

# Jesus Christ and the Lostness of Man (Urbana 73)

by Edmund Clowney

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*All the perversity that poisons human society springs from a deeper hate that we disguise and deny. We hate God, and we hate him because he is God: holy, just and good.*

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An old popular song tells it like it was:

*Don't bank down those inner fires,  
Follow out your heart's desires  
Until the day comes when they come for you;  
Make today a holiday, take tomorrow, too.  
You can't take it with you, Jack,  
And when you're gone you can't come back,  
You are only going-through!*

That's an old song, well before your time. As a matter of fact it was popular in Egypt before 1300 B.C. My version is a bit of a paraphrase. You can find a more literal translation under "A Song of the Harper" in Pritchard's *Ancient Near Eastern Texts*.<sup>1</sup>

For more than three millenia men have been drinking to the idea that you only go around once so you had better grab for gusto while you can. But beneath the bravado lurks fear - the fear of death. The "morning after" is bad enough, but what of the night after? Life never escapes that shadow.

From the time of the "Song of the Harper" comes the song of another harper, full of solemn grandeur rather than trivial froth: the song of Moses the man of God, Psalm 90 in the Old Testament. Again we hear of the brevity of human life: "They are as a sleep: in the morning they are like grass which groweth up. In the morning it flourisheth, and groweth up; in the evening it is cut down and withereth" (vv. 5-6).

But Moses sets the brevity of man's life in fearful contrast with God's eternity: "Even from everlasting to everlasting, thou art God ... a thousand years in thy sight are but as yesterday when it is past, and as a watch in the night" (vv. 2, 4).

Put against God's eternity, our living is only slow dying, and not even *slow* dying at that. Death's shadow flies upon us and blots out today's sunlight with tomorrow's darkness. Life is only a breath, and that breath is a sigh. The Nobel playwright Samuel Beckett takes up Moses' theme in the briefest, strangest and strongest of his plays, entitled *Breath*. It is a play without a hero, without actors, without words. The stage is set with a pile of junk. As the light grows we hear a baby's birth cry, then a long inhalation, followed by a choking exhalation, that ends in a death rattle. Beckett's bitter hope can offer only another birth cry as the stage sinks into darkness. "We bring our years to an end as a sigh" (v. 9). Our life-breath expires in that sigh.

Men try to come to terms with death. Fortified with arguments for immortality, Socrates drinks the hemlock with philosophic calm. Tasting the yet more bitter cup of vengefulness a modern terrorist sows death that he may reap it.

A popular Freudian philosopher warns that the fear of death is the morbid fruit of repression. Liberate the body from all repressions, he says, and it will be ready to meet death with no life un-lived.<sup>2</sup> The opposite advice is no less ancient (or modern): Mortify the body as the prison of the soul, and hasten the absorption into the cosmic consciousness. But death's head is still visible behind the many masks we make. Even a doctor of thanatology must die.

But if death is the last enemy, it does not come as a stranger. The horror of the death we do not know reaches us in the agony of the life we do know:

*I am poured out like water,  
And all of my bones are out of joint:  
My heart is like wax;  
It is melted within me.  
My strength is dried up like a potsherd;  
And my tongue cleaveth to my jaws;  
And thou hast brought me into the dust of death.  
(Ps. 22:14-15)*

The anguish of the sufferer in the psalm intensifies the sigh of frustration to a roar of agony. Man's misery is quiet despair at best. At worst it is a scream from the depths.

### **Man the Rebel**

Yet all the sufferings of life and the death they foreshadow do not in themselves fill the cup of human misery. The poison in the cup of life is our

guilt. Moses mourns, "Thou hast set our iniquities before thee, our secret sins in the light of thy countenance" (Ps. 90:8).

Standing beneath an empty sky, a man can strike a tragic pose as the victim of mortality. He can even pretend to be a hero of the absurd, who gives meaning to life's meaninglessness by an act of will. Albert Camus pictures Sisyphus (doomed in Tartarus) as heroically human precisely because his labor has no meaning. He toils forever to roll a rock up a hill knowing that it will forever roll down again. "There is no fate," says Camus "that cannot be overcome by scorn."

