

## 051: Repentance and the Book of Life (based on Ch. 9 in *The Savior of All Men*)

When I first started my business career in Chicago, right out of college, I had the privilege of working with a woman who was near the end of her career and about to retire.

- Her name was Dana, and she was Lithuanian.
- Dana was from the “old country,” her family having fled to America just prior to Hitler’s invasion of Lithuania.
- I still remember her face and strong accent.
- Dana was a kind, gracious woman who was also tough — having endured much hardship in her life.
- But she was not bitter.
- The one thing that stands out, above and beyond, in my memory of this fine woman was her character and morality and love for Jesus.
- She read the Bible and prayed and went to church weekly.
- She often spoke of spiritual matters.
- I was impressed by her devotion to God and righteous lifestyle.

Dana was Roman Catholic.

- According to my traditional paradigm, that meant she would burn forever in the lake of fire in the afterlife, because she had not believed on Jesus for eternal life by faith alone.
- Dana’s religious beliefs led her to the conviction that good works contribute to one’s initial “salvation” (what we would call regeneration).
- I remember being perplexed as to how such a fine woman would have to suffer such an awful end.
- Was I wrong? Is there any hope for folks like this?

- What will happen to the Dana-types at the Great White Throne?

I intend to develop that thought in this episode.

- In a previous episode the point was made that, since Jesus is the Savior of all men (John 1:29, 4:42; 1 Tim. 4:10; 1 John 4:14) — not merely the Savior of those who believe on Him for eternal life — then the penalty for sin (singular), as a consequence of the sin nature inherited from Adam, has been paid.
- All have been reconciled to God through the death of Jesus Christ (Rom. 5:10; 2 Cor. 5:19), who destroyed the never-ending death penalty for all men in His resurrection (2 Tim. 1:10; Heb. 2:14).
- As a result, no one is condemned to never-ending judgment in death, and that includes the second death — which is the lake of fire — because the death of Christ paid the penalty for man’s sin nature inherited from Adam.

As glorious as this truth is, mankind still has a problem.

- Because we have all inherited the sin nature of our first parents, Adam and Eve, we all commit sins.
- The problem for man, therefore, is no longer sin (singular); it is sins (plural) that keep man from reconciling with God.
- Sins (plural) are the individual lawless behaviors that are committed by all men.
- Yahweh is righteous and demands that all men live righteously, so He can declare them justified (not in a positional, forensic sense, but practically righteous at any given point in time).
- But the tendency of all men is to sin (Rom. 3:9-18), so God foreordained that the death of Jesus not only paid

the penalty for sin (singular), His shed blood is also the means by which sinful men can find forgiveness for individual sins (plural).

- Without shedding of blood there is no remission (i.e., forgiveness), Heb. 9:22b.
- Notice the following verses and the use of the word sins (plural) in each verse.

#### 1 Cor. 15:3 Christ died for our sins.

- Heb. 9:27-28 As it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment, so Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many.
- 1 Pet. 3:18 Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God.
- 1 John 3:4-5 Whoever commits sin also commits lawlessness, and sin is lawlessness. And you know that He was manifested to take away our sins, and in Him there is no sin.
- 1 John 2:2 He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world.

#### At the point of salvation, when an individual reconciles with God by believing on Jesus for the gift of eternal life, all of their past sins (plural) are forgiven.

- Going forward, they have the promise of 1 John 1:9, that when they confess sins, God will forgive and will cleanse from all unrighteousness.
- Believers will face Jesus at the Judgment Seat of Christ to receive His verdict on their life — either inheritance or disinheritance — according to how they have lived.
- While this aspect of Christ's death certainly applies to those who believe Jesus for eternal life, it is not limited to those who believe *in this sense*.

- In fact, most of the world knows nothing about Jesus or His gift of eternal life.
- As we shall see, God can expect all men to live righteously, because His Son Jesus has provided a glorious benefit for the whole world, whether or not they ever learn about Jesus and the eternal life He offers.

#### According to Strong's the word *propitiation* means "expiation, the means of forgiveness."

- Eerdman's Dictionary says *expiation* is "a sacrifice-like action that removes a barrier of sin which blocks fellowship between God and people."
- Think of it! — Jesus is not only the propitiation, the means of forgiveness, for our sins (as believers), but also for the sins of the whole world (for unbelievers too).
- Of course, the overwhelming majority of people on Earth have no clue about this.
- Multitudes have never even heard the name of Jesus.
- How can they benefit from this in spite of knowing nothing about the Gospel and the eternal life that Jesus offers?

