



March 3, 2024
“Repent and Return.”

Sunday school at 9:30, Service at 10:30.

News:

March 31st Resurrection Sunday Open House at 9:30, Service at 11:00
 Wednesday Evening Classes at 6:30

330 N. Somers Rd. (Mail: PO Box 10626) Kalispell, MT 59904~ (406) 755-1776

Visit the website ~ www.myaletheia.com

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Emails: pastor@myaletheia.com, stacey.sundt@myaletheia.com

Acts 3:17–26 ~

The purpose of preaching:

How you share Christ with others speaks volumes about...

“Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing” (Luke 23:34).

Ignorance is ἄγνοια (äg-noY-ä):

The Latin translation is *ignoramus* (ē-gnō-řä-müs):

To ignore means to not pay attention – it is to intentionally remain unfamiliar with that thing. It is deliberate because the knowledge is available.

Vincible ignorance versus invincible ignorance:

Fill out the other side, detach this part of the page, and place it in the offering plate or the prayer/suggestion box in the lobby or with an Elder or Deacon of the church.

God Bless You!

Everything that God requires from a human is completely knowable to every human:

Agnostics are ignorant on purpose, which means purposefully.

People refuse to properly search for God because they do not want to find Him.

If God is knowable then that reality has implications:

If a person can remain ignorant of God, then they have an excuse:

I can actually blame God:

Romans 1:18–23 ~ Deep down everyone knows that God exists:

Those who “suppress the truth in unrighteousness.”

We Christians remain agnostic to the finer details of God’s Truth:

There is no excuse:

It had always been God’s plan:

Yet, they all needed to “repent and return.”

Repent is μετανοέω (mē-tā-nō-ē-ō) and return is ἐπιστρέφω (ē-pē-strē-fō):

Belief may reside in the heart, but it always has its source in the head. Romans 12:2 “be transformed by the ἀνακαινώσει τοῦ νοός (ä-nä-kī-nō-sā tü nō-ös) the renewal of your mind.”

Every person is by default, regardless of their ignorance or God’s Sovereignty, a child of wrath:

Are you so locked-in to a particular thing that you don’t recognize that your path is wicked?

Write a brief note – detach and place in the offering, or the prayer box, or give it to a Deacon or Elder.

Name _____ Address _____
Phone _____ Email _____



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CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP



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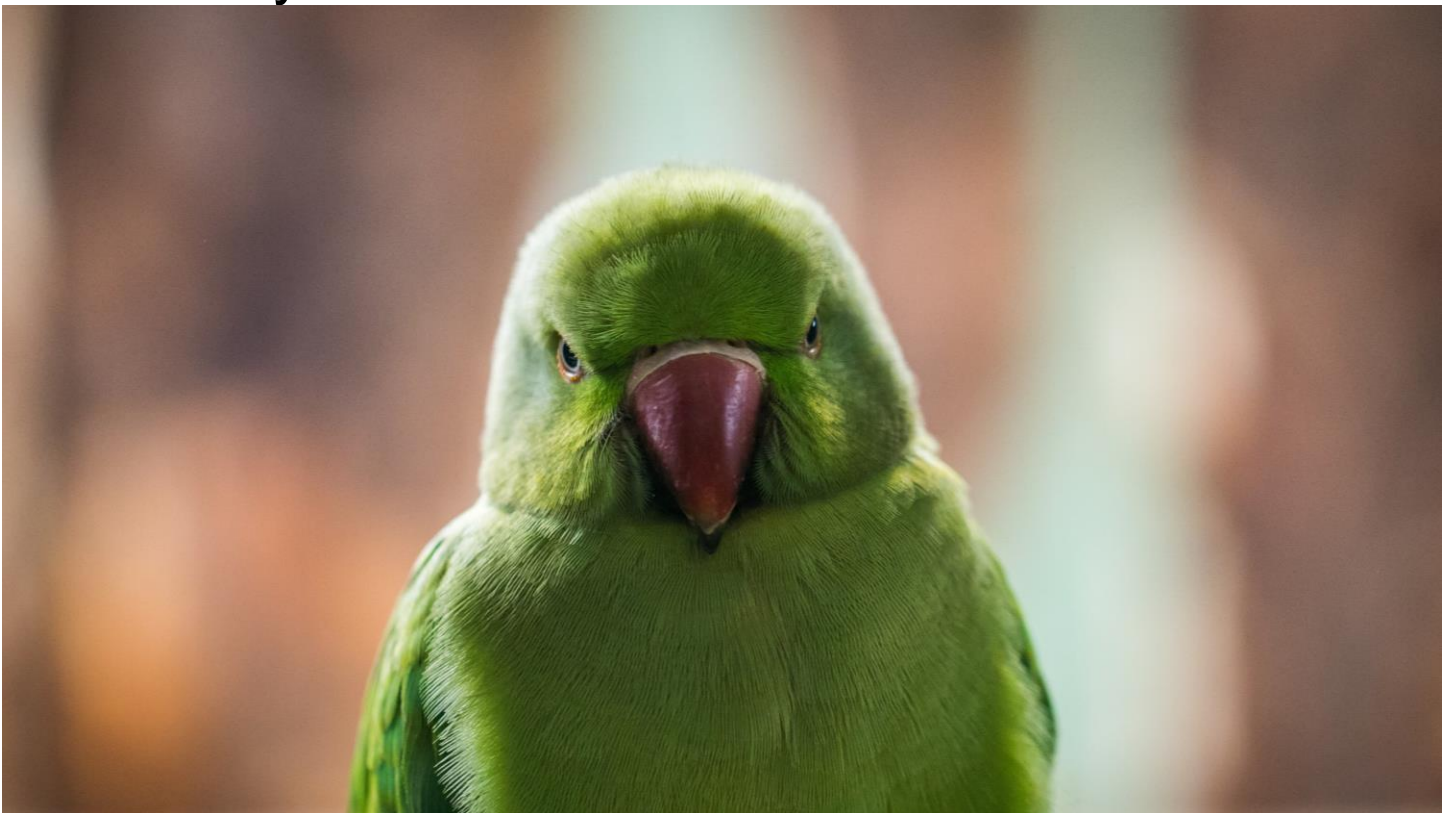
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Acts 3:17–26, 17“And now, brothers, I know that you acted in ignorance, just as your rulers also did. 18But the things which God previously announced by the mouths of all the prophets, that His Christ would suffer, He has fulfilled in this way. 19Therefore repent and return, so that your sins may be wiped away, in order that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord; 20and that He may send Jesus, the Christ appointed for you, 21whom heaven must receive until the period of restoration of all things, about which God spoke by the mouths of His holy prophets from ancient times. 22Moses said, ‘the Lord God will raise up for you a prophet like me from your countrymen; to him you shall listen regarding everything He says to you.

