

ARTICLE IV.

NOTES ON ACTS XIV. 16, 17, XVII. 30, AND ROM. III. 25, 26.

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Acts xiv. 16. Ὅς ἐν ταῖς παρωχημέναις γενεαῖς εἴσε πάντα τὰ ἔθνη πορεύεσθαι ταῖς ὁδοῖς αὐτῶν, 17. Καίτοιγε οὐκ ἀμάρτυρον ἑαυτὸν ἀφήκεν ἀγαθοποιῶν, σβρανόθεν ὑμῖν ἕτοις διδοῦς καιροῦ καρποφόρους, ἐμπιπλῶν τροφῆς καὶ εὐφροσύνης τὰς καρδίας ἡμῶν.

IN the course of the ministry of Paul and Barnabas in Asia Minor, after being expelled from Antioch (xiii. 50) and compelled to flee from Iconium (xiv. 5, 6), they continued their labors in Lystra and Derbe, and the adjoining regions (xiv. 6). At Lystra a man who had been a cripple from birth was restored to perfect soundness, so that he "stood up" and "leaped and walked" (xiv. 8-10). The result of this miracle was such that there seems to have been a general feeling, loudly expressed, that their gods, whose altars and images were near the gate of the city, had assumed human form, and were walking about amongst them. No wonder that, with this belief, immediate preparations were made for honoring them with a sacrifice.

But the horror of this idol worship, so opposed to the gospel which they preached, was so great that Paul and Barnabas, not listening to any insinuation which the spirit of evil may have made, that this reverence and regard might be turned to some good account whilst they themselves received it, instead of the idols overthrown, rushed out (ἐξεπήδησαν) of the house where they were, with the strongest indication of their grief at the proceeding (διαρρήξαντες τὰ ἱμάτια αὐτῶν, vs. 14), and Paul forthwith addressed the assembled multitudes: Refrain, refrain; we are mere men like yourselves (ἄνθρωποι, not θεοὶ as you seem to suppose), and our object in coming among you is to turn you away from reliance upon

these useless, *dead* idols (τούτων τῶν ματαίων), and commend to you trust in the *living* God (τὸν Θεὸν τὸν ζῶντα), who is the author of all these things that you see about you (vs. 15).

This exhortation to forsake their old ways with the implication that they were wrong, would naturally suggest the query: Why have we known nothing of this before; both we and our fathers have thus worshipped? And this Paul proceeds to answer in the first verse quoted above.

Ὅς ἐν ταῖς παρρηγημέναις γενεαῖς, *who in times (ages) past.* The *times past* here referred to, are unquestionably the ages before this Messianic age, when the gospel is preached to the Gentiles. This constituted a turning-point, an era in the history of the world, and the stand-point from which the apostle spoke. *Elase, suffered, permitted,* but without any idea of complacency, more than there is when in vii. 42, where God, when his people had turned to idolatry "turned [away from them] and gave them up to worship the host of heaven." Those who had first abandoned him he abandoned (Hackett). Πάντα τὰ ἔθνη, *all the Gentiles, πορεύεσθαι ταῖς ὁδοῖς αὐτῶν, to go in their own ways.* That these ways, referring to their whole course of life, "belief and conduct," were wrong ways, is sufficiently indicated by the demand that they should turn (ἐπιστρέφω, vs. 15) from them. So Lange says: "He does not expressly declare that these were wrong ways; but this truth is indicated with sufficient distinctness for those who are willing to understand."

Parallel with this clause are Acts xvii. 30: τοὺς χρόνους τῆς ἀγνοίας ὑπερίδων ὁ θεός, and Rom. iii. 25, last clause: διὰ τὴν πάρεσιν τῶν προγεγονότων, of which see exposition below.

Lest any should misunderstand what is meant by the allowing of the Gentiles in past ages to go in their own chosen way, the apostle proceeds in vs. 17 to show to them the *ground* of their guiltiness, so plainly implied in what he has previously said. Καίτοιγε, *and yet indeed* (the nations were not guiltless since), οὐκ ἀμάρτυρον ἑαυτὸν ἀφήκεν, *he*

left not himself without witness. The word *ἀμάρτυρος* is not used in the New Testament, except in this passage, and rarely elsewhere, but its meaning, *unattested*, from its derivation from *ἀ* priv. and *μάρτυς*, is plain. The manner in which this witness is borne is expressed in general by the participle *ἀγαθοποιῶν* (acc. to the best MSS. *ἀγαθουργῶν*) *by doing good.* *Διδούς κ.τ.λ.* gives the manner of *ἀγαθοποιῶν*, and *ἐμπιπλῶν κ.τ.λ.* introduces the result of *διδούς*, and *οὐρανόθεν, from heaven*, by its emphatic position calls especial attention to the source of all these blessings.

