

# DOCTRINE OF GOD CONSCIOUSNESS

## (WHAT ABOUT THE HEATHEN?)

- I. Introduction.
  - A. This doctrine is designed to answer many questions that arise due to the apparently conflicting doctrines of the sovereignty of God and the free will of man.
  - B. The questions regarding the sovereignty of God, and His part in the process of salvation, are dealt with in doctrines such as foreknowledge, predestination, election, and calling.
  - C. Questions that arise concerning the human or volitional aspects of salvation are answered by doctrines such as volition and God consciousness.
  - D. Some questions which this doctrine addresses include:
    - 1. The reality of spiritual death, the destiny of children, or the mentally defective.
    - 2. The heathen, those who have never heard the gospel.
    - 3. The terms positive volition and negative volition.
  - E. As we will observe, this doctrine is compatible with all other doctrines, such doctrines as the sovereignty of God, the impartiality of God, unlimited atonement and human freedom, or volition.
  
- II. Vocabulary and definitions.
  - A. There is no specific term for God consciousness in either the Old or New Testament.
  - B. The verb that is used for those who are interested in the plan of God is *seeking*.
    - 1. שָׁקַף (baqash), Heb. verb, to search, to seek out or inquire into something, to look for something with the idea of obtaining it.
    - 2. שָׁרַף (darash), Heb. verb, to tread with the feet, to walk to or frequent a place, hence to seek diligently.
    - 3. ζητέω (zeteo), Grk. verb, to seek in order to obtain or find, to seek to find out, to pursue or strive after.
    - 4. These verbs are quite important, since God states in His word that He becomes a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him. Ps. 14:2; Heb. 11:6
    - 5. One should recognize the fact that there are those that are willing to seek God on His terms; this type of person demonstrates his intellectual honesty and a willingness to orient to the terms God sets forth. Lk. 13:24
    - 6. This type of person manifests a desire to understand God, the truth about Him and His word, and therefore denotes a willingness to acquiesce or humble one's self before God and His sovereign rule. Ps. 34:18; Isa. 66:2
    - 7. On the other hand, pseudo-seekers are those that give an overt appearance of wanting to have a relationship with God, but are not willing to seek Him on His terms; instead, they seek Him according to their own pre-conceived ideas, terms, and agendas. Matt.16:4; Joh.5:44, 6:24,26
    - 8. Quite often, this type of person manifests an arrogance that keeps him from humbling himself sufficiently to find and please God. Ps. 10:4

- C. God consciousness, also known as the age of accountability, occurs when the individual becomes aware of the fact that God exists.
  - 1. There is no specific age for every member of the human race, but this generally occurs at a relatively early point in life.
  - 2. Children who are not old enough to believe, or who are incapable of believing by virtue of some mental deficiency, are provided for under the doctrine of unlimited atonement.
    - a. Only one sin can send the individual to hell, the sin of unbelief. Matt. 12:31-32
    - b. This is a conscious choice to reject the ministry of the Holy Spirit in regard to the issue of faith in Christ, which is the only sin for which Christ did not die.
    - c. Therefore, children that have not reached sufficient age, or who are not possessed of sufficient mental capability, to make this decision, are secure before God, since Christ died for whatever sins they may have committed. IISam. 12:23
- D. At God consciousness, one either desires to know God and have a relationship with Him or he is disinterested.
  - 1. Those who do desire a relationship with God are called positive volition.
  - 2. Those who do not desire a relationship with God are called negative volition.
- E. God consciousness is to be distinguished from gospel hearing and from saving faith.

### III. The nature of God consciousness.

- A. God consciousness simply means that every normal member of the human race becomes aware of the fact that God exists.
- B. This is accomplished by means of general revelation, by which God continuously makes Himself known to all men; through His creation, His power and divinity are manifested to the human race in an ongoing basis.
- C. General revelation is communicated through the media of natural phenomena, occurring in the course of nature, human nature, or human history.
- D. General revelation is one that is addressed ordinarily to all intelligent creatures, and is therefore accessible to all men at all times.
- E. General revelation includes the following.
  - 1. The physical creation, which argues for an intelligent designer, and which demonstrates the power, Divine nature, and goodness of God. Ps. 19:1ff, 50:6; Acts 14:17; Matt. 5:45; Rom. 1:20
  - 2. The moral nature of mankind, particularly the existence of the conscience, demonstrates the existence of a righteous, moral Creator. Rom. 1:19, 2:14-15
  - 3. The third method in which God reveals Himself to mankind is through human history; when history is rightly perceived, it bears the imprint of God's activity and thus has a theological character. Primarily, God is revealed in history through the rise and fall of peoples and nations. Deut. 32:8; Job 12:23; Dan. 2:20-21, 4:17; Acts 17:26-27
- F. General revelation is available from the earliest time of one's conscious existence; therefore, God consciousness develops relatively early in life; at that point, the individual becomes culpable before God for his eternal destiny.
- G. The accumulation of information from others, the power of observation, and the power of reason are factors that aid in the development of God consciousness.
- H. While information that comes to the individual may be true or false, it still forces each person to consider the issue of God.

