

WHAT HAPPENS TO PERSONS WHO NEVER HEAR THE NAME OF JESUS CHRIST? EPHESIANS 1:4-6

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Jesus Christ is living proof that God loves you and the whole world. Jesus, Himself said, “God so loved the world He gave His only begotten Son.” God is depicted as taking the initiative in the act of redemption. Man is represented as “receiving” the act of God.

The motivating force behind the work of the Father on our behalf is love. It was the eternal love of God that drew salvation’s plan; and His beloved Son that brought it down to man. The text says, “He has chosen us . . . predestined us . . . made us acceptable in the Beloved.”

“He has chosen us.” “Chosen” translated the Greek word *exelaxato*, meaning “picked out for Himself,” it can be translated “elected.” A choice is an expression of the will. The act of election is likewise an act of the will. The doctrine of election speaks of God’s expressed will. God made His choice “before the foundation of the world” (Eph 1:4) “according to the council of His will” (Eph 1:11).

“Foundation” translated the Greek word *kataboles*, meaning the departing of the world. Literally, “the flinging or casting down” of the world. The word for “world” is *kosmos*. It is said that God chose us before we came into the world because if He had waited He wouldn’t have wanted us. However, God loved us and had his heart set upon us long before there was a world or a universe. There has never been a time when we were not His choice. There has never been a time when we were not elected.

Before the dawn of creation the Tri-unity counseled together and made a decision. Before the foundation was laid for the Alps and Andes, before the North Star was placed in its orb, before the first flower bloomed in Eden, before the first lamb walked in the garden it was determined Jesus Christ was to be “the Lamb of God slain from the foundation of the world.”

Election is not coercive, we may freely respond; but if God had not chosen us, we could not have chosen Him. He did not choose us because of our good, but so he through

us could do good. People are not lost because they are not elected. People are lost because Christ has been rejected by them. Basically, election means God has taken the initiative in His purpose to save man. Apart from that initiative no one can be saved. However, it does not imply fatalism. It does not indicate God's purpose to save as few but as many as possible, it must be understood in light of "whosoever believeth" (John 3:16), and the "whosoever will" (Romans 22:17). It always stems from God who is love and relates to man who is morally responsible.

This is in the Scriptures to show how we become Christians and enjoy the Christian blessings. It has reference to the sovereignty of God, and the majesty of God. It is of great importance from the standpoint of our understanding of the love of God. It is here we see the love of God at its highest.

"Predestined" translates the Greek word *proorizo*. It is a surveyor's term meaning to mark off the boundaries. Years ago surveyors marked off the boundaries of the state of Georgia. It was thus decided that persons living "in" that boundary would be Georgians. That was predetermined by them being "in" the boundary. Before the foundation of the universe the Trinity counseled together and marked off the boundary as being "in Jesus." It was predetermined that those who would freely receive Him as Savior would be "in Christ" and share His destiny—thus, a pre-determined destiny. God, in His sovereign will, decreed salvation is "in Christ." Human kind, in its free will, must decide to be "in Christ."

We have so much and know so much; but how about others in far away places like Zaire, Sri Lanka, and Guyana? What happens to those who never hear the name of Jesus: the Hottentot, Niue, and Laplander? What about those of previous generations who never heard the gospel?

There has always been and there is more evangelism than the world recognizes and reports. For example, after Christ's resurrection, a great outpouring of the Holy Spirit happened at the celebration of a feast called Pentecost. Acts 2:5-21 lists the languages of 18 different languages spoken there. Years before Alexander the Great laid siege to Jerusalem. The priest came out of the city to greet him with the Book of Daniel and convinced him Daniel wrote of him. Thereafter he carried a large contingency of Jews with him in his world conquest. They were scattered over most of the known world. They learned the languages of their adopted countries but returned to the land of their ancestors to celebrate Pentecost. Many of these were saved when they heard of the resurrection of Christ. Extra-Biblical sources tell of a great wave of evangelism that swept the world in the first century as these people carried the gospel back to their adopted lands.

