God overlooked.” The word overlooked in the Greek is *ὑπερίδων* (huperidōn). In the King James version it says – “And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commendeth all men everywhere to repent...” Now, somehow this word “wink” may give a false impression. For God never winks at sin. He promises everywhere in His word that He must judge all sin and punish the sinner for his sins if he does not repent of them. But in the history of the world, in the time after the Flood, when He called Abraham as the first Hebrew, God specifically did not pay much attention to the other nations of the world in terms of warning them of their sins or saving them from their sins.

He set His love on the Hebrew people and made a nation of them. And, as it says in Acts 14: 16 – “In times past He suffered all nations to walk in their own ways. That is, He let them walk in their own ways without punishing them for their false worship for many generations. It does not mean that their sinful ignorance He overlooked in terms of His final judgment of all men at the end of the world. It means that He simply left them to walk in their own ignorance, while they lived, so that it could be easily and sufficiently proved to everyone, what man left to himself degenerates into. He overlooked those times, He winked at those times, as if to say – Now we will see what men will do when I do not intervene to turn them back from the desires of their sinful hearts. He winks and He says – This is what they become, when they are left to themselves, trying to figure out the meaning of life on their own, and what I am like in my Divine nature. They become idolaters. He winks only because He knows better than them.

This is why Paul says to these philosophers – “Therefore, since we are the offspring of God, (people who are created by God in His image and likeness) we ought not to think that the Divine Nature is like gold or silver or stone, something shaped by art and man’s devising.” Paul specifically reproveth the Epicureans and the Stoics for their false gods, their idols that they made of gold, and silver and stones, images formed by the art and imagination of men. This God

overlooked before, but now, with Paul's coming to them as one of the Lord's apostle's, the message of repentance is sounded forth. Let us learn from this, that God cannot overlook anyone's sin, but according to His infinite wisdom and eternal purpose, He can righteously overlook certain times of ignorance in men and nations of the world. God is always impartial and righteous in His justice. It says in Ezekiel 18: 20 says – "The soul who sins shall die." (That is, the soul who practices sin and will not repent of sin, shall die eternally, and be punished in the lake of fire forever.) But verse 21 says – "But if a wicked man turns from all his sins which he has committed, keeps all My statutes, and does what is lawful and right, he shall surely live; he shall not die." The truth of what God has defined as right and wrong, concerning all men's behavior is absolute, and it is unchanging. This is why, when a person sins, they must repent. If they do not, they will die eternally.

2nd Question – What is this repentance which God commands of all men?

The Greek word that is used here in verse 30 is *metanoeo* (μετανοεο). Easton's Dictionary says that *Metanoeo* means to change one's mind and purpose, as the result of after knowledge. (that is – after the sinner comes to see the guilt of his own sins committed and the sinfulness of his heart.) This verb, with noun that it is derived from – *metanoia*, is used of true repentance, a change of mind and purpose and life, to which remission of sin is promised. This is good to know. But we need to see a concise definition of this repentance from the Scripture itself, and so turn with me over to 1st Thessalonians chapter 1, verses 5-10. "For our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Spirit and in much assurance, as you know what kind of men we were among you for your sake."

"And you became followers of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Spirit, so that you became examples to all in Macedonia and Achaia who believe." "For from you the word of the Lord has sounded forth, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place." "Your faith toward God has gone out, so that we do not need to say anything." "For they themselves declare concerning us what manner of entry we had to you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from dead, even Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come."

So, repentance is described for us here, very succinctly, in verse 9, as those who heard the gospel, they "turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God". So there is a negative turning, and a positive turning which are mentioned here. These were deliberate acts which they themselves did. Positively, they turned to God, and negatively, they turned from idols. They turned to God by faith in the gospel promise of what Christ had done for them by His righteousness, and His sufferings on the cross. They received the truth of the forgiveness of their sins in the joy of the Holy Spirit. They had much assurance of the truth of God's word. So, in turning to God through Christ, they were also turning away from everything that was false and sinful. It says here that they became followers of the apostle and received his teaching of the word of God. Faith and repentance are two sides of the same coin of salvation. You cannot have the one without the other.

It says here that they became followers of the Lord Himself because of Paul's word to them, and they left the worship of the false gods behind. They no longer would in any way worship or serve those false gods, but in every way that they were taught the truth by the apostle, they would worship and serve the living and true God. These words show us the responsibility of all men, not just those persons who believed at Thessalonica. All persons everywhere are commanded by God to do this very thing. Now, we must understand that there is an initial repentance that takes place when the gospel is first heard and believed, and there is an on-going repentance which God expects of us in terms of our living our life to Him. The Bible teaches very clearly that repentance is every man's responsibility. Nevertheless, this responsibility can

only be engaged in, with success, because of the grace which is given to the repenting sinner, both at the beginning of the Christian life, and all through their Christian life.

