

COULD GOD WIN AN ELECTION?

By Paul Penno, Jr.

May 20, 2009

The majority has always tried to turn God out of office. Once He had only eight persons who voted for Him. What does it take to stand with God's loyal minority in the final act of the great drama of world history?

Everybody has heard of God, and He usually enjoys good public relations because of His excellent reputation. But it's extremely unlikely that He could ever win a free election as Chief Executive anywhere on earth. The simple reason is that fallen human nature is in a state described as "hostile to God" (Romans 8:7), and the general run of mankind has always been against having Him as ruler.

Jesus symbolically represented Himself in a parable as a certain "nobleman" whose "citizens hated him and sent an embassy after him, saying, 'We do not want this man to reign over us.'" Luke 19:14. Like it or not, we humans must admit that this has been our general attitude throughout history.

Once when God actually was the theocratic ruler of a special nation, Israel, the people demanded of His prophet that He be displaced: "Appoint for us a king to govern us like all the nations." The Lord told the prophet Samuel to do it, "for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected me from being king over them." 1 Samuel 8:5, 7. Israel would probably have denied that they were rejecting God,

but it is obvious that He had lost at the polls. The ultimate rejection of Christ by their descendants correctly interpreted their entire national history.

This human pattern of hostility began to develop after the Fall, when Adam and Eve lost their original sinlessness. By the time of the Flood, only eight people were loyal enough to God to go inside His ark, at a time when world population could well have numbered one billion.¹

God may be almighty, but He will not force Himself on people or impose on their free will. Neither, however, has He been willing to wash His hands of planet Earth and accept defeat at the polls as final. As Creator, He has a rightful stake in affairs here. His plan has always been to achieve a comeback in spite of man's ongoing hostility. Because of the opposition of the masses, He has had to work through a minority. The Bible describes this minority as a "remnant."

Noah and his family represented that minority at the Flood. Centuries later Abraham spearheaded a new minority through whom God promised that "all the families of the earth shall be blessed." Genesis 12:3, margin. But Abraham's descendants failed to "bless" the other nations: they became like them. In the days of Elijah, it seemed to him that the entire nation of Israel had turn from God to worship Baal. The prophet was tempted to give the people up as hopeless, but the Lord encouraged him with the good news that there was "a remnant, chosen by

¹ According to Whitcomb and Morris (*The Genesis Flood*, Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1961, p. 27).

grace,” “seven thousand men who have not bowed the knee to Baal.” Romans 11:4, 5. Through them God would effect a comeback so that His plan of salvation for the world would not be defeated.

A few centuries later, the apostasy of Israel and Judah resulted in God’s people being scattered among the nations. Again, an observer would have concluded that God’s plan of evangelizing the world was forever nullified; but once more He worked through a minority: “Though the number of the sons of Israel be as the sand of the sea, only a remnant of them will be saved.” Romans 9:27. This remnant, only a handful, did what they could to bring the surrounding nations a knowledge of God.

In the eighth century B.C., the prophet Micah saw the brighter side of things: “The remnant of Jacob shall be in the midst of many peoples like dew from the Lord, like showers upon the grass.” Micah 5:7. This faithful remnant of God’s people worked quietly and unobtrusively like dew on the thirsty ground to enlighten and uplift the pagan cultures of ancient civilizations. Some scholars see traces of their witness in Buddhist and Zoroastrian history and ethics. If so, we can more easily believe that there has always been a “true light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world” (John 1:9, KJV), even though at times the light has been so frustrated by the unfaithfulness of God’s people that it has had to shine through refracted rays.

The light shone its brightest in the person of Jesus the Messiah. But again, the majority voted Him down. Only a remnant who believed passed on His gospel to the world. One of Christ’s most thoughtful

followers, the apostle Paul, discerned the astounding truth that the little Christian church of his day was the counterpart of those “seven thousand” in Elijah’s time who had not worshiped Baal: “So too at the present time there is a remnant, chosen by grace. . . . Israel failed to obtain what it sought. The elect obtained it.” Romans 11:5-7.

Put yourself in God’s place and try to appreciate the continual frustration God has known, always trying to bless all families of the earth through His people, yet stymied by their rebellion or rejection. In age after age He has tried it again, working through a remnant. So it has been even throughout what we call the Christian age—the majority even in the church steeped in apostasy, while a small remnant bravely endures the fire and the rack because they bear witness to the truth of the gospel. As James Russell Lowell wrote:

Truth forever on the scaffold,
wrong forever on the throne;
Yet that scaffold sways the future,
and behind the dim unknown
Standeth God within the shadow,
keeping watch above His own.