Yet the scorn with which a man shakes his fist at the empty sky shows that the sky is not really empty. Man's sense of tragedy betrays him. Man is not a victim but a rebel. He stands before God and stands revealed for what he is - a sinner. God's holiness manifests the enormity of our crimes against our brothers. In his rebellion man can not only sanction but even sanctify his hatreds in tribal or national pride. He can brutalize his women and discard his babies. Hilarion, a traveling businessman of the year 1 B.C., writes a letter to his wife in Egypt: "If by chance you bear a child, if it is a boy, let it be, if it is a girl, cast it out." <sup>3</sup>

It is before the living God that adultery is vile and infanticide murder. The dignity that "humanizes" man is the reflection of his likeness to God - his creation in God's image. By that image God's claim is on every man: He cannot be made a chattel or a pawn without defiance to his Maker.

When Jesus was asked whether Jews should pay taxes to Caesar he asked to see a Roman silver coin, a denarius. One was produced from a questioner's fat purse. "Whose is the image and superscription?" asked Jesus. "Caesar's," was the reply. Jesus' retort is a double-edged sword: "Give to Caesar what is Caesar's, but give to God what is God's" (Mt. 22:15-22).

We need to ponder the kingdom teaching of this Messiah who authorized Roman taxation. But even more we need to ponder the kingdom claim of the other edge of Christ's saying. Who bears the image of God? We do. What do we owe to God? Ourselves. God's image sets God's seal against all exploitation of our fellow man.

But it does much more than this. It forbids us to rob God by withholding ourselves. When the apostle Paul describes the unrighteousness of men, he begins at the beginning - with their ungodliness. They are without excuse, because "knowing God, they glorified him not as God, neither gave thanks;

but became vain in their reasonings, and their senseless heart was darkened" (Rom. 1:21).

In strange ways God causes even the wrath of men to praise him. Just as man's tragic sense witnesses to God's creation, so man's rage witnesses to God's righteousness. Try taunting some furious protester with the logic of what he claims to believe. Tell him, "O.K., so there is no God; man is a chemical accident in a random universe. What are a few thousand lives, more or less? What if a bomb suddenly reorganizes the molecules that were for the moment patterned in the form of a little girl. So what? No energy is lost."

When he calls you a fool or a monster, his rage for righteousness bears witness to the God he denies. We measure right and wrong by an absolute standard. We are blind not to see that the imperative of "rightness" points beyond our own desires or the desires of other men anywhere or everywhere. Only before the living God does morality find meaning. All sin is at last sin against God. The most heinous sin is the root of all other sin: rebellion against God. Because the mind of the flesh is enmity against God, we cannot see our sin as it is.

Paul says that our understanding is darkened in the ignorance of hardened hearts (Eph. 4:18). Violence, licentiousness, greed, envy, murder--all the perversity that poisons human society springs from a deeper hate that we disguise and deny. We hate God, and we hate him because he is God: holy, just and good.

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It is the measure of our hardening that hating God is made the least of sins, perhaps even a virtue: Promethean courage against an omnipotent tyrant. When God pleads with his rebellious people in the Old Testament, he exhausts the images of broken faith to show how heinous the great sin is. Israel is a vine bearing bitter grapes to the divine vinedresser who has spared no pains in cultivation (Is. 5). God's people is a rebellious son turning against the father who held him in his arms and taught him to walk (Hos. 11). The nation is an adulterous wife requiting a husband's faithful love with shameless harlotry.

We may be filled with rage at callous crimes of selfish violence reported in the newspaper, but we cannot comprehend the wickedness of violent rebellion against the living God. Yet our judgment is proportionate to our crime. Moses descends to one last level in his psalm of human misery. The tragedy of life is not only the vanity of our days and the sinfulness of our hearts. There is more, for the sinfulness of our hearts is open to the eyes of God: "Thou hast set our iniquities before thee, our secret sins in the light of thy countenance" (Ps. 90:8). Therefore, we are consumed in thine anger, and in thy wrath are we troubled" (v. 7) ... "all our days are passed away in thy wrath" (v. 9) ... "who knoweth the power of thine anger and thy wrath according to the fear that is due unto thee?" (v. 11).

Moses' psalm has its setting in the wilderness where a generation of rebels was doomed to wander until they perished. Refusing to believe that God would give them the Land of Promise they heard God's word of judgment turning them back to the desert. That word echoes in Psalm 90: "Thou turnest man to destruction; and sayest, Return, ye children of men" (v. 3).

