



Conducted by
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"We used to hear a lot about 'death-bed repentances' and doubtless many feel that God will foregive them and take them to heaven provided they say they are sorry to God, just before they die. Any justification for thinking this?"

I saw many men during the war who, when they thought they were going into life threatening situations, prayed to God. It would be wrong of me to say that they were repentant for having neglected Him for so long; they were, however, unsure and afraid of what they considered to be imminent oblivion. They were at the extremity.

There are two occasions in life when we are at the extremities; one is when we are newborn babes, the other is when we are on the death-bed (that is, of course, if we die a natural death). In both cases we are afraid and unsure. In the first instance instinctively; in the second instance with the knowledge that we face the unknown. The resolution of the child's fear and uncertainty will come by growth and time; the latter is more traumatic unless we have tried to prepare ourselves for it. It is impossible for us to apprehend the mind of God, but He has revealed something of Himself to us in His word, and it is to that word we must turn for enlightenment on all matters concerning life and death.

A JEALOUS GOD

Jealousy is a condition brought on by apprehension of losing the love or goodwill of someone. Socially it could be a close friend; in the married state it could be husband or wife. If pushed to the extreme, jealousy can have terrible repercussions for many people, both inside and outside of families. We cannot, however, refer human actions to God. He is not jealous in the sense that He would do unrighteous actions in order to sustain His own righteousness.

In Deut. 4:23,24, we read, "**Take heed unto yourselves, lest ye forget the covenant of the Lord your God, which He made with you, and make you a graven image, or the likeness of anything, which the Lord thy God hath forbidden thee. For the Lord thy God is a consuming fire, even a jealous God.**" Jealousy when referred to God, means that He is intolerant of disobedience and unfaithfulness. He does not want to see the love and goodwill which He has lavished on His creation spurned out of hand by them. Many people get the idea of a benign Deity who, because He is love, is unable or unwilling to punish those who displease Him. Consequently, the thought persists that He is on 'tap' whenever we want him. We 'turn Him on' whenever we want something from him. We must disabuse our minds of that idea. It is very dangerous for us to treat God like that. He is not to be regarded as some sort of personal 'talismán'. He wants our allegiance, and He wants it while we have something to offer.

UNCARING MAN

This question is applicable to any period of time. People have died, people are dying now, and people will continue to die unless, of course, God intervenes. This particular age, it seems to me, is the age of 'escapism.' Many people are poor, and so they try to alleviate their poverty by placing faith in such things as the national lottery; at the end of the day they succeed only in making themselves more impoverished. Reality has become something which must be 'escaped' from, and in their desire to escape, they run deeper into the mire which ultimately engulfs them completely.

This 'solution in escapism' means that people think only of themselves. The general attitude seems to be, "look after yourself and let the devil take the hindmost" . . . The trouble is that the devil seems to take a distressing delight in taking the 'front-runners' also.

The real tragedy is, of course, that people also **forget God**. Materialism has become endemic in society. The prospector digs for gold and finds it. This starts a 'rush' of people who also want to become rich. This brings along others who kill, maim, loot, in order to deprive those of the treasure they have dug from the earth. Riches galore! It doesn't matter how you get it; just take it. Along comes the Christian and begins to talk about the riches of

the Christian life; love, mercy, concern for others, sacrifice, and the eternal hope of heaven. "You call those "riches"?" says the materialist, "I call those things 'pie in the sky'", and so he continues to dig for the gold which may enable him to buy many material things, but which will never ensure for him true happiness and contentment. Why do I mention these things? Well, simply because God knows the true hearts desire of all of His creation, and one day He is going to make decisions about their eternal destiny.

Picture now, if you will, the materialist lying in his bed with an illness he knows to be terminal. The Christian, out of concern for him, is visiting and trying to comfort him. "Tell me some more about the riches you spoke to me about earlier. I think I would like to take them up now." Is the man truly repentant, or is he trying to be a partaker of the heavenly riches in order to compensate for the earthly ones which his illness has denied him? We could never know that, but God does, and it is He, in His wisdom, who will have to give the verdict.

THE VERDICT

Everyone, when they die, will have determined their own guilt or innocence. If we have been obedient to God and tried to do His revealed Will, then we shall have determined our own salvation. If, on the other hand, we have disbelieved and spurned God and His Christ, then we shall be guilty before Him. God will then pass judgment as to where we shall spend eternity.

"Ah", someone may say, "what about those who have never heard the Gospel!, or those who have never had it explained to them properly?" Well, those who have never even **heard** the Gospel would be the same on their death-beds as they had been during their lives, i.e. **unknowing**. Lack of adequate explanation of the Gospel message in order to ensure understanding, would be the fault of those who had taught it. But let me say this. A person who never **hears** the Gospel is, technically, in the same condition as those who hear it but reject it, i.e., he is unsaved and consequently 'lost'. The ultimate charge may be levelled at those who **know** it but do not **dispense** it to those who **need** it. The verdict, then, against the 'unknowing' would not be based on disobedience of something he had never heard - he is technically 'lost', anyway - but would be based on the mercy of the One examining him, i.e., God. It is hard for us to accept that the unevangelised are 'lost', but on the basis of our humanity the Apostle Paul has concluded, "For all have sinned, and fall short of the glory of God". Rom. 3:23. Therefore, we can only conclude that a person who **needs** the Gospel is a person who **needs** to be saved, and if he **needs** to be saved, then he is lost in sin.

IN CONCLUSION

So what can we say in conclusion about this question of 'death-bed' repentance? In the first place we have to accept that God alone knows whether **any** repentance - 'death-bed' or otherwise - is genuine. **We** can only hear the words spoken, and watch actions; **He** knows the heart of man.

Secondly, a person who, during his lifetime, has known the Gospel and has deliberately spurned the grace of God, and the sacrifice of His Christ, can only expect the 'just' judgment of God. A cynical attempt to make the most personal gain in any situation, e.g., the 'death-bed' will, in my opinion, be of no avail.

Thirdly, the 'unknowing' will have to throw themselves on the mercy of God. But we Christians must realise that if we have let a situation develop in the promotion of the Gospel, then we must be ready to take the stricture of God.

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