It is worthy of notice that Paul calls the attention of his hearers here to "benefits bestowed in the sphere of nature and physical life," *ἕτερός* and *καιρός καρποφόρος*, which most palpably show God's benevolence, and which were especially felt in that eastern country where drought so often brings famine and pestilence. "The blessings," says Lechler, "which God bestowed in the sphere of nature, were voices which spoke with sufficient loudness to awaken the slumbering thoughts of men, and direct their attention to the one true God, especially in the case of reflecting pagans." "For," as Paul says, Rom. i. 20, "the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse."

In this impromptu address of Paul to the Lystrans, of which we have recorded by Luke apparently only the merest outline, we find marked characteristics of the teaching of the apostle to the Gentiles, exhibited elsewhere in the Acts, and more fully in the first part of the Epistle to the Romans. Whilst the Jews have the law and the more immediate communications of God by his prophets, the Gentiles are not wholly dead to the exhibitions of God to them in the works of creation and in his providential care of men, and so are a law unto themselves, and are required "by their own wisdom to know God in his wisdom" (Lange). Their responsibility is none the less real because it is not so great as that of God's own chosen people; "For as many as have sinned

without law (*the Law*) shall perish without law" (i.e. without reference to the Law of Moses, but not without reference to the law written upon their own hearts, Rom. ii. 14, 15).

Acts xvii. 30: Τοὺς μὲν οὖν χρόνους τῆς ἀγνοίας ὑπεριδὼν ὁ θεὸς, τὰ νῦν παραγγέλλει τοῖς ἀνθρώποις πᾶσι πανταχοῦ μετανοεῖν.

Paul had been some time in Athens, and deeply moved in spirit at the indications of idolatrous worship that met him at every turn, had conversed in the synagogue and marketplace with Jew and Greek, the sincere religionist and sceptical philosopher, upon the doctrines of the new dispensation. But when the people were not agreed upon the nature of his teachings, and questioned whether he was a vain and pretentious retailer of worthless opinions (*σπερμολόγος*) or one desirous of introducing new deities (*ξένων δαιμονίων* *καταγγελεύς*), which Socrates was accused of doing; they, in accordance with the proverbial desire to learn every new thing, invited him to give a public exposition of his doctrines on Mars Hill.

He does not proceed at once to a proof or exposition of the doctrines of the new revelation which he came to preach, but with the tact, so marked a characteristic of Paul, attempts with as little shock to their prejudices as possible to turn the attention of his hearers from devotion to idol worship, so marked a peculiarity of the city (*κατείδωλον οὔσαν τὴν πόλιν*, vs. 16), to that of the living and true God; and thus lay a basis for the doctrine of redemption through "Jesus and the resurrection." He does not, plainly, intend to shut up their hearts against his teachings by a harsh attack upon their superstitions, although their abundant insignia of idolatry had moved his indignation and anger (*παροξύνετο τὸ πνεῦμα, αὐτοῦ κ.τ.λ.*, vs. 16), but recognizes their devotion to their many Gods (*κατὰ πάντα ὡς δεισιδαιμονεστέρους*¹ ὑμᾶς θεωρῶ,

¹ There can be little doubt that *δεισιδαίμων* (comp. *δειδω* and *δαίμων*) is used here as in Xen. *Cyrop.* 3. 3. 58, and elsewhere in the good sense = *εὐσεβής*, *fearing the gods*, pious, and in the comparative degree, *too*, or *very god-fearing*. Thus Paul mingles, as Olshausen says, "in a manner very suitable to the circumstances, praise with delicate censure."

vs. 22), and endeavors to turn their attention to a superior object of worship, which they may be supposed to be groping after, as indicated by the inscription on the altar "to the unknown God" (*ἀγνώστῳ Θεῷ*, vs. 23).

Without stopping to speculate upon the exact significance of this inscription, though deeming it most probable, that since there were exhibitions of nature which did not seem to come into the province of any of their named Gods, an altar (or altars) were erected, so that no one of their benefactors should escape the due reverence; it is worthy of notice, that the apostle here, as elsewhere, recognizes in the heathen some desire for a higher object of worship than their own senseless idols, some lingerings of the religious nature with which man was made, and which cannot be utterly obliterated, though so darkened by sin as not to have unaided any adequate knowledge of the true God. It was this dim, almost unrecognized, longing of the heart, the only basis for a true religious life, that "Paul in his wisdom lays hold of, and seeks to guide by the weak threads which connect it with the higher world" (Olshausen); and thus in perfect accordance with his profounder knowledge of the nature of man than his hearers have dreamed of, he says to them "Him, whom therefore ye ignorantly worship, declare I unto you" (vs. 23).