23And it shall be that every soul that does not listen to that prophet shall be utterly destroyed from among the people.’ 24And likewise, all the prophets who have spoken from Samuel and his successors onward, have also announced these days. 25It is you who are the sons of the prophets and of the covenant which God ordained with your fathers, saying to Abraham, ‘and in your seed all the families of the earth shall be blessed.’ 26God raised up His Servant for you first, and sent Him to bless you by turning every one of you from your wicked ways.”



Last week we saw where Peter had just blasted his fellow Jews in fairly harsh terms. 1) He chastised them for being so astonished that their God, the God of the

Jews, the One and Only true God of the universe, had completely transformed a man who had never once used his legs into a man who could instantly stand, walk, and leap for joy. Given Who God is, what was strange about that? 2) Peter then rebuked the crowd for looking to Him and John as though they were special holy men, or magicians, who got God to act. God is sovereign – He chose to act through them. 3) Finally, Peter really castigated them by lumping all of them in with those who had actively betrayed, rejected, brutalized, and viciously murdered the “Author of Life” Himself.

The crowd was no doubt sort of reeling at that point, but then Peter switched gears and struck a different tone with them. This was in order to calm the people and hold their attention. Had Peter continued on his tirade most, if not all, of his audience would have become defensive and angry and any chance of further communication with them would have been lost.



Peter was speaking Truth, but once again we see him trying to speak it in such a way that it would effect change in his audience, not merely to make him look wise, or seem powerful, or feel vindicated, at their expense. He wasn't preaching to hear himself talk or to make them wallow in guilt. He wasn't trying to drive them away; on the contrary, he was trying to entice them to stay. Speaking God's Truth for God always has a purpose, and the purpose is always reconciliation, always right-relationship.

How you share Christ with others speaks volumes about you. It reveals who you are, what scares you, and what you think is important. For example, a person

who hesitates to share until the opportunity passes, demonstrates that they care more for themselves than they do for being like Christ. They care more about what others will think of them, say about them, and perhaps do to them, than they care about the eternity of those others.

A person who does take the opportunity to share Christ, but does so condescendingly, or defensively, or aggressively, exposes their own fears, and insecurities, and doubts. In either case, the Christian is not focused on Christ or on their audience, they are focused on themselves.

What we are called and commissioned by Jesus to actually do is just what Peter did, twice now in the Book of Acts. We are to speak the Truth for the purpose of helping our audience to accept it for what it is. You cannot do that if you make the encounter about you.

To bring the crowd in, we can imagine Peter lowering his voice, and slowing his delivery, and softening his stance, as he was about to make a purposeful appeal to them. He started by calling them “brothers.” Going on from there, Peter granted them that not only had

they acted in ignorance, they had followed their leaders who likewise had acted in ignorance.



The tone and tenor had changed, but the pure unvarnished Truth was still being proclaimed. Jesus Himself, from His Cross of Crucifixion, said just before He yielded up His physical life, "Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing" (Luke 23:34).



This ignorance, this not knowing, is $\alpha\gamma\upsilon\omicron\iota\alpha$ (äg-noy-ä), from which we get our word agnostic. $\alpha\gamma\upsilon\omicron\iota\alpha$ literally means the opposite of knowing, so an absence of knowing, an agnostic is a person without knowledge about a thing. They don't know if there's a God, for instance. Within that statement there's an important philosophical implication in the Greek concept of the word, namely that the knowledge is available, but not known because it is not pursued, discovered, and assimilated.

This Greek concept is captured perfectly in the Latin translation, *ignoramus* (ē-gnō-rä-müs). An agnostic is precisely the same as an *ignoramus*, or as we say in

English an ignoramus. Whichever the word or pronunciation they all describe the same ignorant person. It's far easier for us to see the fuller meaning that a person is agnostic or ignorant because they have ignored learning.

We use the word ignore to mean a person who's not paying attention, or a person who's disregarding something. If we ignore something, we have intentionally remained unfamiliar with that thing – we don't know it – we are ignorant of it. As I have said many times, ignorance is a choice, ignorance is stupidity on purpose! To be an agnostic, or to be an ignoramus, is deliberate because you have ignored the knowledge that is available.