- I. Various logical systems of thought may lead to God consciousness, including:
  1. **The cosmological** (derived from the Greek word κόσμος (kosmos) which deals with the area of metaphysics relating to the orderly nature of the material world and such things as the law of cause and effect by which one can arrive at the original cause. *Aristotle referred to God as the Unmoved Mover.* Isa. 48:12-13
  2. **The ontological** (derived from the Greek verb εἶμί (eimi--to be) which argues for the existence of God based on being or reality. God is the most perfect being, the most perfect being must exist, and therefore God must exist. The soul, which is created in the image of God, develops the concept of the ideal soul or being. Deut. 32:4
  3. **The anthropological** (derived from the Greek άνθρωπος (anthropos--man), which deals with the fact that man is a moral creature with standards of right and wrong. The existence of the conscience bears witness to these precepts of right and wrong, which must have a source. Rom. 2:12-15
  4. **The teleological** (derived from the Greek τέλος (telos--the end, termination or limit) recognizes that the physical world and all things in it are not the product of chance but have a purpose. There is a design evident in the physical creation that demands a designer with some purpose. If this is true of physical, inanimate objects, is it not more obviously true about man? Isa. 46:10; Rev. 21:6

IV. The issue at God consciousness.

- A. When an individual becomes aware of the existence of God, there is but one question to be answered.
- B. Does said individual desire a relationship with God or not?
- C. This issue divides mankind into two opposing camps, those who want to want to have a relationship with God and those who do not.
- D. When one reaches this point, he becomes accountable to God to do those things which God's essence demands of mankind. Rom. 1:21
- E. Positive volition, even before salvation, is referred to as sheep; negative volition, those that will never believe, is referred to as goats. Matt. 18:12, 25:33; Jn. 10:16; IPet. 2:25

V. God consciousness and gospel hearing.

- A. God consciousness, or the awareness and belief that God exists, does not constitute anything in terms of adjustment to God. Rom. 1:21; James 2:19
- B. As we have noted, God consciousness divides mankind into two camps, the positive and the negative.
- C. Positive volition and gospel hearing. Rom. 8:29-30
  1. All whom God foreknew to be positive, He chose or elected to conform to the image of His Son. Rom. 8:29
  2. This is a process that is accomplished in three separate stages of salvation, Ph<sub>1</sub>, Ph<sub>2</sub>, and Ph<sub>3</sub>.
  3. All those whom God predestined to this end will be called in the course of human history. Rom. 8:30
  4. The call is comprised of the presentation of the facts of the gospel, focusing on the need for faith in Messiah. IIThess. 2:14
  5. All who hear the gospel and are positive will eventually believe; however, not all will necessarily believe the truth the first time that they hear the truth. Jn. 6:37,39,45; Acts 7:1-8:1

6. All who are positive at God consciousness will eventually hear the gospel and be saved.
7. This process is secure because it was established by God in eternity past, as He made provision for those He knew to be His sheep; this is most evident in the doctrines of foreknowledge, election, and predestination.

D. Negative volition and gospel hearing.

1. Since God chose those whom He knew would be positive, He obviously did not choose those who He knew would be negative.
2. Some have stated that this failure to choose on God's part destines the negative person for eternal destruction, totally apart from any consideration of his volitional choices.
3. While God predestines the positive for being conformed to the image of His Son, He predestines no one for any other eternal destiny.
4. No passage of Scripture can be adduced to promote or substantiate that erroneous viewpoint.
5. Due to foreknowledge, God recognizes whether or not a person will accept the invitation contained in the gospel.
6. Since that is the case, He is not required to send an invitation to anyone that He knows will reject the invitation anyway.
7. This is not to say that negative types are not exposed to the gospel; it is just to say that they will never believe, no matter how many inducements to believe, or opportunities to believe, they may be given. Rom. 10:14-21; Ex. 5-14
8. Therefore, some that are negative at God consciousness will never hear the gospel; moreover, even if they do, they will continually refuse to believe and make the salvation adjustment. Matt. 22:14

E. When it comes to the matters of God consciousness and gospel hearing, the overwhelming majority of the human race is negative. Matt. 7:13-14

1. The narrow gate represents positive volition at God consciousness.
2. The broad gate represents negative volition at God consciousness.