#### That leads to a discussion of repentance.

- On the basis that Jesus is already the Savior of all men, having died to pay the penalty for sin (singular) and providing the means of forgiveness for sins (plural), we can now clearly see the purpose for repentance.
- The traditional paradigm assumes that all men are on their way to Hell, where they will burn forever, unless they have believed on Jesus for eternal life, in which case they will go to Heaven.
- The last several episodes have demonstrated that the traditional paradigm is unbiblical and, therefore, incorrect.

- When this is understood, the purpose for repentance comes into clear view.
- 2 Pet. 3:9 The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.
- Acts 17:30-31 Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent, because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained.

Initial salvation (i.e., regeneration) is received by believing Jesus for His gift of eternal (age-lasting) life.

- It is not of works.
- Therefore, repentance is not required.
- When John the Baptist and Jesus, and later the disciples, proclaimed, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand,” they were not preaching a message of initial salvation by grace, through faith.
- They were calling the Jews, who were already believers in an Old Testament sense, to turn from their ways (repent) and return to fellowship with Yahweh, in the spirit of 2 Chron. 7:14.

I have some very sincere friends who do not see it this way.

- They understand that salvation is by faith alone, not of works, but they fail to see that repentance is not required for salvation.
- Consequently, they make two grave interpretive mistakes.
- First, they assume Jesus was calling Israel to be saved from Hell so they could go to Heaven.

- Of course, that dramatically shapes one’s understanding of the Gospels and how they should be preached and taught.
- Second, they define repentance according to its exclusive lexical root meaning.
- Since the Greek word *metanoeo*, translated *repent*, means “to think differently” or “to change one’s mind,” they assume works are not involved in this mental transaction.

However, words derive their meaning, not merely from the lexical definition, but from how those words are used in the text.

- Given the way the words repent and repentance are used in the Scriptures, the words cannot be referring to a mere change of thinking.
- Behavioral change is also required, or else genuine repentance has not occurred.
- Incidentally, numerous theological dictionaries that give the full meaning and usage of terms in the Scriptures make this quite clear.
- Citing those references is outside the scope of this study, but you can investigate further on your own.
- The point to be made is that, inherent in the meaning of the words repent and repentance, is behavioral change, and that necessitates doing something, which is works.

Thus, repentance is not required for salvation, i.e., receiving the gift of eternal life, which is by believing Jesus (faith alone).

- Repentance for the church-age believer is turning from continued sinning, resulting in restoration to fellowship with God.

- Assuming this is correct, what is the purpose of repentance, say, for Gentiles, that is, unbelievers — those who are not *in Christ*?
- Why does God desire that all come to repentance, which would include unbelievers (2 Pet. 3:9)?
- Why does He command all men everywhere to repent (Acts 17:30)?
- 2 Pet. 3:9 says it is because he is not willing that any should perish.
- We saw in a previous episode that to perish is “to be destroyed; to be put to death, to die; to be lost, to stray.”
- The word does not mean to go to Hell.

God does not want anyone to die while living in sinfulness.

- Why is that?
- Acts 17:31 gives the answer. He commands all to repent, “because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained.”
- God knows few will believe on His Son for eternal (age-lasting) life in this age, but all mankind will believe by the end of the ages.
- Nevertheless, because Jesus has retroactively paid the penalty for sin (singular) and has provided the means of forgiveness for sins (plural) for all mankind, He expects all men to repent and live righteously, regardless of whether they believe Jesus for eternal life.
- Those who ignore God’s command to repent and live righteously will be punished for their sins (plural) at the Great White Throne Judgment.

Isa. 13:11 I will punish the world for its evil, and the wicked for their iniquity.

- Nevertheless, the punishment serves a remedial purpose, for it is temporary, designed to bring the sinner to repentance.
- Like a parent punishing a child with the intent of teaching for future obedience and growth, so God, who is the Father of all men (Acts 17:28) consigns unrepentant sinners to the lake of fire, where they endure the purging fires of His discipline.
- This is true for believers (Judgment Seat fire) as well as unbelievers (lake of fire).
- For example, in the parable of the sheep and goats (Matt. 25:31-46) — which is a judgment of the believing nations remaining at the close of the Tribulation — the goats receive a verdict of *everlasting punishment* in v. 46 (which is called *everlasting fire* in v. 41).