A letter from Pliny the Elder to Emperor Trajan referred to the large number of believers throughout the area. Peter and Thaddaeus worked in Persia where King Agbar became a zealous follower of Christ and many people in his realm were converted. Pontius of Alexandria went to India in AD 190 where he found many Christians resulting from the work of Matthew in that region. In the sixth century the Nestorians went to China as evangelists. For years there were more believers than nonbelievers in China. This continued to be true until the emergence of the Khans. Globally our Lord has been at work throughout the ages. He is presently.

Traditional mission fields are experiencing marvelous growth. These are countries where there are between 15,000 and 100,000 converts a year with 75 to 200 new churches being started a year. Some of these are in Korea, the Philippines, India, Mexico, and Brazil. Some traditional mission fields in which there is great revival going on are Zimbabwe, Zambia, and Uganda. There are people groups being reached as never before in non-traditional mission areas. In Cambodia large numbers are being saved and churches started.

- In one people group in India amid great persecution 400 new churches were started last year.
- In China similar growth is being experienced among certain people groups.
- In North Africa there is a house church in every town and village.
- In Kazakhstan there is a bright movement of God in spite of efforts to stifle and disrupt the work.

In the Middle East, in Iran particularly, there is a great movement of the spirit currently. This is a sampling of what the Lord is doing all over the world which He loves.

Today as in those days more people are saved than the world cares to report. Still the question lingers: how about those who have never heard the gospel, those who live in areas where we have not exported the gospel? In the next few moments a biblical answer will be offered. Five points are needed to answer the questions.

I. THE DOCTRINE OF DIVINE ESSENCE

This point of beginning is the highest level possible. It is the character of God. One characteristic of God is absolute righteousness. That means God cannot sin. He never has an improper motive. Our human righteousness conduct is relative; that is, sometimes we are act righteously and sometimes we don't. God is consistently absolute righteous. That means He has never been nor can He ever be unfair or unjust to anyone. He is incapable of being unfair. All people of all ages are in the hands of a just and righteous loving God.

Any person who ultimately stands before Him guilty is without excuse.

Install it on the hard drive of your mental mainframe and store it in permanent memory.

God cannot be unfair, and God cannot be wrong. God wanted to get so intimately involved in opening the door to heaven that He manifested Himself on earth in the person of Jesus Christ. He is defined and described as "our great God and Savior Jesus Christ" (Titus 2:13). This answers the question as to who Jesus Christ was.

Romans 9:5 defines Jesus as "Christ . . . who is over all, the eternally blessed God."

In Christ "dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily" (Col 2:9).

II. THE DOCTRINE OF UNLIMITED ATONEMENT

Atonement is not a word in the working vocabulary of most moderns. The word means reconciliation or to make peace between two parties. It refers to a sacrificial offering to remove the effect of sin. In the New Testament it refers to reconciliation between God and humanity achieved by the sacrificial death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

The purpose of Christ coming to earth was “to give His life a ransom for many” (Mark 10:45).

“When we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son” (Romans 5:10).

The manner in which the way of salvation was made possible is clearly spelled out. The body of believers is depicted as “the church of God which He purchased with His own blood” (Acts 20:28). This raises the question: when did God shed His own blood? Jesus Christ, God in flesh and blood, did it on Calvary.

Neither the father nor the mother provides the blood for an embryo’s development. It develops its own blood supply. When Jesus’s red blood dripped on the gray stones of Calvary that was the “blood of God” being shed for “the sin of the world.”

The biblical reference to the principle of atonement refers to what Christ did to satisfy the righteous demands of God the Father. After sin entered the world God saw all persons as the sinners they were. In love He devised a plan to solve this sin problem. It might well be called “Operation Grace.” The plan called for God the Son to come into the world and remove the sin barrier that existed between God and mankind. This barrier could not be removed by any human effort. The purpose of the virgin birth was to provide the sinless Son of God to die on the cross to do what no mere mortal man could do. That is, remove the sin barrier.

On Calvary He bore every sin of every person who has ever lived. This made forgiveness available to the “whosoever” of John 3:16. That does not mean every person is saved, it means every person can be saved.