Christ warned His true followers not to expect more in this world than remnant status. In fact, He said the situation in the last days would be a replay of Noah’s minority relationship to the unbelieving populace of his day: “As were the days of Noah, so will be the coming of the Son of man. For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day when Noah entered the ark, and they did not

know it until the flood came and swept them all away, so will be the coming of the Son of man.” Matthew 24:37-39.

Out of 6 billion people in the world today, how many are seriously emulating Noah and his family by entering the safety of the modern counterpart of the ancient ark? Only a remnant. While we dare not try to count them, we may easily suppose that they are as difficult to spot as Elijah’s elusive “seven thousand” in his day.

But the Lord assures us that His patience and perseverance will pay off at last. Just as He has always had a remnant who have remained faithful, so just before Christ returns, he will have a faithful remnant who will stand before this world distinguished as “those who keep the commandments of God and bear testimony to Jesus.” Revelation 12:17.

This final remnant are described elsewhere in the book of Revelation as those who keep not only the commandments of God, but also “the faith of Jesus.” Chapter 14:12.

The gospel of Jesus Christ contains the most important message this world has ever heard—stupendous good news for the inhabitants of Planet Earth. This good news tells us that God, through Christ’s death on the cross and resurrection, has made salvation possible for every human on earth. Not just a few select ones, individuals “predestined” for heaven, but for every human being—every man, woman, and child.

No matter what a person has done in the past—what act of theft, murder, or mayhem he or she may

have done—God gives full and complete pardon and a welcome into His family.

Let’s look at some of the evidences of this willingness on God’s part as revealed in the Scriptures.

“God our Savior . . . wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth” (1 Timothy 2:3, 4, N.I.V.).

More than idly wanting this, He has effected it: “God . . . hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began, . . . who hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel” (2 Timothy 1:8-10).

We can’t rewrite Paul’s words for him. Christ has “*abolished* death.” “He suffered death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone” (Hebrews 2:9, N.I.V.). This was the real thing, “the second death” (Revelation 2:11; 20:14). Therefore, if any human being at last suffers the pain of that second death it will be against God’s will and action, because that torment is specifically and exclusively “prepared for the devil and his angels” (Matthew 25:41). Any humans who get there do so only because they thwart and reject God’s salvation already freely given for them.

Scripture teaches that the whole human race has been saved from the horror of that death; otherwise Christ tasted it for everyone in vain! “All . . . are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus” (Romans 3:23, 24,

N.I.V.). The reason this is true is that “God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them” (2 Corinthians 5:19).

One of the most explosive ideas in the gospel is *grace*, which is kindness shown to the most undeserving (that means everybody). That “grace of God has appeared, *bringing salvation to all men*” (Titus 2:11, N.A.S.B.). There are differing translations of this passage because some translators can’t fathom how good the good news is, but this version is faithful to the original.

“It follows, then, that as the issue of one misdeed [Adam’s] was condemnation for all men, so the issue of one just act [Christ’s sacrifice of Himself on the cross] is acquittal and life for all men” (Romans 5:18, N.E.B.). Could Paul’s enthusiasm have outstripped his good sense? Let’s see what Jesus Himself said:

“God . . . gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish. . . . God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that *the world* through him might be saved” (John 3:16, 17). His blood was “shed for *many*” (Matthew 26:28). He gave His “flesh . . . for the life of *the world*” (John 6:51).

“Ah, yes,” says someone, “you see the catch? You’ve got to do something terribly difficult for most people—you’ve got to *believe*. Most of us, especially modern, sophisticated people, just aren’t cut out to have faith! God pretends to be ever so generous, but He still has His loophole; He keeps the cards stacked against most of those ‘many.’”

The King James Bible offers an encouraging answer to this objection: “God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith” (Romans 12:3). If God handed out this “measure” arbitrarily it would confirm that extreme predestination libel against His character, for He would be handing out tickets to heaven to His favorites and slamming the door in the face of others. But not only has He given the Saviour to “every man” but with the gift He has added “the measure of faith” so he can believe and receive it. This means that everyone becomes responsible for what he does with the gift of salvation made available to him.

This is what Paul means, for he says in another passage, “It is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God” (Ephesians 2:8, N.I.V.). Since the gift is by grace, it is obvious that it must be given to all alike.

It follows that the only way anyone can be lost is to reject what has already been given to him. This is what Jesus means: “Here lies the test: the light has come into the world, but men preferred darkness to light” (John 3:19, N.E.B.). That “true Light . . . lighteth every man that cometh into the world” (1:9). No one can be lost unless he *prefers* “darkness to light.” This involves his personal choice.

In other words, no one can be lost because of the sins he has committed, for God has given justification for all men. The lost reject forgiveness and cleansing, having *preferred* to hang on to sin. This may be a series of unconscious choices, but the ultimate judgment will disclose how each lost

individual has again and again spurned the light that tried to brighten his dark soul.

