

The Judgment of God
Grace that won't accept "No"
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Editor's Note. After reading "Free Will, Part I and II", this reader had the following question for John. His answer follows. Jan Antonsson

Hi John,

Thank you for your reply to my question on "Free will." It was very interesting.

I have been reading a lot of your articles, and also articles written by other believers in Universal Salvation. I find I understand a lot of what is written but there are one or two subjects I am struggling with. For instance I quote from an article below that I read recently:

"We're talking about Love that "never fails" here. But we are not talking about NO PENALTIES for willful disobedience to the light God has given us. Christians and non-Christians alike will be judged for their works. And there IS a lake of fire reserved for any of us who opt for an "anything goes" and unrepentant life style.

God is no respecter of persons. So just because we've been "born again"

does not mean that we're automatically exempted from meeting with the just penalties for any unrepented wickedness we afterwards may do." (Jn.

15:6; Rom. 2:1-12; Heb. 2:1-4). End Quote.

John, do you agree that even Christians can go to the Lake of Fire? My understanding is that Christ took away our sins and any associated punishment or penalties.

What Charles Slagle says sounds to me like another form of Legalism, i.e., we must perform or else! Surely sinless perfection is not required of us. There must be many sins we don't 'repent' of before we die, even as Christians.

Please can you help me? Thanks, and Happy New Year.

Regards,
Greg (not his real name)

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John's reply:

Hi again, Greg,

I'm getting back to you for some hopefully helpful input regarding your question about what the writer, a dear friend of mine, meant by the statements you referred to. First, I think we need to clarify that the idea of Christ dying for us and dying for our sins, in the sense of Him dying INSTEAD of us, is really unscriptural. As I've mentioned in a couple of my articles; that is called the doctrine of "vicarious, substitutionary atonement."

In that view, God has to "get back at people" for sinning against Him, but since He loves them, He does it to Christ instead of us, and if we'll accept that, we'll go free. I could go into much more detail about it, but I won't at this point. You can though, if you haven't already, read two of my articles, "The Great Misrepresentation" and "The Atonement" (Links at end), which might help you better interpret what the writer is saying.

The death of Christ is not an "instead-of" death, it is a "co-death." Our old man (the font of sin) died and was buried WITH Him, rather than HIS dying INSTEAD of us. The totality of humanity was resident in Christ, and the totality of humanity's curse of death ran its course in Christ, so that IN Him, and WITH Him, we died, once and for all. Christ's death does not settle a legal matter as is conventionally taught, it settles what manner of man dies and what manner of man lives.

He effectively died FOR us by INCLUDING us in his death that we might be raised up by His resurrection into newness of life as a new person whose origin is from eternity when our true personhood was foreknown. Our true personhood has its roots in who we are in Christ. That is how we were foreknown by God before time began and before the lie about God and man was spoken.

That is how God continues to know us. That is not to say that He is not aware of the contradictions that cling to us in the form of the lie-constituted false persona that afflicts us, but that will ultimately serve to root us more deeply in our true personhood, in the Being in which "we live and move and have our being."

Back to the statements in question: The passages of scripture that Charley refers to reveal what he's actually talking about, which has to do with the correctional judgment of God, as opposed to the conventional view that boils down to a retaliatory vindictiveness on God's part.

Allow me to just take the one passage, as beautifully representative of all three and representative of what Charley means to convey:

"If a man does not abide in me, he is cast forth as a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire and burned"

(John 15:6, RSV). I will point out something in Jesus' story of the vine and how it illustrates God's relationship to us both in terms of supplying us with His life and dealing with that which is counterproductive to that life flow.

Very few Christians have read this marvelous story carefully and I was among them until the Spirit brought me up short years ago and caused me to see some things I'd never noticed before. At the heart of Jesus'

illustration is the picture of Christ as the Vine, the Father as the One who cultivates and cares for the vine, and we as the branches.