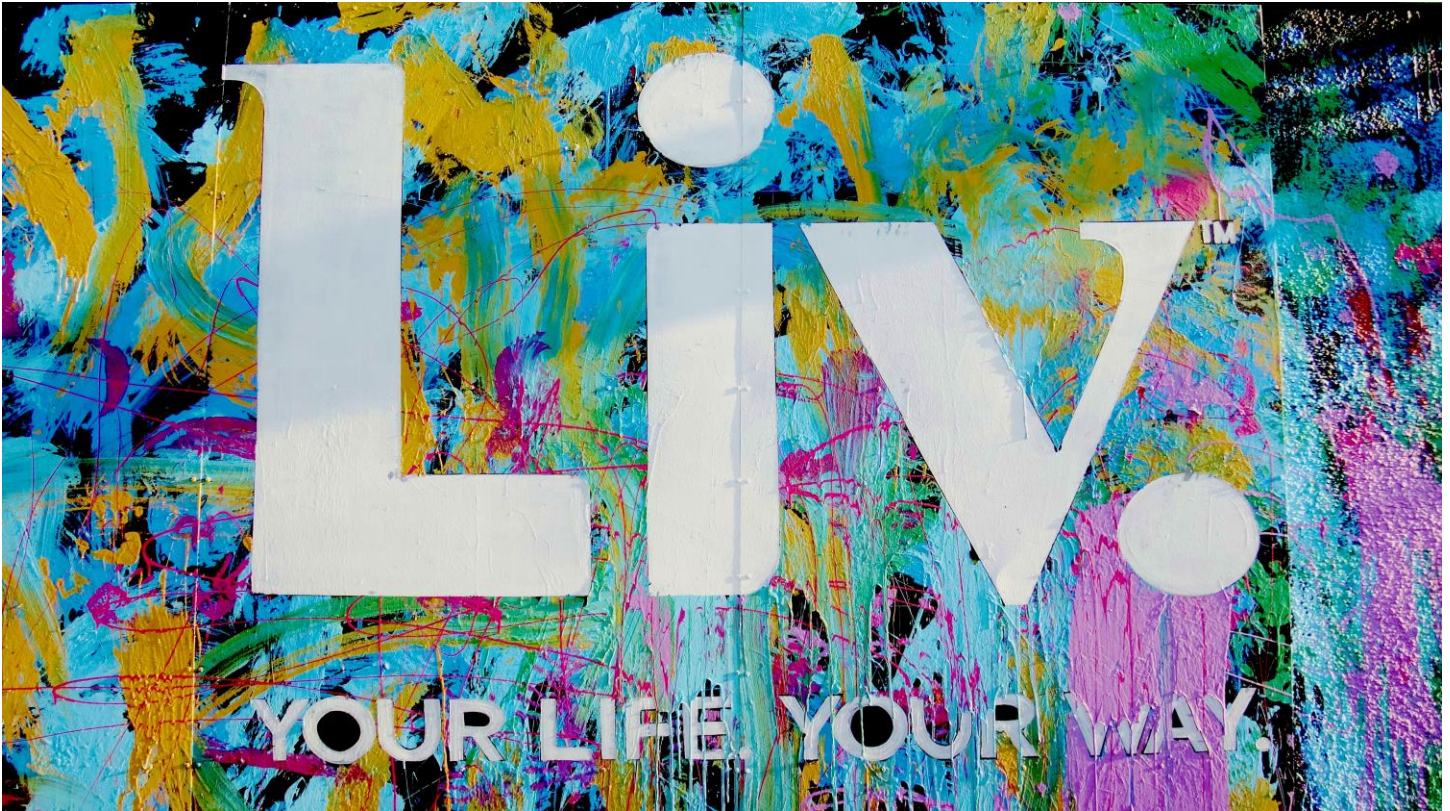
What has always shocked me, and still does, is how so many people go around wearing ignorance like a badge of honor. My dear friends, there is nothing at all honorable about being intentionally dumb.

Now what I've talked about so far is what's technically called vincible ignorance. An ignorance that can be overcome. There is also invincible ignorance. It refers to ignorance that cannot be overcome. It is invincible in the sense that it is something that is simply

unknowable no matter how much time and effort is expended.

It can be that the person is mentally incapable or that the information is unobtainable, but in either case, it is far rarer than people imagine and here's the important bit, invincible ignorance – the kind of ignorance that a person can't help – is completely nonexistent as it pertains to knowing God enough to be Saved.

What that means is that everything that God requires from a human is completely knowable to every human and so Salvific knowledge is only ever unknown to a person because that person refuses to seek and acquire. They are agnostic on purpose, which means purposefully.



That's a notable subtlety. People refuse to properly search for God because they do not want to find Him – that's what being ignorant purposefully means. Please understand this basic reality because it's vital to understanding why people refuse to accept Christ. When, and notice that I didn't say if, but when you share the Good News of eternal Salvation in Christ Jesus with someone and they don't respond the way you hope, you'll know why. They want to remain ignorant of God. They'll ask more questions, put up more objections, and you'll dutifully answer, but it's all merely a distraction – they don't want to know God!

If God is knowable then that reality has implications, and those implications are a big problem for people. Every atheist and every agnostic have a deep-seated, severe, allergic reaction to the possibility that God might require them to live in a particular way, have them do certain things and abstain from other things, that He might commission them to live their life for Him. Worst of all, that He will judge them one day.

The subconscious defense for being your own god, living your best life, doing your own thing, and making your own rules, is “I didn’t know.” “I just didn’t know.”



If a person can remain ignorant of God, then they have an excuse on Judgment Day for ignoring Him during their life.

A further nuance to that line of thinking is that if living my life, my way, turns out to be wrong, I simply blame God. I turn the tables on Him. I didn't know because God didn't make it clear enough. I did my best with what God gave me. I might even shake my fist at Him and tell Him that there were any number of wildly divergent religions claiming to be the answer and there was overwhelming scientific data to support a non-god solution – how was I to sort all that out? My ignorance about You God was invincible ignorance because You didn't make Yourself known to me – there was no way that I could have known. I was set up by You.



Romans 1:18–23, 18For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of people who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, 19because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them. 20For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, that is, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, being understood by what has been made, so that they are without excuse.

This is why I say that there really aren't any atheists – there are only different degrees of open rebellion against God within the intentionally agnostic ranks. What I mean is that a person choosing not to seek God

only calls themselves an atheist when they really hate the idea of God. In a way, the more bitter and angry the agnostic calling themselves an atheist, the more they must actually believe in God. Atheism isn't disbelief in God; It's anger at God.

As an example, no one who truly believes that something cannot possibly exist gets defensive about it. Someone who doesn't believe that Santa Claus delivers presents to all the people around the world on Christmas Eve will not get defensive if you disagree. Even if you told such a person that they really do believe in Santa, or that they're simply confused about him, they would probably just shrug and carry on. To them it's nonsensical and certainly not worth discussing, let alone fighting about. Try that with an atheist.

Deep down everyone knows that God exists and so people only choose not to know about Him and that's what God is talking about in Romans 1:18. The wrath of God is on those who "suppress the truth in unrighteousness." Why? Because the first step in rebellion against God, is the suppression of His Self-revelation. Truth with a capital "T."