When I talk to children about this good news I like to stage a little demonstration of how much God personally loves each of us. I select a boy to play the game with me, and tell him that the door to one side is the door that goes to heaven and the door on the other side goes to hell. I will play that I'm God, and he will play that he's "every man." "Now," I say, "let me see you try to go to hell."

Grinning, he starts to lunge for the door to hell, but I block him. He tries to dart this way or that, but I tackle him and even whirl him around facing heaven. On one occasion the schoolroom floor had waxed tiles, and the boy had on rubber soles. I happened to be wearing leather soles, and he pushed me, sliding on my feet, all the way to hell. The children laughed, delighted to see their speaker defeated in the point he was trying to make. But I said, "Children, maybe the Lord let it be this way so you can see that if anyone is *really* determined to go to hell, he can go; *but he has to crucify his Saviour all over again in order to do it!*"

God has strewn the freeway to hell with all kinds of obstacles. I like the way one author has put it: "All along the road that leads to death there are pains and penalties, there are sorrows and disappointments, there are warnings not to go on. God's love has made it hard for the heedless and headstrong to destroy themselves."²

² Ellen G. White, *Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, p. 139.

More than this, by the Holy Spirit the Saviour is sitting beside each of us as we travel down that freeway in the wrong direction, constantly nudging us to get into the right lane and take that blessed exit ramp to life eternal. His job is specifically to be a *parakletos*, "one called to the side of" us, and constantly "convict" us of "sin and righteousness and judgment" (John 16:8, N.I.V.). He will never tire of His job or leave us to our perverse ways unless we beat Him off persistently and determinedly. He cannot deny us freedom of choice.

And what about realigning that road to heaven in order to meet His competition? The Lord Himself assures us that His way is "easy," while the road to hell is "hard" (see Matthew 11:30; Acts 26:14). The Saviour invites us to yoke up with Him (Matthew 11:29) on the way, and it is He who bears the weight and does the pulling. That more than compensates for any supposed uphill difficulties! The "strait" gate and "narrow" way (7:14) does not mean a hard way. There is just not room for the sins that would destroy us, that's all.

The old song says something true:

"And once again the scene was
changed,
new earth there seemed to be;
I saw the Holy City beside the
tideless sea.
The light of God was on its
streets
its gates were opened wide,
And all who would might enter,
and no one was denied."

In other words, immortality is yours for the asking. God gives it to everyone. All we have to do is say Yes—to reach out and accept the gift of salvation.

But remember, the Lord will not force Himself on anyone who doesn't like Him and doesn't want Him around; He is too much a gentleman to do so. If He forced everyone to be saved many would be miserable in an environment where the prevailing spirit is heartfelt gratitude to the Lamb for His sacrifice in redeeming the world. If by accident one rebel found himself there he would head for the nearest exit. The lost are not shut out of heaven by God, but by their own unfitness for its companionship. God's love is forced to let them have what they want.

God's love for every individual is more intense than that of a devoted mother for each of her children. She does not divide her love between them; each gets the whole of it. And if one is lost she grieves. John the Revelator says that when the Lamb "had opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven" (Revelation 8:1), which can mean the silence of God's infinite personal grief for those who have insisted on choosing the way of self-destruction.

The remnant boldly announce the arrival of God's "hour . . . of judgment," and call upon the world to "worship him who made heaven and earth" (Revelation 14:7), a clear allusion to God's alternative to the theory of random evolution. Those who are described as reviving the Bible truth of creation and keeping all of God's commandments will undoubtedly be observing and emphasizing the

seventh-day Sabbath, which commemorates His creation in six days and His resting on the seventh day. See Genesis 2:1-3; Exodus 20:8-11.

But this remnant do not keep God's commandments as legalists, for they are represented also as "an angel" proclaiming to the world the pure truth of the "eternal gospel." Revelation 14:6. The word *gospel* means "good news of salvation by faith in Christ alone." "By grace you have been saved through faith; and this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God." Ephesians 2:8.

To proclaim such an "eternal gospel" requires that God's final remnant also unmask the counterfeit gospel that leads away from loyalty to the true Christ and His law. This work is symbolized by "another" angel's message, "Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great." Revelation 14:8. Babylon has always been a place of "confusion" (that's what the word itself means). Those who claim to follow Jesus, but who reject obedience to Him and His commandments, find themselves in a confused, fallen state, symbolized as "Babylon." Sincerity in error becomes knowing, willful refusal to identify with God's remnant who stand on the side of full loyalty.

The early church understood that the purity of apostolic faith would give way to a corrupted version. Paul warned the church leaders at Miletus that this apostasy would come from within. "I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock. Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth

in order to draw away disciples after them” (Acts 20:29, 30).