Probably the most familiar statement in the story is in verse five; "I am the vine and you are the branches." When the Lord began to open to me the meaning of this story, He pointed out that Jesus had made something very clear about the vine in verse one that must be kept in mind in interpreting the rest of the parable. He establishes something about the vine in verse one that colors His whole message and particularly verse five. We must not infer that the vine, as spoken of in verse one, is essentially dissimilar to the vine as it is spoken of in verse one.

In the first verse, He doesn't simply say, "I am the vine," rather He says, "I am the TRUE vine." Of course, there's only one vine involved in this whole story, so that when he speaks of the vine in verse five, it is the vine that He calls "true" in verse one. Now, if He is the vine and we are the branches, and the vine which He is, is the true vine, then the branches must be "true" also. We---the real we---cannot be branches in the true vine and be false branches. The branches are part of, they are one with, the vine. The vine is inclusive of the branches.

If you say that the branches are false, then you are saying that there is falseness in the vine, but that can't be right, because Jesus is the TRUE vine---pardon my repetition. If you'll check any good dictionary of new testament words, you'll find that the Greek word, translated "true" in this case, carries the idea of real, ideal and genuine. That is, anything that is described by that Greek word is the exact opposite of false, fraudulent or deceptive. It is true and thus it is not a lie.

I have, in recent years, been captivated by the realization that there is, in regard to all things, the truth and the lie. The truth is Christ and all that is true in and of Him, is true of us. He, the Truth, is our truth; our genuine ideal, our reality. There is a lie in opposition to this truth, and the fact that it makes an appearance and opposes the truth, in no way makes the lie true and in no way detracts from the truth.

The lie has no creativity of its own, it attempts to steal and use the divine principle of incarnation against the God of incarnation. God is the incarnating, incarnate God. "In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God-----and the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us..." (John 1:1, 14). The lie puts on flesh in counterfeiting the truth, but though it parades around, flaunting its perverse behavior, it is a lie and every manifestation coming from it is constituted by that non-truth.

By seeing this we come to know what is pruned away from the vine, away from us. We can then understand what the fire of God (the fire which God is) operates against and what it consumes. The God-fire, the Lake of Fire, the baptism with the Spirit and with Fire, consumes the chaff

that envelops our true being in Christ, and quite marvelously so, that chaff temporarily serves a purpose in the unfolding of the truth.

Three dots, so to speak, need to be directly connected in the picture that scripture draws for us of God: First, "Our God is a consuming fire"

(Heb. 12:29); second, "God is love" (I John 4:8,16); and third "Love never fails" (I Cor. 13:8, Phil.). So we can see that love will not fail to separate us from the lie we have been subjected to. Most essentially that lie has to do with the true identity of God and our identity in Him. God's nature, His "I AM" identity, is declared, manifested and gloriously expressed in the Christ, whose body we are. As members of Christ, we, with Him as our Head are the bodily fulness of God, and as living stones in relationship to the Chief Cornerstone, we are the living temple of God.

Paul is in total agreement with Jesus when we compare Paul's statement that "You are the temple of God, which temple IS HOLY" (I Cor. 3:16, 17, 19, emphasis, mine), with Jesus' story, telling us that He is the true vine and we are the branches. The temple of God, which we are, is holy.

That means it is separate from all that is sinful and unclean.

No matter what lie may be spoken about the temple, no matter if, for a season in the eonian dimension, the temple of living stones is partially concealed beneath a veneer of the lie, the lie cannot change the holy nature of the temple. In the case of the vine, God is cutting away what we are not, what is in contradiction to the vine's reality, which includes the reality of the branches---again, please pardon the repetition. We might say that God is cutting away sucker branches.

Charley seems to be addressing a situation that we often find among professing Christians, and that is the idea that, being in Christ, exempts one from the corrective judgment of God. Being in Christ, in fact, quite particularly qualifies us for the corrective work of God, which paradoxically has already been carried out in Christ; a completed work which we are presently experiencing.

That which God did in Christ is at work in us in the present, and though it's so hard to put into words, we are not going through it in

order to make it complete, we are going through that which has been completed.

Our experience does not complete it; our experience confirms it.

God's finished work in Christ is unfolding in us presently. I hope this has been of help. You are a saint, dear brother, and don't forget it.