We see that all around us in the non-Christian world and I brought it up to remind us of what we're up against in sharing God's Self-revelation with them, but there's something that I'm even more interested in us seeing. You guessed it, how are we Christians guilty of the same thing, albeit to a lesser degree?

We Christians sin against God, which is to say that we put our interests and desires ahead of His by doing the exact same thing. We "suppress the truth in unrighteousness." We remain agnostic to the finer details of God's Truth because we, just like our nonbelieving neighbors, want the excuse that we didn't know.

You may have heard that “Ignorance is of the law is no excuse.” It actually comes from the Bible in Leviticus 5:17, which says that if a person sins, even “though he was unaware, he is still guilty and shall bear his punishment.” The reason is that it is a vincible ignorance. It’s vincible for two reasons. First, everyone already knows what is right and wrong. Second, anyone can go find out what the law says.

That’s what suppressing the truth is – beyond refusing to find the Truth, beyond actively ignoring the Truth, one actually suppresses, twists, and hides, the Truth because they don’t want to know, because they don’t want to comply. They don’t want anyone else to know either, because the more ignorant people the more it seems like it bolsters their case for disobedience. It’s dumb, but the thinking goes that if I can get every Christian committing the same sin as me, then God won't punish me, because surely, He wouldn’t punish everyone. That would be a bad assumption.



We get to the end of that Romans passage and see that there is no excuse. No one in the entire sweep of human history will have a valid excuse on Judgment Day. “Without excuse,” literally means without any defense at all. The judge hears from the prosecution and then He turns to you and says, “your turn,” to which you simply cannot answer. You’ve got nothing. The only thing remaining then is for the Judge to sentence you. Unfortunately, for those who are agnostic enough, there’s only one sentence.

Now, what about the Christians who play the same game in order to have their cake and eat it too. As a person who has acknowledged God and accepted

Christ and been filled with the Holy Spirit you will bypass the Great White Throne Judgment. Instead, you will stand before Christ and as He looks at you intently with fire coming from His eyes, and a sharp two-edged sword coming from His mouth, He will ask for your defense of why you, who knew better, who had the full counsel of His Holy Word and His anointed teachers readily available, chose to mostly live for yourself. I think that we all understand by now that the “I didn’t know” defense is no defense at all.

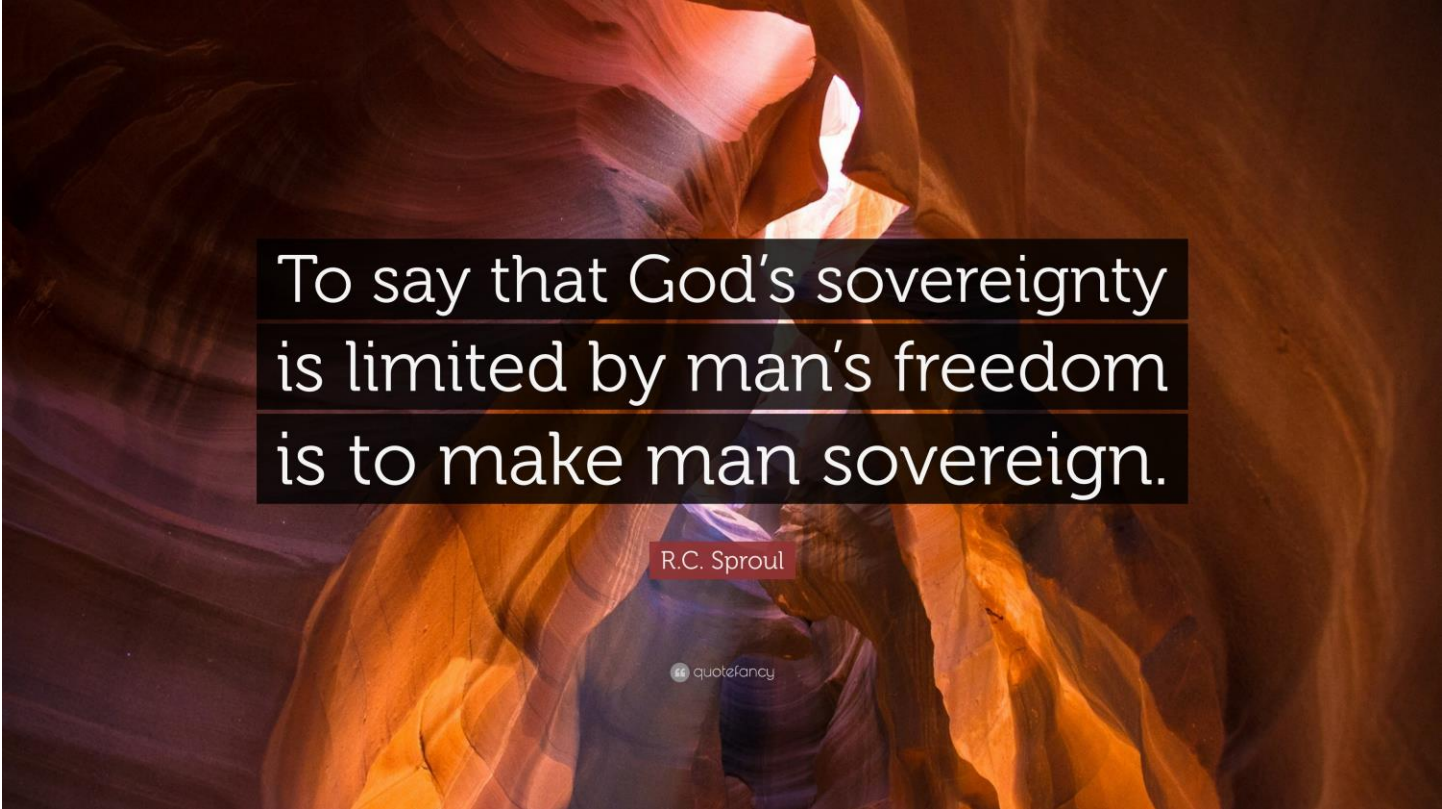


Of course, the Jews in the Temple 2,000 years ago didn’t know that they were murdering the Messiah. Even the High Priest and his fellow elites would have acted differently if they had truly known Whom they

were persecuting. Here's the important bit... God gets that, and God mercifully gives opportunities to "repent and return" to a point, but if a person is still refusing after their final opportunity there is nothing left but wrath.