We have seen that this is age-lasting punishment and fire, a metaphor for being consigned to the darkness outside the New Jerusalem, which means loss of inheritance and conscious regret (weeping and gnashing of teeth).

- This is obviously punitive, but it is also purgative.
- In fact, according to Vine, the word *punishment* comes from a Greek verb (*kolasis*), meaning “to curtail, prune, dock.”
- Punishment, in this sense, means “correction,” according to Thayer.
- Thus, fire can be used temporarily and metaphorically for corrective purposes.
- In 1 Pet. 4:12 Peter encouraged his readers not to be surprised by the fiery trial that would test them.
- Job experienced fiery trials and expected to come forth as gold.
- In Zech. 13:8-9, Yahweh announced that in future judgment — which is probably a dualistic reference to

the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70 as well as the future Tribulation — He will bring some of His people “through the fire, will refine them as silver is refined, and test them as gold is tested.”

- Thus, in both Old Testament and New Testament contexts, God also uses fire in His judgments — sometimes literal and sometimes metaphoric, but always temporary — to bring His children (in the broadest sense of the word) around to repentance.

Let's consider the logic of all this.

- Repentance is not required for salvation (i.e., regeneration).
- Yet God requires all men everywhere to repent.
- What, then, is the divine purpose for repentance?
- What benefit does it serve?
- We know that those who do not believe on Jesus for eternal (age-lasting) life will not be resurrected before the Millennium to meet Jesus at the Judgment Seat of Christ (1 Cor. 3:13-15).
- They will remain in the grave for an entire age, and will be resurrected after the Millennium to meet Jesus at the Great White Throne Judgment (Rev. 20:11-15).

Presumably, that is the judgment that Paul is referring to in Acts 17:31.

- God expects all to repent, regardless of what they do with Jesus and the eternal (age-lasting) life that He offers, because all who have not believed on Jesus for eternal life will give an account at the Great White Throne for how they lived throughout life.
- In other words, they will be judged according to their works (i.e., their deeds, whether sinful or righteous).

- Rev. 20:13 makes that very clear. This is true even for those who have never even heard the name of Jesus.
- Jer. 32:19 (HCSB) You (God) are great in counsel and mighty in work, for your eyes are open to all the ways of the sons of men, to give everyone according to his ways and according to the fruit of his doings.
- Eccl. 12:13-14 (NASB) Fear God and keep His commandments, because this applies to every person. For God will bring every act to judgment, everything which is hidden, whether it is good or evil.
- Rom. 14:12 So then each of us shall give account of himself to God.

Many traditionalists claim that those appearing at the Great White Throne will be consigned to the lake of fire because they never believed on Jesus, not because of their sins.

- But that is merely an assumption on their part.
- That is not what the text says.
- Again, Rev. 20:13 is quite clear that those at the Great White Throne will be judged according to their works (i.e., their deeds or acts, whether sinful or righteous).
- Keep in mind that those at the Great White Throne will have already been judged for not believing on Jesus for eternal life by being left in the grave during the entire Millennium.
- What a tremendous loss!
- They will miss an entire age of glory!

Whose names, then, will be found written in the Book of Life at the Great White Throne?

- It seems that those who fear God and live righteously have been written in the Book of Life and will avoid the lake of fire — on the basis that Jesus retroactively provided the means of forgiveness for sins (plural).

- We look now at two illustrations of this, one from the Old Testament and the other from the New Testament.
- First, Abraham’s nephew Lot didn’t always make the best choices.
- I often wonder why he relocated to Sodom.
- But despite my reservations, God says something commendable regarding this Gentile man in the New Testament.
- He was righteous!
- 2 Pet. 2:6-8 Turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah into ashes, (God) condemned them to destruction, making them an example to those who afterward would live ungodly; and delivered righteous Lot, who was oppressed by the filthy conduct of the wicked (for that righteous man, dwelling among them, tormented his righteous soul from day to day by seeing and hearing their lawless deeds).

Yes, Lot troubled his soul by dwelling among the wicked people of Sodom, but he did not live in the same manner as the people of that city.

