



“Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you...” Matthew 28:20

Church of Christ • 13800 S. 4080 Road • P.O. Box 527 • Oologah, Oklahoma 74053

Is Ignorance an Excuse?

Chuck Northrop

To many, one of the most troubling questions concerning salvation and the gospel is: “What will happen to those who have never heard the gospel nor had an opportunity to obey it?” Often, the question is posed in a setting of someone in the far reaches of an uncivilized nation such as some tribesman who will never be able to hear the gospel proclamation because of politics or being so far back into the jungle. He and his family have no modern conveniences: no radio, no television, seemingly no way to hear the gospel. They are isolated from the rest of the world.

When this question is boiled down, it becomes a matter of whether or not ignorance is an excuse. Keep in mind, ignorance is not necessarily the lack of ability to know but the lack of information to know. Actually, there are three classes of people who are ignorant. Some people are ignorant of various ideas and concepts because they have never been taught. Others are ignorant because they have never taken the time to learn or are unwilling to take the time to learn. Neither of these first two categories of people are ignorant because of inabilities. The third class of people are those who are ignorant because of inabilities. These fit into the same realm as innocent children — safe in the arms of Jesus. Those who we are concerned with in this article are those who fit into one of the first two categories, but the bottom line is “Is ignorance an excuse?”

Those Who Know Not God

Because the Bible provides “all things that pertain unto life and godliness” (2 Peter 1:3), a person can expect to find a Bible answer to this question. In 2 Thessalonians 1:8 Paul wrote the Lord Jesus shall come “In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not

the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.” Every reasonable person must realize all who are ignorant of the gospel message do not know God. Therefore, those who are ignorant of the gospel message are those who Christ will take vengeance against.

When Paul entered into the city of Athens, he passed by an altar with the inscription, “TO THE UNKNOWN GOD” (Acts 17:23). In his address to the Athenians on Mars’ Hill he declared, “the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent” (Acts 17:30). Because Paul said “all men,” this admonition excludes no one and because he said, “every where,” it matters not where they might live, even in the deepest jungle.

In the beginning sections of the book of Romans, Paul noted the sins of Jews and Gentiles. Concerning the Gentiles he wrote, “For the invisible things of him [God] from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse” (Romans 1:20). In this passage, Paul explained God manifested Himself in the things which were created. The same line of reasoning can and should be applied to all men. All men are without excuse because all men can look inwardly and know God exists. In addition, all men can look at the universe and know God exists. Since all men can know God exists, all men have a responsibility to Him to do His will.

One Way of Salvation

The Bible clearly teaches there is only one way of salvation, and it is through Jesus. In John 14:6 Jesus said, “I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.” Undeniably, Jesus is the only way to the Father. Since He is the only way, there can be no other way. He is not just the provider of the way but is Himself the way. Nor is He just the proclaimer of the way for He is the way — the one and only way. If ignorance is an excuse, then there would be two ways of salvation: ignorance and Jesus. Therefore, because Jesus is the only way, ignorance cannot be a way.

Luke recorded in Acts 4:12, “Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.” Again, the emphasis is placed on Jesus as being the one and only way of salvation. Heaven’s door is open because of His atonement, because of His blood, and because of His sacrifice. Thus, “whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved” (Romans 10:13). If any person, because of any reason, does not call upon the name of the Lord, there is no salvation for in Him only can redemption be found. It cannot be found in ignorance for in Him only is there salvation.

In Christ, we are blessed with “all spiritual blessings in heavenly places” (Ephesians 1:3). Certainly, salvation is a spiritual blessing, and it is found in Christ Jesus (2 Timothy 2:10). In some cases, ignorance may be bliss. However, when it comes to ignorance of God and Christ, it is without spiritual blessings. Ignorance of spiritual things are not found in Christ. In Christ, man has redemption, justification, sanctification, and salvation. In ignorance, there is only damnation.

Sin Condemns, Not the Gospel

What causes a person to be lost is sin. Paul wrote, “For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord” (Romans 6:23). Death is separation. Physical death is the separation of body and spirit (James 2:26), while spiritual death is separation from God. Isaiah wrote to Israel of old: “But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear” (Isaiah 59:2). Sin separates man from God — not God’s sins but man’s sins. What causes a person to be separated from God is **NOT** his or her knowledge of the gospel. It is sin.