In other words, vincible ignorance is never an excuse, and it's not even a mitigating factor or an extenuating circumstance, it's simply the reality at the time. A reality that can be remedied if there still is time.

Peter then said that while both he and God recognized that the reason, they had rejected Jesus was their vincible ignorance, God had known all along and had used it to serve His prearranged purpose.



To say that God's sovereignty
is limited by man's freedom
is to make man sovereign.

R.C. Sproul

quotefancy

Peter referenced several passages of Old Testament Scripture to confirm that this had always been God's plan. God is never caught off guard – He's the One making things happen for an ultimate good.

You might think that if ignorance doesn't mitigate guilt, then certainly the fact that they were only fulfilling God's plan would mitigate their guilt. Nope! Not at all. Just as Jesus said in Luke 22:22, "For indeed, the Son of Man is going as it has been determined; but woe to that man by whom He is betrayed!" God's sovereignty and man's responsibility.

The fact that neither ignorance nor God's fulfilled purposes mitigates or lessens guilt is confirmed in verse 19, where Peter told them that "Therefore," they all must immediately "repent and return." Repent is μετανοέω (mĕ-tă-nŏ-ĕ-ō) and return is ἐπιστρέφω (ĕ-pĕ-střĕ-fō). Both words are used in the Bible to represent the same basic idea. While the first stresses turning away from evil and the second stresses turning towards God, they both imply the other and are roughly equivalent.



Here they function a bit like a hendiadys, meaning that they combine to emphasize and intensify the single idea of definitively turning away from one thing while at the same time entirely turning towards another thing.

μετανοέω means to think again, which is to say, to change your mind. You are travelling in a direction with your life, you are thinking, saying, and doing, things in a particular manner because you believe that to be the best way. It doesn't matter that you're wrong, or that your methods are self-destructive, or that you pretend that what you do is not what you want to do. The reality is that we each think, say, and do what we want most.

Something happens. Call it a significant emotional event, call it an epiphany, by whatever name, you realize that you are indeed wrong and so wrong that you must instantly change your entire belief.

Belief may reside in the heart, but it always has its source in the head. That's why the Apostle Paul commanded us to “be transformed by the ἀνακαινώσει τοῦ νοῦς (ä-nä-kī-nō-sā tü nõ-õs) the renewal of your mind.” Your νοῦς (nõ-õs). Notice that the command is stated passively, meaning that you are to actively allow yourself to be transformed. It is the work of God in us and so the command is to intentionally yield ourselves to the Holy Spirit's renewing of our thought patterns so that our repentance is complete.



I hope that you can see a thread here. Ignorance ἄγνοια is choosing not to think, repentance μετανοέω is choosing to think in a different way, and the key to that is the renewal of your thinking, your mind, νοός. These are all closely related words. When we allow the Holy Spirit to change our perspective and enable new, Godly patterns of thought, then the new creation in Christ that you truly are will begin to shine through you, to be externally seen. That being transformed.



Obviously the turning away from old fleshly ways of thinking that resulted in separation from God, in this context, implies the turning towards Him and right relationship with Him by thinking correctly. Peter more than doubled down on the concept by explicitly adding ἐπιστρέφω, the turning towards God.

He was imploring them to change their status, because even though they acted in ignorance and even though Jesus' sacrificial death was all part of God's grand design, they were currently bound over in God's Holy Wrath.

Every person is by default, regardless of their ignorance or God's Sovereignty, a child of wrath until they choose to change their status by first choosing to abandon ignorance.

