

The Message that Turns the World Upside Down

A Five Part Series from Acts 16 & 17

Part V – The Standard of Judgment

(Acts 17:30-34)

Outline by Randy Wages

6/13/08

Note: The text below was prepared for oral delivery rather than for publication in print. As such, be aware that sentence fragments are intentionally used and that this document has not been edited to correct the errors in grammar, sentence structure, etc.

I. Introduction ó

- A. Today I ðll bring the 5th and final message of this series on ðThe Message that turns the world upside down.ö We ðve been looking at this message, the Gospel, in the context of Acts 16 and 17. I ðve titled this final sermon of our series ðThe Standard of Judgment.ö
- B. Here we will pick up where we left off at Acts 17:30 and consider the concluding section of Paul ðs famous sermon on Mars Hill. Previously we observed how in the 1st part of Paul ðs sermon he proceeded to expose the folly of the idolatry that was rampant in Athens by simply reasoning with the philosophers and other listeners there from the perspective of that which they should know by the light of nature.
- C. Today, beginning in verse 30, Paul brings forth the specific message of the Gospel, this message that indeed turns one ðs world upside down when God is pleased to bring it near to them and give them life so as to turn from the idols of their own imaginations to the true and living God. Recall that it was this specific message, the Gospel, that Paul had already been preaching in Athens as described in vs. 18 which caused them to say that he was a “...**setter forth of strange gods,...**” as it reads, “...**because he preached unto them Jesus, and the resurrection.**” That is, there was something distinctive revealed in Jesus and testified of by the resurrection that makes this message seem strange to their ears (as we read in vs. 20). And this distinction, this newness is why that, in their curiosity, they brought Paul to Mars hill
- D. You may recall that in our consideration of vss. 22-29, I pointed out the similarities between the natural notions that all first entertain about God and those held by the idolatrous Athenians. Thereby, we can conclude that all men in every generation (our own not excepted) likewise need to hear declared unto them a God who is initially likewise unknown to us. And as such, in our text for today we pickup with Paul ðs issuance of God ðs command in verse 30 “...**to all men everywhere to repent.**” That is a command to reject this idol of our own construction (i.e. ó God as we all initially and erroneously imagine Him to be) and to know and serve the true and living God as uniquely distinguished in the Gospel which Paul declared concerning Christ.

II. Exposition of Acts 17:30-34 (Read through first, then comment):

A. Verses 32-34

1. Now notice that these philosophers seemed content to listen to Paul's logical discourse and reasoning up until now; however when he begins to set forth again this Jesus and the resurrection, we see a sampling of how men react.
2. Note that the doctrine of the resurrection was denied by every sect of the philosophers and understandably so. Because a true understanding of the necessity of the resurrection (as the message was described in Thessalonica) requires a revelation beyond the light of nature. So (1) some mocked. (2) Others not yet convinced but unable to deny it, seemed therefore willing to consider it might be worth exploring further and (3) finally, as verse 34 tells us, some believed and so they "***clave unto him.***"
3. God's word does not return void. It shall accomplish that which God intends and so, as we saw in Philippi, Thessalonica, Berea, & now here in Athens, God had some sheep in each of these places for whom Christ had purchased spiritual life and all its blessings, including the eyes, ears, hearts and minds to receive the revelation of Himself under this very specific message of the Gospel. And so the Gospel was brought near unto them by Paul's preaching.
4. He mentions specifically Dionysius, the Areopagite ó one of the judges presumably of Areopagus (or the court of justice on Mars Hill), and a woman named Damaris, and others.

III. Exposition of Verses 30-31: Up until verse 30, Paul's reasoning with them on Mars Hill had been from the perspective of the light of nature. But beginning in verse 30, Paul sets forth the light of the Gospel ó the specific message under which God is pleased to reveal Himself ó the gospel which is the power of God unto salvation for therein is the righteousness of God is revealed. (Rom. 1:16-17).

A. Brief review of the context from 1st part of sermon on Mars Hill: By way of review, recall that Paul is preaching on Mars Hill í

1. and beginning in verse 23 Paul says, ð²³ ***For as I passed by, and beheld your devotions, I found an altar with this inscription, TO THE UNKNOWN GOD. Whom therefore ye ignorantly worship, him declare I unto you.*** Now here Paul is telling them that they worshipped in ignorance, and as we saw, this is characteristic of everyone in every generation prior to God-given spiritual life and the accompanying spiritual senses to see different. A God we know not by nature must be made known unto us ó that is His Spirit must bring us to see God as He is distinguished from any and all idols by rightly beholding Him in the face (the person and work) of the Lord Jesus Christ.
2. In verses 24-25 Paul describes the folly of their erroneous, idolatrous thoughts. And embodied in that description we find the false religion of works that has been and continues to be so pervasive in every generation. For it is the error we all begin with, assuming there is something we can do in order to be saved.

