

The Unchanging Will of God
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Editor's Note: John wrote this essay in response to a Scottish brother who questioned him about God's reconciliation of all, known historically as restorationism. Jan Antonsson

"John, thanks for sharing the restorationist teaching with me. I can see why it doesn't go down well in orthodox /traditional Christendom. No doubt you will have been asked this question many times by those of an evangelical mindset. Why have a gospel if all will in the end be saved?

Its like we're saying it doesn't really matter what you believe or do as its going to be all right in the end for everyone.

It's interesting that this subject has come up with you as I fellowship with a brother here whom I've known for more than 20 years in the Lord.

In Jan. this year we buried his 17-year old daughter who was killed in a car accident along with her friend. He is a wonderful brother who has borne with great dignity in the Lord, the painful loss of his daughter whom we had held in our arms as a baby and loved as our own.

Dear John, my point in having told you all this is that my brother has been going through a painful period of soul searching with regard to his daughter's eternal destiny. She was a girl whom you could say was open to the Lord but never displayed a public ownership of faith if you know what I mean.

"However some few months ago, he was reading the writings of a deceased German restorationist (now know as a believer in the reconciliation of all). The book was on the subject of our Living Hope not restorationism.

But when he discovered the author was a restorationist he ventured to raise the subject in conversation with me. However you had the sense from him that he was entering into the forbidden zone even bringing up the subject with me.

He is not the type of person to allow his experiences to dictate what he believes and I think he finally decided that in good conscience of faith he could not allow himself to distort his long held beliefs in the fundamentals of faith in order to comfort him in his pain. Apart from this struggle he has by his own confession experienced the direct comfort of the Holy Spirit through it all.

"As you can see John, some painful heart searching has been going on here with regard to the standing of those whom we love in the Lord.

These are deep and weighty matters, brother, which I personally have not felt the pressing need to resolve but I'm definitely open to hear what the Lord's people have to say on this matter. I can also see the attraction to embracing this Gospel as it makes God to be more benevolent and generous than some of the more mean spirited gospel preaching that goes around in today's Christian circles.

Brother John, I don't know you on an intimate personal level but I intuitively perceive that you have an honest heart and a sincere love for the Lord and His people. So brother, I offer you the right hand of fellowship. Good night and God bless. Love Ron. (Not his real name)."

End Quote.

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Greetings,

Yes, you're right; those of a conventional evangelical mindset, upon being confronted with the thesis of ultimate reconciliation often fire off that rather unthinking protest, "Well then, why preach the gospel if all are going to be saved in the end (or more often, instead of 'in the end,' they'll say, 'anyway'). My answer is, that regardless of when we are saved, we are saved by the gospel and each of us comes in our own due time. For some, in God's sovereignty, it is during this lifetime, for others it is "on the other side."

Again that raises the issue of the operative word "Christian" in "Christian Universalism." We do not propose salvation for everyone "anyway," we affirm salvation for all, God's Way, which, of course, is

Christ. The conventional (I refuse to call it orthodox) notion that death ends God's dealing with the soul, cannot be supported by scripture! The verse that is always exploited as supposed proof of a "no-chance-after-death" posture of God, is, of course, Heb. 9:27, "And inasmuch as it is appointed for men to die once, and after this comes judgment,..." (NAS).

It is presumed that by "judgment" Paul meant inescapable, horrific separation from God eternally. Well, the Greek word translated "judgment" there, is the word "Krisis," from which we, of course, get our English word "crisis." It essentially means decision. The thing that we cannot escape is the crisis of facing the unchanging will of God that scripture heralds in no uncertain terms, e.g., "God is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance." (II Pet. 3:9).

In judgment we are confronted with the determination of God that we be saved. At the heart of divine judgment is God's non-negotiable insistence that we must be saved. That verse in Hebrews is nearly always quoted without consideration with its context. The previous verse speaks of Christ being manifested at the consummation of the ages to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself, consistent with John the Baptist's pronouncement, "Behold the Lamb of God, that taketh away the sin of the world" (John 1:29,.36). At that point the writer continues, "And inasmuch as it is appointed....."

God's judgment, in respect to those who are lost, involves the intensification of the fiery passion of His love whereby He convinces the lost one that his enmity and alienation toward God are delusion and unacceptable and that salvation is not merely an offer, but, in fact, an inescapable destiny. The sinner, at that point, experiences the reconciling act of God in Christ, whereby He reconciled the world unto Himself, not imputing their sins against them (II Cor. 5:19).

Isa. 46:10 is so clear, ".....And I will accomplish all My good pleasure." Judgment is simply God's refusal to permit anything but His "good pleasure" to prevail eternally. The gates of Hades shall not prevail against the church, both on this side of the veil and on the other side. Jesus preached to the spirits in prison after His death,

and, I believe that we continue to minister to the lost beyond "this life."

The verse I alluded to in our last communication where Jesus said that He would draw all men to Himself (John 12:32), well, the Greek word there translated "draw," has the force of "drag," so powerful is love of God when fully revealed to us in Christ. As my dear friend, Harry Robert Fox, would put it: God's love and grace in Christ is so "attractive" that we cannot finally resist it.

