

WHAT GOD WINKED AT

(Article below from Bible Students Monthly—1911, Volume III, Number 9.)

“The times of this ignorance God winked at, but now He has commanded all men everywhere to repent; because He hath appointed a Day in which He will judge the world in righteousness by that Man whom He hath ordained.”—Acts 17:30, 31.

THE word “**winked**” in our text is used in a figurative sense to signify that God took no notice of, paid no attention to, that long period of time from the flood to the First Advent of our Redeemer. During those 2,500 years the world of mankind lay in ignorance and weakness and vice, but, as our text declares, God took no notice of it as a whole. He gave His attention entirely to the little nation of Israel, the descendants of Abraham, with whom He made a special Law Covenant.

Israel entered upon a great schooling period, first in a condition of peonage in Egypt; and later, under the Command of Moses, passing from Egypt to Canaan, with a wandering of forty years in the wilderness, still later under judges, and then under kings, etc. God did not wink at sin among the Israelites, whom He adopted as His “peculiar people” under the Law Covenant mediated by Moses.

We read that every disobedience received a “just recompense of reward.” (Heb. 2:2) Stripes, punishments, captivities, under Divine supervision and predicted through the Prophets, was the portion of the chosen people of the Lord. Obedience on their part brought blessing, and disobedience and idolatry brought chastisements—God winked at nothing as respects His chosen people.

At first glance this is perplexing. Not understanding the Divine Plan we would be inclined to expect that the favored nation would be excused more than others—that it would be the people whose imperfections would be winked at. But not so: Israel was chosen for a purpose. And in order to prepare them for their mission and to fit them to fill it, the Lord chastened and scourged them for their sins, and thus educated and assisted them more than others out of degradation. As a result, when our Lord came into the world to be man’s Redeemer, Israel, under the chastising, scourging, instructing experiences of many centuries, was by far the most advanced nation in the world along religious lines.

Thus it was that when the Redeemer presented Himself, some, “a remnant,” were “Israelites indeed” and ready to receive Him—five hundred during His earthly ministry and several thousand more at the following Pentecostal season. It is but reasonable to suppose that no other nation in the world would have furnished any such numbers ready of heart for Messiah, and consecrated fully to Him. Note, for instance that St. Paul’s preaching to the Athenians on Mars Hill apparently touched not a single heart nor head.

The Justice of the Wink

The Almighty informs us that Justice is the very foundation of all of His dealings. He cannot be less than just, although through Christ He has provided to be more than just—that is loving and merciful. There must have been a justice in this winking mentioned by the Apostle. What was it?

The Apostle explains that owing to a death sentence that was upon the world in general, and no provision having yet been made for a redemption from that death penalty and a resurrection deliverance, it would have been illogical for God to give laws to the world of mankind commanding repentance, etc. Why? Because they were already **condemned to death**, the extreme penalty of the Divine Law. No more could be done to them than to destroy them, however badly they lived; and nothing that they could do would make them deserving of eternal life. So long as that death sentence rested upon them and no prospect was offered even of release from it, God let them alone, and justly enough “winked” at their imperfection and did not lay it specially to their charge.

With the Jew it was different. God instructed that nation through the Law and the Prophets and the chastenings for their wrong doings, and thus prepared in them a “little flock” of “Israelites indeed” ready for spiritual things. Additionally He wished to use them and their experiences as types or lessons for Spiritual Israel yet future. These types, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, through the New Testament, have constituted very helpful lessons to the Church of this Gospel Age—Spiritual Israel—“For the Law Covenant was a shadow of good things coming after it.”

But before having this dealing with Israel, God made a Covenant with them promising them life eternal if they would obey. They gladly accepted the proposition and strove to live righteously, strove to keep the Law. They did not gain eternal life under the Law, because they could not keep it; not that the Law was defective, but that they, like all other members of Adam’s fallen race, were imperfect. God knew of their weakness and allowed them to be disappointed in the outcome of their Covenant, but nevertheless He made it a great blessing to them—a means of instruction, which, as we have seen, ultimately prepared several thousand to be of so ripe a condition of heart as to be ready for the Savior and to become His disciples.

The Jew, then, had this advantage over the Gentile up to that time: He had God’s promises. He knew the Law of God. He was profited by striving to do the impossible thing of keeping it perfectly. Had God not chosen the nation of Israel to bring them under the schooling processes of the Law Covenant (Gal. 3:24), he would have “winked” at their ignorance, etc., as He did at the transgressions of other nations up to that time.

“Now Commandeth All Men”

What is the secret of this change on God’s part—from winking at the sins and imperfections of the world to commanding them to repent? If it was just to wink at their sins for thousands of years, why did not God continue to wink at them? The Apostle answers the question, telling us that this change in God’s dealing which sent forth the message that the world should repent was based upon the fact that His eternal purposes had by that time reached the stage of development which justified such a message.

The Son of God had left the glory of the Father which He had before the world was: He had humbled Himself to become a man. As the Man Christ Jesus He had been obedient to the Heavenly Father’s wish and had laid down His life sacrificially—first that it might benefit consecrated believers during this Gospel Age; secondly, that it might bless the world of mankind during the Messianic reign.

For a time these good tidings were confined to the Jewish nation, but 3½ years after the crucifixion the limit of Israel’s favor respecting the message came to an end, and then the good tidings of great joy were permitted to go to all the Gentiles on the same terms that the Jews had enjoyed.

The Gospel or “good news” consists of the information that God in His mercy has provided that the death sentence upon Adam and his race shall not be perpetual; that there shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and of the unjust; that the provision for this has already been made in and through the death of the Redeemer. Is it inquired what advantage would there be in a resurrection of the dead if therewith all were to be placed back just where they are at present?