- He was righteous. God says so.
- I have heard preachers and commentators compare Lot to New Testament Christians who have believed on Jesus for eternal life.
- They claim that Lot possessed the righteousness of Christ (via imputation).
- But that is an assumption that cannot be supported biblically, for Lot lived prior to the time of Christ.
- He knew nothing of Christ’s atonement or the gift of eternal life.
- Plainly put, Lot was righteous because he chose to live righteously.

- We cannot push New Testament theology back onto Old Testament believers.

According to Peter, God used Sodom and Gomorrah’s destruction as an “example to those who afterward would live ungodly.”

- As we saw in the previous episode, the destruction of these cities serves as a type of the lake of fire, the temporary, remedial punishment for those who live ungodly.
- Lot was delivered from this destruction because of his righteous lifestyle.
- Other examples of righteous Gentiles include Noah and Job.
- Notice what God said to the people of Judah through the prophet Ezekiel:
- Ezek. 14:13-14 “Son of man, when a land sins against Me by persistent unfaithfulness, I will stretch out My hand against it; I will cut off its supply of bread, send famine on it, and cut off man and beast from it. Even if these three men, Noah, Daniel, and Job, were in it, they would deliver only themselves by their righteousness,” says the Lord GOD.

Daniel was obviously Jewish, but Noah and Job were both Gentiles.

- The Old Testament picture given is that God does not judge those who live righteously, Jew or Gentile.
- Again, these Old Testament righteous ones knew nothing of Jesus or His eternal life.
- God’s verdict upon them was based on their behavior, which was driven by their fear of God.

- Could this also describe Cornelius (a Gentile), prior to his meeting with Peter about salvation (believing on Jesus for age-lasting life)?
- When Peter first met Cornelius, the apostle exclaimed:
- Acts 10:34-35 In truth I perceive that God shows no partiality. But in every nation whoever fears Him and works righteousness is accepted by Him.
- Cornelius obviously believed in God; although, being Roman, he probably did not have all of his theology straight about Yahweh.
- In fact, he may not have even known the name of this God in whom he believed.
- It's highly doubtful that Cornelius understood God as a trinity, much less, that Jesus is God's Son.
- Nevertheless, he feared God and lived righteously.
- How did this Gentile man know about God and how to live, presuming he did not have the Jewish Scriptures?

Perhaps we can gain insight from Paul's conversation with the idolaters at Athens, in his meeting with them on Mars Hill in Acts. 17.

- In their zeal to know God and worship Him, the people of Athens had erected an altar "to the unknown God."
- Earlier, Paul told them about Jesus and His resurrection (v. 18), but in the follow-up conversation (vs. 22-33), he did not urge them to believe on Jesus for eternal life.
- With these idolaters, he took a different approach.
- Paul told them about the unknown God.
- He referred to this God as the Creator and Sovereign over Earth and mankind, describing Him as a Spirit being who does not live in a temple.
- Nor can He be represented as an idol.
- Seeing that He made all men, "we are His offspring."

- Keep in mind, Paul said that to unbelievers, men who were idolaters.
- Pagan idolaters are God's children too, in a broader sense, for He created all men.
- It was to those very idolaters that Paul said, "God commands all men everywhere to repent," because a day of reckoning is coming, and He will judge the world according to His righteous standard (Acts 17:30).

He didn't tell them to believe on Jesus for eternal life.

- Apparently, they weren't ready for that.
- They might have added Jesus to their collection of gods, like the taxi driver I met in India.
- He had stickers of numerous gods and goddesses of India pasted around the perimeter of his windshield.
- I was shocked to see that he also had a sticker of Jesus — at least what some artist thought Jesus might look like.
- I said to him nonchalantly, "Oh, I see Jesus is amongst your gods."
- He responded, "Oh yes, He's one of my favorites!"
- At that time, before I learned the Scriptural truths that I have spoken about in these episodes, the best I knew was to give that man a gospel tract — the traditional Romans Road presentation.

But I now realize he wasn't ready for that.

- Maybe he never will be.
- To him, Jesus is just one of many gods.
- But that man has three things going for him, and so does the rest of God's creation.
- First, Solomon said in Eccl. 3:11 that God has put eternity in the hearts of all men.
- Presumably, that is because man has been made in God's image and, therefore, has been given an inherent sense

of something much bigger and grander than the mere here and now.

