

Is Ignorance an Excuse
By Trey Sullins

Have you ever heard the saying “ignorance is bliss”? In some areas of life like doing the laundry or painting a cabinet this might be the case. In other words, because of your ignorance of the task, you don’t have to do the task. In God’s word we find that this is not the way that spiritual things work. All throughout the Bible you find examples that reveal to us how God feels about spiritual ignorance. Let’s start by looking at 2 Thessalonians 1:7-10:

“and to give you who are troubled rest with us when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. These shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power, when He comes, in that Day, to be glorified in His saints and to be admired among all those who believe, because our testimony among you was believed.”

First, notice that God is going to take vengeance on those who deserve it. God is righteous and He judges righteously. Therefore, if He determines that someone deserves punishment then He is certainly right. Next, notice the group of people mentioned here who will receive this vengeance: those who do not know God and those who do not obey God. The latter is obvious in the minds of those who study the Bible. When someone disobeys God, they receive punishment. This pattern is plainly found by warning, command, and example all throughout the Bible. But the former group of people is what people often forget or even choose to ignore. Those who do not know God are set to receive the same consequence as those who reject God. In the eyes of God ignorance is not an excuse! If God said it then that is just the way that it is, and we must accept it.

We find examples of ignorance not being an excuse throughout the Bible as well. In Acts 17 as Paul was going through the city of Athens, he saw numerous idols and other objects for the worship of the Athenians abundant gods. In 17:23 Paul focuses on one specific altar which was inscribed “to the unknown God.” Now consider what Paul does next. He uses this as an opportunity to teach them about the true God they did not know. Why would Paul do this? If God does not bring vengeance upon those who do not know Him, then Paul could have done them a great favor by never revealing the gospel to them. Their ignorance of God would be their justification all the way heaven. However, guided by the Holy Spirit, Paul knew that these people were lost in sin because they did not yet know God; Therefore, he proceeded to teach them 17:24 and following. Down in 17:30 Paul says that God commands all men everywhere to repent. This was not just a need that all of the sudden arose once Paul revealed God, but again it was this preexisting need which caused Paul to preach these things to them.

Another great example is in Matthew 28:19-20 and the corresponding gospel accounts. Here Jesus makes a simple and clear statement, “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” Jesus gave the command to go and preach to the whole world. If ignorance was an excuse in God’s eyes then simply by sending out all His messages to the world, He indirectly condemned everyone who

would hear and then reject. Once again, this viewpoint does not hold water. The real reason why Jesus sent the word out to the world was people were already lost without God and needed to hear this message in order to have faith unto salvation.

While it may be more difficult for some to accept that ignorance of God will lead to condemnation, this is God's plan. We can only speak and believe what God has revealed if we are to be right with Him. Truly in the eyes of God spiritual ignorance is not bliss!