

The Doctrine of Heathenism

These studies are designed for believers in Jesus Christ only. If you have exercised faith in Christ, then you are in the right place. If you have not, then you need to heed the words of our Lord, Who said, "For God so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten [or, uniquely-born] Son, so that every [one] believing [or, trusting] in Him shall not perish, but shall be have eternal life! For God did not send His Son into the world so that He should judge the world, but so that the world shall be saved through Him. The one believing [or, trusting] in Him is not judged, but the one not believing has already been judged, because he has not believed in the Name of the only-begotten [or, uniquely-born] Son of God." (John 3:16–18). "I am the Way and the Truth and the Life! No one comes to the Father except through [or, by means of] Me!" (John 14:6).

Every study of the Word of God ought to be preceded by a naming of your sins to God. This restores you to fellowship with God (1John 1:8–10). If there are people around, you would name these sins silently. If there is no one around, then it does not matter if you name them silently or whether you speak aloud.

Introduction: The word *heathen* is used theologically to refer to those who have not believed in Jesus Christ. They may or may not have heard the gospel; they may or may not be open to hearing the gospel. They may or may not belong to a civilized or relatively modern society.

A question raised by many people, believers and unbelievers alike, is, what about those who have never heard the gospel of Jesus Christ? Will they go to hell? What about Muslims and Jews and Buddhists? Isn't their faith and sincerity enough to merit God's favor? And, how can we believe that someone who has never heard the name of Jesus be condemned to hell? How can a God who does this be a just and loving God?

Here is the **principle of heathenism** in a nutshell: if a person is positive toward God and willing to engage in a relationship with God as God is, God will bring the gospel to him. God will make certain that person has a chance to believe in Jesus Christ, no matter where he lives. However, if a person has no interest in God as He really is, then God is under no compunction to bring to gospel to him. And since God can both read our thoughts and He knows the end from the beginning, we know that God is just and fair when it comes to the presentation of the gospel.

This brings us to a question asked by believers and unbelievers alike:

What About the People Who Have Never Heard?

1. God is perfect justice. It is impossible for God to be anything but just. **Y^ehowah is righteous and He loves righteousness** (Psalm 11:7b). **I, Y^ehowah, love justice** (Isa. 61:8a). **God is just** (2Thess. 1:6a).
 - 1) As an aside, *righteousness* is the principle of God's integrity; *justice* is the function of God's integrity.
 - 2) For instance, righteousness would condemn sin and justice would punish it.
2. Many believers do not realize it, but it is God's justice which is usually the most important aspect of God to us. In fact, it is justice that is our point of contact with God, rather than love. We can depend upon our salvation because of what Jesus did on the cross; not because of any good thing that we do. Eph. 2:8–9
 - 1) **He saved us, not because of any good deeds we ourselves had done, but because of His mercy. [He saved us] through the cleansing of new birth** (Titus 3:5a).
 - 2) **"Do not be surprised that I say to you, It is necessary for you to have a second birth."** (John 3:7; BBE).
 - 3) **"Point of doctrine, and let Me emphasize this, that unless a man is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God."** (John 3:3).
 - 4) **Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness** (Rom. 4:3 quoting Gen. 15:6; ALT).
 - 5) **God presented Jesus as the atoning sacrifice [for our sins] through [our] faith in His blood [i.e., His death on the cross]. This was in order to demonstrate His justice when, by using forbearance, He passed over people's sins in previous generations. [In doing this] God [also] demonstrated His justice [to people] of this present time, that He Himself is just and the One who makes the people right with Him who have faith in Jesus. Where then is the [basis for] boasting [i.e., over being right with God]? There is not any. Is it by [obedience to] a law? Is it by doing certain deeds? Not at all, but by a law of faith** (Rom. 3:25–27; AUV–NT).
3. Add this to the fact that **God is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to a change of mind** [about Jesus, about God and about themselves] (2Peter 3:9).
4. People come to God consciousness in all societies, even when the political structure denies God's existence (China, for instance, is filled with believers in Jesus Christ).
 - 1) For a person of normal abilities, somewhere between the age of 3 and, say, 21, come to some knowledge of God. They have a concept of God; they have a limited understanding of a Supreme Being which they think about, but Who they cannot see.
 - 2) God consciousness is often reached by means of information about God (correct or false) from others.
 - 3) Sometimes, God consciousness develops as a result of observation and reason.
 - (1) The cosmological approach: based on human intuition and the law

What About the People Who Have Never Heard?