We should not think of our repenting of our sins without God's giving us grace to turn and grace to repent. Let's think together for a few minutes about repentance unto life. In the Westminster Shorter Catechism, Question 87, it defines repentance in this way: "Repentance unto life is a saving grace, whereby a sinner, out of a true sense of his sin, and apprehension of the mercy of God in Christ, doth, with grief and hatred of his sin, turn from it unto God, with full purpose of, and endeavor after, new obedience."

We see an example of this if we turn with me over to Acts chapter 11, verses 15-18. "Peter is explaining to the other apostles of his receiving a vision from God concerning his preaching to the Gentile Cornelius and his household, the gospel. And he says this – "And as I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell upon them, as upon us at the beginning." "Then I remembered the word of the Lord, how He said, 'John indeed baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit.'" "If therefore God gave them the same gift as He gave us when we believed on the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could withstand God?" "When they heard these things they became silent; and they glorified God, saying, "Then God has also granted to the Gentiles repentance to life."

In other words, as a part of their conversion to Christ, Cornelius and his household, received the Holy Spirit, and they were also granted repentance unto life. Now, this was a very significant thing, for the Gentiles to receive the gospel. Christ had commanded the apostles at the time of His ascending into heaven, in Luke 24: 46-49, that "Thus it is written, and thus it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day, and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem." "Behold, I send the Promise of My Father upon you; but tarry in the city of Jerusalem until you are endued with power from on high." The apostles did receive the Holy Spirit's power to preach and see tangible results from their preaching on the Day of Pentecost and following. The indication that any man is savingly brought out of the darkness of sin and into the light of Christ, is their repentance.

Look with me also at 2nd Corinthians chapter 7, verses 8-11 and you will see the importance of godly sorrow over sin, in the repentance of any person. "For even if I made you sorry with my letter, I do not regret it; though I did regret it." "For I perceive that the same epistle made you sorry, though only for a while." "Now I rejoice, not that you were made sorry, but that your sorrow led to repentance." "For you were made sorry in a godly manner, that you might suffer loss from us in nothing." "For godly sorrow produces repentance leading to salvation, not to be regretted; but the sorrow of the world produces death." "For observe this very thing, that you sorrowed in a godly manner: What diligence it produced in you, what clearing of yourselves, what indignation!" "In all things you proved yourselves to be clear in this matter."

What matter was this? Paul is speaking of the church of Corinth's repentance of their tolerating one of their member's sins for a time. This man had fallen into sexual immorality and had taken his father's wife to bed. And the church did not act immediately, to confront him over it, and take steps to tell him that he must repent. But after Paul pointed this out to them, they did repent of this sinful toleration. They did remove the evil person from their midst until he repented of his sin. Paul commends them for this. He said that he knew that his letter had made them sorrowful, but that sorrow had led them to repentance. There was indignation over the man's sin. There was the fear that tolerating this man's sin would lead others to think that they could commit immorality. There was vehement desire and zeal to do the right thing!

Let us understand that there is a grief and hatred of sin which attends true repentance. That grief and hatred is worked into the heart of the believer in Christ when that person is regenerated by the Holy Spirit. And it is there, in the heart of the Christian, because they have

been made to die to sin through the body of Christ. When a true Christian falls into sin, they mourn over that sin. They come to know the blessedness of this mourning, for it leads them to repentance, and a more thorough repentance if necessary, as time goes on. True repentance is a repentance which does not need to be repented of. It is not to be regretted. The sorrow of the world, feeling sorry for yourself because of the consequences of sin, is not enough to save from sin. It is only by seeing the great dishonor which your sin has brought to God Himself, accompanied by the gracious working of the Holy Spirit, which produces this true and godly repentance.

3rd – According to Paul, why is it necessary that all men everywhere repent?

The answer is straightforwardly simple. It says in verse 31 that He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained.” Paul wanted the Athenian philosophers to see that it does matter how you live your life before God. It does matter to Him what you believe and how you live out what you believe. It matters because He is the Lawgiver and He is the Judge of all men. His law is His holy word. His law is the 10 commandments. His law is summed up by loving Him with all of your mind, heart, soul, and strength, and your neighbor as yourself. Well, these Athenians were Gentiles who did not know God’s word, you say. How could God judge them? He will judge them by the law of the original creation which was in their hearts.

Romans 2: 12-16 – “For as many as have sinned without law will also perish without law, and as many as have sinned in the law will be judged by the law (for not the hearers of the law are just in the sight of God, but the doers of the law will be justified; for when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do the things in the law, these, although not having the law, are a law to themselves, who show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and between themselves their thoughts accusing or else excusing them) in the day when God will judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ, according to my gospel.”