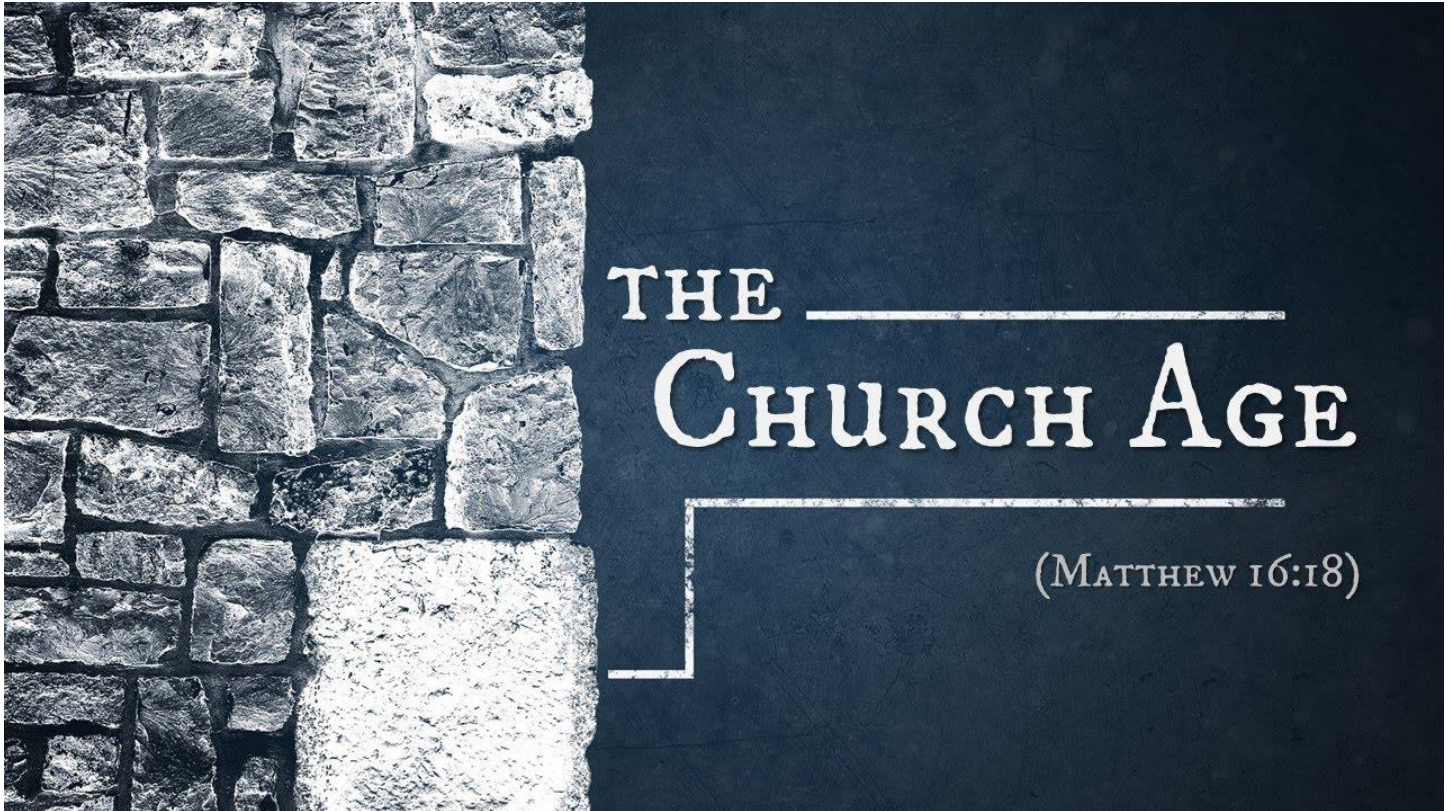


Verses 19-21 are kind of wild. The language of verse 19, stating the ultimate goal that “times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord,” clearly refers to the terminal Messianic prophecies as in the Book of Joel where the prophecy pleads with the Jews to repent and return so that God will relent and bless them. It ends with the Lord vanquishing all of Israel’s enemies and dwelling forever in Jerusalem with them. Another example is God speaking in Isaiah 65:17–19, 17“For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth;

And the former things will not be remembered or come to mind. 18“But be glad and rejoice forever in what I create; For behold, I create Jerusalem for rejoicing And her people for gladness. 19“I will also rejoice in Jerusalem and be glad in My people; And there will no longer be heard in her The voice of weeping and the sound of crying.”

The gist is that if Israel would, as a corporate entity, as a people, as a nation, “repent and return” then God would send His Messiah to usher in the Last Days and set everything right. In Malachi 3:7 God declares, “Return to Me, and I will return to you.” Peter is calling for this very thing. It seems as if the onus was on the Jews to “en masse” repent and return and that if they did, God would send Jesus back immediately.

The Apostle Paul seems to confirm that, especially in Romans chapter 11. He wrote there that the refusal of the Jewish people to adequately respond is temporary and that the delay allows Gentiles to be Saved. In verse 15 of Romans 11, he said that “their rejection proves to be the reconciliation of the world.” Paul went on in to say in verse 25 that it’s all of part God’s plan. “That a partial hardening has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in.”

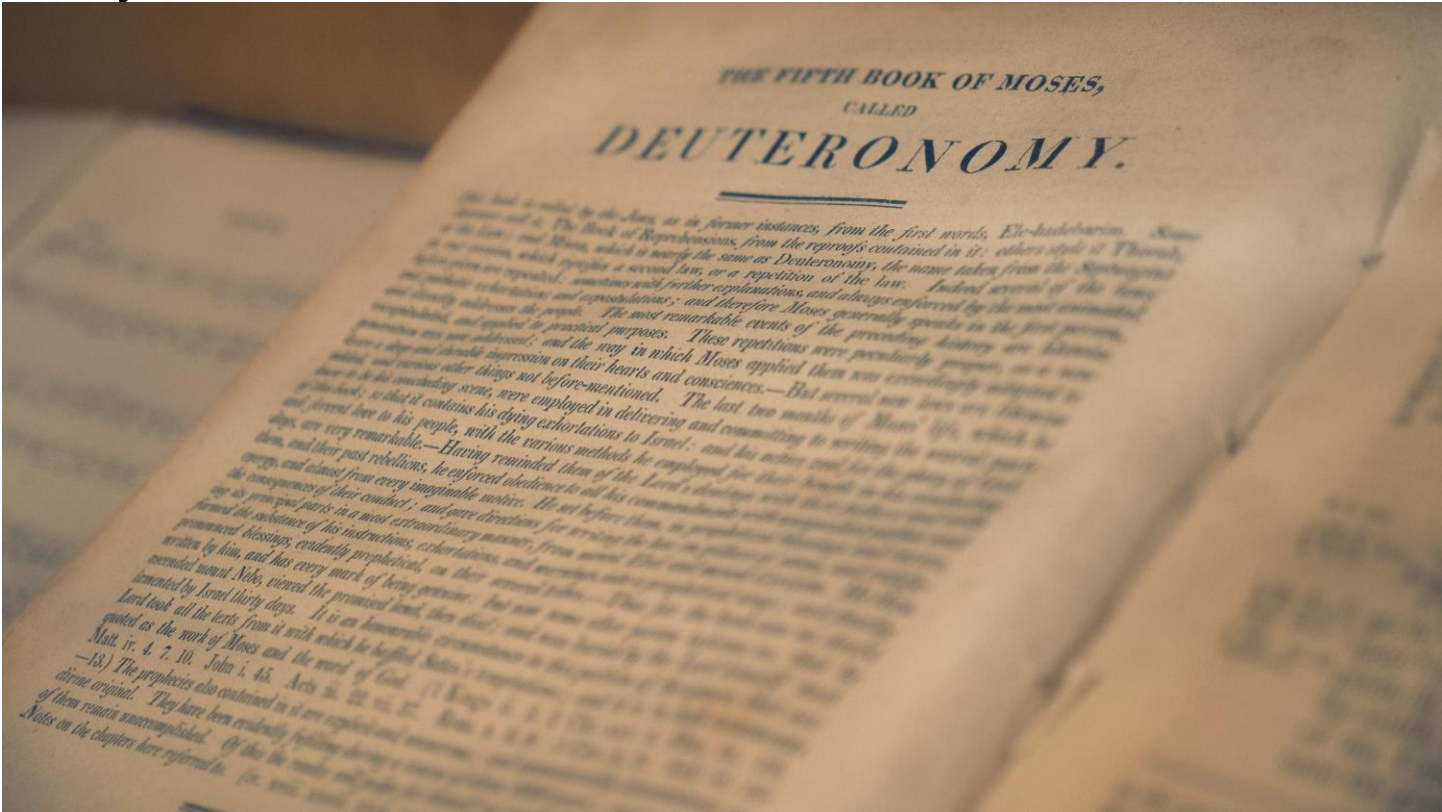


This gap between the Jewish Messiah Jesus providing a path to Salvation and the Jewish nation by and large accepting it became known as the church age. We are in the 20th century of the church age. Peter confirmed that in verse 21 stating that the Resurrected and Ascended Jesus would remain in Heaven until “the period of restoration of all things,” which echoes Psalm 110, which starts, “The Lord says to my Lord: ‘Sit at My right hand Until I make Your enemies a footstool for Your feet.’”