The fact Christ died for all sin of all persons means God wants to save all persons. That does not imply all persons are saved. Observe these texts:

II Cor. 5:14, 15 “one died for all”

I Tim. 4:10 speaks of Christ “who gave Himself for all.”

I Tim. 4:10 also speaks of Christ “who is the Savior of all men.”

Again I say this does not mean all persons are saved. It means salvation is open to all. Each person must personally receive it by faith.

Hebrews 2:9 says, “He, by the grace of God, might taste death for everyone.”

I John 2:2, “He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world.”

John 1:29, “Behold the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world.”

In love God extended Himself on the cross on behalf of every person. God in love has exhausted His every effort to make salvation available to every person.

III. THE DOCTRINE OF THE SOVEREIGNTY OF GOD OR GOD’S WILL

Through the prophet Ezekiel God spoke: “Do I have any pleasure at all that the wicked should die? . . . says the Lord God, and not that he should turn from his ways and live.” (Ezekiel 18:23). The clear answer is that God desires all to turn and be saved.

Second Peter 3:9 states God’s will clearly. He is “not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.” Thus, God has stated he wants everyone saved. For any person not to go to heaven they have to violate God’s will which is for them to be there. To accomplish this from His vantage point Christ died for all.

Again the will of God is noted in I Timothy 2:4. Therein He is described as the God “who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of truth.” That is His will. What is yours?

The first three parts of the answer to what happens to the person who never hears the name of Christ have been from God’s perspective. The next two are from man’s standpoint.

IV. THE HUMAN MIND

The determining issue is what do people think.

In the life of every person there is time when they become God-conscious. That is, the Holy Spirit convicts them there is a loving God. No matter when or where a person lives, there is a point in their life when they are convinced by the Holy Spirit of their being a loving God.

Acts 2:17 God said, “I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh.”

I Cor. 7:17, “God hath called everyone...”

John 7:17, “If anyone wants to do His will, he shall know”

At a point in the life of every person they are made God-conscious by the Holy Spirit. That is, they become aware there is a loving God.

Romans 1 tells us of the reaction of many at the point of God-consciousness. At the point of God consciousness many send mental signals indicating they don’t want to know the true God but prefer to make their own gods.

This brings us to the fifth point.

V. THE HUMAN HEART

At the point of God-consciousness every person responds in one of two ways:

- A. I want to know more about this God, or
- B. I don't want to know more about this God.

“For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse, because, although they knew God, they did not glory Him as God, nor were they thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man; and birds and four-footed animals and creeping things” (Rom. 1:20 - 23).

It is at the point of God-consciousness that most people reject Him. At the point of God-consciousness they respond negatively and in their ears say: “I don't want to know more about this God. I want to make my own god of wood, stone, or metal.”

This shouts this fact: The heathen is not a heathen because he is in spiritual darkness, but he is in spiritual darkness because he is a heathen. It is not the spiritual darkness that causes the heathenness, it is the heathen-ness that causes the spiritual darkness.

However, there are those who send up positive signals at the point of God-consciousness indicating they do want to know more about this loving God. Then God takes it upon Himself to get the gospel to them through His obedient people.

No matter who, when, or where any person who wants to know the gospel message, God gets it to that person through a human instrument.

God can tell who has said “no” and who has said “yes” at the point of God-consciousness. We can't. We must assume all have said, “Yes, I want to know more.” Therefore, we must evangelistically reach out to them. That means we are to export the gospel.

After preaching on this subject a member of our congregation approached with his face aglow. He, Dr. Ashas Gupta, is a brilliant scientist. He developed the Coke can first used by the astronauts to take a Coke into space. He said, “Pastor, I know what you mean. As a child I sat on the banks of the Ganges River in my native India praying: “God, if you are there please send someone to tell me of you.”

“Then,” he said, “one day a missionary came and told me of the love of Jesus Christ. My affirmative signals had been observed by God and He faithfully sent a messenger.”

What signals are you sending?