DON’T FORGET THE PART ABOUT THE SHEEP & THE GOATS!

by Jon Zens
Kindle and audio by Locust & Honey Productions (Adam Zens)

CAN WE PICK AND CHOOSE FROM WHAT JESUS SAID?

Many in our culture are sick-and-tired of people in church pointing their fingers at others and making judgments about who’s “in” and who’s “out”—and rightly so, for Jesus calls us to love our neighbors, not pronounce judgment over them. In recent years, the outspoken condemnation of the culture by many in the Western church has been countered with new voices that go in the opposite direction. For them, the pendulum has swung the other way where everything is positive and a future judgment by Christ is deleted from their story lines. In what follows, one expression of this position will be examined. With both subtle and overt language, here are some of the significant shifts they are advocating:

> They present things as if God is in redemptive relationship with all humanity, not just His believing people. To them, all are included in Christ, and thus the message of the Gospel becomes, ‘you are included.’
> They say that separation is a myth and a lie. People, they believe, have been told that they are separated from their Maker, but that is only an illusion in their minds. That lie that has caused their suffering and death because God has never been separate from them.

Of course, for believers indeed nothing can separate them from the love of God in Christ Jesus. But those in unbelief are in fact separated from the Lord. Paul designated them as “without God” (“atheists,” Greek, atheoi) in the world.

In the last judgment, there will be people “who do not know God.”
> They construct their view of God’s love in such a way that His wrath is erased from the picture. Because “God is love,” they suggest “and He cannot be anything other than love.” God comes against anything that would hurt His beloved humanity.
> They believe that humanity is in good standing before God just by virtue of being made in His image. Thus the positive, irreversible identity every person has is based solely on the inherent worth as a being made perfectly in the image and likeness of God. They deny that because people are sinful, the image of God needs to be renewed in righteousness and holiness through faith in Christ.
> They believe that the essence of the message is that everyone is already in Christ, they just don’t know it yet. John
Crowder asserts, “All humanity is fully included in Christ whether they know it or not. Faith is simply realizing it.” But what about those who openly pursue the works of the flesh as a lifestyle? The reply is given: they don’t know the truth, but the truth is they are home, they are just fine, and they are righteous and holy, whether they know it or not.

They suggest that ultimately all humans will be reconciled to God, and no one will be left out of the bliss with Christ. It is their conviction that there is a river of life not just in believers, but in all of humanity.

In order to maintain their views if the Scriptures challenge them, they must posit that the Writings cannot be taken at face value. For example, they do not see any difference between what Islamic terrorists do and what Israel did in liquidating certain nations as recorded in the Old Testament.

But to suggest that there is no difference between an Islamic terrorist and what the Israelites did seems to put them in the position of creating their own reality. There is in fact a chasm of huge proportions between what terrorists do and what Israel did. The difference is this: God told the Israelites to liquidate the foreigners, while terrorists have no direction from the true God to carry out their actions. Israel was chided by the Lord on those occasions where they failed to carry out what He told them to do. Did God not tell Israel to do those actions? So when the text says, “God told Israel to . . .” that isn’t really God saying it? Are they saying Israel thought God told them to do some things, but He didn’t really speak to them?

The God and Father of Jesus sent a flood on humanity because of their non-stop iniquity. The God and Father of Jesus sent fire from heaven on Sodom/Gomorrah because of their sin. These two events are cited in the New Testament as pictures of the final judgment on unbelievers. Jesus said that there would be a resurrection of the just and the unjust, one to life and the other to condemnation. Jesus said that on the Last Day the angels would separate the righteous from the wicked. These facts must be side-stepped in order to create their own conception of reality.

When everything is boiled down, important parts of the narrative about God and His actions cannot be taken at face value. The Old Testament, they believe, is unreliable in much of what it says. As they see it, those who wrote the OT left behind an understanding of God that was mistaken, and thus God did not really say and do all that is attributed to Him.

So they conclude that any depictions of God taking people out—“acts of violence” they call them—are not really Him doing it, but the wayward activities of humans. Wrath is real, they say, but it comes from humanity and not God. But such notions undermine the entire Old Testament narrative. Where will such logic stop? What about the Red Sea exodus? According to their line of reasoning, it can’t be God delivering Israel from slavery because many “acts of violence” came upon Egypt, the most decisive one being that the pursuing Egyptians were drowned by the release of the parted sea.