3. There in vs. 24 Paul declares: *“God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that he is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands; ²⁵Neither is worshipped with men’s hands, as though he needed any thing, seeing he giveth to all life, and breath, and all things”*; So there’s the issue: Is your concept of God and how blessings are derived from Him based upon an assumption that He needs (or that it requires) some work of your hand ó that He needs you to act, respond, or meet some condition or requirement? Or instead, are the blessings of God based solely upon a work of God with no contribution from the sinner ó this God who is the sole source and giver of all life ó including spiritual life. So now with that backdrop, Paul launches into the conclusion of His sermon wherein He sets forth clearly the standard by which all men are ultimately judged.

B. Verse 30:

1. Paul said that *“...the times of this ignorance God winked at.”* The word *“winked”* there means to overlook. We know of God’s hatred for idolatry among the heathen Gentile nations from the record of the Old Testament and so we conclude that this cannot mean He overlooked their idolatry. No, God despised their willful ignorance and idolatry, and as evidence of His contempt for all of that, He had overlooked the Gentiles, including these to whom Paul is preaching, God giving them (the Gentiles) no revelation up until then other than what which they had by light of nature and conscience. He had given them no prophets or teachers to instruct them and so had left them in their ignorance.
2. God is an unknown God to those who have only the light of nature. None of us come to see with our natural eyes and minds how God’s salvation requires a perfect righteousness such as He tells us we must have in verse 31.
3. We must be taught of the need for a righteousness that as sinners, we cannot produce nor contribute to producing. It takes the light of the Gospel, through the preaching of the Word of God, applied to the sinner by the regenerating power of God the Holy Spirit in order for anyone to see and value this.
4. As Christ Himself said in John 6:44: *“No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him...”* So God had justly left them in their ignorance up until now.
5. But Paul continues his sermon saying, *“But now <God> commandeth all men every where to repent.”* Now simply because repentance is represented here as a command does not mean it is within the power of fallen, sinful, blind men and women to comply. Consider that the Mosaic law had no provision setting forth that mercy would be granted on the basis of or because of repentance. The law only demands strict, continual compliance ó that perfection be rendered.
6. So we see that repentance, while a necessary grace that always accompanies true, God-given faith ó it possesses no merit in and of itself.

Vs. 30 (Con't.):

7. We often tend to think of commands as burdensome obligations, but know this ó if and when God gives a sinner spiritual life, he or she has no problem heeding this command to repent because when God draws a sinner to Himself, they have no where else to go ó they can do no other.
8. As unsettling as it is when God initially exposes, (through the Gospel message that turns our world upside down) how tragically mistaken weøve been, know that it is actually a blessing beyond compare to not be left in our ignorance but rather for God, in His providence, to have brought you under the sound of this message of Christ and Him crucified and to make it the savor of life unto life for you.
9. And consequently, there is repentance from ever having presumed that anything other than or in addition to the satisfaction rendered by Christ in His life and death ó His righteousness ó would, in rivalry with His work, possess merit before this God who needs no work from the hands of men.
10. So consider that God-given faith involves believing something contrary (actually opposed) to that which we previously believed, as spiritually dead sinners. And so it involves a radical change of mind. When we turn from the way that seems right to us naturally (the way that scripture says leads to death), to Godø's way, we not only turn toward God in faith, in belief on Him, but this also involves a turning away from that which we previously believed. This involves a change of mind concerning who God is and what it takes to satisfy Him. It involves a change of mind concerning ourselves as sinners as we see the impossibility of salvation based on our character or conduct or anything that proceeds from us. It is a change of mind concerning Christ and how God saves sinners based solely on the imputation of the righteousness of God which Christ established to the exclusion of all we previously imagined.
11. And as such, weøre confronted with our own former idolatry. Thatø's right ó itø's idolatry that we repent of as we discover that the god we worshipped was altogether different from the true and living God we now behold with the God-given eyes of faith. It is this idol embraced in our own naturally sinful minds that God commands all to repent of ó and He graciously makes His people willing to do so in the day of His power.

C. Verse 31: And then in verse 31, Paul explains why it is imperative that we repent. He says itø's because God has appointed a day when He will judge the world in righteousness. How righteous do we have to be? We must be as righteous as that Person whom God appointed and raised from the dead, the Lord Jesus Christ.