- of cause and effect (e.g., Aristotle's "the unmoved mover").
- (2) The teleological approach: the observed order of the universe demands a planner; the plant and animal kingdoms bear the mark of one designer. Developing a belief in chance or happenstance is the result of negative volition at God consciousness, wherein the thinking devises an alternate system.
 - (3) The anthropological approach: the person learns principles of right and wrong and derives from that the idea of an ultimate source. The Bible calls this, **the conscience bearing witness** (found in Rom.2:14–15, which reads: **For when the [unconverted] Gentiles, who do not have the law of Moses, instinctively practice [some of] its requirements, they become their own lawmakers, even though they do not have the law of Moses. In doing this [i.e., practicing some of the requirements of the law of Moses], they demonstrate that these requirements are written in their hearts. Their conscience tells them this, and their thoughts alternately accuse them [of wrongdoing], or else endorse them [for doing right].**).
 - (4) The ontological approach: the soul develops the concept of the ideal being.
 - (5) God, in some way, will make Himself known to man. Rom. 1:18–20 **For the wrath of God is revealed from Heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because the thing which may be known of God is clearly revealed within them, for God revealed it to them. For the unseen things of Him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being realized by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, for them to be without excuse (MKJV).**
- 4) The knowledge the unbeliever possesses about God extends to the specific attributes of His essence. That is, they may recognize God as being eternal, all-powerful, omniscient, perfect justice, etc. Rom. 1:18-20 **For the wrath of God is revealed from Heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because the thing which may be known of God is clearly revealed within them, for God revealed it to them. For the unseen things of Him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being realized by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, for them to be without excuse. Psalm 19:1-6 The heavens declare the glory of God; and the expanse proclaims His handiwork. Day to day pours forth speech, and night to night reveals knowledge. There is no speech nor are there words; their voice is not heard. Their line has gone out through all the earth and their words to the end of the world. In them He has set a tabernacle for the sun, and he comes forth as a bridegroom from his canopy; he rejoices as a strong man to run a race, going forth from the end of the heavens, and its course is to their ends. And there is nothing hid from its heat.**

What About the People Who Have Never Heard?

5. The Bible describes positive volition at God consciousness: **And He has made all nations of men of one blood to dwell on all the face of the earth, ordaining fore-appointed seasons and boundaries of their dwelling, to seek the Lord, if perhaps they might feel after Him and find Him, though indeed He is not far from each one of us** (Acts 17:26–27).
6. If a person reaches God consciousness and is on positive signals (that is, he wants to know more about God); then it is God's responsibility to make sure that this person hears the gospel of Jesus Christ. Because God has stated in His Word that He does not want anyone to perish (2Peter 3:9), we know that God is required to make sure that the gospel gets to this person, no matter who he is, where he lives, or what language he speaks. If God does not do this, then God is not just; and therefore, God is not God.
7. Believing in God is not enough. A person may believe in a Supreme Being soon after reaching God consciousness, but he must believe in Jesus Christ in order to be saved. John 3:7 17:3 James 2:19
 - 1) Not believing in Jesus Christ is called disobeying the truth in Rom. 2:8.
 - 2) Those who do not believe in Him are lost. 1Cor. 1:18 2Cor. 4:3–4
8. If a person reaching God consciousness does not want to know Him, then God is not under any obligation to provide the gospel for him (although God often does). When a person has negative volition at God consciousness, the gospel is said to be hidden from him. 2Cor. 4:3–4
9. God does not violate our volition. Acts 14:16
 - 1) Let me add that, God does often exert some natural pressure upon us. This is still respecting our volition. This may be best understood in the relationship between a parent and an adult son. The parent may put some pressure on the son to get him to respond in a particular way (withhold money, not co-sign a loan), but the parent no longer has the overriding volition on that adult son. When I believed in Jesus Christ, I was under some pressure and difficulties; however, many people have been under similar pressures and difficulties and they did not believe in Him. So, just as a parent might exert influence over an adult son in several ways to help guide his son into making a good decision, this influence may or may not result in the son changing his mind about anything.
 - 2) So, we have many instances in the Bible of people being sick and healed by Jesus; or Paul meeting Jesus in the desert. However, in none of these instances did God reach into that person's volition and change him from positive to negative.
10. If a person never reaches God consciousness—because he dies in infancy or his I.Q. is too low to understand the concept of God—then that person is automatically saved, because there is no issue of volition involved. 2Sam. 12:19–23 (where David speaks of his deceased infant, saying, **“He will not come to me; I will go to him.”**)
 - 1) As an aside, it is our volition which is key, not how good or how bad we are. You can be born into an environment which has led you into crime,

What About the People Who Have Never Heard?

into prostitution, into drug addiction, into homosexuality or into alcoholism—it does not matter. If you throw up these positive signals to God, then God must see to it that you receive the gospel of Jesus Christ (that Christ died for our sins and that we may receive eternal life by believing in Him—1Cor. 15:3 John 3:16, 18).