Cavalier statements are being made about what the love of God entails, and about what a God of love may do or not do. Unfortunately, the grid they push the love of God through ends up becoming a means of both denying the words of Jesus and the New Testament (NT), and justifying unfounded and dangerous conclusions.

A huge red flag should be raised as these voices parade their opinions about the “inclusive inclusion that Christ finished on the cross.” This flag is the acknowledgment that this “new revelation” which is “too good to be true” is coming from people who say, this is “very new to us,” a “recent journey.” Yet they boldly affirm that the atonement has been largely misunderstood until they have come along, and now they possess the “reality” others need to see. And what was the key source of their insight to the cross? A secular anthropologist/sociologist born in 1923, Rene Girard. More will be said about this a bit later.

In light of these notions that are leading others astray, I would like to take a selective trip though the NT and demonstrate that such ideas cannot be squared with what it says, especially with what our Lord said on numerous occasions. It saddens me to see how good people are swept up into perspectives that may sound appealing, yet are so at odds with the NT revelation. While going on and on about the “rebirth of humanity” in Christ, in an appalling way they chop out the many words of Jesus about judgment. It’s like something snaps in people, they embrace errors, and sidestep or discard what they know the NT says against it.

**THE GOSPELS**

Our Lord very clearly and repeatedly asserted that not everyone will be redeemed, and that there is a final judgment in which the just and the unjust will be forever separated.

**Matthew**

“Then Jesus began to denounce the cities where He did miracles . . . . ‘it will be more bearable for Tyre and Sidon on the day of judgment than for you’ . . . . ‘it will be more bearable for Sodom on the day of judgment than for you.’”

“No,” He answered, ‘let both grow until the harvest. Then I will tell the harvesters: First collect the weeds and tie them in bundles to be burned, then gather the wheat and bring it into my barn.”

“The harvest,” Jesus said, “is the end of the age, and the harvesters are angels . . . . They will weed out of His kingdom
“The Gospel is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.”

— Paul of Tarsus

everything that causes sin and all who do evil. They will throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and grinding of teeth. Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. The ones with ears, let them hear."

“This is how it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come and separate the wicked from the righteous . . . .”

Mark

“If anyone is ashamed of Me and My words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of them when He comes in His Father’s glory with the holy angels.”

Luke

“But when you enter a town and are not welcomed . . . . I tell you, it will be more bearable on that day for Sodom than for that town.”

With the destruction of Jerusalem and its Temple in view, which came to pass in 70 AD, Jesus said, “Because of this, God in His wisdom said, ‘I will send Israel prophets and apostles, some of whom they will kill and others they will persecute.’ Therefore this generation will be held responsible for the blood of all the prophets that has been shed since the beginning of the world, from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah, who was killed between the altar and the sanctuary. Yes, I tell you, this generation will be held responsible for it all.”

And why in particular was the judgment against Israel so harsh and brutal from 66 - 70 AD? Because of how they severely mistreated Jesus, the Son of God. As Jesus told the story of the landowners in Matthew’s Gospel, “Last of all, He sent His Son to them [the Jews]. ‘They will respect My Son,’ He said. But when the tenants saw the Son, they said to one another, ‘This is the heir. Come, let us kill Him and take His inheritance.’ So they took Him and threw Him out of the vineyard and killed Him . . . . Therefore the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit. The one who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces, but the one on whom it falls will be crushed.”

Luke adds Jesus saying, “the vineyard owner will come and kill those tenants and give the vineyard to others.” As God had spoken in a Psalm, “Kiss the Son, lest He be angry and you be destroyed in your way.”

“Or those eighteen who died when the tower in Siloam fell on them -- do you think they were more guilty than all the others living in Jerusalem? I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish.”

“There will be weeping and grinding of teeth when you see Abraham, Isaac and Jacob . . . in the kingdom of God, but you yourselves thrown out.”

“Just as it was in Noah’s time, so will it be in the days of the Son of Man. People were eating, drinking, marrying and being given in marriage up to the day Noah entered the ark. Then the flood came and destroyed them all. It was the same in the days of Lot. People were eating, drinking, buying, selling, planting and building. But the day Lot left Sodom, fire and sulphur rained down from heaven and destroyed them all. It will be just like this on the day the Son of Man is revealed.”