Men are not only sinners, they are "children of wrath," subject to the righteous judgment of God. Death comes as a curse, "the wages of sin is death" (Rom. 6:23). "It is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment" (Heb. 9:27). The apostle Paul in the fifth chapter of Romans is at pains to trace the course of sin in the world to its source. Where death comes, there sin is being judged. The death-knell tolls through the genealogies of Genesis, the first book of the Bible: "and he died ... and he died ... and he died." Those who died were judged as sinners. Before the law had been given to Moses, before its precepts could call sin to account, men were guilty and liable to death.

At what point, then, did sin enter, and death through sin? Evidently in the first sin of the first man, Adam. Through one trespass death ruled over many (Rom. 5:19). Paul, of course, presses on to the parallel in salvation. As one act of sin made men guilty, caused sin to be charged against them - for all men sinned in Adam (Rom. 5:12,18) - so one act of righteousness brought justification and life to the new humanity in Christ.

We may need to review the apostle's reasoning in reverse. As Christians we understand that Christ was our representative who stood in our place as the Head of the new humanity. But we must also recognize the role of the first Adam in relation to the second. The guilt and judgment of Adam's transgression is shared by those who are united to Adam their head by God's creative appointment. All die in Adam because all are guilty in Adam. The sinfulness of all humanity is not a survival of the jungle; it is the result of the

Fall. Man's doom stretches back to his initial rebellion and grows with his multiplied iniquity.

Before God's holiness our ruin is complete. We are dead in trespasses and sins (Eph. 2:1). We are by nature children of wrath (Eph. 2:3). It is the heart of man that is "deceitful above all things and exceedingly corrupt" (Jer. 17:9). No, man is not as bad as he can be, for God restrains men from the hellish fury of their own corruption. But no part of man escapes the blight of sin. His mind is at enmity with God, "for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can it be; and they that are in the flesh cannot please God" (Rom. 8:7-8).

And more: man the sinner is in bondage not only to evil but to the Evil One. He is taken captive by the snares of the devil (2 Tim. 2:26) and walks according to the prince of the powers of the air, the evil spirit that works in the sons of disobedience (Eph. 2:2). Men who were made to be sons of God have become children of the devil, doing the works of their father and doomed to share his judgment (Eph. 2:2; Mt. 25:41, 46; Jn. 8:44).

Man's bondage to evil rolls like a subterranean river of fire through human history. In willful ignorance man fabricates his delusions and destroys himself and his world in the lusts of his idolatries (Eph. 4:18; Rom. 1:28; 6:21, 23). No man can overlook human evil; he may only add to it by condoning as pitiable that which God reveals to be damnable.

The Wrath of God But God is not mocked. Whatever a man sows he will reap. The biblical teaching about the wrath of God is very different from the mechanical wheel of fate in Eastern religions. God cannot be a detached observer in a spiritual world of cause and effect where actions generate their own inevitable consequences. Nor is God merely a name for the process. The living God is personal: a God who reveals himself to his people as slow to anger and abundant in loving kindness and truth (Ex. 34:6). The wrath of God is not soon kindled. God is not "vindictive" in our usual sense of the word. Yet God's wrath is the zeal of his own holiness against all sin. "Our God," warns the writer of Hebrews, "is a consuming fire" (Heb. 12:29). Not fate, not the reincarnational process of the wheel of samsara, but the searching knowledge of the living God judges the sinner.

Yet God does employ the fruits of our deeds to judge us. Indeed, he often makes our very sins to become our punishment. As Paul in Romans 1 describes the plunge of the heathen nations into depravity, he shows the justice of God by matching man's abandonment to sin with God's abandonment to judgment. Paul's Greek is more vivid than our translations.

Man gave up the glory of the incorruptible God for idols (v. 23); God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to uncleanness (v. 24). Men gave up the truth of God for a lie (v. 25); God gave them up to vile passions (v. 26). Men gave up the knowledge of God (v. 28), and God gave them up to a reprobate mind (v. 28).

Even man's abandonment of natural sexual relations is judged by a divine abandonment to the chains of perversion (vv. 26-27). A man is lost as he rejects God for his own desires. His lostness is his doom as God abandons him to those desires. C.S. Lewis once said that heaven is the place where man says to God, "Thy will be done," and hell is the place where God says to man, "Thy will be done." That is not the whole truth, but it catches the meaning of God's judgment as abandonment.

