

Foxhole Religion

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An old expression says that there are no atheists in foxholes. It conveys the idea that when we are in a position of danger or peril, or even a period of great stress, we have a tendency to look to someone greater than ourselves for help. It usually takes the form of, "God if you will get me out of this, I promise that I will..." We hope to be able to strike a deal with God in order to preserve ourselves.

When I was in seminary, one of my professors related an incident that occurred to him. He was a Gunners Mate on a ship in World War II. He saw an enemy plane drop its torpedo. The plane was shot down, but the torpedo continued its course toward the ship directly under this young sailor's battle station. He knew that if the torpedo detonated below him, he would surely die. In desperation he cried, "Lord if you will get me out of this, I promise to go into the ministry!" He watched as the weapon came closer and closer, then passed beneath the ship without striking its target. True to his word, after he was discharged from the Navy, he entered seminary and the ministry.

One reason we do this is because during these times, we have little or no control over the situation. By bargaining in this manner, we feel that we can to some degree control events. By invoking God's intervention in our favor, we have to a degree taken control of our own destiny. At the same time, most of us sincerely hope that there is someone greater than ourselves who is interested in what happens to us and cares for us.

The good news is that God does love us and is concerned with what happens to us. The bad news is that, for the most part, God is not open to negotiations on these items. Why my professor was spared is a mystery. Many others make similar offers to God without the same happy result. Does this mean God cares more for some than others? I don't think so. The Bible teaches that He cares for all of us equally. We simply cannot understand why one person is spared and another is not.

While we cannot control to a great degree the time or place of our own demise, one thing we can control is whether or not we are spiritually prepared when that time arrives. Just as we would not expect anyone to wait until they are on the battlefield to prepare himself for combat, we should not expect anyone to wait until the time of their death to prepare to die. The longer we train for conflict with enemy forces, the more ably we can face them when the time comes. In the same way, the longer we prepare ourselves spiritually, the more we are able to face our time of death without fear and with the assurance of how and where we will spend eternity.

While I hope none of us are faced with a premature or untimely death, the reality is that each of us will face death eventually. Since we do not know the time or date of its arrival, we have the responsibility of being prepared when it comes. We should not rely on being able to make "battlefield bargains." Instead, we should take whatever measures are necessary to begin preparing now, so that when the time of our departure is at hand, we are able to enter into eternity with the assurance of everlasting peace with God.

Semper Fi in the Lord and I hope to see you in church on Sunday.