“The Pharisees devour widows’ houses and for a show make lengthy prayers. Such persons will be punished most severely.”

John

“Many people saw the miraculous signs He was doing, and trusted in His name. But Jesus would not entrust Himself to them, for He knew all people. He did not need human testimony about people, for He knew what was within humans.”

If everybody is OK with God and there is no separation of unbelievers from their Creator, then Jesus should have unreservedly rejoiced that these people trusted in Him. But He didn’t because He knew something was wrong within them. It would be similar to what Jesus said about other religious people -- “they honor Me with their lips, but their hearts are far from Me.”

John 3:16 gets a lot of air-time, but it would seem that some key points in the verse are often missed. What was said just before this verse is also pivotal, and we will look at that in a moment. God so loved the world that He gave His Son. For what purpose? “In order that all the ones who are believers will not perish but have everlasting life.” Two options are given: (1) those who believe in the Son and (2) those who do not believe and as a result, perish.

Then John makes it clear that unbelievers are separated from the Lord and are outside of His redemption unless they come to Jesus for salvation: “The ones not believing stand as condemned already because they have not believed in the name of God’s one and only Son.”

And what was proclaimed just before
John 3:16? “Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes in Him may have eternal life.”

What Moses did refers back to Numbers 21:4-9. Once again, Israel complained about their journey, “then the Lord sent venomous snakes among them; they bit the people and many Israelites died.” The people confessed that they had sinned and asked Moses to “pray that the Lord will take the snakes away from us.” The Lord told Moses, “make a snake and put it up on a pole; anyone who is bitten can look at it and live.” Moses made a bronze snake and put it up on a pole, and when any who were bitten looked at the bronze snake, they lived.

The snake was lifted up to resolve a serious problem and effect healing to those bitten ones who looked up to it. Jesus used this picture from the Old Testament as a reference point for His atoning work on the cross. The snake on a pole did not automatically heal all who were bitten. Only those who looked up (believed) were restored.

In Numbers 16 another event occurred where Israel grumbled against Moses and Aaron. The Lord asked them to move aside so that He could put an end to them, and they fell on their faces. Moses told Aaron to take a censer with incense and fire from the altar -- “hurry to the assembly to make atonement for them because wrath has come out from the Lord and the plague has begun.” “Aaron offered the incense and made atonement for them. He stood between the living and the dead, and the plague was stopped.”

The Lord Jesus was the “Lamb of God” and made atonement for our sins. If one carefully looks at the elements connected to “atonement” in the Old Testament types and shadows, it would be discovered that (1) atonement was necessitated because of people’s sin; (2) because of God’s holy reaction against sin, atonement was the means to restore the relationship; and (3) atonement was God’s provision for reconciling those who were separated from Him by sin. There are certainly many dimensions to Christ’s cross-work, but for sure He fulfilled these three crucial components of “atonement.”

There are some in our day asserting that God is only love, and that there is no place for wrath from a loving God. But they are not paying attention to what they know is revealed in the NT. John 3:36 —not too far away from “God so loved” —specifically affirms that “those who put their faith in the Son of God have eternal life, but those who reject the Son will not see that life, for God’s wrath rests [present tense] on them.” Unbelievers in their daily existence are separated from the Lord and under His wrath, until they turn to the Son. As Paul said to the Ephesian believers concerning their pre-Christ living, “Like the rest, we were by nature children of wrath.”

**RENE GIRARD’S CONCEPT OF A SCAPEGOAT**

These new voices (“new” in the sense that it is all new to them), taking their cue from themes in Rene Girard’s thought, have re-defined the key elements of Christ’s atonement. First, the thought of God being involved in the death of His son is replaced with a human-based reason for the crucifixion. In this construct Jesus is seen as a scapegoat to absorb human anger. They posit that humanity killed Jesus as a scapegoat to satisfy the wrath of humanity and that Christ’s blood was shed to appease the bloodthirsty appetite of humanity.

Secondly, the dimension of a God-required sacrifice is removed. They suggest that God did not require a sacrificial system, but humans did. Thus, in their scheme, the cross was not dealing with a sin problem.

