



"God loves us the way we are, but He loves us too much to leave us that way."

—Leighton Ford

**08-Dec-17**

## Time to Repent (Part One)

In Jesus Christ's letter to the congregation in Thyatira, one small statement illustrates an aspect of God's nature that is crucial for us to understand: "And I gave her [time to repent](#) of her [sexual immorality](#), and she did not repent" ([Revelation 2:21](#)).

Even though [God](#) is in no way obligated to give a sinner one additional second of life, His overall approach is to give people time to repent. There are exceptions to this, such as with Uzzah, whose [sin](#) and death appear to be simultaneous ([II Samuel 6:6-7](#)). The Bible contains other examples, even in the New Testament, where God's response to sin is extremely swift, such as with Ananias and Sapphira ([Acts 5:1-11](#)). Even so, we see throughout Scripture that God's general pattern is to allow people time to repent.

This pattern can help us to understand some of the frustrations of life. Psalm 73 contains the record of the testing of Asaph's [faith](#). He had nearly slipped away from God when he observed that the ungodly appeared to be at ease. In reality, ungodliness always bears sour fruit, so even though God had not yet judged the wicked whom Asaph saw, they were not actually getting away with anything. What Asaph considered to be God's lack of action was—at

least in part—just Him giving them time to repent. Only when Asaph entered the sanctuary, and God returned to his thoughts, did he grasp that the wicked person's path is one of ruin. The wicked had some time to repent, but that time turned out to be a source of anguish for Asaph.

Noah is another prime example of this effect. He preached for 120 years, longer than we live today. For those 120 years, [the world](#) was warned; the people had ample time to repent. Noah was the only righteous person in that generation, and being surrounded by wickedness weighs heavily on the godly (see [Ezekiel 9:4-5](#); [II Peter 2:7](#)). Part of God's testing of Noah's faith involved his having to persevere while God gave the rest of his generation time to repent.

We who are called of God find ourselves in a similar circumstance today. We see the nation's crumbling morality, knowing what it portends for the future. From the man on the street to those in the highest offices in the nations of modern Israel, people are turning farther from God. We sometimes become frustrated because our ideas about justice and judgment involve far less time than God's approach. We are required to show faith and perseverance to keep walking until God judges that He has given enough time and that it is time for Him to intervene.

Paul proclaims [repentance](#) to the men of Athens with profound words:

Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent, because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead. ([Acts 17:30-31](#))

Keep in mind that this was nearly 2,000 years ago. The apostle says that God was willing to overlook ignorance in times past, yet God now commands all men everywhere to repent. He points to Christ's resurrection as an absolute sign that a day of judgment is coming, and the One who was raised will be the Judge. This aspect of the resurrection is likely never heard in a typical [Easter](#) service!

Note that Paul's words do not mean that God is *calling* all men everywhere, nor is He requiring perfection in people who do not have His Spirit. But when we combine this with [Romans 1:18-23](#), it means that enough information exists about the Creator God that mankind is without excuse. The general parameters of right and wrong are clear.

The opening chapters of the [book of Amos](#) record God's judgment against the ancient Syrians, Philistines, Edomites, Ammonites, Moabites, and the people of Tyre. These nations did not have God's revelation as Israel did, yet God still held them responsible for the heinous things they did. Enough knowledge of God's way was available to make them accountable for how they behaved. Now, for the last 2,000 years, God has required repentance, because He has judged that even carnal people can do better than they are. God has given mankind time to repent.

As we see conditions worsening around us, Solomon's observation in [Ecclesiastes 8:11](#) strikes home: "Because the sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil." This teaches that more time to change does not always lead to more repentance. In fact, it actually *increases* the danger that the human heart will adjust to the sin and consider it acceptable or even good.

Consider the remarkable repentance of the city of Nineveh came after Jonah's warning that destruction would occur in a mere forty days. The short time span seems to have strongly focused the Ninevites' attention, and it bore positive fruit. What changes would we want to make if we had it on good authority that our nation had only forty days left? God set the Ninevites a short time to repent, and they did.

Conversely, the longer Noah preached without anything bad happening, the easier it was for his audience to relegate his message to irrelevance. Their hearts became practiced at receiving a warning and then overriding it. The longer this went on, the more they reckoned they could defy God without apparent consequence. No immediate calamity occurred to change their minds, so their hearts became set in their evil ways. God gave them abundant time to repent, all of which was wasted on them.

Next time, we will see that a similar thing is happening in our time, both in our nations and in the church of God.

- David C. Grabbe

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## From the Archives: Featured Sermon

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## From the Archives: Featured Article

### [Are We Ready for Change?](#)

by Bill Onisick

The apostle Paul describes the Christian life as a process of change: from the old man to the new man. Human beings, though, typically resist change because it is difficult. Bill Onisick provides advice on how we can make the process of change more organized and perhaps a bit easier too.

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