- The Hebrew word for *eternity* in this verse is *olam*.
- As described in a previous episode, this word refers to the ages in God's plan.
- Though man, outside of God's Word, doesn't know the details, he suspects — or at least wonders if — there is life after death.
- That thought alone should prompt him to seek God.
- So God has put eternity in the hearts of all men.

There is a second truth that should point mankind to God

- In Rom. 1:20 Paul points out that all men can see the invisible God's attributes in His works of creation, even His eternal power and glory, so that they are without excuse.
- The tendency of traditionalists is to assume this means they are without excuse to believe on Jesus for eternal life.
- But that is not Paul's point.
- All mankind is without excuse to believe in God.

The third truth pointing men to God is found in Romans

- Rom. 2:12-16 For as many as have sinned without law will also perish without law, and as many as have sinned in the law will be judged by the law (for not the hearers of the law are just in the sight of God, but the doers of the law will be justified; for when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do the things in the law, these, although not having the law, are a law to themselves, who show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and between themselves their thoughts accusing or else excusing

them) in the day when God will judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ, according to my gospel.

- Since all men have a God-given conscience, the entire creation knows the difference between right and wrong, even Gentiles who were never privileged to have the Mosaic law.
- That being the case, all mankind is without excuse to live righteously.
- Because Christ's death is the propitiation for the sins of the whole world, He has already provided the means of forgiveness for sins (plural), when one repents and lives righteously.

Therefore, on the basis that all men have no excuse for not believing in God and living righteously, I could have told the taxi driver what Paul told the men on Mars Hill:

- "Let me tell you about the one true God, the one who created this world and mankind.
- We are His offspring!
- He wants us to seek Him and grope for Him and find Him.
- To that end, He commands all men everywhere to repent.
- I would urge you to seek for Him, turn from your sinful ways, and live righteously, because a day is coming when you will meet Him and give an account for how you lived your life — whether wickedly or in righteousness.
- He is right now ready to receive you with open arms, despite any sinful things you may have done.
- He is a loving Father!" (See Paul's complete message in Acts 17:22-32).

I can't help but think that if a person believes God, repents, and lives righteously, to the best of his or her knowledge, God will give that person greater understanding and perhaps



greater revelation, maybe even about His Son Jesus Christ and the eternal life He offers.

- But even if that never happens, all are without excuse, nonetheless.
- For all will give an account at the Great White Throne, and the judge of the universe will determine how each one lived in this life.
- If they believed in God and lived righteously, even if they didn't have all their doctrine straight, or didn't know about the person of Jesus, I believe they will NOT be cast into the lake of fire.
- On the other hand, those who snub God's command to repent and choose not to live righteously will be consigned to the lake of fire for a period of refining and purging, until they are ready to bow the knee in humble submission to King Jesus.

Apart from this, what other purpose could the Book of Life serve at the Great White Throne?

- Dare we suggest that those whose names are revealed as written in the Book of Life are considered at the Great White Throne to be "overcoming unbelievers?" —
- that is, "overcoming" in the sense that they believe God and obey Him, and "unbelievers" only in the sense that they never had the opportunity to believe on Jesus for eternal life.
- This potentially includes all those who lived before the time of Jesus, as well as those after the time of Jesus who either have never heard about Him or have never clearly understood how to receive the eternal life He offers.
- We are talking about countless multitudes.
- Presumably, "overcoming unbelievers" will instantly bow before Jesus as judge and confess Him as Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

- All others who do not believe God and live righteously will be cast into the lake of fire.

I fully realize this view makes a couple of assumptions, but the assumptions seem to be the logical conclusions of the Scripture texts, quoted earlier.

- In light of the truth of universal reconciliation, we must wrestle with these concepts.
- To that end, I am proposing this theory as a possible explanation for what happens at the Great White Throne for those who believe God and live righteously throughout life.
- They never believed on Jesus for eternal (age-lasting) life, either because they never heard or never understood that message.
- Perhaps this explanation doesn't apply to those who heard the truth but blatantly rejected the message of Christ.
- That requires further study, thought, and discussion.

By way of illustration, think of Mother Theresa.