There are some serious problems with these ideas. Again, they dismiss many pictures, promises and perspectives found in the Biblical record. What about the powerful type/shadow-picture in the Abraham/Isaac story? Christ and Isaac are the only two persons in Scripture called “beloved sons.” The son of promise is finally born after a drawn-out process, and then the Lord asked Abraham to sacrifice the young lad on a mountain (which might also be the place where Jesus was crucified). When Isaac asked where the sacrificial animal was, his father said, “The Lord will provide Himself a lamb for the burnt offering.” When Abraham raised the knife, the Angel told him to stop, and behold an animal was caught in the bush to take Isaac’s place. Hebrews tells us that Abraham believed that even if Isaac’s life was taken, God would raise him from the dead. There is no human anger happening on the mountain, no wrath of humanity present.

What about the prophetic portrayal of the cross in Isaiah 53? There’s nothing here about human wrath finding a scapegoat in the Messiah. This chapter is about the Deliverer being a sin offering, and the origin of His death is said to be God, not humanity. “Yet it was the Lord’s will to crush Him and cause Him to suffer.”

What about the prayer in the early church? What did they see happening in the recent events befalling Jesus? Indeed, there was jealousy, envy and politics going on as the Jews and Gentiles united to kill Jesus. But the brothers and sisters saw beyond the temporal forces and exclaimed, “they did what your power and will had decided beforehand should happen.”

Jesus’ prayer in Gethsemane makes it clear that it was His Father’s will for Him to end His earthly life on the cross —“Not My will, but Yours be done.” The cross was not rooted in human anger (although it was certainly present), but in God’s promise long ago that redemption’s fruition was grounded in the Seed
“This is how it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come and separate the wicked from the righteous.” —Jesus Christ

(Christ) of the woman, who would on the cross be struck in the heel by the serpent, while in the same act then crushing the serpent’s head.

What about the announcement by John the Baptist, “Behold the Lamb of God”? To the hearers, wouldn’t those words point to the One who was fulfilling the shadows in the OT sacrificial system? Doesn’t the Book of Hebrews teach over and over that Jesus fulfilled every aspect of the OT pictures of the future in the Messianic age?

When they assert God did not require a sacrificial system, are they forgetting the detailed instructions given to Moses for the Tabernacle? He was told to build it according to the pattern given him on the mountain. The blood sacrifices were central in it.

Rene Girard’s sociological observations about human behavior are fascinating, but certainly can be no foundation upon which to re-construct a view of Christ’s death on the Cross—especially when so much Biblical material must be disregarded or twisted beyond recognition to make the pieces fit.

Certainly no one in the first century would have interpreted Christ’s atonement in a way that reflected Girardian theory. This appears to be another of many examples where an alien human philosophy, which is not according to Christ, has come along and influenced Biblical interpretation. This occurred, for example, in the 3rd - 5th Centuries when the post-apostolic theologians were infected deeply with Greek philosophy, and in the 19th Century when a theologian like Charles Hodge was influenced by Scottish Realism.

It must be underscored that this claimed “new revelation” about Jesus’ atonement rests heavily upon the theory of a 20th Century sociologist, Rene Girard, born in 1923, who taught for years at Stanford University. Girard’s suggested “scapegoat” theme in human history—that individuals, clans, tribes and nations are always looking for someone to blame—becomes the backbone of their view that functionally removes God’s involvement from the Cross, and sees it as a the result of human-driven forces. Girard’s philosophy, as Andre Rabe notes, has become for them the lens through which the Scriptures are read.

In All Set Free Matthew Distefano presents a new way of reading the Scripture that will be new to many. . . . Using Rene Girard’s anthropological insights, Distefano creates a context in which to read the Scriptures that exposes the God of violence as human projection, and unveils the Father of Jesus Christ as the inversion to this human projection.

JESUS DREW LINES IN THE SAND

A time is coming when all in the graves will hear His voice and come out -- those who have done good will rise to live, and those who have done evil will rise to be condemned. What could possibly be the point of such speech, and the integrity of it, if in the end every person “lives,” and no one is “condemned”? In the end there will be a resurrection of the just and the unjust. The just will “live” and the “unjust” will -- as foretold in John 3:16 — “perish.”

“I know you do not have God’s love in your hearts . . . . You do not know Me or My Father . . . . You will indeed die in your sins . . . . You belong to your father, the devil . . . . You do not belong to God . . . . You do not believe because you do not belong to My flock.”

