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### **The Impediment of Ignorance**

*How ignorant can you get? This one's hard to beat!*

Jamie Neil, 41, drunkenly tried to hold up a gas station in Cornwall, England, while wearing a clear plastic bag as a mask. Neil's accomplice, Gareth Tilley, disguised himself with a scarf and pointed his cell phone at the gas station clerk, demanding cash. When the phone's keypad lit up, the clerk realized she wasn't in danger and hit the alarm. Neil then head-butted the employee and fled with several bottles of liquor in hand. He didn't get away for long, as you can imagine. An off-duty police officer recognized Neil on the street two days later, identifying him from the gas station's security footage, in which his face was clearly visible through the plastic bag. Both men pleaded guilty and were sentenced to two years in prison.<sup>1</sup>

We often use *ignorant* as a synonym for *stupid*. But ignorance means being uninformed, not unintelligent. I can be highly intelligent and yet never take a calculus class, in which case I never know calculus. Being ignorant of advanced math doesn't make me stupid, unless I aspire to become an engineer without learning the Pythagorean

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<sup>1</sup> Bryan Le, "Drunk Robs Gas Station with Clear Plastic Bag as 'Mask,'" *The Fix*, June 19, 2013, <http://www.thefix.com/content/drunks-rob-gas-station-clear-plastic-bag91807>.

theorem. That would be conscious ignorance, intentional ignorance, preferred ignorance. This kind of ignorance does make us foolish. Not because we're uninformed but because we reject the opportunity to be informed. Ignorance isn't bliss when enlightenment is available.

In Acts 17, the apostle Paul commended the philosophers of Athens for their religious devotion. He sought common ground with them by teaching them about the unknown God to which they had built an altar. During his discourse, Paul said, "The times of this ignorance God winked at," or "overlooked" (verse 30, KJV, NKJV). In other words, God wasn't condemning them for what they didn't have the opportunity to know. Theirs was an unconscious ignorance, an incidental ignorance. They hadn't been in the right place at the right time to know better, until they met Paul.

Notice that Paul didn't stop with God's winking, however. He informed his audience that God "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 17:30-32).

After Paul's address at the Areopagus, Athenian ignorance would no longer receive God's wink. God's judgment holds us accountable, not only for what we know but what we have opportunity to know. As God declared through the prophet Hosea, "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge: because thou hast rejected knowledge, I will also reject thee, that thou shalt be no priest to me: seeing thou hast forgotten the law of thy God, I will also forget thy children" (Hosea 4:6, KJV).

Did you notice that our rejection of knowledge not only

blocks our own blessings but blessings for our children as well? On the other hand, God promises, “I show mercy to thousands of generations of those who love me and obey my commandments” (Exo. 20:6, GW). See how God’s mercy outweighs His justice? Isn’t it good news to know He’s seeking to bless thousands of generations through your faithfulness? Why not uncork God’s blessings upon yourself and future generations by seeking His will and obeying His word?

### **Impediment Check**

The people of Athens had three basic responses to Paul’s challenge:

1. *Laugh it off.* One way people seek to avoid accountability is to laugh away their sense of conviction, as if the claims of truth weren’t even deserving of thoughtful consideration. My question to the man in the mirror is, “Do I have a tendency to laugh away serious issues?”

2. *Put it off.* Some people act as though tomorrow has more hours than today because of the many good intentions they stuff into it. What about me? Do I have a tendency to put off learning about spiritual matters until tomorrow (perhaps hoping tomorrow doesn’t come)?

3. *Take it on.* Some in Paul’s audience immediately decided to follow him so they could learn more about Jesus. They took on the challenge of abandoning their former beliefs and overcoming the criticism from those who laugh off the importance of knowing Jesus and put off getting to know Him. When confronted with truth, do I have the courage to take it on in spite of tradition, criticism, and social or financial pressure?

## **Impediment Removal Tools**

“My son, if you take my words to heart and treasure my commands within you, if you pay close attention to wisdom, and let your mind reach for understanding, if indeed you call out for insight, if you ask aloud for understanding, if you search for wisdom as if it were money and hunt for it as if it were hidden treasure, then you will understand the fear of the LORD and you will find the knowledge of God” (Prov. 2:1–5, GW).

“But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear” (1 Peter 3:15).

“A knowledge of the truth depends not so much upon strength of intellect as upon pureness of purpose, the simplicity of an earnest, dependent faith” (*Lessons of Love*, 19).

“It is the first and highest duty of every rational person to learn from the Scriptures what is truth, and then to walk in the light and encourage others to do the same” (*The Great Hope*, 32).

“Many claim that it matters not what one believes, if his life is only right. But the life is molded by the faith. If light and truth is within our reach, and we neglect to improve the privilege of hearing and seeing it, we virtually reject it; we are choosing darkness rather than light” (*The Great Controversy*, 433).

*Lord, please open my eyes and heart to truths from Your Word and Your Spirit. Empower me to accept and apply what You teach me, especially when Your Word cuts against the grain of my lifestyle or brings social and financial challenges. Don't allow me to stumble in darkness with so much light surrounding me. Thank You, Jesus. Amen.*