

Does God Ever Turn His Back?

Hosea 5:1-6

1) Today we dare to think about the unthinkable: Is it possible that God would ever turn His back on us? Some would answer – NO WAY! They quote verses like II Timothy 2:13:

"Though we are unfaithful, yet he remains faithful. . ."
(II Timothy 2:13)

But, we also should remember the verse just preceding that one says,
"If we deny Him, He also will deny us." (II Timothy 2:12b)

a. There is clear indication in the Bible that God does turn His back on individuals as well as nations. The quiet, subdued Old Testament prophet Hosea knew this truth. In the little book that bears his name, we not only find the story of his love for an unfaithful wife, we find two statements attributed to the eternal God.

b. First in Hosea 5:6 we read,

"When they go with their flocks and herds to seek the Lord, they will not find him; he has withdrawn himself from them." (Hosea 5:6)

c. And then again in the same chapter we read,

"I will go back to my place until they admit their guilt."
(Hosea 5:15a)

2) This is not a pleasant thought or a view of God that is joyous to contemplate. Those who deny God could ever turn His back on a person are called "universalist." Universalism says no man is lost. In the end, everyone will be saved.

- The latest to espouse this theory is Rob Bell in a book "Love Wins." Although he denies that he is a universalist, his reasoning is basically the same – "A good and loving God could never send anyone to hell."

a. This reasoning is correct to a point. A good and loving God does not send people to hell. The person who ends up in that place has gone there despite all a good and loving God could do to prevent it.

b. If universalism is correct and in the end everyone will be saved anyway – why did Jesus command us to –

"Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you." (Matthew 28:19-20a)

We are going to a lot of unnecessary expense to evangelize the world if in the end everyone is going to be saved anyway.

- Why did Bill and Joyce Oden spend their lives in the Philipians if everyone goes to heaven anyway?

- Why do we go to all the effort and expense to have the church if everyone is saved with or without Christ?

If everyone goes to heaven, why bother?

c. If everyone goes to heaven, why did Jesus warn us otherwise?

"Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven." (Matthew 7:21)

3) The problem is not that God turns His back on man, but that mankind has turned its back on God. In the first chapter of Romans, we read about the downward spiral of non-religious man. This spiral began when there was sufficient knowledge of the one and only God. God says this knowledge about God is so clear that no one has an excuse.

"What may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them." (Romans 1:19)

a. Human history didn't start with man in a cave, ignorant of his Creator, striving to better himself as many anthropologists theorize today. On the contrary, according to the Bible, human history began with man walking in a garden with his Creator in a state of perfection where he knew God intimately!

b. The Apostle Paul says that God is angry because He offers sufficient evidence and man intentionally chooses to deny it. We have turned from God and this is the result.

"Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles." (Romans 1:22-23)

c. Isn't it interesting how we classify ourselves on this planet? We call ourselves "homo sapiens." It means wise one! Now, listen to how we explain where we came from.

"We begin by saying a superior being or God did not create us. Of that we are most certain. We look a bit like monkeys, so we probably came from them. Where did the monkeys come from? Perhaps they came from amphibians. Our ancestors were Salamanders. But, where did the Salamanders come from? Obviously from fish, which came from other sea creatures, which had to come from plankton, which came from protean molecules, which came from complex amino acids which came from random collisions of other molecules, which came from a primal puddle of ooze somewhere in Africa that was hit by a bolt of lightning."

Pitiful, isn't it? The wise one's best and brightest effort to explain his existence takes him back to a mud puddle. And for that you can get a PhD or be awarded a Nobel Peace Prize. No wonder God is angry.

