

# RUMINATIONS OF A FORMER HEATHEN

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Most of the people who have existed in the world since creation have died unsaved. Most of the people existing today will die unsaved, and future generations will mostly die unsaved. Some members of our own families will die unsaved. The hopes that many Christians have today of worldwide revival will go unfulfilled. It is not going to happen. My Bible says everything is going to get worse, as we continue to move towards the end of time.

Nevertheless, a few here and a few there are still being saved. It is possible, even likely, that more people in other religions will turn to Christ as their end nears. But it is not going to be that many, that's for sure, the Bible says only a remnant will be saved. How big is that remnant, or how small? It's hard to tell. Isaiah 17:6: "Yet gleaning grapes shall be left in it, as the shaking of an olive tree, two or three berries are left in the top of the uppermost bough, four or five in the outmost fruitful branches thereof..." Isaiah 24:13: "...there shall be as the shaking of an olive tree, and as the gleaning grapes when the vintage is done." The context of these verses was the relatively near future (at that time in history), and the destruction that would come upon Judah at the hand of Nebuchadnezzar. But it also represents the future until the end of the world, or until the end of the life of every person, whichever comes first. Only gleanings will be saved. It appears that Satan will gather a big harvest. It's not going to do him any good, of course. Death and Hell will be thrown into the lake of fire at some point. He will be destroyed in due time. Sadly, he will manage to take many people down with him. Particularly sad from God's point of view, because he does not wish that any should perish. He has no pleasure even in the death of the wicked. He would much rather that the wicked turn from his wicked ways and be saved.

Man's rebellion has only increased; and as rebellion increases, the remnant gets proportionally smaller. Only the congregation of Christ knows the way to eternal life. Only the congregation of Christ knows how to make absolutely sure to not go to Hell after they die. Only the congregation of Christ knows the way to peace of mind. What is more important than those things in the life of any person? Money? Power? Could money and/or power be more important? Neither can buy

eternal life, not surety to avoid Hell, nor peace of mind.

All that is just fine, but if the message is so vital and so good and so perfect and so available, why are we so ineffective? It's a bit frustrating. Yet, we are ineffective, the vital information we have is either not presented clearly, or it is not presented at all. Most of the Christian world is drifting into apostasy, falling away from the original message, that is, that the death of Jesus Christ is the payment for all our sins, and that the resurrection of Christ is the proof that he was indeed able to pay for our sins. The focus in many big, and small, Christian Churches is about this world, healing, money, happiness, self-esteem. In the ultimately sense of life and death, teachings today are irrelevant, simplistic and infantile. Further and further away from God. Jeremiah 12, 2: "Thou hast planted them, yea, they have taken root: they grow, yeah, they bring forth fruit: thou art near their mouth, and far from their reins." Jesus rephrases Isaiah 29, 13 in Matthew 15:8, "This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me." Once in a while there can be found a little church somewhere giving the right message, almost like a voice in the wilderness.

Why aren't our arguments convincing enough to cause people near to us to be saved? Why are we so ineffective? A pastor whose older brother had died recently said, "My brother was hard to witness to." I'm sure this pastor wanted very badly that his brother would be saved. He probably reasoned with his brother, cajoled him, threatened him, begged him, but ultimately his brother appeared to have died unsaved. Why is that? It certainly was not for lack of effort from this pastor. There is a wall out there, nobody wants to hear, there is a stubbornness that is hard to overcome. People are guarded, very guarded. It is hard to find an opening. Isaiah 65, 12: "Therefore will I number you to the sword, and ye shall all bow down to the slaughter: because when I called, ye did not answer; when I spake ye did not hear; but did evil before my eyes, and did choose that wherein I delighted not."

