



Cherreguine Bible Doctrine Ministries

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FULLNESS OF TIME

The expression the "fullness of time" appears twice in the NT: Galatians 4:4 and Ephesians 1:10. These two verses cover the totality of God's redemptive plan in history,

Galatians 4:4 refer to the period before Christ's birth. Israel had waited centuries for a Messiah. The Exile had come, the return had happened, Persia had fallen, Greece had fallen, the Seleucid oppression had come and gone, and finally Rome had arisen.

Where was the redemption? Why did Israel still groan? These questions could be asked whether one looked for Israel's spiritual purification or political restoration. Paul uses this expression (which literally indicates the time set for a child's majority) to indicate that only when history had "matured" to the proper point was God ready to act.

Traditionally this maturity has been as a combination of the widespread Greek language and culture with the Roman political pacification and transportation system making the spread of the gospel easier. One could add the socially oppressive situation in Palestine and the existence of legally protected Jewish synagogues around the Mediterranean. Paul, however, is thinking of something deeper. Just as in Genesis 15:16 God was "not ready to act" (because men were not yet prepared), so God patiently waited until the inward and outward aspects of history were "just right" before He sent His Son. There was no accident, but God worked through and controlled history (Mark 1:15; Matthew 13:11, 16-17).

Everything inside the divine decree will come to pass in their respective succession and appointed time. Nothing will be canceled or call -off. Everything decreed by God shall come to pass at their proper or "appointed time"- at their "own fullness of time".

GUILT -The state of a moral agent after the intentional or unintentional violation of a law, principle, or value established by an authority under which the moral agent is subject. The law may have been established by the head of a social order as a part of a greater legal system. God may have established it in his effort to lead and protect the highest well being of mankind. Or the law may have been established by one's own authority and integrated into his or her personal code of ethics. In the Bible, guilt is that state of a moral agent after the intentional or unintentional violation of a law (Leviticus 4:2, 13, 22, 27; 5:2, 3, 15) or principle established by God.

The Bible shows a progressive development in the concept of guilt. Early in the book of the law personal responsibility was not necessary for one to have been considered guilty. The priest's sins made "the people also become guilty" (Leviticus 4:3). Even the common citizen's sin could bring guilt upon the whole land (Deuteronomy 24:4). Individual personality and individual responsibility were undeveloped, with the individual merged into the body of the clan. A man's family, even if totally unaware of his sin, bore his guilt, and they and even his animals were subject to equal punishment with him (Joshua 7).

By the time of the prophets, however, we see a notable advance in the concept of sin and its consequent guilt in that they have become more clearly ethical and personal. The emphasis is less on ritual correctness and more on motive, inner spirit, and personal attitude (Isaiah 1; 57:15; 58:1-12; Micah 6:8). The idea of personal responsibility had arrived.

The people could no longer hold an adage claiming that when their fathers ate sour grapes, their children's teeth were set on edge. When their teeth were on edge, they were reaping the results of personally having eaten sour grapes. They had to pay the natural consequences of their actions, and they would pay additionally by being punished (Ezekiel 18:29-32; 2 Kings 14:6).

Jesus recognized even broader and deeper implications in guilt. He was concerned not only with the act and the inner attitude (Matthew 5: 21-22), but he saw degrees of guilt dependent on knowledge and motive (Luke 11:29-32; 12:47-48). He made it clearer that the law had been made for man's benefit (Mark 2:27) and that which made him guilty not only brought suffering to the offender and possibly another human being, but it brought pain to the heart of God. Jesus, God incarnate, was already paying a price for the guilty people's sins even as he grieved over the city of Jerusalem (Matthew 23:37-39).

Their guilt and others' guilt was not only in the violation of rules, but in the violation of persons, whether the injury was to others or to themselves. The weight or seriousness of guiltiness is in its cost in terms of human injury. Jesus paid the ultimate price upon the cross. Since God loves humankind, any injury to man is an affront to God.

The word "guilt" carries with it the concept of deserved punishment or payment due, or even payment by punishment. This was established in the first judgments upon man's behavior and attitude that declared him guilty (Genesis 4:11-15) and was earlier incorporated into the written law (Leviticus 4). The concept of payment for wrongdoing by punishment runs throughout the OT and into the NT. The concept of payment was significant in the atoning death of Christ upon the cross for the individual and collective sins of mankind, and the concept of payment is significant today among some religious sects in the form of flagellation as payment for their own sins. Current theological and psychological literature shows abundant evidence of the inner need of man to punish even Himself, atoning for the violations of his own accepted ethical code.

But inner psychodynamic forces make it possible for another to pay in his behalf. Though it is not widely discussed in secular literature, modern clinical studies help us understand the psychological mechanism that makes it possible for a person to accept a vicarious atoning payment for his sin.

Clouding the modern understanding of guilt is the common but erroneous use of the words "guilt" and "guilt feeling" as though they were interchangeable. Guilt is an after-the-fact reality or state that may or may not be accompanied by guilt feeling. Indeed, some remnants of humanity have enacted the most heinous crimes with no testable trace of any feelings of guilt. Guilt feeling is a painful conglomerate of emotions that usually includes anxiety in anticipation of punishment; shame, with its sense of humiliation, dirtiness, and the need to hide; and grief, or depression, for the diminished sense of worth, dignity, and self-esteem.

Though a source of intense emotional pain, the feelings of guilt do have value. They serve as an internal alarm system that alerts us to a keener awareness that we have violated our own value system. They goad us, correcting us toward more constructive behavior or attitude. But since it is such an intense source of pain, man commonly draws from about

three dozen methods of escaping, evading, or killing the pain of the guilty conscience, most of which bring further injury to human personality. The most constructive, healthy response of mankind to the pain of guilt is repentance and acceptance of the grace of forgiveness offered by God through the person of Jesus Christ.