Girard-based teachers are telling their listeners, “Every man, woman and child is in Christ, they just don’t know it yet.” Again, if this be true, then how could Christ make such black-and-white remarks like “you do not belong to My flock” with any integrity? Jesus said that the words He received from His Father will “condemn them in the last day.” What sense can be made of this if everyone is reconciled and there are none to be condemned at the end of history? It makes a mockery of what Jesus explicitly uttered on numerous occasions.

Acts

Paul’s encounter with the Athenians recorded in Acts 17 is very instructive. He is repulsed by their idols, but used their “unknown god” as a spring board from which to talk about Jesus. Among these pagan religious people, he did not speak from the Jewish Torah, but began with creation and that they were the “offspring” of God, that is, made in His image. Because they were made by Him, he pointed out that their breath and everything else came from Him. In this sense, God was not far from any of them.

But humans being in God’s image is not sufficient to establish a reconciled relationship with God. Paul pointed out that those who worshipped the creation needed to turn from idols to the Living God. In the Gospel, “God commands all
people everywhere to repent because He has set a day in which He will judge the inhabited earth in righteousness by a Man who He appointed; He gave assurance to all of this fact by raising Him from the dead.”

The idea making the rounds that Gospel proclamation is to tell people they are already in Christ has no basis in the Book of Acts. Acts contains a boatload of proclamations to unbelievers and they are exhorted to believe in Christ, repent from sin and be baptized. No one is told to just realize that they are already safe in Christ. In Paul’s writings there is for believers a wayward pre-Christ way of life, and, after trusting Jesus, a post-Christ life in the “new humanity.” There is a vivid transition from being children of wrath to being new creations in Christ. In Colossians Paul depicted this change in his readers as “delivered out of the authority of darkness and transferred into the kingdom of His dear Son.”

**Are passages like this to be swept away?**

**Romans**

“In the Gospel of Christ the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith. As it is written, ‘the just shall live by faith.’ For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of humans, who hold the truth in unrighteousness.”

It would seem that the wrath of God must be factored in to the “why” of the Gospel. Doesn’t suggesting that His wrath does not exist remove the backdrop for the Gospel Paul received from Jesus Christ? Paul’s unfolding of the Gospel in Romans supposes that humans -- both Jew and Gentile—are separated from God and that sin is the issue that must be dealt with in Jesus Christ.

“But according to your hardness and unrepentant heart you treasure up for yourself wrath for the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, who will render to each person according to their works . . . . to those who are self-seeking and disobeying the truth, indignation and wrath; affliction and anguish on every one working evil, both Jew and Gentile.”

The wrath of God is not a pleasant subject, but to posit that it is non-existent is a very dangerous and misleading notion. To announce to people that there is no future judgment and that God’s wrath awaits no one, flies in the face of what is clearly revealed in the NT.

**2 Thessalonians 1**

The believers here were being heavily persecuted. Paul comforted them by pointing them to the future glorious return of Christ. He assures them, “God will do what is right: He will bring trouble to those who trouble you, and He will give relief [Greek, anacin] to you who suffer, and to us as well.”

And when will He do this?

He will do this when the Lord Jesus appears from heaven with His mighty angels, with flaming fire to punish those who do not know God and who do not obey the Gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, separated from the presence of the Lord and from His glorious might, when He comes on that Day to glorify His people and honor all those who believe.

To deny that there is a future judgment as portrayed above takes away the comfort Paul was passing on to the first century saints. To affirm that all are redeemed and no one will face a fiery judgment, maligns Paul for constructing a falsehood in order to comfort suffering people.

**Revelation**

If everyone is right with God in the end, then you would expect that reality to be portrayed in the final chapters of Revelation. But it is not to be found. If all are saved, then every one’s name should be found in the Book of Life, but there are names missing. The Bride comes down from heaven, but it is not a universal homecoming, for “cowards, traitors, perverts, murderers and immoral, those who practice magic and idol worshippers, and all liars” face a fiery judgment. The city of God is pure and “nothing impure will enter the city, nor anyone who does shameful things or tells lies, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb’s book of life will enter the city.” To believe that in the end all humans will enjoy the bliss of God is a human construct and a figment of the imagination.