Election and free will always come up, and the more I look at them the less I know. They both exist, there is election and there is free will. God says, when I called, ye did not answer, when I spake ye did not hear. If we did not answer when he called, it was because we decided to ignore him. If we did not hear when he spoke, it was because we covered our ears. I certainly did that. When I heard his call I ignored him and when he became insistent I covered my ears. That looks to

be a pretty good case for free will. There is election in the calling and there is free will in the refusing. One big reason why we ignore him, or refuse him, is that we are not afraid of him enough; we are too dumb to be afraid. The fear of God is the beginning of wisdom, the fear of God is a gift of God, and it is a good thing to have. The fear of God really comes *after* a person is saved. After a person is saved it becomes clear what they were saved from. Before we are saved, we are as blindfolded people dancing at the edge of a precipice, never aware of the danger. The sacrifice of God in the person of Jesus our beloved Christ becomes more and more clear *after* we are saved, and highly poignant when one considers the miserable people he died for. How a person is saved is still very mysterious to me. But I can tell you this: before I knew God, I had plenty of self-esteem. After I knew God, I abhorred myself.

II Samuel 17: 27: “And it came to pass, when David was come to Mahanaim, that Shobi the son of Nahash of Rabbah of the children of Ammon, and Machir the son of Ammiel of Lodebar, and Barzillai the Gileadite of Rogelim,

Brought beds and basins, and earthen vessels, and wheat, and barley, and flour, and parched corn, and beans, and lentils, and parched pulse

And honey, and butter, and sheep, and cheese of kine, for David, and for the people that were with him, to eat: for they said: ‘The people is hungry, and thirsty, in the wilderness.’ ” The context here is David running away from his own son, Absalom, who was going about to try to kill him. Shobi, Machir, and Barzillai were loyal friends of David and they went to assist him in this moment of David’s great need. The people are hungry, and thirsty, in the wilderness, they said.

Part of our ineffectiveness is due to the massive wall that exists out there. Those walls are thick and high, but inside them the people are still in the wilderness, with no place to rest, hungry and thirsty.

People all over the world want spiritual peace. What they really mean is that they want to be sure that everything is going to be all right after they die. That there will be either total extinction with no consciousness at all and no suffering, or, if there is no extinction that they will not end up in a horrible place. People want assurance of salvation from the fires of Hell. How are you going to obtain that assurance? The only place where such assurance exists is in the Bible. All the religions of the world are based on works, your works will save you out of the fire. Yet guilt, the awareness of deserving punishment, always returns or it never leaves,

proving that the good works are not enough. Christianity is the only place where there is assurance of salvation from Hell, and reading the Bible is the only place where that assurance can be obtained.

The catch is that when you're an unbeliever the last thing you want to do is to read the Bible. The Bible is to be shunned, scorned, put down, dismissed.

So, here we go back to the question of election and free will. All this is profoundly intriguing. Is there a free will we exercise to come to God? Do we come to God of our own free will? If the only way we are saved is by sovereign election of God (and it is), where is the free will to accept the blood sacrifice of the Lamb? Are we programmed in a way that we cannot help, and no matter what we do we will eventually "accept" Jesus? Or do we have a role in the exchange of our putridness and wickedness for a pardon without conditions? Are election and free will mutually exclusive? No, I don't think so. But there is an order. Election comes first and then we move with free will. When God condescends to put fear in our hearts, then, there is a measure of free will that is exercised. It is the same free will that compels one to grab hold of a rope when drowning, or the free will exercised when jumping out of a burning building. Before that, the only thing free will is good for is rebellion.

Ultimately, rebellion is a function of ignorance. As long as one doesn't know with whom one is contending there can be rebellion. It's a question of raw power. The difference between us and God in terms of power, cannot be adequately expressed. If nothing else, it cannot be expressed because the extent of the power of God is not known.

Even Satan was ignorant of the totality of God. Otherwise, he would not have done what he did.

And yet, can a person rebel against God to the point of preferring Hell rather than Heaven? Yes, I think so. But it's never a very conscious choice. It's more like not caring, it's sort of like saying, so what if I go to Hell? There's nothing I can do about it, anyway, and it's probably not so bad. Disregard for the consequences speaks of profound ignorance.

To be afraid of God indicates belief in him, in his existence. You believe that great harm could come your way if his voice is not heeded. The fear of God is a blessing from God to us. It will cause us to go after the refuge; the refuge that is our wonderful beloved Christ.