11. The key to heathenism is not where someone lives or what language they speak, but their volition and God's perfect righteousness. I have heard stories of some Africans walking for days to hear the gospel which was brought to whatever corner of the earth it was that they were living in. How did they find out about a missionary who was speaking? God made certain that those on positive signals were given this opportunity. God made certain that they heard the gospel.
12. Missionaries—good and bad—have gone out all over the earth, to every nook and cranny of this planet, again and again and again. They have learned languages which are known by a few hundred people; and they have given to gospel to such people in their language. And people do respond to the gospel.
 - 1) Let's go back and tie this into what we have already learned: when a [client nation](#) provides missionaries that go out and give the gospel of Jesus Christ, then God respects and protects that national entity.
 - 2) When a missionary goes out to some remote geographical area, God both protects the missionary and protects the people who respond to the gospel.
 - 3) In the [laws of divine establishment](#), we have talked about the importance of nationalism, and this is because God deals with people corporately (as well as individually). When God deals with a group, it is helpful that group is some sort of an independent entity (like a city or state).
 - 4) Islam, which wants to establish one nation under sharia law all over the world, would be acting in opposition to God's plan. Internationalists who want to establish one single nation or a government over all nations are acting at cross-purposes with God's plan. Our only true defense against Islam is the gospel of Jesus Christ.
13. The book of Jonah is about missionary activity when Israel was a client nation to God. Assyrians were positive toward God at God consciousness. The Assyrians were hated by the Jews and by Jonah. God told Jonah to go evangelize the Assyrians and Jonah went in the opposite direction. God turned him around, John proclaimed God's judgment to the Assyrians, and, much to his chagrin, the Assyrians believed in his God, Y^ehowah. Jonah was all in favor of God judging these Assyrians harshly; he did not like at all that God forgave them and regenerated them.
 - 1) As an aside, one of the things I worried about as a new believer was being called to the mission field. I had absolutely no interest in this. Those who are pastors, those who are evangelists and those who are called to the mission field make up a small percentage of believers. There are all kinds of spiritual gifts. The spiritual gift (or gifts) given to us by God at salvation is going to be compatible with who we are.

What About the People Who Have Never Heard?

- 2) As another aside, being a successful evangelist has absolutely nothing to do with numbers. That is, Billy Graham of the previous generation may have spoken to millions in his lifetime, and millions believed in Jesus Christ as a result. He is no more successful than a similarly motivated evangelist today who speaks to hundreds and has a handful of converts every year. God provides the hearers and the venues, and the evangelist and the missionary are to do what God expects of them. If the evangelist faces a crowd of people who were positive at God consciousness but will reject the gospel of Jesus Christ, that is not the responsibility of the evangelist.
 - 3) The same thing is true of the pastor-teacher. You may have a small but relatively faithful congregation of 20 or 30; and there may be a 1000. Your faithfulness in studying and teaching is key; the response of the congregation depends upon their volition.
14. What about the true believer in Buddhism or Islam? Don't they get some sort of credit? Isn't this positive volition? Jesus Christ died for our sins; our righteousness is based 100% upon Jesus Christ; not upon any meritorious thing that we do. We are given God's righteousness based upon our non-meritorious faith in His Son. We do not earn salvation; we do not work for salvation; it is a free gift of God. Buddha did not die for our sins; Mohammed did not die for our sins. These men did not represent God; and their teachings which have come down to us do not represent the thinking of God. There is not some sort of a point system and someone who is really dedicated to God (in whatever way that he perceives God to be) is saved. That would be works. Quite obviously, in the teaching of Islam, a really dedicated person might blow himself up along with a dozen innocent people who are near him. This is clearly a work of Satan and not of God (Matt. 7:16). Unbelievers hear a lot of things, and if they are negative toward the gospel of Jesus Christ, they after often drawn into some other false religion. **Go in through the narrow gate, for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and many there are who go in through it. Because narrow is the gate and constricted is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it. Beware of false prophets who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves** (Matt. 7:13–15 MKJV).
15. There is also the issue of accuracy in evangelism. Even some of the greatest evangelists do not always get the gospel right. They want those in the audience to raise their hands, to come forward, to be baptized, to ask Jesus into their hearts (which takes Rev. 3:20 completely out of context). None of those things save. We can only be saved by what the Bible teaches us: **Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved** (John 3:16, 18, 36). What often happens is, God the Holy Spirit, despite the confusing things that the evangelist says, makes it clear that we must believe in Jesus Christ. Somehow, in our muddled unsaved mind, we do this, and we are saved.
- 1) It is the Holy Spirit that convinces us of sin, because we have not believed in Jesus Christ. John 16:8–9
 - 2) The mechanics appear to be that the Holy Spirit acts as our human spirit

What About the People Who Have Never Heard?

