

RUMINATIONS OF A FORMER HEATHEN

Copyright Walter Arcel **A Pardon without conditions** www.graceandsanity.org
W. Arcel e-mail, gen315@charter.net Grace and Sanity Ministries, November 2007

The subject of Hell is one that most people would rather avoid, and given the bad press on it, with good reason. Nevertheless, at some point, sooner or later, the existence of Hell is a possibility that must be considered. Those who should know the subject well, preachers, theologians, teachers, for the most part, don't tell it like it is. What many of them say is either irrelevant or unclear. This lack of relevance and clarity has taken away the fear we should have. The consequence of rejecting what he has given us is terrible. This information must be continually refined, only then can one be sure that everyone sees the situation clearly. And, yet, I find that refining the information doesn't make a lot of difference.

There is still a wall out there. People close their eyes and stop their ears, pull away their shoulders, they don't want to know. They don't seem to care at all about their final destiny. They go on with their day to day lives with absolutely no concern for where they are going to end up. But, of course, there should be a concern. Nobody can afford to go to Hell after they die. It is easy to understand that people don't want to consider a bad outcome. Hell is not something people want to contemplate as a possible destination. That is probably the main reason for avoiding the subject regarding our final destiny. We know we are unclean, and we know there is no way to avoid being unclean. Yet, precisely because we know we are unclean, a free pass out of Hell should be highly desirable.

If people knew for sure their sins have been paid for, if they knew for sure all their trespasses have been taken off the books, they would go for it. Or so one would think. People should jump at the offer of a pardon without conditions. But they don't. It must be that the situation is not completely clear. This is how it is: God is Pure, Holy, and undefiled. We are Impure, Unholy, and Defiled. The purity of God can not possibly tolerate our presence. There is a total lack of tolerance from purity towards impurity. This is so because if purity were to come in contact with impurity, purity would be contaminated and would no longer be pure. Purity would cease to exist if it were exposed to impurity. Our natural state is incompatible with God. Those are the facts. By themselves, those facts are not terribly important. What difference does it make if God tells me yes, you are bad, deceitful, wicked past measure, in all the secret places of your mind, beyond human help you are impure? Big deal. Why should I care? I've always known myself to be wicked and bad and impure so it was really no big surprise to me when God pointed that out. The problem with purity versus impurity arises if Hell

really exists. The existence of Hell is what would make all the difference, it would be the destabilizing factor, the one possibility that cannot be ignored. The possible existence of a horrible place waiting for us after we die is what gives relevance to this purity versus impurity situation. The horror and suffering one might experience in Hell are too much. Nobody with any sense would think it is going to be bearable. Of course, some people do think precisely that, they think they are going to be all right, that they will be able to handle Hell. We'll be in Hell where we can be totally carnal and have lots of fun. That is such nonsense. Only a complete idiot would think he can handle it, or that it's going to be a long party with all his friends. It's hard to tell from here but it's probably not very smart to assume everything is going to be all right. There is no place to recoil to in Hell. "Hope for the best but prepare for the worst" is a good cliché. One should always take the worst possibility into account. Does it look like rain? Take your umbrella. Going for a ride in your car? Make sure you can change a flat tire. Caution should be the standard procedure. Unless God is bluffing, and one would have to take that chance, Hell is a place of weeping and gnashing of teeth, a place of utter darkness, a place of burning and torment and unending desperation, where the worm dieth not and the fire is not quenched. There is total consciousness and sensation of feelings, thirst, anguish, fear. There is the clear awareness of having had the opportunity to go to Heaven but instead you allowed yourself to slide into Hell. And for what?, for nothing, totally for nothing, because the price has already been paid and it is there for the taking. Inattention and rebellion is what keeps us out.

The *only* reason for ending up in Hell is the refusal of the free gift and hardening toward God. And once you are there, there is no escape. And what is that burning and torment? Is it really a fire that burns but does not consume? Or is it rage at yourself for letting this terrible situation come to pass? Or is it both? There is thick darkness as in a cave, enveloping fear, complete helplessness, and the agony of wanting to end the suffering but not being able to. Those are some of the available descriptions we have of Hell. Hell happens to be, also, the final destination of anyone who is not Pure, Holy, and Undeiled. When I found that out, I immediately identified with a cornered rat. What must be understood is that the standard cannot be reached, from a human standpoint. There is no way for us to bridge the chasm and we have no control over our final destiny. The awareness of deserving punishment, normally called "guilt," becomes more insistent over time because of that lack of control. The only way one can deal with this guilt is to harden more and more, sear the conscience, as Paul would put it. A big part of the problem is that we are both ignorant and afraid of the Bible. It is because we are ignorant that we are afraid. We don't know how good God is. God is the only one

who can eliminate this guilt, entirely remove it from us. But to our own hurt we reject him. We are afraid of the Bible, we are afraid to be condemned by the Bible because we have heard lots of preaching against sin and we know we are sinners. Which takes us to respond to the Bible with defensiveness, hopelessness and helplessness. Who are you to tell me anything? You made me like this and now you ask me for a price I cannot pay? Did *I* make myself, or did *you* make me? The reaction at being in an impossible situation is anger, defiance, and rebellion; which, as far as I am concerned, is completely natural. But that happens because, as stated before, we don't know how good God is. God can do, and has done, what man cannot do. God has provided himself a lamb, one without blemish and without spot, Pure, Holy, and Undefined. How he would rejoice to have more of his children back!