- As far as I know, she lived morally and loved Jesus.
- She dedicated her entire life to helping people, at great personal sacrifice and expense.
- Granted, she was a Roman Catholic who, to the best of my knowledge, did not believe that eternal (age-lasting) life is a gift of God to be received by faith alone.
- If she held to traditional Roman Catholic doctrine, then she understood initial salvation to be by works, and that is biblically incorrect, of course.
- If we are understanding her spiritual condition correctly, then she will not be resurrected prior to the Millennium, because she did not receive Christ's gift of eternal (age-lasting) life by faith alone.

- Consequently, she will remain in the grave for the coming age and will be resurrected after the Millennium, to face Jesus at the Great White Throne Judgment.

Will she be cast into the lake of fire for not having believed on Jesus for eternal life?

- Or will she be spared that judgment because her name has been written in the Book of Life, on the basis that she feared God and lived righteously?
- — not to mention, Christ’s blood atonement paid the penalty for her sin (singular) and provided the means of forgiveness for sins (plural).
- I wonder if she will instantly bow before our Lord, with full understanding at that point, humbly confessing Him as Lord.
- Or will she be cast into the lake of fire for a time until she comes around?
- The answers are not clear, but at this point, my mind opts for the former as more in line with Scripture.
- Granted, these thoughts go against the grain of the traditional paradigm, but we have seen throughout these last several episodes that the orthodox view on this subject is unbiblical, having been shaped by the Reformation.

I now have hope that my dear friend Dana will not have to suffer in the lake of fire, when she meets Jesus, presumably, at the Great White Throne.

- Seeing that she “feared God and worked righteousness” (see Acts 10:34-35), like Cornelius, will she be accepted by God?
- I would think that people like Dana will instantly bow in the presence of Jesus and confess Him as Lord.
- They will not require purging in the lake of fire.

- That is my opinion, of course, but I believe it is grounded in Scripture, and it is now the paradigm under which I am operating.

How sweetly I remember the crackling voice of my wife’s late grandfather — we called him “Pops” — as he recounted to me the story of the prodigal son.

- Tears were streaming down his face.
- Pops had just read the story in Luke 15 that very morning, and he was deeply moved, not by the son’s repentance, endearing as it was, but by the father’s open arms, ready to receive back His erring son.
- “What a picture of our great God!” he said, sobbing at that point.
- I could not agree more.
- The prodigal son story is not about the son; it’s about the Father, and His magnificent love and mercy, and His eagerness to be reconciled with sinners.

I realize Jesus shared that parable with the Jewish people.

- I know the prodigal son represents the tax collectors and harlots — the sinners in Israel who were humbly repenting in droves at the preaching of John the Baptist
- — and the elder son represents the legalistic scribes and Pharisees who proudly thought they were above repentance.
- However, I now believe the image of God presented in the prodigal son story can also be applied in a much broader sense.
- From what I’ve learned about God in my lifetime, and particularly during this study, I now believe the father in the prodigal son story represents God the Father, as eager to receive anyone who believes in God, repents of sins, and goes forward living righteously.

- Those individuals are accepted by Him, as Peter said of Cornelius in Acts 10, and God is no respecter of persons.
- Remarkably, this applies to all, not merely those who have believed on Jesus for eternal life — because He is “the Savior of all men, especially of those who believe” (1 Tim. 4:10).

#### How is He “especially” the Savior “of those who believe?”

- Those who believe in Jesus for eternal (age-lasting) life receive special glorious benefits, not the least of which is the privilege of being resurrected prior to the Millennium.
- If the book of Revelation is in chronological order, then all who have not believed on Jesus for eternal life will remain in the grave until after the Millennium.
- They will be resurrected to give an account to Jesus at the Great White Throne, having missed the Millennium, an entire age.
- Because of my traditional teaching, I used to think that all those who have not received Christ’s eternal life will burn in Hell forever.
- I now realize that teaching is incorrect, and I am relieved to know I was wrong.
- I certainly don’t want anyone to burn in Hell forever.

#### That raises an important point.

- Most evangelicals are opposed to what I have shared in these episodes, and from my experience, go into “bulldog” attack mode at the mere mention of universal reconciliation.
- I am shocked at how polarizing this position is.
- But I wonder if many evangelical Christians have developed the attitude of the elder son in the prodigal son story.

- He had a condescending, “holier-than-thou” mindset toward his younger brother and was quite upset that his father had not thrown him a feast like he had for the rebel child.
- After all, the elder son was entitled to more, seeing he had served the father all through the years.
- He even had the audacity to say he had never disobeyed the father’s commands at any time.
- I find that hard to believe.
- The father had to remind him, “Son, you are always with me, and all that I have is yours.”