- and reveals to us the truth of the gospel. For who among men knows the things of a man except the spirit of man within him? So also no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God (1Cor. 2:11 MKJV). But the natural man [lit., *the soulish man*] does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned (1Cor. 2:14 MKJV).
- 3) Just as our souls help us to understand other people and our environment around us; it is the human spirit which is the storage area for information about God and our relationship to God. The unsaved man (the *soulish man*) is dichotomous, having only a body and a soul (1Cor. 2:11, 14). The Bible often speaks of the unregenerate as being dead (Eph. 2:1 Col. 2:13). What is dead is the human spirit, as unbelievers obviously have functioning bodies and souls. The saved man has a body, soul and spirit (1Thess. 5:23). See also Heb. 4:12
 - 4) Since the first information that we receive about God and our relationship to Him, is the gospel, and since we do not have a human spirit as an unbeliever, the Holy Spirit therefore would act as our human spirit, and reveal the gospel to us.
 - 5) Then part of being born again (or, *born from above*), also called a *new creation*, would be that the human spirit is made alive. John 1:13 3:2–12 2Cor. 5:17 Gal. 6:15 Titus 3:5 1John 5:1
16. So, a person who has never heard the gospel (and there are very few who have not), is not a heathen because he has not heard, but because he had no interest in God when he developed limited cognizance of Who God is. God's righteousness is not violated for not bringing the gospel to someone who will reject it.

Some of this doctrine came from <http://www.versebyverse.org/doctrine/heathen.html> (which doctrine has been reproduced below).

DOCTRINE OF HEATHENISM AND GOD-CONSCIOUSNESS

December 30, 1986

From: <http://www.versebyverse.org/doctrine/heathen.html>

- I. The nature of God-consciousness.
 - A. God consciousness is the state of awareness of the existence of a Supreme Being.
 - B. It develops early in life and occurs in all persons who possess normal mental faculties.
 - C. God consciousness can be developed via information about God (correct or false) from others; otherwise, it will develop as the product of observation and reason.

- D. Rationales which lead to God consciousness.
 - 1. Cosmological: based on human intuition and the law of cause and effect (e.g., Aristotle's "unmoved mover").
 - 2. Teleological: the observed order of the universe demands a planner; the plant and animal kingdoms bear the mark of one designer. (Belief in chance or happenstance is the result of negative volition at God consciousness devising an alternate system.)
 - 3. Anthropological: the principles of right and wrong which men are taught (and to which the conscience bears witness) demand an ultimate source (Rom.2:14,15).
 - 4. Ontological: the soul develops the concept of the ideal being.
- E. The knowledge the unbeliever possesses about God extends to the specific attributes of His essence (cp. Rom.1:18-20; Act.14:17; Ps.19:1-6.).
- II. The issue at God consciousness (Act.17:27a; Rom.2:7).
 - A. At God consciousness, man either does desire, or does not desire, relationship with God (Rom.2:6-11).
 - B. Positive volition at God consciousness and negative volition at God consciousness divide mankind into two camps.
 - C. God consciousness is also called accountability.
 - D. Man is obligated to satisfy God's righteousness (+R), honor Him (Rom.1:21, illustrated in Act.14:13), and give thanks (Rom.1:21; cp. Act.14:17).
- III. God consciousness and gospel hearing.
 - A. God consciousness does not save (James 2:19).
 - B. Those who are positive at God consciousness will believe (eventually) at gospel hearing (Rom.2:7,10).
 - C. Those negative at God consciousness will not believe (even if they hear), but will perish (Rom.2:8,9; 1Cor.1:18; 2Cor.4:3,4).
 - D. So volition is tested at two points, and it will always be positive-positive or negative-negative (Jn.3:18,36), never positive-negative or negative-positive.
 - E. The overwhelming majority are negative-negative (Mt.7:13,14 "broad is the way").
 - F. God never violates human volition (Act.14:16).
- IV. Heathenism is the result of negative volition at God consciousness (Rom.1:18-32).
 - A. When negative unbelievers reject the truth and righteousness of God, they are left with error and unrighteousness (Rom.1:21; cp. vs.18).
 - B. When they pursue unrighteousness, they end up suppressing the truth.
 - C. Their understanding ("heart") becomes darkened (i.e., unable to see the truth; Rom.1:21; cp. 2Cor.4:3,4).
 - D. They pursue error and profess themselves to be wise, but they actually become fools (Rom.1:22; cp. 1Cor.1:18a).
 - E. They distort the nature of God, succumb to idolatry (Rom.1:23,25), and remove God from their thinking (Rom.1:25,28; cp. 1Cor.1:21a).

