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"GOD'S WAY VERSUS MAN'S WAY"

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"Who in times past suffered all nations to walk in their own ways" (Acts 14:16); "And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent" (Acts 17:30).



There are two ways set before us in the Scriptures: God's way and man's way. God says in Isaiah 55:9: "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts." David prays in these words: "Teach me thy way, O Lord, and lead me in a plain path, because of mine enemies" (Psalm 27:11). God's ways are heavenly; man's ways are earthly. God's way is right; man's way is wrong. Speaking of God's way, the Psalmist says, "As for God, his way is perfect: the word of the Lord is tried: he is a buckler to all those that trust in him" (Psalm 18:30). Speaking of man, Isaiah says: "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all" (Isaiah 53:6). Man's way is a way of ignorance. "O Lord, I know that the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps" (Jer. 10:23). "There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death" (Prov. 14:12).

Man's ways are known to God. "He knoweth the way that I take: when he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold" (Job 23:10). "For his eyes are upon the ways of man, and he seeth all his goings" (Job 34:21). "The eyes of the Lord are in every place, beholding the evil and the good" (Prov. 15:3). David says: "Thou compassest

my path and my lying down, and art acquainted with all my ways" (Psalm 139:3). "Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight: but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do" (Heb. 4:13).

Our text points to a time when God suffered all nations to walk in their own ways. "Who in times past suffered all nations to walk in their own ways." To suffer means to allow or permit. Our text says that God allowed or permitted all nations to walk in their own ways. HOW?

1. Not by giving them license to do as they pleased. Not by condoning their sin. It does not mean that God had pleasure in what they did. It does not mean that God loved their ways, or approved of their ways. The word suffer in this connection means a negative consent. There is in the word the idea of toleration. He tolerates their ways for a while, only to punish them in the end, for we read that "The wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the nations that forget God" (Psalm 9:17).

2. God suffered them to walk in their own ways by giving them up to themselves. He left them to themselves. He threw about them no restraints of grace, nor of law. He just let them do as they wanted to. "Wherefore God also gave them up to uncleanness through the lusts of their own hearts, to dishonour their own bodies

between themselves" (Rom. 1:24).

(1) He gave them no written law.

(2) He sent no prophets to warn them of their evil way. One of the greatest blessings to any people is a faithful prophet to warn them of the danger of having their own way. There is a clamor today on the part of the people for preachers who will not disturb the present order of things—men are wanted who will fit into the world's mold. A preacher, in the popular eye, is a failure if his preaching causes trouble and splits a church.

When God permits people to have their own way, He is not acting in mercy but in judgment. The worst thing that could happen to any of us would be for God to let us have our own way. We ought to thank God for every rebuke, for every sharp sermon that brought us face to face with our sins. We are all such fools that we do not know our friends when we see them. We are so stupid as to think that the preacher that flatters and pampers, and never gets under our skin, is a great fellow.

(3) God suffered them to walk in their own ways in that He did not send His Spirit to convict them of their evil ways. It is a great day in any life when God's Spirit opens the eye of conscience to see the evil that is present. When God lays hands on man to save him, the first thing He does is a work of destruction. He blasts all our former hopes, before He gives us the good hope that is in Christ. Before He sends the showers of refreshing, He sends a terrible drought and our souls become dry and parched. Before He shows us the living fountain, He cracks our manufactured cisterns and causes all the water of human merit to run out. Before He clothes us with the robe of Christ's imputed righteousness, He strips us of our filthy rags of self-righteousness, and holds it up to our gaze. He makes us weak before He makes us strong; He makes us sad before He makes us glad.

What were the results of walking in their own way? Nothing good.

1. False religions. The heathen nations are not irreligious, but they are held in the grip of false religions. The heathen nations are an example of what men will become when God lets them have their own way. "But I say, that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to devils, and not to God: and I would not that ye should have fellowship with devils" (I Cor. 10:20); "Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, And changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to

birds, and fourfooted beasts, and creeping things" (Rom. 1:21-23).

2. Immorality. "Wherefore God also gave them up to uncleanness through the lusts of their own hearts, to dishonour their own bodies, between themselves: Who changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed for ever. Amen. For this cause God gave them up unto vile affections: for even their women did change the natural use into that which is against nature: And likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust one toward another; men with men working that which is unseemly, and receiving in themselves that recompence of their error which was meet. And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient; Being filled with all unrighteousness, fornication, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, debate, deceit, malignity, whisperers, Backbiters, haters of God, despiteful, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, Without understanding, covenantbreakers, without natural affection, implacable, unmerciful: Who knowing the judgment of God, that they which commit such things are worthy of death, not only do the same, but have pleasure in them that do them" (Rom. 1:24-32).

Man does not have a free will to do good. When he has his own way he does bad. His conduct is in keeping with his nature. "Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? not one" (Job 14:4).

God in salvation brings man to the end of his own way. He gives him strength (Rom. 8:3); peace (Col. 1:20); and righteousness (Rom. 10:4). The Bible says in Psalm 37:5: "Commit thy way unto the Lord; trust also in him; and he shall bring it to pass."

Is it a way of poverty? Commit thy way unto the Lord. Is it a way of disobedient children? Commit thy way unto the Lord. Is it a way of sickness? Commit thy way unto the Lord. Is it a way of darkness and uncertainty? Commit thy way unto the Lord. Is it a way of loneliness? Have friends forsaken thee? Commit thy way unto the Lord. Oh, how wonderful it is to know God's way for our life!