At last, the justice of God's judgment must be confessed by every sinner. Jean-Paul Sartre's play *No Exit* has the much-quoted line, "Hell is other people."<sup>4</sup> He pictures a sitting room in hell into which three strangers, one man and two women, are ushered. They are without eyelids; nothing can be changed or forgotten; and since they are already dead, murder or suicide is impossible. Given that setting, the "Hell is other people" line is easy to understand!

But the climax of the play is in an earlier line. After bitter conversation has stripped away their pretensions, the "hero," Garcin, is revealed as a coward who had deserted his comrades. Inez, who has savagely torn away Garcin's lies, says, "You are your life, and nothing else."<sup>5</sup>

"You are your life, and nothing else." No, you cry. I am not what I have been - I am what I am *going* to be; I am what I *meant* to be. In the day of judgment, the gaze before which you will stand naked is not the lidless eyes of another sinner, but the burning eyes of Almighty God. There will be no injustice, only truth; you will be revealed for what you are, and nothing else. "Yea, O Lord God, the Almighty, true and righteous are thy judgments" (Rev. 16:7).

When every knee bows to God in the day of judgment, all rebellion is ended. No sinner will dispute God's sentence. The gnashing of teeth that Scripture describes on the part of those who are forever lost is no longer the gnashing of hatred and defiance, but of anguish and remorse.<sup>6</sup> We who still taste the possibilities of earthly life cannot imagine the meaning of existence without hope where the guilt of past rebellion seals the abiding wrath of God.

Michelangelo tried to portray the horror of the lost on the wall of the Sistine Chapel, where the damned sink down behind the altar. Yet neither Christ the judge nor the doomed who peer out from the candle soot of the centuries are convincing figures. Far worse are the grotesque horrors of Hieronymous Bosch. No, the meaning of judgment must be approached from within, not without.

The man who rejects what the Bible teaches about the Last judgment should stand before God instead of presuming to call God to account. Let him ask, before God, "What do my sins deserve?" The deepest agony of hell itself is the realization that eternal separation from God is what the sinner has demanded and deserved.

The solemn argument of Paul in Romans concludes that all men are under God's wrath because all men deserve it. The nations of the Gentiles are without excuse, for they have forsaken the God they knew. He never left himself without a witness - in the world and in their own hearts. Their very ignorance is of their own making; their false worship of their own devising; and their degrading vices their continuing delight. But when the Gentiles are condemned by self-righteous men who know the law, Paul writes a stronger condemnation. Not the hearers of the law are justified, but the doers. The man who knows the law and disobeys is worse than the man who never knew the law. Paul's conclusion is the verdict of the psalmist:

*There is none righteous, no, not one; there is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God.... that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may be brought under the judgment of God. (Rom. 3:10-11, 19b)*

Yes, there are mouths today that chatter on, mouths of men excusing themselves and blaming God, or excusing others to overturn the sentence of God. The only remedy is for the man with the mouth to stand before God. If he beholds the Lord, he will cry with Job, "I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear; but now mine eye seeth thee. Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes" (Job 42:6).

## **The Gospel**

Yet in describing some of the teaching of the Bible about man's lostness I have been holding back the context in which we learn these things. To consider lostness, death and doom by themselves, we end up splitting Bible verses in half. "The wages of sin is death"- yes, we must know that in the sin explosion of our times - but how can we stop with "death"? "But the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord!" (Rom. 6:23).

The Bible reveals God's wrath in the proclamation of the gospel. Why does Paul so insist in Romans that all have sinned and come short of the glory of God?" (Rom. 3:23). Because he wants us to know that "God hath shut up all unto disobedience, that he might have mercy upon all" (Rom. 11:32). See the connection between the revelation of the *righteousness* of God in the gospel (Rom. 1:17) and the revelation of the *wrath* of God (Rom. 1:18). The wrath of God is not disclosed simply as a timeless principle of retributive righteousness. God's judgment is proclaimed as part of the news of God's purpose and work.

You hear this in Paul's preaching in the book of Acts. The message of judgment calls the nations from walking in their own ways (Acts 14:16), for now God

*commandeth men that they should all everywhere repent: inasmuch as he hath appointed a day in which he will judge the world in righteousness by the man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead* (Acts 17:30-31).