If a person could be saved because of ignorance, then the gospel is not a gospel of salvation but a gospel of condemnation. If an uncivilized tribesman who is isolated from the rest of the world and who never had the opportunity to hear the gospel can be saved because of his ignorance, then if and when the gospel is preached to him, it would bring condemnation rather than salvation if he did not respond to it favorably. It would not be “the glorious gospel” (1 Timothy 1:11), it would be the horrible gospel. It would not be “the gospel of peace” (Romans 10:15), it would be the gospel of conflict. It would not be “the gospel of the grace of God” (Acts 20:24), it would be the gospel of the brutality of God. There would be no “hope of the gospel” (Colossians 1:23), only despair.

This justification through ignorance would make the gospel of no power rather than “the power of God unto salvation” (Romans 1:16). It would make the Great Commission of Jesus useless, unproductive, and vain. Yea, even the sacrifice of Jesus would have no value if man can be saved through ignorance. It would be better for the world not to know then to know and to be condemned. If man could be saved in ignorance, Christians are doing no favors to anyone by teaching the gospel. Christians ought not name the name of Christ among the nations for it would be better to leave every person untaught.

Responsibility

To some, these things are hard. However, the hardness is not seen in that they are unloving. Jesus Christ paid the price for every person, and the price was His own precious blood. For “though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich” (2 Corinthians 8:9). Because God “will have all men to be saved,” Christ Jesus “gave himself a ransom for all” (1 Timothy 2:4,6). “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life” (John 3:16). These are the most loving words to ever pierce the hearing of man.

These things are hard because of the weight of responsibility placed upon the children of God to publish and to herald His word to the four corners of the earth. If a Christian really cares about the isolated, ignorant, and unenlightened tribesman, he will do everything in his power to send the gospel light to the far reaches of the world. He would not hold back the gospel but proclaim it at every dawning of the morning and every dusk of the evening. Like the apostle Paul, Christians ought to feel indebted to every man and be compelled to preach the gospel (Romans 1:14-15). Because ignorance is no excuse, woe is unto us, if we preach not the gospel! (1 Corinthians 9:16).

Observations and Concerns

November 8, 2023

Welcome Visitors! We appreciate the encouragement you provide us by your coming.

Praise in Psalm: “Blessed *be* the Lord, *who* daily loadeth us *with benefits*, even the God of our salvation. Selah” (Psalm 68:19).

Declaration of Appreciation: This coming Lord's day, the Lord's church in Oologah will be having our Thanksgiving dinner. We are thankful for the church and for the opportunity to be thankful with one another for God's rich provisions. All are welcomed to stay.

Our **annual Thanksgiving potluck** will be this Sunday after morning services. All are invited to stay!

Roy Goddard will be our guest speaker Sunday morning. He is from the Bible Institute of Missouri.

Remember in Prayer:

- ▶ ***Darla Smith*** spent last Sunday in the ER. She is now home and doing better.
- ▶ ***Pat Taylor*** is still struggling with her legs, and scheduled for surgery November 9th to clear a blockage in her carotid arteries.
- ▶ ***Caroline Swearingen*** is doing good, and she and her family appreciate your prayers.
- ▶ ***Trayton Linton***, great-grandson of Darla Smith, was in a severe automobile accident. He is in the hospital and stable but has a long road of recovery ahead.
- ▶ ***Sherry Carmona*** fell and suffered trauma to her face. She had surgery on her nose and is recovering at home.
- ▶ ***Sammy Gray*** will be having medical tests conducted in the upcoming weeks.
- ▶ ***Sam Orr***, father of Kathy Orr, is recovering and is no longer under quarantine.
- ▶ ***Sandra Rowell***, step mother of Landon Rowell, has lymphoma.

True Thanksgiving Is Not about Being Thankful for One Season of the Year.

Schedule of Services Sundays Bible Classes. . 9:30 AM Worship 10:30 AM Worship 5:00 PM Wednesdays Bible Classes. . 7:00 PM Website: oologahcofc.org	Assignments			
		Wednesday, Nov. 8	Sunday, Nov. 12 AM	Sunday, Nov. 12 PM
	Announcements	Chuck Northrop	Chuck Northrop	Bill Dilks
	Prayer	Chuck Northrop	Chuck Northrop	Bill Dilks
	Song Leader	Ross Swearingen	Bill Dilks	Ross Swearingen
	Lord's Supper (speaker)		Doyle Jackson	Doyle Jackson
	Lord's Supper		Chris Nelson	
	Lesson	Doyle Jackson	Roy Goddard	Chuck Northrop
	Prayer	Ross Swearingen	Ross Swearingen	Chris Nelson
	Door Attendant	Ross Swearingen	Ross Swearingen	Chris Nelson