#### Could it be there is an attitude of jealousy because we (as Christians) went about it “the right way”

- — that is, having believed on Jesus for eternal life and having dedicated our lives to serving Him —
- whereas these “sinners” simply clean up their act and get to stumble into the arms of God, if not now, then at some future point?
- Does that disturb you?
- Many evangelicals are relieved to know that those who live wickedly now “will have their day in Hell!
- After all, they deserve it!”
- It is only just, they think.
- I remember some years ago attending a conference for pastors and church leaders.
- A well-known Baptist pastor and seminary president was preaching about our need to witness to the lost.
- At one point he shared an illustration of an especially belligerent person who did not want to hear the gospel of grace.
- Frustrated, he said, “Then let him go to Hell!”
- I cringed. But I suppose the traditional view could lead to that — elder son syndrome.

I realize that most of those who are opposed to universal reconciliation stand against it because they believe it is unscriptural.

- I sincerely appreciate their desire to be biblical in all things.
- That is my desire as well.
- But could it be that traditional teaching has so corrupted our thinking that we have gravitated away from the clear teaching of God's Word on this matter?
- Our God wants us to have the same love for lost mankind that He does, for "the greatest of these is love."
- Indeed, Jesus commands His disciples to "love one another as I have loved you" (John 15:12).
- Perhaps this includes embracing universal reconciliation as God's plan for the ages and choosing to become a cog in His plan, loving others with a zeal to see them reconciled to God.
- Does traditional Christianity that believes in eternal conscious torment have this kind of love?

Another, less endearing image than the prodigal son's father comes to mind of the minister in the 1960 Disney Pollyanna movie, standing in the pulpit and bellowing out, "Death comes unexpectedly!"

- The minister was a doom-and-gloom, hellfire-and-brimstone kind of preacher, and the congregants typically left the service with a cloud hanging over them.
- The preacher's emphasis was continually on God's justice and His eagerness to condemn sinners.
- I also think of Jonathan Edwards' sermon, *Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God*.
- What kind of message does that convey? — that God is vindictive?

- One of the great errors of modern Christianity is to highlight one or more of God's attributes to the exclusion of the others.
- For instance, some emphasize God's holiness, but don't say much about His love — or vice versa.
- They emphasize His justice, but not His mercy — or vice versa.
- God is all these things and so much more — and His attributes are not in tension, but rather in perfect harmony.

Yes, there is a lake of fire, even though we may not understand exactly what that place or experience is all about.

- For that matter, there is even fire at the Judgment Seat of Christ (1 Cor. 3:13-15)!
- But the Bible also paints God as a loving, merciful Heavenly Father who has outstretched arms, ready to receive back sinners.
- As I now understand it, our loving God will ultimately reconcile all to Himself through His Son, Jesus Christ and His finished work of redemption on the cross of Calvary.
- Why would anyone repudiate this message?
- At the very least, why not hope it is so while searching the Scriptures with an open mind?

That leads to one final important point.

- One of the most vocal objections I have heard against universal reconciliation is that we won't see the need to witness to the lost.
- If God is going to ultimately reconcile all men to Himself through Jesus Christ, then why bother telling folks about Jesus, seeing they will ultimately bow before Him in a future age?

- I wondered about that too, when I started down this pilgrimage.
- But I now realize this mentality is shortsighted.
- Love is “the greatest of these,” in part, because love will triumph in the end, resulting in the salvation all mankind.
- Knowing that is God’s heart, it is now mine as well.
- I don’t want anyone to have to spend time in the lake of fire.
- I want all to know about my Savior and how they can serve Him.

I now desire more than ever to help others know how they can reconcile with God.

- Ultimately, I seek to share the gospel of grace — salvation by believing Jesus for the gift of eternal life.
- But I have learned that not everyone is ready for that message.
- At the very least, I can share with unbelievers the message that Paul shared with the men on Mars Hill —
- “The one true Creator God commands all men everywhere to repent, because the day is coming when you will give an account to Him of your life.”
- To that end, we are ambassadors for Christ, urging men to be reconciled to God (2 Cor. 5:18-20).
- Now I am able to do that with great love in my heart for fellow man.
- To God be the glory!
- I challenge you to THINK ON THESE THINGS