Even the appointing of a day of judgment shows God's mercy, for it means that there is time given to the nations to repent. Judgment means hope, for the day of wrath is the day of deliverance from the oppressor. Only by judgment can there be a new order, a new world of righteousness. But when a self-righteous people assumed that the day of the Lord would be all brightness for them, they were warned that they, too, must face the judge of all the earth, who does right (Amos 5:18-20).

How, then, can the preaching of judgment bring hope to sinners? Why need they hear of a new creation delivered from groaning if they have forfeited all inheritance in it? The unimaginable answer of the gospel is that God's absolute righteousness brings salvation through the outpouring of wrath. God's good news is Jesus Christ who comes to earth not once but twice. He will come at last to bring wrath, as the judge of all the earth.

The coming of God's kingdom in consummation power means the revelation of the Lord Jesus from heaven with the angels of his power in flaming fire, rendering vengeance to them that know not God, and to them that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus; who shall suffer punishment, even eternal destruction from the face of the Lord and the glory of his might" (2 Thess. 1:7-9).

But if that were Christ's only coming, no sinner could be spared. "Who can abide the day of his coming? And who can stand when he appeareth? For he is like a refiner's fire" (Mal. 3:2).

Even John the Baptist, Jesus' forerunner, had difficulty here. He preached the coming of the Messiah to judgment, the Messiah who would baptize with fire and hew down every tree of wickedness. When Jesus wrought miracles of healing rather than signs of wrath, when he opened the eyes of the blind rather than bringing thick darkness, when he raised the dead rather than slaying the wicked, John sent an inquiry from prison - the prison from which the Messiah had not set him free: "Art thou he that cometh, or look we for another?" (Lk. 7:19). Jesus kept John's two disciples with him while he performed more miracles of hope. "Go," he said, "and tell John the things which ye have seen and heard; the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, the poor have good tidings preached to them" (v. 22).

Jesus' answer reflects the prophecy of Isaiah 35:5-10, a promise of the blessings of renewal in God's kingdom of salvation. But how could blessing come without judgment? What gospel is there for the poor until their exploiters and oppressors are judged?

Jesus said to John, "Blessed is he whosoever shall find no occasion of stumbling in me" (Lk. 7:23). The answer that John awaited in faith is given to us in the gospel. Jesus came first not to wield the axe of judgment but to bear the stroke of death.

Christ, the judge who must tread the winepress of the wrath of God, Christ himself bears the wrath and drinks the cup from the Father's hand. By his blood we are saved from wrath through faith in him (Rom. 5:9). Christ was made sin for us, bore the curse for us so that we might be made the righteousness of God in him. Only so can God be just and yet be the justifier of him who believes in Christ.

Paul preaches the revealed righteousness of God-righteousness in God's wrath against sin, righteousness as God's gift by grace - righteousness in the first and second coming of Christ. Because God's wrath struck his own Son on Calvary, it is forever past for those who are united to Jesus Christ. The gospel calls men to the cross, where wrath is swallowed up by love, where grace and justice meet.

### **Is God's Wrath Too Severe?**

Is God's wrath too severe, his holiness too intense, his judgment too heavy? After World War II a play in West Berlin made a deep impression on the city. It was *The Sign of Jonah* by Günter Rutenborn. In a courtroom scene all the actors are found guilty in the evils of the war they have survived, and all transfer the blame to God. God is accused, found guilty and sentenced to become a human being, a wanderer on earth, deprived of his rights, homeless, hungry, thirsty. He shall know what it means to die. He himself shall die! And lose a son, and suffer the agonies of fatherhood. And when at last He dies, He shall be disgraced and ridiculed .z

God's amazing grace has done more than the most bitter blasphemy could propose. God's wrath has been poured out on earth already, and God himself has borne all its fury.

The Bible itself presents a scene in which God is tempted and accused by his own people. It is the incident of Masseh-Meribah that followed the exodus of Israel from Egypt (Ex. 17). God guides the wilderness march to Rephidim, where there is no water. The people strive with Moses in judicial fashion. They are ready to initiate court-martial proceedings to execute Moses as a traitor who has led the nation into a deathtrap. Moses protests that their case is not just against him but against God. The people are accusing God of unfaithfulness to his covenant promise. The word Meribah does not mean merely a controversy. Meribah means a law-case. In Micah 6 the prophet uses the term to describe God's law-case against Israel as he summons the mountains and the foundations of the earth to bear witness to his faithfulness.

