

## **“In the past God overlooked such ignorance but now....”**

Worship of Idols

Pagan Worship

Sunday being more secular than “remembering the sacrifice.”

Wednesday night at church....no way. Sunday is enough for me.

You want to visit me....No thanks. Being in church on Sunday is all I need.

Sometimes I am amazed and surprised how a few people deal with their spiritual accountability. The very short list above deals with a couple of items from times past as well as a few situations I have found myself in with other people. A few situations are polite ways of saying these were their excuses or rationale of their spiritual accountability. I am referring to adults and people within the church.

Within the Jewish spiritual environment we have what is referred to as bar mitzvah and bat mitzvah. These two phrases mean “son of commandment” and “daughter of commandment.” It is understood that at the ages of 13 and 12 respectively they become responsible for their actions from a religious perspective. This can be represented in many different ways but most commonly religious studies continue and become a part of the life commitment of a child to his/her spirituality. Unfortunately, as times have changed so have attitudes toward this part of the heritage of a Jew. The secular invades the spiritual and changes occur.

The book of Acts provides us with a history of the beginning and spreading of the church “as a result of the work of the risen Lord and the Holy Spirit through the apostles.” This book tells of the spread of Christianity from Jerusalem to Rome and the problems and persecutions that occurred along this path for both Jew and Gentile. Pagan worship, Jewish thinking, Roman control and Greek society are all confronted by the apostles as they journey toward Rome. Similar problems continue today and the underlying theme is the same. The underlying theme for all is repentance.....to turn from sin to Christ.

As this journey of the apostles made its way towards Rome there was this city called Athens that they traveled through. Athens was a city full of idols and this greatly distressed these men of God. We are told that Paul began to get the attention of these Athenians using a technique that they did respect even if they did not agree. That technique was simply talking and relating to them the story of Jesus and his life and his resurrection. Yes, the Athenians had questions. Yes, the Athenians argued but this was the Athenian way and yes, Paul was getting his message of repentance out to these idol worshipping people. Eventually Paul said to them:

***“In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent.”*** (Acts 17:30)

The Athenians listened, argued with Paul but a few men became followers of Paul and believed. Paul was making these people aware that in times past their idol worship had

been overlooked, not approved, by God. In fact the clear message that the Athenians understood was that God had overlooked them because of their idol worship and took no notice of them. Paul let these people know that God would no longer accept any people and their idols especially those labeled as an idol to an unknown god. For the Athenian their time had come and Paul was not backing off. They would now have the complete disapproval of God in their idol worship and would be given the opportunity of either great mercy shown to those who repented or great punishment to those who did not. The message has not changed. The choices are the same as for the Athenians. The question is simply do we want greater mercy or greater punishment?

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