

Repent!

God promised any nation which turns to Him could expect to live in peace, prosperity, health and security. Obviously what we are doing now isn't working, or our nation would not be suffering so much sorrow. But it does little good to call for repentance if we don't explain from what folks need to repent. It's not secret, but it's been ignored for a long time because we wrongly believe we have it all figured out.

In the New Testament book of Acts, we find there was some controversy over this very thing. The Jews who embraced Jesus as their Messiah knew He had flatly rejected the highly corrupted concept of the Law of Moses commonly taught in His day. He called it "traditions of men," but Jews today refer to it as the Talmud. The substance of the problem was the perverting influence of Hellenistic rationalism, which dismissed the ancient Hebrew culture as mystical and illogical. But it's pretty hard to understand Hebrew writings from a Greek point of view. Jewish scholars had embraced Hellenistic rationalism a couple hundred years before Christ. Those who followed Jesus knew they had to repudiate that.

Their mistake was in thinking anyone coming to Christ had to become Jewish first. The Council of Jerusalem (Acts 15) wisely realized that was not so. Still, for Gentiles to repent from their pagan ways required some practical guidelines until the Holy Spirit had renewed their thinking. The answer is not much different from what even today's Talmudic Jews say about Gentiles: *The Seven Laws of Noah*.

If you research that term today you'll discover it describes a set of principles practicing Jews require of non-Jews for any significant level of interaction. While the Apostles didn't list all seven, it's easy to see why. Some were already a matter of civil law, or simply too obvious. What they offered were three prohibitions which Gentiles might not realize mattered: idolatry, sexual immorality, and meat with blood in it, usually strangled. Let's look at the whole list.

1. **Idolatry:** More than just pagan images and shrines, this was a prohibition against allowing anything get in the way of your complete and utter loyalty to God. In the Gentile world of the First Century, that would include avoiding most public celebrations dedicated to this or that deity. That was radical then, and would tend to be radical today, if we really thought about what it meant for us.
2. **Murder:** The ultimate expression of contempt for another person, just about any expression of contempt moves us in the direction of murder. Indeed, the very feeling of contempt is a sin, as Jesus taught we must love all others equally with ourselves.
3. **Theft:** Not just their persons, but contempt for someone's ownership of property is also forbidden.
4. **Sexual Immorality:** Way back before Noah, this was wrong. Jesus taught it was a sin against the self and the other, as well. It should be obvious to anyone God hasn't changed His mind about this; anything outside the lifelong commitment of husband and wife is sin.
5. **Blasphemy:** This is typically defined as raising yourself or someone else who isn't God to the place and privilege of God, or bringing God down to a human level. You can't treat God or His position with contempt.
6. **Bloody Meat:** While Noah observed kosher, God made it clear anything that moves can be eaten. It implied animals have their place beneath humans in the scheme of things. At the same time, all life is sacred. Blood is an ancient symbol of life. By insuring meat has been properly drained of blood, we symbolize our respect for life as God's creation; we are not God.
7. **Civility:** In the broadest sense, we are obliged to maintain a set of customs and conduct which shows respect for others. More than this, we must develop laws and government which promotes it. The difficulty for us here is allowing that same Western rationalism Jesus rejected to provide the framework for our concept of civility and justice. We would find ancient concepts shocking, but we have to keep in mind, that was the setting God chose for revealing Himself. Not because it had the greatest need for correction, but because it was the closest to His ways for mankind.

We consider our society more advanced, and that ancient one more primitive, but that's arrogance. We pretend our modern rationalism is better than the symbolic logic of Heaven. The ancients realized ultimate truth could not be described in human language, so they developed a symbolic language, such as parables, based on the underlying symbolic logic. God chose the Hebrew culture and language of ancient times, formed it Himself by His direct guidance through the prophets. As time went on, the Hebrew people grew farther and farther away, and the teaching of Jesus to correct all that was revolutionary. Just so, our modern society values all the wrong things.

That ancient Covenant of Noah, as expressed by the Seven Laws, is the fundamental requirement God demands from all nations, not to mention all humans as individuals. When Noah and his household emerged from the boat as the only eight humans living on the earth at that time, it wasn't too hard to keep those commands before them. Over the thousands of years since that time, mankind has scattered over the face of the earth, morphed into thousands of different cultures and languages. However, at no time was the Covenant of Noah rescinded. There are still rainbows in the sky after every rain.

The Council of Jerusalem did not promote the Seven Laws of Noah as the path to salvation, but as the essential change in conduct which signified a changed heart. Not just a change in feelings or intellectual beliefs, but a change in commitment to a God who portrayed Himself as a great Eastern Sheik. Not simply the God of the Jews, but Creator of all mankind, and the universe in which we reside. You see, for the ancient Hebrews, the heart was not the place of feelings but the seat of the will, the place where your commitments reside. It requires a miracle of God touching your soul, and raising up your dead spirit to life with His Spirit.

The Covenant of Noah was not about saving souls, any more than the Covenant of Moses. It was about giving fallen mankind some hope – the only hope. Those Law Covenants pointed to the higher spiritual reality, Moses for Israel, Noah for everyone else. That higher reality is very hard to comprehend without the symbolic obedience described in the codes of law. Those Laws were the path to seeing what God offered on the higher plane. Jesus called people to repent from their sin, meaning both Moses and Noah. In the process, He knew His Father would use those Laws as the revelation of Himself as the path to bringing eternal life. All humanity is held now to the Seven Laws of Noah. It won't matter what men believe or don't believe; these things are in force now. God's Creation operates on those principles. As He warned in laying out that covenant (Genesis 8 & 9), wherever mankind fails to live by the Seven Laws, nature itself, symbolized by discussing the regularity of seasons and weather, will begin to work against human life.

Now you know what it means when His servants say to you: Repent!