After giving some hints as to the nature of this being, who made all things, "dwelleth not in temples made with hands" (vs. 24), who needs nothing at the hands of men (vs. 25), whom he made of one blood, and so appointed them their lot in the earth (vs. 26), that they were under obligation to seek after and find him, which he had made it easy for them to do, because he is not far from every one of us (vs. 27), "for in him we live and move and have our being." This nearness of God, recognized even by the heathen poets as our father, shows the absurdity and wrong of debasing the divine nature (*τὸ θεῖον*, vs. 29) to an equality with objects of sense, and of thinking of the Godhead as like unto gold or silver or stone, graven by art and *man's* device."

The apostle then proceeds to say in the verse quoted above,
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μὲν οὖν, *therefore, indeed*, since the nature of idolatry is such as has been implied, God ὑπεριδών, *overlooking*, τοὺς χρόνους τῆς ἀγνοίας, *times of ignorance*, i.e. past ages, before the advent of the Messiah, indicated by τὰ νῦν, *now*, when a new dispensation is introduced; παραγγέλλει, *commands*, τοῖς ἀνθρώποις πᾶσι¹ πανταχοῦ, *all men everywhere*, indicating *universality* without limitation, μετανοεῖν, *to repent*. The objective reason for this exhortation to the heathen (as well as to all men) to repent, is given in vs. 31. Καθότι ἔσθησεν ἡμέραν ἐν ᾗ μέλλει κρίνειν τὴν οἰκουμένην ἐν δικαιοσύνῃ, *Because he has appointed a day in which he will judge the world in righteousness*, ἐν ἀνδρὶ, *by a man*, i.e. as Meyer says, "in the person of a man who will be a representative of God," ᾧ ἔδρασε, *whom he hath appointed* for that purpose, and given to man, by raising him from the dead. Is there not also here a subjective reason, also implied in ὑπεριδών, namely, God's goodness and long-sufferance in not hitherto demanding punishment of the heathen for their sins?

But the question is naturally suggested whether there is here any ground for the belief that the heathen before the gospel was presented to them were excusable for their conduct in forgetting God and indulging in all the wickedness charged upon them in the first chapter of Romans. Paul there (Rom. i. 20, 21) explicitly declares that "they are without excuse, because that when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful, but became vain in their imaginations," etc. Besides the very fact that they were now called upon to repent, plainly implies the wrong in their previous course of life. The wrong in rejecting God and debasing the soul and body to the vilest uses was not, and could not, have been caused by the advent of a Messiah. The way of escape from the effects of the "reprobate mind" to which "God had given them over," because "they did not like to retain the knowledge" of him which he had implanted, is made possible by the atonement of Christ; but the wrong is not caused by the offer of salvation, though the guilt of

¹ Best MSS. πάντας.

continuance in heathenish practices is greatly aggravated if that offer is not accepted. It is not possible to conceive of a holy God as passing over without disapprobation the enormities of heathen nations, either as related to himself or themselves, if, indeed, they retain a moral nature and are not brute beasts.

We, therefore, need to examine more particularly what is meant by Paul in the use of the word translated *winked at*, *ἡπεριδών*. It is not elsewhere found in the New Testament, but is used a few times in classical Greek, and also in the Septuagint, but nowhere with the metaphor implied in our translation. To *wink at*, i.e. *to connive at*, although that would imply *fault* on the part of the heathen, yet it would imply a disregard of sin, a kind of complicity in it on the part of God, which we cannot for a moment suppose God capable of. From the composition of this Aorist form *ἡπεριδών* from *ἡπέρ* and *εἶδω*, it means *to look over*, so Herodotus uses it (vii. 86) to designate "looking out over the sea"; the Septuagint uses it as a translation of the Hiph. עָבַר, עָבַרְתָּ, which means to conceal, *hide*, as the eyes or ears from anything, as in Lev. xx. 4, implying *neglect*. Compare Ezek. xxii. 26, LXX, παρακαλίπτω τοὺς ὀφθαλμούς, signifying *neglect*, and Isa. i. 15, LXX, ἀποστρέφω τ. ὀφθ. *disregard*, and Job xlii. 3, LXX, κρύπτω, *cover over* with words, implying *crime*, i.e. *to chide* or *rebuke*. There is, then, nothing in the use of the word that implies in its employment here any remission of the due punishment for transgressions committed by the heathen. But from the original meaning of the word, *to look over*, we have naturally the derived meaning of *not to look at*, *not to notice*, and *to let alone*; which applies well in this case. The heathen who had had the law of God written upon their hearts (Rom. ii. 15), had not yielded obedience to that law, and God had forsaken them who had first forsaken him. So the apostle tells the Athenians that previous to this time (τὰ νῦν), i.e. in τοὺς χρόνους τῆς ἀγνοίας, *times of ignorance*, God has made no special manifestation of his displeasure, or any peculiar demand for a change, only such