Paul elaborated on this to the church at Thessalonica: “Don’t let anyone deceive you in any way, for that day [the second coming of Jesus] will not come until the rebellion occurs and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the man doomed to destruction. He opposes and exalts himself over everything that is called God or is worshiped, and even sets himself up in God’s temple, proclaiming himself to be God” (2 Thessalonians 2:3, 4). The “man of lawlessness” and the “secret power of lawlessness” (verse 7) refer to Daniel’s prophecies of a prominent religious power that would “speak against the Most High and oppress his saints and try to change the set times and the laws” (Daniel 7:25). Revelation 17:5 catches up the refrain from Daniel and repeats the scene under the symbol of Babylon and speaks of her as the “mother” of the “abominations of the earth.”

Can it be possible that these terrible “abominations of the earth” that have plagued modern humanity have their roots in a Christianity that has fallen away from the truth of God’s Word?

Mankind’s greatest suffering has been directly related to clever perversions of Christianity. The horrors of the French Revolution grew out of the injustices inflicted on the country for centuries by a corrupt church and priesthood. Nazism arose in a Christian Germany, permeated by the infidelity that accompanies a rationalistic higher criticism of the Bible. Communism took root in a Russia that was sick of the national church which had long since

departed from the purity of the apostolic faith. A counterfeit caused Karl Marx to label religion as “the opiate of the masses.”

Finally, according to Revelation, a third angel warns against the peril of continuing down the broad road of popular custom: “If any one worships the beast and its image, and receives [his] mark on his forehead or on his hand, he also will drink the wine of God’s wrath, poured unmixed into the cup of his anger.” Revelation 14:9, 10.

Jesus said that He intended the Christian church to be “the light of the world” (Matthew 5:14). But He added, “If your very light turns dark, then—what a darkness it is!” (Matthew 6:23, Moffatt). If you can imagine a light bulb that projects darkness instead of light, you will understand what Jesus meant. Fortunately, no one has yet invented such a thing. But the devil has corrupted Christ’s truth into a great falling away, which was predicted by Daniel, John, and Paul. What God planned to be a light has actually propagated darkness instead.

In such a context, the Sabbath-Sunday issue ceases to be a mere whimsical choice of one day or another. It becomes, instead, an issue of loyalty to our Creator and Redeemer and to His revealed will. The great issues have not all fully worked themselves out in human history, but the Bible teaches that before Jesus comes, the world will come face to face with what is basically a reenactment of Calvary. The unregenerate mind will war against Christ. Love of self will be pitted against the cross of Christ (see Romans 8:7; Revelation 19:14).

The ultimate choice to join that conflict *against* the Lamb will be the result of many apparently insignificant choices, each one saying, "Not as You will, but as I will."

A reverent observance of God's original seventh-day Sabbath is an act of faith based on the say-so of our divine Creator. He rightly deserves our heartfelt worship and adoration because He is also the Lamb who gave His blood for us.

Thus Revelation introduces us to the role of God's faithful remnant in the final act in the great drama of world history. God has been standing in the shadows, and many have imagined He has abandoned planet Earth. But He has not been asleep. His age-long search for those who will serve Him has resulted in a people who by His grace stand "without fault before the throne of God." Revelation 14:5, KJV. He trusts them to remain His faithful allies in the final conflict.

Christ's apostles in their day looked forward to "the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus." Ephesians 2:7. This end-time display of God's grace in the lives of His remnant, the full fruitage of the redemption accomplished at the cross, will be the undoing of Satan and all who have chosen hostility to God as their permanent stance. Every lying accusation against God will have been refuted, every question answered. At last, every mask has come off, every underground machination of evil has been exposed. In the experience of His final remnant, God's handling of sin will be vindicated in the eyes of the

universe. Even the wicked will confess His justice unanimously and voluntarily.

Then God will win His case. The remnant sing a hymn of triumph: "Who shall not fear and glorify thy name, O Lord? For thou alone art holy. All nations shall come and worship thee, for thy judgments have been revealed." Revelation 15:4.

In the December 31, 1989 *Chicago Tribune*, the editors printed their photos of the decade. One of them, by Michael Fryer, captured a grim fireman and paramedic carrying a fire victim away from the scene.

The blaze, which happened in Chicago in December 1984, at first seemed routine. But then firefighters discovered the bodies of a mother and five children huddled in the kitchen of an apartment.

Fryer said the firefighters surmised, "She could have escaped with two or three of the children but couldn't decide whom to pick. She chose to wait with all of them for the firefighters to arrive. All of them died of smoke inhalation."

There are times when you just don't leave those you love. John heard "every creature in heaven and on earth" joining in acclaiming God as the rightful Ruler of the earth. Revelation 5:13. For once, God will win at the polls. Are you willing to stand for Him today?