All the Gentiles who do not know the law in all of its specific commands, still have the law written in their hearts from the original creation of Adam. When Adam fell, he passed on his fallen nature to all men who are descended from him. But even though marred, still there are enough remnants of original righteousness to work together with the conscience of those persons who do not know the law, to convict of sin, or else excuse them, if they are doing the right things. God will judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ on that final day, the day when Christ returns; the day when the last judgment will take place. All people must repent in this life that they have now, before they die. For it is appointed unto man once to die, and then comes the judgment it says in Hebrews 9: 27.

Do you want to be able to have the expectation of Christ’s approval of you, and your being welcomed into the eternal kingdom on that day? Then repent now of all of your sins. 1st John 2: 28 and 29 – “And now, little children, abide in Him, that when He appears, we may have confidence and not be ashamed before Him at His coming.” “If you know that He is righteous, you know that everyone who practices righteousness is born of Him.” In other words, part of what it means to abide in Christ is to confess your sins where you find them in your heart and in your actions, even as a believer, so that you will not be ashamed before Him at His coming. Putting off sin and practicing righteousness are the two sides of the coin of evangelic repentance.

You repent of worldliness and pride and selfish ambition and foolishness and you put on the Lord Jesus Christ. You make no provision for the flesh according to its lusts. You repent of adultery and uncleanness and lewdness. You repent of idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions and jealousies. You repent of dissensions and heresies, envy and sinful anger, drunkenness and revelries, going to wild parties. You know that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. Your repentance was not just of these kinds of outward sins, when you were first converted to Christ. You did break off from the practice of those sins when you first

came to Christ. But you still repent of those sinful thoughts when you find them, lurking in your heart as a Christian. You mortify these thoughts so that they will not become sinful actions which will dishonor God and bring shame and reproach upon you for not having dealt with such sins in your heart, beforehand, in repentance. Let us also repent of the sins of omission in our lives. That is, as it says in James 4, verse 17 – “Therefore to him who knows to do good and does not do it, to him it is sin.” If you know that you should be doing certain good things for people around you, and you are not doing them, repent of that attitude of selfishness and unloving attitudes, and begin to ask God to show you how to do good. This is what it means to endeavor after new obedience, when you repent.

4th – What is the proof that God will judge the world in righteousness, through our Lord Jesus Christ?

Verse 31b says – He has given assurance of this to all men by raising Christ from the dead.” Since Christ has suffered and died as the sinless sacrifice for sinners, then God raised Him from the dead to be the Judge of all men because He is the Lord of all men, the Lord of glory, who died for sinners everywhere. Since He died for sinners everywhere, God raised Him from the dead to show forth the glory of His Person and the glory of what He has accomplished by His redemption. It is justly appropriate that the One who has, as the God-Man and only appointed Mediator between God and men, be raised from the dead, and seated on the right hand of the Father. From whence He shall come to judge the living and the dead.

In 1st Corinthians 15: 12-16, Paul says – “Now if Christ is preached that He has been raised from the dead, how do some among you say that there is no resurrection of the dead?” “But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ is not risen.” “And if Christ is not risen, then our preaching is empty and your faith is also empty.” “Yes, and we are found false witnesses of God, because we have testified of God that He raised up Christ, whom He did not raise up – if in fact the dead do not rise.” The reason why Christ was raised was so that He would be the Judge of every man on the Last Day. The reason that we are raised from the dead is so that we will be judged by Christ on the Last Day, as to whether we built upon the foundation that He laid for us.

1st Corinthians 3: 11-14 – “For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.” “Now if anyone builds on this foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood hay, straw, each one’s work will become clear; for the Day (that is, the Day of Judgment) will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one’s work, of what sort it is.” “If anyone work which he has built upon it endures, he will receive a reward.” “If anyone’s work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire.” The question that each of us should ask ourselves is this: When we repented of our sin, did we consciously begin to build on the foundation of Christ? Have we been living a life which is pleasing to Him, and where it has not been pleasing, did we repent?

2nd Corinthians chapter 5, verses 9-11. “Therefore we make it our aim, whether present or absent from the body, to be well pleasing to Him.” “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.” “Knowing the terror of the Lord, we persuade men; but we are well known to God, and I also trust are well known in your consciences.” I hope that you can see from all these verses, that for the Christian who has been faithful, Christ’s appearing on the Last Day will be a glorious event, a thing long waited for, and looked for. Listen to what the apostle Paul says in 2nd Timothy chapter 4, verses 7 and 8 – “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.” “Finally there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing.”