as their natures have demanded. He has allowed these past ages "to pass by without any positive manifestation of grace on the one hand, and also without any stern rebuke on the other" (Lechler); but *now* a change of mind, *μετάνοιαν*, is demanded.

Rom. iii. 25: "Ὁν προέθετο ὁ Θεὸς ἱλαστήριον διὰ τῆς πίστεως ἐν τῷ αὐτοῦ αἵματι, εἰς ἕδειξεν τῆς δικαιοσύνης αὐτοῦ, διὰ τὴν πάρεσιν τῶν προγεγονότων ἁμαρτημάτων 26. Ἐν τῇ ἀνοχῇ τοῦ Θεοῦ, πρὸς ἕδειξεν τῆς δικαιοσύνης αὐτοῦ ἐν τῷ νῦν καιρῷ, εἰς τὸ εἶπαι αὐτὸν δίκαιον, καὶ δικαιούντα τὸν ἐκ πίστεως Ἰησοῦ.

"Ὁν *whom* (i.e. Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ, vs. 24), προέθετο ὁ Θεός, *God has (publicly, pro) set forth for himself* (Mid. Voice), i.e. in the crucifixion. This word plainly does not here mean *purposed* as in Rom. i. 18, but *exposed to view, proposuit* (so in classical writers, e.g. Plat. Phaed. p. 115 E.; Thuc. II. 84; Alcestes, 667); ἱλαστήριον, as a *propitiatory offering*. This word is used in the LXX, Ex. xxv. 17, and elsewhere, not very accurately, as a translation of *קִפּוּר*, *lid, cover* (of the ark), in our version, *mercy-seat*. So in Heb. ix. 5. Olshausen and some others derive its meaning here from its use in the LXX, but unnaturally, especially with the clause ἐν τῷ αὐτοῦ αἵματι (see Stuart, Alford, and Meyer).

But the idea in the kindred forms is that of *appeasing, propitiating*. So Homer and Xenophon use *ἱλάσκομαι*, for *propitiating* the gods, by sacrifices, etc. Cf. also Josephus, 6. 6. 4. In the New Testament it is used with *τὰς ἁμαρτίας*, to propitiate sins. So *ἱλασμός* is used in 1 John ii, 2, 4, 10, meaning *propitiation*, abstract but implying the concrete, *propitiator*. So *ἱλαστήριον* here.

This setting forth of a propitiatory offering for sin, it should be borne in mind, is a turning-point in the history of the race. The sacrifices under the old dispensation were only symbolical of this great sacrifice, and received their efficacy only through their relation to Christ. This is for all; those for individuals and individual sins.

Διὰ τῆς πίστεως, through faith, must be taken with ἱλαστήριον, as denoting the subjective means on man's part, by

which the propitiatory offering is made available. The offering would have been the same if no one had believed, but no benefit would have accrued to man; ἐν τῷ αὐτοῦ αἵματι, by his blood, taken with the same word, denotes "the objective means of manifestation of Christ as a propitiatory sacrifice." (DeWette).

The object of this setting forth before the eyes of men this propitiatory offering follows: οὗς ἐρδειξεν (cf. 2 Cor. viii. 24), for the manifestation, τῆς δικαιοσύνης, of his righteousness; justice, or judicial righteousness; which had been lost sight of or obscured; in what way is given in the next clause, which is the prominent object of the present exposition in connection with Acts xiv. 16; xvii. 30.