**Matthew 25**

Here all humans have been resurrected and stand before the Lord Jesus. This is the resurrection of the just and the unjust. Note well that Jesus Himself divides all these folks into two groups, the sheep on the right and the goats on the left. After going over what they did and did not do to Him, Jesus announces their destiny, life or death. How can people have any integrity with a narrative like this and announce that all are safe and redeemed in the future?

There are those parading the idea that everyone was chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world. Such a falsehood is contradicted by the words of Jesus Himself, “Come, you blessed of My Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world.” The sheep were chosen before creation, not all of humanity, and certainly not the goats who
end up with the devil and his angels. There is a dimension in this story that is vital, yet overlooked. The typical assumption is that when people die they immediately go to heaven or hell. Their spirit goes somewhere, but their body remains on earth. But how can these ideas be squared with what will happen on the final day as depicted in Matthew 25? Jesus will separate humanity into two groups, review what they have done to Him, and then consign them to their destiny, "come, you who are blessed . . . depart, you who are cursed." Think about it. If these myriads of humans had for some time already been in a good or bad place, then Jesus' words would be superfluous -- He would be announcing to them what they were already aware of since they died on earth.

Given the pervasive emphasis in the NT on Jesus' resurrection and His Bride's resurrection, it seems better to see, as Paul did, that the dead "sleep" until the Last Day, when the just and unjust will be raised. Reflect on all the occasions in Jesus' teachings when His reference point was the resurrection to come, not one's personal death -- "in the resurrection, whose wife will she be?" In these words, He brings out the "remnant" pattern revealed in redemptive history. When the flood occurred, a small remnant was safe on the ark. Only a handful left Sodom before it was burned up. Elijah thought he was alone in the midst of a wayward nation, but God told him, "I have reserved for myself seven thousand who have not bowed the knee to Baal." There was only a remnant that returned to build the Temple in Nehemiah's time. When Jesus was born there was a remnant among Israel looking for the Messiah. The bottom line? Relatively speaking, only a "few" find the way of life in every generation, but in the end the Lord's Bride will be a number no one can count, and they will come from every people group on the earth. The promise to Abraham will come true -- his Seed (Christ) will be as the sand on the beach and the stars in the sky.

"The Aroma of Christ"

"For we are to God the aroma of Christ among those being saved and those perishing. To the one we are the smell of death; to the other, the fragrance of life." If everyone will ultimately have life, and none will cease to exist (perish), then what can possibly be the point of remarks like this? One could say that behind everything Jesus and the apostles said and did was the belief that humanity was divided into those who believe in the Son and those who will perish. And this is precisely what is stated in John 3:16—"God sent in order that all the believing ones would not perish, but have everlasting life."

"Perish," " Destroyed," "Burned Up"

There are several verses in the NT that some have suggested teach that the wicked are tormented in unending flames. But if the many key images used to describe the fate of those without Christ are closely examined, it would seem that "cease to exist" is a better description. Our Lord said, "Then I will tell the harvesters: First collect the weeds and tie them in bundles to be burned, then gather the wheat and bring it into my barn." The weeds would not be burned forever; they would be consumed in the act of burning. Jesus used the days of Noah (water) and the days of Lot (fire) as reference points for the future judgment. "The flood came and destroyed them all . . . fire and sulphur rained down from heaven and destroyed them all." People were not drowned forever in the flood, and the inhabitants were not burned forever in Sodom/Gomorrah. They were "destroyed," that is, ceased to exist.

In John 3:16 the opposite of "eternal life" is "perish." When the Tower of Siloam fell on eighteen people and killed them, Jesus warned, "unless you repent, you too will all perish." "Perish" carries the idea of "cease to exist."

Check the usage of "perish," " destroy," and "burn up" in a concordance and you will see that "existing forever" does not fit the intended meanings of these words. The basic image of "hell" in the NT is gehenna, which was a garbage dump outside Jerusalem. The smoke from this place never ceased and the fire never ended because stuff was constantly thrown into it. But the individual objects did not "burn forever." They were consumed in the dust and smoke.

The Way to Life is Narrow

If every person will ultimately find life and no judgment, then what sense can be made of these words from Jesus? "Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it."
“Jesus said, ‘Depart. . .’”

“If any person does not love the Lord — let them be anathema [cursed]. Come, O Lord.” If it is true that all without exception will be “Blessed,” then how can Jesus and Paul affirm strait-forwardly that there are those who will be “Cursed” because they do not know the Lord?