God is a righteous and just judge. If the people demand a court hearing, a trial will be held. God tells Moses to pass before the assembled people and to call the elders of the people into session. Moses is to take in his hand the rod of judgment, the rod with which he smote the River of Egypt, turning the Nile to blood. In the Pentateuch, the rod is both the symbol and instrument of the infliction of judgment. A guilty man in a controversy was to be beaten with the rod before the face of the judge (Deut. 25:1-3).

But now Moses takes the judicial rod and lifts it to inflict the sentence of judgment. In Isaiah 30 the prophet describes the descent of the rod of God's wrath upon the Assyrian enemy: *For through the voice of the Lord shall the Assyrian be dismayed; with his rod will he smite him. And every stroke of the appointed staff, which the Lord shall lay upon him, shall be with the sound of tabret and harps.* (Is. 30:31-32)

Dread fell upon Israel as Moses lifted the rod of God. Upon whom would the wrath of the Lord descend? Here is one of the most amazing verses in the Bible. God says to Moses, "Behold, I will stand before thee there upon the rock in Horeb; and thou shalt smite the rock" (Ex. 17:6).

Nowhere else in the Old Testament does God say that he will stand before a man. God is the Judge. Men come to stand before him. Provision is made for hard judicial cases that can be appealed to the priests, Levites and judge in the place where God will set his name (Deut. 17:8-9).

But here God stands before Moses, the judge with the rod of judgment. God has been accused, and he stands in the prisoner's dock. God is symbolized by the rock on which Moses stands. In the Pentateuch, Rock is a name for God: "Ascribe ye greatness unto our God, the Rock, his work is perfect" (Deut. 32:3-4). The psalms that speak of Masseh-Meribah call God the Rock (Ps, 95:1, 8; 78:15-17, 35).

God commands Moses to smite the rock. It would be impossible for Moses to smite the Shekinah glory of God. God bears the smiting, and living water flows forth to the people. For this reason John bears witness in his gospel that when the spear was thrust into the side of the crucified Savior there flowed forth blood and water (Jn. 19:34). The Rock in the wilderness was Christ (1 Cor. 10:4) and great was Moses' sin in striking the Rock a second time (Num. 20:10-13).

The mystery of God's mercy foreshadowed in the Old Testament is fulfilled in the New. The measure of God's love shows the reality of his wrath. Do not tell the Father his wrath is too great when he must direct it against his Beloved Son!

How much does the Father love the Son? The Son, who was in the bosom of the Father before the world was ... the Son, the firstborn, of whom God says, "I will be to him a Father, and he shall be to me a Son" (Heb. 1:5) ... the Son in whom the Father's heart delights ... the Son who prays, "Father, glorify thy name! " How much does the Father love the Son at Calvary as he takes the cup and is obedient unto death?

What would God not give for his Son? "For the Father loveth the Son, and hath given all things into his hand" (Jn. 3:35). "For God so loved his only begotten Son that he gave the world that he might not perish ... ! " No, that is not John 3:16! "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten

Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish but have everlasting life."

In giving his Son, God gives himself, and here is the measure of love.

I cannot understand that. I cannot explain that. Can you? I cannot begin to enter into the mystery of the love of God. But I can say this to you. What do you think it cost the Father to abandon the Son? Abraham took his son Isaac out to the mountain, but Abraham did not have to plunge the knife into his son. The promise was "The Lord will provide." And the Lord did provide. The Father sent the Son, and the Son bore the wrath. And Jesus Christ in the will of the Father hung upon the cross. There upon the cross Jesus Christ cried out, "*Eli, Eli, lama Sabachthani*": "My God, My God, why hast thou forsaken me?" (Mt. 27:46). In that act, Jesus Christ endured the lostness, the judgment, the doom, the poured-out wrath, because he came to bear that wrath in the place of man.

I know you have doubts. I know you have fears. I know you are bewildered sometimes. And I know you ask why. But oh, my friend, go to the very depths of your doubts and gather them all up; take all your unsolved problems, all the whys that come out of the anguish of Your heart, whys that grow out of major tragedies, whys when you do not understand. just bring your whys, your questions, to God.