What Peter and Paul knew was that the Second Coming of Jesus is ordained by God, not by the faithfulness of mankind whether universally, or as the

nation of Israel, or as the Christian community, or as the nation of America. No human effort or goodness is going to accelerate the end and likewise no amount of human evil and depravity will force God's hand either. God knows precisely when to send Christ back to the world.

What the church has also known for 2,000 years is that the moment of Jesus' Return could be today. We certainly don't have time to get into the End of the World stuff any further today, but it is highly likely, probably certain, that anyone not already a Christian when Christ appears will still kneel and confess, like everyone else, but for them, it will be too late.



Peter went on to tell them that none of this was new. Everything had been laid out in God's Self-revelation long beforehand. He quoted and alluded to various Scripture passages especially Deuteronomy 18:15–22, as quoted by Peter, in verse 22. An interesting note about that passage in Deuteronomy is that God told the Israelites how to recognize the Messiah. He said that any true prophet speaking the very Words of God, would never be wrong. God would never leave His anointed holding the bag.

In other words, any true prophet of God would be validated by God. Anything that he claimed, whether in word or in deed would be true. That's what Jesus meant in John 10:38, "even though you do not believe Me, believe the works, so that you may know and understand that the Father is in Me, and I in the Father."

In summarizing a bunch of prophecies Peter told his fellow Jews you are the sons of the prophets and of the sons of the promise and the sons of the Covenant that God established with Abraham and confirmed repeatedly over the centuries. That through you, the Jewish people all the families of the earth would be blessed. Well, Peter was saying, that day has come

and so repent and return by realizing that Jesus is the Messiah and that through Him Israel can at last be free.

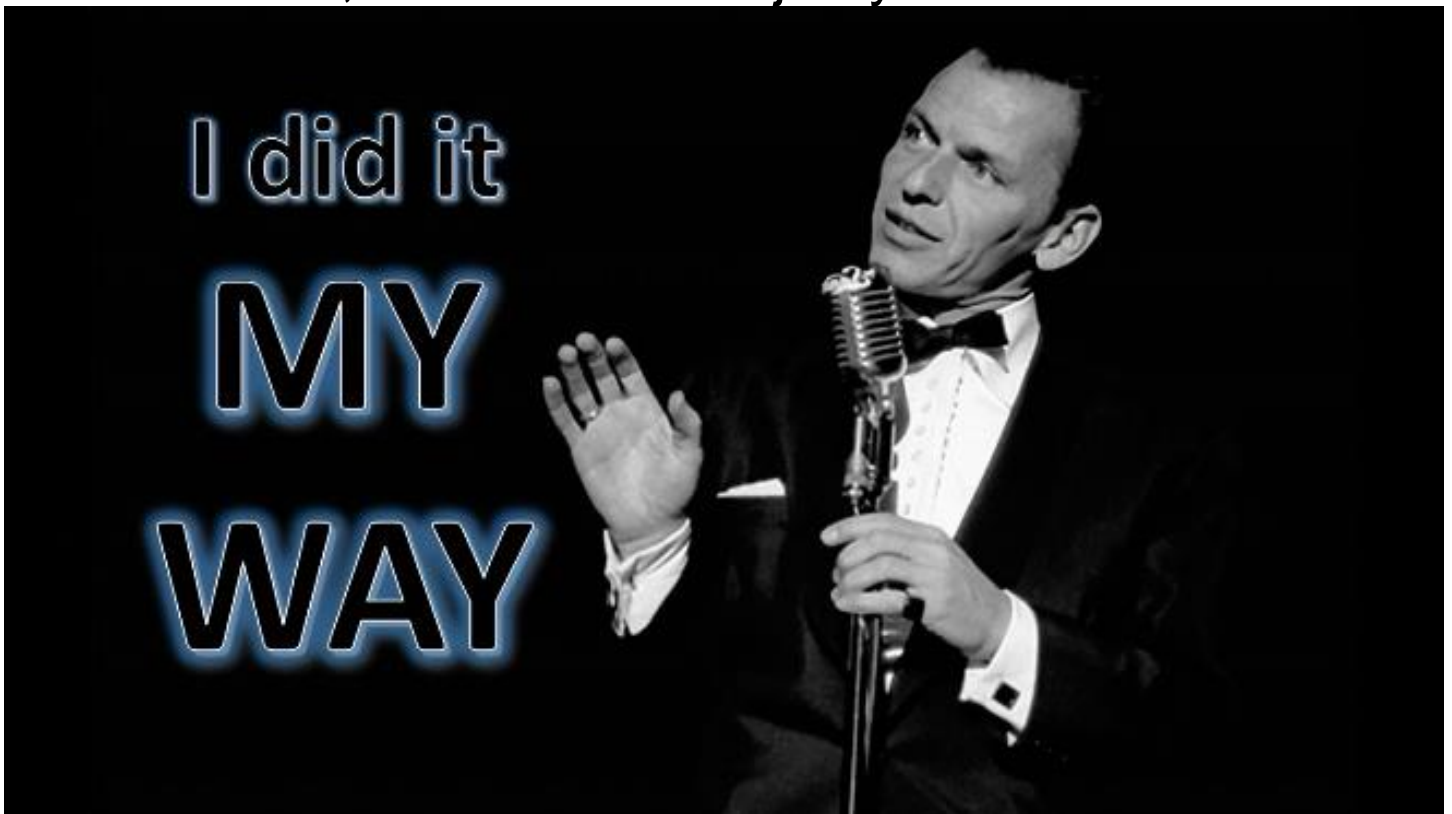


Verse 26 is just awesome, “God raised up His Servant for you first, and sent Him to bless you by turning every one of you from your wicked ways.”