“A Loving God Would Not Do That!”

Some people are throwing the God of love around in such a way that He is portrayed as thoroughly happy with all humans, all will be well for everyone, and everything will pan out nicely in the end. But it must be asked, What do they do with the many ‘unpleasant’ parts of the NT, like Revelation 19?

Before me was a white horse, whose rider is called Faithful and True. With justice He judges and makes war . . . . He treads the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty. On His robe and on His thigh he has this name written: King of Kings and Lord of Lords. And I saw an angel standing in the sun, who cried in a loud voice to all the birds flying in midair, “Come, gather together for the great supper of God, so that you may eat the flesh of kings, generals, and mighty men, of horses and their riders, and the flesh of all people, free and slave, small and great.” The beast and the false prophet were thrown alive into the fiery lake of burning sulphur. The rest of them were killed with the sword that came out of the mouth of Christ, and all the birds gorged themselves on their flesh. [Remember Jesus’ words, “Wherever there is a carcass, there the vultures will gather’”]

There is no point getting into the details here, but clearly we have the Lord Jesus with His host coming against evil forces. As He does this we are told that He is carrying out “the wine press of the anger of the wrath of God Almighty,” and that evil people are being destroyed with His sword. Are passages like this to be swept away or consigned to oblivion by some in order to maintain their conception of a “loving God”?

What about the picture given in Revelation 6? “Then the kings of the earth, the princes, the generals, etc., hid in the caves and in the mountain rocks. They called to the mountains and the rocks, ‘Fall on us and hide us from the face of Him who sits on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb! For the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand?’” Are such Scriptures as these to be edited out of the story because they contradict some one’s construct of a loving God?

We need to be careful about putting Him in a box by making statements like, “My God would never do that!”

The God and Father of Jesus drowned a sinful sea of humanity in a flood—and saved a remnant from it. The God and Father of Jesus sent fire from heaven and destroyed several cities—but saved a few from the conflagration. The NT teaches that these two events are pictures of the future judgment by the Father on those who did not “kiss the Son,” and therefore will perish in the Last Day. As we pursue Christ, have we made a place for God’s revealed judgments on the Last Day?

“Do not believe every spirit; test the spirits to see if they are from God...”

There are many angles which could address the errant ideas that I’ve dealt with, but the focus will be on what should be the one decisive perspective — what the Lord Jesus has said. Paul emphasized this in these words:

If anyone teaches differently and does not consent to the healthy
Greek, hygienic] words of our Lord Jesus, and to the teaching that is according to godliness, they are puffed up, understanding nothing, but are diseased concerning questionings and battles of words.

Those who are opting for no one being left out of salvation, and no one ever facing judgment, are flagrantly denying the clear remarks that came from the lips of Jesus. The Father put His seal on the Son, and told us out of a Shekinah cloud, “This is My Son, hear Him.” Christ said nothing except what came to Him from the Father. And what did Christ say as He walked along the dusty roads of Palestine? Here are several statements He made about the future, among many:

“A time is coming when all in the graves will hear His voice and come out — those who have done good will rise to live, and those who have done evil will rise to be condemned.” “This is how it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come and separate the wicked from the righteous . . . .” These sentiments highlight their new “reality,” but there is no basis from the NT to give any credence to such thoughts, especially in light of the words of Jesus that are just tossed to the wind.

“The truth is, all are included in Christ, but if you believe you get to subjectively experience the reality of your salvation . . . . Christ is in them, even if they don’t believe that Christ is in themselves, He’s there, just in a hidden way . . . . If I have an ‘enemy,’ I understand that that’s a ‘brother’ or ‘sister.’ They may not know it, but I can love them . . . . I can call even the unbeliever ‘brother.’ Spiritually, we are one in reality.”

I appeal to all of you to embrace Jesus by heeding His healthy, hygienic, teachings.

WHAT HAPPENED TO THE GOOD NEWS?

There is the possibility that certain readers may say, “What’s the big deal?” — “Why worry about this stuff?” — “Who cares what some others may believe?” I would like to suggest that the very core of the Good News (the Gospel) is at stake. The issues under consideration are not peripheral but threaten the heartbeat of the Good News that Jesus proclaimed when He came to earth.

Crisply, then, here are some of the key components of the truth as it is in Jesus that are being denied by the new voices:

> They say, All humanity was in Christ before creation. False. Jesus’ words to His sheep on the Last Day, “Come, you who are blessed by My Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world.”