4) What is God to do when He sees His creation going awry? One can only imagine the pain the Father God must feel. As parents who love our children, what do we do when we see our children taking the wrong path and flirting with disaster? We warn them of the consequences.

a. God doesn't abuse our humanity by running roughshod over our personalities. He protects our free will by allowing us to make even destructive decisions, but He warns us of the consequences if we continue and don't turn back. This is the essence of love, and the key to entering into a love relationship with us. His faith in us despite knowing our nature to wander to the darkness is truly amazing. I don't have a category for the depth of that love.

b. It is typical of the God of the Bible that the driving force behind divine declarations of doom is God's longing to inspire people to turn around before it is too late. Our Lord goes to such lengths not because there is no hope of them escaping the prophesied disaster, but precisely because there is hope. In His grace, He is giving them a foretaste of what it will be like unless they turn around and get serious with God.

5) Many Christians have wrongly supposed that if God prophesies something, it is final. The truth is that Scripture emphatically and repeatedly declares that whether God's prophecies come true depends on the response of the people the prophecy is aimed at.

a. The Lord, speaking through the prophet Jeremiah, clearly lays out this principle. ***"The instant I speak concerning a nation and concerning a kingdom, to pluck up, to pull down, and to destroy it, if that nation against whom I have spoken turns from its evil, I will relent of the disaster that I thought to bring upon it."*** (Jeremiah 18:7-8)

The reverse is also true. A change of heart for the worse can nullify prophecies of blessings.

"And the instant I speak concerning a nation and concerning a kingdom, to build and to plant it, if it does evil in My sight so that it does not obey My voice, then I will relent concerning the good with which I said I would benefit it." (Jeremiah 18:9-10)

b. Most prophecies are not declaring the inevitable future but are detailing what can be expected if there is not a change of heart. God's purpose is to motivate them to call upon Him, because –

"Whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved." (Joel 2:32)

c. For a prophecy of doom to "fail" is the ultimate success to God.

Look at Jonah. His message from God to the Ninevites was that in just forty more days, they would be destroyed. The prophecy held not a shadow of hope. There was nothing about the body language or tone of voice of Jonah to hint to these pagans that God might be loving or merciful, but when the Ninevites repented, God spared them.

Whether God's prophecies come true depends on the response of the people the prophecy is aimed at. In this case, Nineveh repented and the Lord relented.

6) When contemplating whether God ever turns His back on us, we must remember that God did turn His back on Jesus when He hung on the cross. The prophet Habakkuk says this about God:

"Your eyes are too pure to look on evil; you cannot tolerate wrong."
(Habakkuk 1:13a)

a. God cannot look upon sin, because it is nauseous to Him. He can't have anything to do with sin and be God. So, in that moment when the sins of the world were placed upon Jesus, God (the Father) turned His back and could not look at the sin that Jesus bore. It was at that moment the Son cried out –

"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"
(Matthew 27:46b)

b. If you reject the One who died for your sins, refuse the cleansing blood which washes away your sins, and you elect to stand before God in your sin – in that moment God will have to turn His back on you.

7) The most important thing I can tell you is that God never shuts the door on anyone who truly wants to come to Him in repentance and faith. Jesus' promise is for you:

"Whoever comes to me I will never drive away."
(John 6:37)

a. One clear sign that God hasn't shut the door on you already is your own inner desire to come back to Him. Where does this come from? It doesn't just come from your own dissatisfaction with the way you've been living. Instead, God gives it to you! His Spirit is at work in your heart (whether you're aware of it or not), convicting you of your sin and convincing you of your need of Christ. Jesus said,

"No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him."
(John 6:44)

b. Would God be drawing you to Himself if He wasn't willing to receive you and forgive you? Don't ignore His call, however, or assume you can indefinitely delay turning to Him. The Bible says,

"Now is the time of God's favor, now is the day of salvation." (II Corinthians 6:2).

c. A woman had finally decided to leave her husband. She had hung on as long as she possibly could. Her husband was completely insensitive to her needs. He was inconsiderate and thoughtless. He had ruined their relationship. For the sake of her own health and the welfare of her children, she had decided it would be best for her to leave. But, she left a note with her pastor that said: "If he ever really wants me, tell him this is where he can find me."

If you really want God, He left His address at the cross of Calvary. I plead with you to turn to Christ and commit your life to Him today.