The answer is that there would be no advantage in such a resurrection. If the Jew could not keep the Law, and if the very best-intentioned of the Gentiles have found themselves to be imperfect and their efforts to stand approved before God in the present life to be failures, what good could result from merely awakening them from the sleep of death? Would it not be wiser and better every way to let them perish like the brute beast?

We answer that God’s Word reveals a very grand outcome to His Plan of Salvation. The word **resurrection**, as Scripturally used, signifies much more than to be merely resuscitated. It signifies awakening and more, uplifting out of all sin and death conditions, up, up, up to perfection—to all that was lost by Father Adam and to be redeemed through the Calvary sacrifice.

“God Hath Appointed a Day”

This, then, is the meaning of the Apostle’s argument. By providing the Lord Jesus Christ as the Redeemer of the Church and the world, God has made possible a fresh trial or

judgment for Adam and his race. Adam's first judgment or trial day was in Eden. There he lost everything by his disobedience and brought upon himself and all of his race the Divine sentence to death. Christ has appeared that He might redeem Adam and his race, for the very purpose of giving them individually another full, fair trial or judgment for life everlasting or death everlasting.

That general Judgment Day mentioned by St. Paul in our text is neither a damnation day nor a 24 hour day. It is the thousand-year day of Christ—the period of His Mediatorial reign, in the which Satan will be bound, all evil influences be removed and the light of the knowledge of the glory of God be made to fill the whole earth. St. Peter reminds us, “Beloved, be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day with the Lord is as a thousand years.” (2 Peter 3:8) This is the key to the expressions, “The Day of Christ,” “The Day of Judgment,” etc.

The Mediatorial reign will be the Day of Judgment, or trial, in the sense that all mankind, the living and the dead, will then be brought to a full knowledge of God and to full opportunity to regain by resurrection processes a complete uplift from all weaknesses, imperfections, etc., which have resulted from our share in Adam's sin and our own weaknesses and ignorance. Sins to the extent that they were willful will to the same extent be punishable and receive a “just recompense of reward.” (Heb. 2:2) Every good endeavor will be rewarded and every transgression will be punished.

From this standpoint we see the force of the Apostle's argument, that it is the Divine intention to grant to every member of Adam's race another trial, another judgment, to determine afresh and individually the worthiness or unworthiness of each to have eternal life. But why should this fact make any difference to the world in the present life? Why did not God wait until the Messianic Age and give them all a surprise? Why did He send them the message of His love and a revelation of the knowledge of His future dealings? Did He not know what the past 18 centuries have proven, namely, that few of mankind would have the “hearing ear” and that fewer still, after hearing, would so love righteousness and so hate iniquity as to sacrifice the interests of the present life by espousing the Gospel message, repenting of sin, and seeking to live a saintly life, in opposition to all unrighteousness?

Yes, we answer, it is written, “Known unto God are all His works from the beginning of the world.” (Acts 15:18) God surely knew that the message of His grace would generally fall upon ears that were dull of hearing. That we might know this He caused it to be written in the prophecies in advance, that few would have the hearing ear for His message of love and mercy. Why, then, did He send the message? We answer that there were two reasons for His so doing:

(1) He intended that a witness should be given so that those comprehending would have an incentive to a reformation of life. He wished all to know that their responsibility in life would be proportionate to their knowledge of this fact of redemption. This principle is stated in the Scriptures by our Lord. He declares that he who knew not and was disobedient would be punished with comparatively few stripes, while those who knew better and sinned with deliberation would be punished with many stripes—in that New Dispensation.

(2) Another reason for the promulgation of this good tidings of the Day of the Lord's Judgment is that God wishes to use this message as a primary lesson to do a primary work of instruction for a special class of "elect" characters, whom He is seeking in the present time, before the inauguration of the Mediatorial Kingdom. He calls these His "jewels," the "Bride of Christ," His "members."

This class is specially called out of the world now, in advance of the Messianic Kingdom, that they may eventually be God's Royal Priesthood, or priestly kings, in association with the Redeemer. These, according to the Scriptures, are to be associate judges of the world with Christ. St. Paul asks, "Know ye not that the saints shall judge the world?" (1 Cor. 6:2) We do know it, thank God! And we know that they will be thoroughly competent for that work. Their experiences in the present life, in battling against the world and the flesh and the Devil and coming off conquerors through the assistance of the great High Priest, will make them competent judges of the world; competent priests to assist and to bless the world; competent under-priests to govern the world from the spirit plane.

"Building Up Yourselves"

We are glad to warn all men everywhere to repent, and glad also to give them the good reason why they should repent—to tell them of God's appointed time, the Messianic Epoch, in which all shall have a full opportunity of gaining eternal life through Christ. We are glad to assure them that every endeavor for righteousness put forth now will bring large returns of character development and better position then. We warn them that every willful transgression, all willful ignorance, will react upon them to their disadvantage and make for their shame and lasting contempt, under the glorious sunlight of that New Day. It will search out and expose to all humanity their weaknesses, their sins, to the extent that these have been recognized or approved or have not been resisted.

There are some who are of the saintly class, "called, chosen and faithful"—some of this jewel class, whose judgment or trial is in progress now. We trust that these are striving with might and main to make their calling and election sure through faith in the Redeemer's sacrifice and obedience to His Law of the Spirit of life—the Law of Love.

Now is our Judgment Day, our day of testing or trial. We will not stand or fall as congregations and denominations or lodges or societies. Our testing is an individual one and nothing short of loyalty of heart to the Lord, to His Truth and to the brethren will make us, as the Lord's jewels, "heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ [our Lord], if so be that we suffer with Him that we may be also glorified together"—Rom. 8:17.