Δια τὴν πάρεσιν τῶν προγεγονότων ἀμαρτημάτων, on account of the passing over of past transgressions. The word πάρεσις is nowhere else used in the New Testament, and rarely elsewhere; but ἀφεσις (from ἀπό and ἵημι, to put away) is used seventeen times, and is the common word for remission, forgiveness: Ἔσθι ἀφεσις ἀμαρτιῶν Matt. xxvi. 28; Mark i. 4; Luke i. 17, and in several other passages both in the Gospels and Acts. Paul, too, uses ἀφεσις with ἀμαρτ. in Col. i. 14, with παραπτώματων, Eph. i. 7, and by itself in Heb. ix. 22; x. 8, with the same meaning of pardon and forgiveness. Πάρεσις from its derivation from παρά and ἵημι, to let fall at the side, to let pass, might mean pardon, forgiveness, and so the earlier expositors, and some later ones, as Stuart, explain it as synonymous with ἀφεσις. But the more natural meaning is passing by or over from neglect or inattention, "leaving undealt with." In Memorabilia, i. 1. 12. παρέσθες has just this meaning. The Prep. διὰ, too, with the Acc. is better rendered on account of and not through or by, which is its office with the Gen. (See Buttmann's Gr. 147, 6). Besides, it is altogether probable, that if the idea intended had been remission, Paul would have employed the common word for that idea, sanctioned by his own and others' usage. Furthermore, we should expect grace, χάρις (objective), or faith, πίστις (subjective), and not forbearance, ἀνοχή,

as the ground of pardon. So in Eph. i. 7, *ἄφεσις* is followed by *κατὰ τὸν πλοῦτον τῆς χάριτος αὐτοῦ*. “*Ἄνοχή* suspends and puts off the judgment by *πάρεσις*; *χάρις* abolishes the guilt of sin by *ἄφεσις*.” (Schaff).

Προγεγονότων ἁμαρτημάτων, past sins. What sins? Not here the sins of individuals before conversion, as some suppose, because *προγεγονότων* would in that case be useless at least, if not erroneous, as implying that the propitiatory offering was made only for sins committed previous to regeneration. Besides, the contrast plainly implied with *ἐν τῷ νῦν καιρῷ*, vs. 26, *in this present time*, the Messianic ages, demands this meaning of sins committed before the advent of the Messiah. So Hodge says: The words *that are past* (*προγεγονότων*) seem distinctly to refer to the times before the advent of Christ. This is plain from the opposition to the expression *at this time*, in the next verse, and from a comparison with the parallel passage in Heb. ix. 15. He is the Mediator for the redemption of sins *that were* under the first Testament. This last passage refers strictly to the Hebrews, who were under the law, whilst in the Romans the reference is to all, inasmuch as “all have sinned” (vs. 23).

This explanation of *προγεγονότων ἁμαρτημάτων* entirely accords with that given above of *πάρεσις*, and the idea is that God in this present time has set forth a propitiatory sacrifice, so as to give proof of his justice in passing over the sins of all past generations without adequate punishment for their enormity, “whereby his righteousness had been lost sight of and obscured, and therefore came to need an *ἔνδειξις* for men” (Meyer). The full integrity of God in this matter is exhibited in not sparing the blood of his only son, which “at once satisfied his justice and demonstrated it before the world.”

The clause *ἐν τῇ ἀνοχῇ τοῦ Θεοῦ, through* (by virtue of) *his forbearance* is sometimes taken with what follows. So Lange puts a period after *ἁμαρτημάτων*, and says: “We connect the *ἀνοχῇ* with the following *πρὸς τὴν ἔνδειξιν* (vs. 26) into one idea, and suppose here a brief form of expression by which *προγεγονότων* must be again supplied before

ἀνοχῆ. The πάρεσις must by all means be connected with ἀνοχῆ, but is not operative through this alone." Olshausen, on the contrary, says "the connection of ἐν τῇ ἀνοχῇ with what follows is quite unsuitable; it must be construed with πάρεσις, of which it discovers the inward ground." This latter seems altogether the most natural explanation. Meyer, Philippi, Stuart, and others adopt it.

Πρὸς ἐνδειξιν κ.τ.λ. in vs. 26 is an emphatic resumption of εἰς ἐνδειξιν κ.τ.λ. in vs. 25, with the additional element of time (ἐν τῷ νῦν καιρῷ), which is only implied in the preceding verse. In *this present time*, i.e. when the *passing over* πάρεσις is past, and a new order of things since the advent of Christ supervenes, man must either accept the full pardon, ἄφεσις, of sin, or expose himself to the judgment of a righteous God. (Schaff).

The last part of vs. 26, εἰς τὸ εἶναι κ.τ.λ. gives (as the Infin. with the Art. preceded by εἰς often does), the object or intent of what precedes in these two verses, ὃν προέθετο . . . καιρῷ. The design and result of God's propitiatory offering set forth before the world and manifesting his justice is, that he *may be* (in the corresponding appearance) *just*, i.e. recognized as just (indirectly), εἰς τὸ εἶναι αὐτὸν δίκαιον; and also *make just*, δικαιούντα, *the believer*, τὸν διὰ πίστεως Ἰησοῦ, i.e. as Alford says, "him who belongs to, stands in, works from, as his standing-point, faith in Jesus."