- F. God removes His restraints as a demonstration of His judgment against them, and permits them to pursue lusts from their STA (sinful trend of Adam; Rom.1:24).
 - G. They degenerate to the pursuit of unnatural sexual activity (lesbianism and homosexuality, Rom. 1:24,26,27), thus incurring the disapproval of their own society.
 - H. God judges them for their violation of Divine Institution #2 (marriage) and His natural order with sexually transmitted diseases, like AIDS (Rom. 1:27).
 - I. God further judges them for their rejection of Him by permitting them to become further depraved via all sorts of sinful activity, thus receiving the further condemnation of their own society (Rom.1:28-31).
 - J. They become totally depraved in that they approve of activity they know has been condemned (Rom.1:32).
 - K. When a whole society degenerates into Heathenism because of negative volition and either the absence or the removal of any righteous persons, God destroys it (Gen.6:5-7,13; 18:20-19:25); the conquest of Canaan (cp. Gen.15:16b; Rev.18).
- V. God consciousness and the problem of the heathen (Jer.23:23; Act.17:27).
- A. What about the people who have never heard or apparently never heard?
 - B. To those who are negative at GC, God is under no obligation to give them a gospel hearing (they never heard of Christ and went to hell!).
 - C. For those positive at GC, God preserves them alive to hear the gospel (cp. Jonah.1:1,2; 3:4-10; 4:2).
 - D. So regardless of geographical isolation, race, language, or any other factor, God will provide the gospel.
 - E. Conclusion: the heathen are heathen because they are negative (Rom.1:18,19).
- VI. Not even one person who is positive at God consciousness will fail to believe (Jn.17:2 "Even as You have given Him authority over all mankind, that to all You have given Him, He may give eternal life"; cp. 1Tim.2:4; 2Pet.3:9).
- VII. The problem of the rich (Mk.10:23-27), and the stumbling blocks.
- A. Among both rich and poor there are those who are positive at God consciousness (Ps.49:1,2).
 - B. Jesus is referring to the positive rich only in Mk.10:23.
 - C. But wealth is a stumbling block to his faith in Christ.
 - D. So he must become a pauper before he will believe.
 - E. God will intervene and remove it.
 - F. God has this right (Ps.50:12 "the world is Mine, and all it contains").
 - G. For the man to remain wealthy would cause him to stumble over it and go to hell.
 - H. So God does what is impossible for the man himself, and the rich man enters the kingdom poor (go sell and give to the poor).
 - I. Case histories.

1. Nebuchadnezzar (Dan.4).
 2. The rich young ruler (Mk.10).
- J. The Pharaoh of the Exodus illustrates the antithesis.
- K. Principle: whatever the stumbling block between the individual and faith in Christ, God will remove it (see Mk.9:43-48).
1. No one would voluntarily cut off his hand or foot, or gouge out his eye.
 2. But the Lord will remove any stumbling block.
 3. No one will stumble over anything and go to hell.
 4. Only negative volition leads to hell.
- VIII. Evangelism and God consciousness.
- A. Nationalism provides the environment for evangelism (Act.17:26,27).
 - B. Evangelism has occurred in every generation and dispensation (Act.17:6; Col.1:6; 1Tim.3:16).
 1. Evangelism in Noah's day.
 2. In the day of Moses (Rahab).
 - C. The church is the institution of evangelism today (Mt.28:16; make disciples of all nations).
 - D. The figure of speech is fishers of men (nations are the lakes and ponds and streams).
 - E. Not one fish positive at God consciousness will go uncaught (Jn.17:2,20-22).
- IX. The verb of positive volition at God consciousness is zhte,w (zeteo, seek; (Act.17:26,27; Rom.2:7).
- X. Application of certain doctrines.
- A. Doctrine of the Integrity of God. God is impartial (Rom.2:11).
 - B. Doctrine of unlimited atonement (Christ died for all; 2Cor.5:14,15,19; 1Tim.2:6; 4:10; Ti.2:11; Heb.2:9; 1Jn.2:2).
 - C. Doctrine of divine sovereignty applied (2Pet.3:9).
 - D. Doctrine of Election and Calling.

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Let me also suggest the booklet [Heathenism](#) available without cost from R. B. Thieme, Jr. Ministries (713-621-3740)