

RUMINATIONS OF A FORMER HEATHEN

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GOOD DEEDS

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There is something very important to be said about good deeds. There is nothing wrong with doing good deeds. The problem arises when those good deeds are aimed at obtaining favour from God, showing God you are a good person doing what he likes, therefore worthy of his mercy.

How many are hungry and thirsty! How many are turned away from God because of egotistical teachings! There are many shepherds who admire themselves and seek admiration from their audience. A neighbour said recently: "When I was a kid I heard the preacher say: give me ten percent or you'll go to Hell. Then you go by his house and it looks like a palace." Another one says: "The preacher is always talking about humility but he points at himself to show how humble he is." Another preacher talks of selflessness but expects to be told: "Well done, my good and faithful servant." Many look after honour, crowns and great rewards in heaven. They are in it for themselves, they push the needy with shoulder and horn, they scatter his flock. They give no balm for the wounded, no hope for the hopeless. God is near their mouth, but far from their reins, he will remember them in his day of wrath.

Did Jesus say, flog my sheep? Did he say, drive my sheep into the ground? Did he say, squeeze the juices out of them? Or did he say, feed my sheep?

For one reason or another, many people become disillusioned with the Church. They cannot trust the pastor anymore, cannot trust the church anymore. Some stay in those churches, but more for the company than for what the pastor says. It's a nice club, the people are polite, a chance to be social in a non-threatening atmosphere. But there is always an unfinished business, something is nagging. They then turn to what little they know, the golden rule, making sandwiches for the poor, volunteering at the senior center, helpful to strangers, all around nice person, doing good deeds, because they know God likes that sort of thing. Accumulation of points is the aim. But no matter what the effort, the effort comes up short every time. The clear awareness is that of not doing enough. There is a *constant* pursuit and no betterment. How hungry they are! Their efforts are never enough. They look at themselves and say: I'm doing all I can, why don't I feel accepted? Where is God? Why does he hide? Can I count on him or not? Does he listen? Does he see me? Is he keeping tally, does he know my efforts? Does he know what I'm doing? Is he looking after me? Why don't I feel loved by him? Oh, boy, I'm doing all I can and I still don't feel your favour. Where are you,

my Lord?, I'm doing all I can to surrender but I cannot find you.

Isn't that the cry echoing through the ages? How many Christians have expressed that anguish? Guilt is the driver. Guilt, the awareness of deserving punishment, is continually confronting. In some way, somewhere, deep, deep inside we have a need to justify ourselves. We need to know that our excuse is valid. I know you asked for \$3.95, but I only got \$3.94. Is that not enough? Why is that not close enough? I'm doing what you want me to do, but this is all I can do. Why do I hear all this talk about grace but the weight of guilt continues to push me down? Perceived abandonment brings many problems, mental and emotional.

It all comes from lack of understanding the simplicity of the good news, the Gospel. It is because of wrong doctrine, wrong teaching, that people suffer. The horse and the cart are not in the right order. Only the awareness of the total pardon, before you do anything to justify yourself, the total pardon before you knew him, that's what removes the awareness of deserving punishment. People go hungry and thirsty for nothing, the banquet is served and the price has been paid. All you have to do is jump up with your hand up in the air and say: Me too!, me too!, I too want to be part of that covenant! I too want to get in the deal where my sins are paid for. That covenant that God himself initiated with a lamb killed in my behalf, it is my Jesus who pays for my sins. He guarantees me passage into Heaven and eliminates the possibility of me going into Hell. And for those who might say that no one can just choose to be saved, that only election determines who is saved and who is not, one might argue that only the elect will "choose" to take part of the covenant. The fact is nobody knows exactly how God works, God keeps calling and some hearts will harden while others will soften, but we all belong to him and that is not going away. We are lost without him, and we know it at a level we cannot pinpoint. We are spiritual beings, there is a part of us that is invisible and in one way or another we seek the knowledge of the invisible world, the acquaintance with the spirit who rules the invisible world. This guru is really tremendous, we'll go see him. Now there is this other guy who tells you things that are so right on, we'll go see him. Then, there is somebody else, and so on. But no one satisfies, and we continue to go about, like lost dogs, looking for our home and our master. Before we knew him, he loved us. Before we were aware of his existence, he loved us. Before we knew he was watching, he loved us. When we were at our worst, he loved us. How wonderful he is!

Does that mean not doing any more good deeds? No, not at all. In fact, the awareness of not having a punishment pending is a great motivator. The tendency of the person who is saved is to do more, not less. But this time and from then on, those good deeds will be done with peace in their minds and a song in their hearts.