I felt such gut-wrenching empathy with the brother of whom you spoke as he wrestled with the imagined possibility of his daughter being lost forever. It was because of a couple situations of that sort that forced me to "come out of the closet," so to speak, on my belief in restorationism.

When I was pastoring, on a couple of occasions, while counseling two dear sisters in the Lord, (separately) who had each been going through a time of extreme emotional duress, to which was added the loss of a loved one who had never made a profession of faith in Christ, I was faced with having to try to comfort them somehow, as they agonized over the probability that their loved one was, at that very moment, suffering agonizing pain in hell, and would continue so throughout all eternity.

I just had to tell them, that in spite of all they'd been taught, not only was there hope for their loved ones, but they could be assured that Christ would bring them to Himself finally. That prompted me to decide to be honest with my co-pastor and a couple of elders, lest it get back to them what I'd said to the two sisters in counseling, only to find some time later that they (the pastor and elders) couldn't handle it and decided that I must be demon oppressed to believe such a damnable lie.

I soon discovered, as I feared, that the doctrine of eternal torment is, for all intents and purposes, embraced as passionately as the Deity of Christ, the necessity of the shed blood and the reality of the Lord's resurrection. In fact, conventional evangelicals are often more passionate about defending an eternal hell than any other so-called

cardinal truth, in spite of the fact that the earliest creeds of the church make no mention of it, and it can be clearly traced to the cult of the Pharisees who preserved the idea within Judaism which had become contaminated by it during the years of Israel's captivity.

How I would love to be able to take that brother in my arms and assure him with the utmost conviction, that he and his daughter shall meet in glory someday, and rejoice together in the "marvelous grace of our loving Lord, grace that exceeds our sin and our guilt."

I must disagree with him regarding the supposed greater weightiness of the theology of men such as Calvin and others of that tradition. Calvin certainly, in the natural, had a capable analytical mind. But, he used his powers of deduction to extrapolate from heinous presuppositions.

Beginning with a go-to-heaven or go-to-hell reduction of the meaning of foreordination and predestination, he bent Paul's words to fit that scenario.

Paul's teaching of predestination makes no mention of being predestined to heaven or hell, but of being predestined to be conformed to the image of the Son of God (Rom. 8:29). That predestination, according to Paul, is based upon God's foreknowledge of us, which, in Pauline thought, clearly is a matter of God "knowing" us in Christ, refusing to acknowledge any false, temporary anomaly of persona and embracing that knowledge to His heart until we embrace it with Him. In Paul's words, "we shall know as we are known" (I Cor. 13:12, KJV).

Christians love to claim exclusive right to that predestination, but we are not the exclusive recipients of such love and grace, but rather, God intends that we be representative recipients, representative of what the redemptive heart of God has accomplished in Christ. G. Campbell Morgan said, "God does not choose pets, He chooses patterns."

From the 4th or 5th century on, the institutional church (by that time, already far departed from apostolic Christianity) went on the offensive with the doctrine of eternal damnation for all those who did not submit themselves to its hierarchical authority, which they claimed, provided

the only access to the saving grace of God. It was a masterful power-play. What better way to wield absolute control over men than to threaten them with eternal damnation.

The Reformation did not rid itself of that heritage, rather, though it did introduce a shaft of light into that medieval darkness, it fell short of revealing the true nature of the heart of our Father God. The most essentially erroneous assumption of the reformers was that of pitting God's holiness/justice against His mercy/grace.

Rather than understanding that it is His love that constitutes His holiness, they presented a conflicted God, who, on one hand nursed an attitude of petulant perfectionism toward sinners, while on the other hand, since He loved them, devised a way to satisfy His offended holiness by making His Son suffer instead of them. Yet, even then, according to that scenario, though Christ was made to suffer instead of us, that would not translate into salvation for any but a very few. Of course, there was the added confusion of Calvin's TULIP, i.e:

T----Total Depravity

U----Unconditional Election

L----Limited Atonement, (now that's a real winner-----Christ died only for the elect) I----Irresistible regenerating grace, (he was right there)

P----Perseverance of the saints, (right again, with the spin that those elect, persevering saints, [according to esteemed Calvinists such as the venerable Jonathan Edwards and others], would look down from the ramparts of heaven in eternity, having their eternal bliss enhanced by witnessing the torment of the eternally damned---he actually vividly and eloquently described such a demonically inspired event in his sermons).

What a mixture of truth and madness! According to Calvin, men are, in effect, arbitrarily predestined for heaven or hell, and though the blood of Christ, was able to save all, since God had predetermined not to save all, the blood was not shed for all. Now we today, in evangelicalism, have a refined version of the above, placing all the responsibility on man's "free will."

One old country preacher I heard on the radio, obviously quite self-satisfied with his homespun summation of how eternal destiny is worked out, said, "It's like this folks, there's three votes being cast concerning your eternal destiny. God's voting for you, the devil's voting against you, and you've got the deciding vote."

That's the refined amalgamation of Calvinism and Arminianism in its present form. Man's will decides the issue closest to God's heart, thus making man sovereign and not God. As you can see, I am passionate about this, but I do not allow it to separate me from brethren who do not see it yet. More often than not, they choose to separate from me, but that will not finally work, since God has made us one in Christ.

With unfeigned love,