God bodily resurrected Jesus from three days dead confirming even the most outlandish claim that He made. Jesus is the Son, the Heir, and so, the Servant of the “Most High God,” and true to God’s Own Word, He sent Jesus to the Jews first.

The purpose for Jesus the Messiah to be sent to the Jews was to bless them with the ability to “repent and

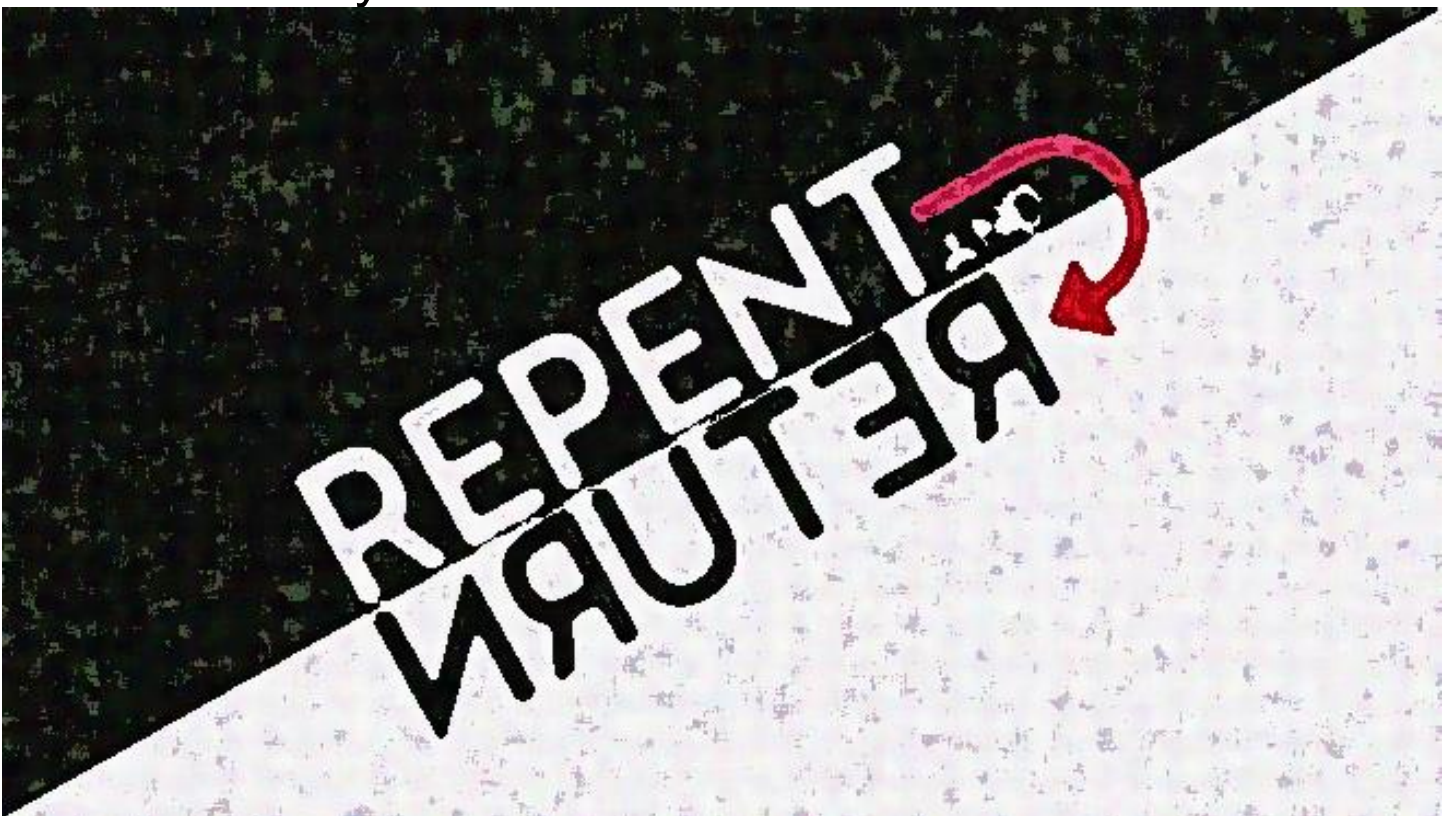
return.” As we will see many did. Perhaps the Jews living then who accepted Jesus numbered in the tens of thousands, but the vast majority refused.



They refused because they preferred to remain ignorant. They chose to remain ignorant because they were set on their path, convinced in their own mind, not realizing that their way was wicked.

Again, this is the problem with the world, but it is also a concern within the family of God. Are you so locked-in to a particular thing that you don't even recognize that your path is wicked? The German genius Goethe said, "A person hears only what they understand." If you want to hear the Truth, you must work at it.

In counseling, as an example, there are bits of information that would be incredibly helpful to the counselee, which they simply cannot hear. It's frustrating, but always true. That reminds me of another thing Goethe said, "Know thyself? If I knew myself, I'd run away." Therein lies half the problem, the other half is what we've discussed at length today and that is, in a word, change. The fear that we might have to live contrary to how we want to live.



Might I suggest an alternative? If you are not a Christian, it's because you need more. More proof, more details about what it means to be a Christian, more information about the long-term commitment.

Well, you already have as much certainty as is possible without stepping out in faith. No matter how long you delay, no matter what you learn, you will never be any surer than you are right now. What God wants is trust. He's given you enough for you to trust. Once you put aside your childish fear and take the leap of faith, He will give you more proof and your trust in Him will grow. Repent and return. Do it now.

If you are already a Christian and are honest enough to admit that you mostly live your life your way to please yourself at the expense of living for God, then repent and return. Do it now.



Please trust me when I tell you that time is of the essence.