1. The great issue that determines what will be declared concerning you at the Judgment is this: **DO YOU HAVE A RIGHTEOUSNESS THAT ANSWERS THE DEMANDS OF GOD'S HOLY LAW AND JUSTICE?**

Vs. 31 (Con't.):

Now this is important. The scriptures tell us that most are sentenced to hell and shall be banished from His presence forever while others, the objects of His mercy and grace, shall enjoy the untold riches of eternal life in heaven forever. And the standard for this determination is right before your eyes. This is like an open book quiz ó Hereø how all will be judged. Hear it again: DO YOU HAVE A RIGHTEOUSNESS THAT ANSWERS THE DEMANDS OF GOD'S HOLY LAW AND JUSTICE?

2. Well, it is impossible for any sinner to have it based on character, conduct, anything they do, anything they presume they have been enabled to do, or anything proceeding from him or her to any degree. If anyone meets this standard which only Christ could and did meet, then it can only be by imputation, God freely giving it. And as a result of all that Christ merited for His people, God, in time, providentially brings them under the sound of this message and gives them spiritual life (eyes to see, ears to hear, hearts and minds to understand that which they would never see otherwise). Faith (and its inseparable grace of repentance) is the gift of God, and **"...not of works, lest any man should boast."** (Eph 2:8-9).
3. Thankfully, God has given full proof and evidence that that those borne of God, in Christ, will spend eternity in heaven. Whereø that proof? We see it in verse 31 where Paul proclaims, **"...whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that He hath raised Him from the dead!"** Christ paid their debt. He represents His sheep and He lived and died on their behalf. They are made righteous and holy due to their oneness with Christ at the cross and declared to be so at Judgment based solely on the righteousness produced by (and residing even now in) their Substitute, the Lord Jesus Christ. They possess the merit of His righteousness by it having been judicially charged (or imputed) to their account just as the demerit of their sins were imputed (or charged) to Him in order that He could bear it away in His substitutionary death on the cross.
4. There can be no greater proof of the absolute certainty of the salvation of any sinner who trusts Christ and pleads His righteousness alone than the fact that God raised Him from the dead! God was satisfied with that which Christ accomplished on the cross. As Isaiah 53:11 reads, **"He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied:.."** We know how word associations are useful as a memory tool. If you want a word to associate with the resurrection then here it is ó ÷satisfaction.÷ God was completely satisfied with what the Son accomplished and God is likewise satisfied with everyone for whom He accomplished it ó all based upon the imputation of the satisfaction that was wrought out in their behalf at the cross.
5. So this is an urgent message for sinners. God is going judge you "by Christ." It does not matter how you compare to other people! Does your righteousness equal that of Christ! Mine sure doesn't and neither does yours! So, you are commanded to trust in Him, plead His righteousness and forsake your own, and thereby you can know that you are saved!

Vs. 31 (Con't.):

6. Know that you are saved? How? ó Because of your act of faith? No ó that's not faith in Christ. That's faith in faith. Faith in Him repents of ever thinking that salvation was conditioned on anything that proceeds from me, the sinner, including my faith. Listen, God-given faith doesn't even presume to play any part in the procurement of His righteousness whereby we are justified before Him. We look to Christ as the author and finisher of our faith (Heb 12:2), seeing that salvation was procured for us some 2000 years ago.
7. So the consequence of the resurrection is that it gives irrefutable proof that righteousness shall be the standard by which all men shall be judged as to eternal life or death. This is why the command in Acts 17 to repent is so urgent and applicable to all men. Where righteousness is found, there shall be life. And where there is life, it will be evidenced by faith and repentance.

IV. Closing:

And so we conclude this series with Paul setting forth that which distinguishes the Gospel message from all other counterfeits ó this distinct Gospel message that when applied to a sinner's heart by the Holy Spirit does turn one's world upside down. And so they repent. They change gods.

And as we've seen today, this distinctiveness is revealed to be the standard by which all the world shall be judged ó the perfect satisfaction to God's justice rendered exclusively by Jesus Christ in His life and death ó the righteousness of God in Christ.

As I've quoted often this week from Romans 1:16-17, the Gospel is the power of God unto salvation. Why? ó For therein is the righteousness of God revealed. And that is the standard by which all shall stand or fall before the bar of God's eternal judgment.

I pray if God has not already done so, may He also turn your world upside down!

Footnote from the author: While this sermon was prepared and delivered by me, I often utilize the commentaries, study helps, and teachings of others to supplement my own prayerful study of the scriptures. Since this document was not originally prepared for publication in print, please excuse and recognize that it was unfeasible to properly identify and credit all of the various original sources used to develop the content herein. Ultimately, it is my sincere and foremost objective to accurately present the gospel of God's grace found in the only infallible source, God's word itself ó the Bible.