> They say, In the Old Testament, we have a portrayal of God that fundamentally misunderstood who God is; it was written by people, so when it says “God said to Israel, ‘Cast out the nations,’” it was not God who really said it, and not everything attributed to God is from God. The true God cannot be
Among other examples, two striking ones are when Jesus’ Father sent a flood on humanity because of their non-stop iniquity, and when He sent fire from heaven on Sodom/Gomorrah because of their sin. These two events are cited in the New Testament as pictures of the final judgment on the Last Day.

> They shift the NT emphasis on the believing ‘new humanity’ to humanity in its entirety, whether believing in Christ or not. But Paul exulted in the fact that “God placed everything under Christ’s feet and appointed Him to be the Head over all things for the sake of the ekklesia, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills everything in every way.” Jesus lifted His voice to Father, “You have granted Him authority over all humans in order that He might give eternal life to all those You have given to Him. I have revealed You to those whom You gave Me out of the world . . . . They believed that You sent Me. I pray for them. I am not praying for the world, but for those You have given me, for they are yours.”

> They maintain strongly that any notion of God being separated from unbelievers is a myth, a lie. The whole premise of Romans is that sin has separated humankind from their Creator. These voices are out of touch with the Good News Paul laid out in the Roman letter.

The reason they have no place for separation is because they believe that everyone is already identified with Christ and in Christ. As a result, the huge issue for them is identity, not the sin of unbelief. Jesus, however, said that “when I send the Spirit, He will convict the world about sin because people do not believe in Me.”

> Because of their emphasis on identity, they must re-define repentance. It no longer has anything to do with sin, but becomes a change of mind about one’s identity. The lie of identity with Adam is exchanged for the idea that they have always been in Christ. Problem is, though, that there is no example in the NT of unbelievers being told to change their mind about their identity.

With all the emphases of these new voices, one would expect to see those who proclaimed the Good News in the Book of Acts to have said, “All of you are fine, you are already in Christ, so just acknowledge this and enjoy the salvation you’ve always had.” But there is nothing approximating such language spoken to unbelievers in the NT.

> Concerning the atonement, they shift the focus from “a sin problem” and re-cast it into Rene Girard’s theories. God is removed from involvement in the cross, and it is made into a vengeful act of humans against an innocent man, who became the “scapegoat.” But in the Garden of Gethsemane the sole issue for Jesus was “Father’s will.” It was not about human violence or human volition. It was “Your will be done.”

There is a monumental shift in their thinking from sure judgment for those who do not obey the Gospel to no judgment for anyone. To them, the “Good News” can be good only if no one faces judgment on the Last Day. But it is not for us to define the “good,” rather it is for us to submit to how He has defined the outworking of the Good News. Clearly, what came from the lips of Jesus Christ portrayed a judgment day in which, as He put it, “All the nations will be gathered before Me, and I will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. I will put the sheep on My right and the goats on my left.”

In all honestly, in light of these glaring shifts and re-definitions, what is left of the Good News as it is unfolded by Jesus and His new covenant apostles? A happy ending for everyone is an opinion some are embracing, but such a vision cannot be found in or confirmed by what came from the lips of our Lord Jesus Christ. Will we listen to Him, or to opinions shaped by a 20th Century sociologist?
For Further Reflection


For the past thirty-seven years, Jon Zens has been the editor of the quarterly magazine *Searching Together* and has devoted considerable time researching the New Testament and church history.

Since 2000, he has been a plenary speaker and presented workshops at House Church Conferences in Northern and Southern California, Atlanta, Georgia, Clemson, South Carolina, Central South Carolina, Denver, Colorado, Dallas Texas, and Jacksonville, Florida.

Since 1977, Jon and his wife Dotty have been involved in working with informal fellowships by focusing on Christ-centeredness and living in Christ-like love. Their work has led them all over America and into the Philippines, England, Romania, Canada, Ecuador, New Zealand, and Ireland.

From 1970-1975 and 1985-2000, Jon worked in three manufacturing companies in aerospace production planning, inside sales, inventory control, engineering support, human resources, purchasing and shipping/receiving.

Jon and Dotty have three lovely children and six wonderful grandchildren.

© 2015 Jon Zens