VI. Heathenism is the result of negative volition at God consciousness.

- A. Many fundamentalist believers have expressed a great deal of consternation regarding the heathen; they struggle with the reality that there are those who have never been, and will never be, exposed to the gospel message.
- B. Their fallacious presupposition is that people are heathen because they have not heard the truth.
- C. The Word of God teaches that they are heathen due to a rejection of the truth, to which they have previously been exposed. Rom. 1:21
- D. When negative unbelievers reject the truth of God, they are left with spiritual error, which manifests itself in religious apostasy and moral error. Rom. 1:21-23,25 26-32
- E. Their rejection of the light of the truth of necessity leaves them in the darkness of error. Rom. 1:21b
- F. Rather than change their minds, a segment of negative volition ends up actively suppressing the truth, fighting against God. Rom. 1:18
- G. This brings further judgment from God, which will manifest itself in the decay of their society and institutions, once he removes the normal divine restraints that have been in place. Rom. 1:24,26,28
- H. Since they chose to remove the true God from their frame of reference (FOR), God removes His restraints of evil and allows unbridled STA activity, which will eventuate in His active judgment. Rom. 2:2,5

- I. This is how heathen nations became heathen nations; it is clear that the truth about God was present with the eight that survived the flood. Gen. 9:18-19, 10:32; Acts 17:26
- J. Conclusion: the heathen are heathen because they have been exposed to the light and rejected it, and not because they have not heard the truth.
- K. However, God is responsible to provide the gospel to positive volition, regardless of geographical isolation, race, language, or any other factor.

VII. Case histories that validate this doctrine.

- A. Esau and Jacob. Rom. 9:10-14
  - 1. God chose Jacob before either of the twins was born.
  - 2. This must have been based on some knowledge that God had, or He becomes so arbitrary as to defy logic. IPet. 1:1-2
  - 3. Jacob was positive and Esau was negative, which accounts for God's attitude toward each of them. Rom. 9:13
- B. Nebuchadnezzar. Dan. 4 This man illustrates the fact that God will remove all hindrances to faith in those who are positive, especially human arrogance, which is often the chief obstacle. Dan. 4:28-37
- C. Nineveh. Jonah 1-4
  - 1. This historical drama demonstrates that God knows where the positive volition resides. Jonah 3:5
  - 2. It also illustrates that the failures of any communicator will not deter the plan of God, and cannot ultimately be the reason that people do not make the salvation adjustment, or any other adjustment after that. Jon. 4:1-3
- D. Pharaoh of the Exodus. Ex. 5-14 This man illustrates that negative volition will not come to faith no matter how many opportunities they may have.
- E. Judas. Matt. 27:3-10
  - 1. This man was privy to all that Jesus did and taught over the course of His 3½ year public ministry.
  - 2. Nevertheless, he failed to believe, just as Jesus knew he would. Jn. 6:64
  - 3. He had a perfect communicator, who was absolutely perfect and sinless; however, he failed to make the salvation adjustment and went to Hell. Jn. 17:12

VIII. Conclusions.

- A. This doctrine, when properly presented and understood, is not incompatible with any other doctrine of Scripture.
- B. The reality of positive and negative volition forms the basis for God's foreknowledge, which in turn forms the basis for the doctrine of election. IPet. 1:1-2
- C. It is in harmony with such doctrines as the impartiality of God, volition, unlimited atonement, sovereignty, foreknowledge, election, and calling.
- D. Since God knows where all positive volition resides, He can make any necessary provision to harvest that positive volition in the course of human history.
- E. Nationalism provides the environment for evangelism, and is one means that God uses to protect those that are ultimately positive. Acts 17:26,27
- F. However, as believers, we do not have this knowledge; therefore, we are fishers of men, and under the principle of evangelism we use doctrine as bait and fish for those who are positive. Matt. 4:19
- G. Not one fish that is positive will fail to be caught! Jn. 17:2,20