But come there to stay. Come there to watch Jesus Christ. Come there to listen while Jesus Christ the God-man in his human nature cries out, "Why?" Then do not say that the Father's wrath against sin is too much.

"Who knoweth the power of thine anger?" Moses asks in Psalm 90. We know the answer. Jesus Christ through the power of the Father knew it, because he bore it. We must proclaim that the wrath of God is a reality, for God is just and we are vile sinners. But we proclaim God's judgment in the message of the gospel. Praise God. We proclaim it in the message of Jesus Christ.

Do not trifle with Calvary. Paul pleads,

*Or despisest thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance? But after thy hardness and impenitent heart treasurest up for thyself wrath in the day ... when God shall judge the secrets of men, according to my gospel, by Jesus Christ. (Rom. 2:4-5, 16)*

No, rather, let the solemnity of God's holy wrath at Calvary open your eyes to the wonder of his love.

*Who know not Love, let him assay  
And taste that juice, which on the cross a pike  
Did set again abroach; then let him say  
If ever he did taste the like.  
Love is that liquor sweet and most divine,  
Which my God feels as blood; but I, as wine.*<sup>8</sup>

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## **Notes**

- 1 James B. Pritchard, *Ancient Near Eastern Texts* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1950), p. 467.
- 2 Norman O. Brown, *Life Against Death* (New York: Vintage Books, 1959), p. 308.
- 3 C. K. Barrett, ed., *New Testament Background: Selected Documents* (New York: Macmillan, 1957), p. 38.
- 4 Jean-Paul Sartre, *No Exit and Three Other Plays* (New York: Vintage Books, 1949), p. 47.
- 5 *ibid.*, p. 45.
- 6 Henri Blocher, "La doctrine du châtement. éternel," *Ichthus*, 32 (April 1973), p. 8.
- 7 Günter Rutenborn, *The Sign of Jonah* (New York: Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1960), p. 80.
- 8 George Herbert, "The Agonie," in *The works of George Herbert*, ed. F. E. Hutchinson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1941), p. 37.

## **Ravi Zacharias**

The Lostness of Man

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# Lostness of Man

*Since the question of people's lostness outside of Christ is an article of biblical faith, we go back to the basic question: "What do we think about Christ?" Do we accept Him as the King of Truth? Do we accept His position on the inspiration and authority of Scripture?*

*Following is an excerpt from a positional paper authored by former Alliance president Louis L. King, who led the denomination with cutting-edge initiatives of establishing self-supporting, self-governing, and self-propagating national churches that have become the hallmark of The Christian and Missionary Alliance.*

## The Source of Our Knowledge of Mankind's Lostness

Our knowledge of people's lostness if they are outside of Christ is derived exclusively from the Bible. Philosophy does not help us. This knowledge cannot be learned by reasoning or by research. It cannot be established inductively or deductively. God Himself reveals the fact in His Word. It is an article of faith. We perceive it only by divine enlightenment.

People's lostness is a Spirit-taught truth that those without the Spirit cannot receive (*1 Corinthians 1–14*). Their darkened understanding is not capable of this awareness by their own reasoning powers (*Ephesians 4:18*). This knowledge comes only through revelation by the Spirit. Indeed, everything of a spiritual nature depends upon the Supreme Revelator, Jesus Christ. What we believe about Him, who He is, and what He teaches will ultimately determine how we regard our fellow beings who do not share in our knowledge of Jesus.

Who, then, is Jesus Christ? The apostle John writes: "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth" (*John 1:14*, author's translation). Grace and truth came through Jesus Christ (*John 1:17b*). Jesus Himself declared: "I am the way—and the truth and the life" (*John 14:6a*, NIV). From these three texts we learn that Jesus Christ is the truth, that He is full of truth, and that He brings truth to us.

The King of Truth, Jesus Christ, taught the Bible's divine inspiration, its impregnable truth and its complete authority. He declared of the Old Testament Law, "Until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law" (*Matthew 5:18*). Later He rebuked two of His followers for not believing "all that the prophets [had] spoken" (*Luke 24:25*). In a confrontation with some of His fellow Jews, Jesus emphasized that "the Scripture cannot be broken" (*John 10:35*).

Kenneth B. Kantzer, former editor of *Christianity Today*, writing in *The Church's Worldwide Mission*, has said of those statements:

This testimony of Jesus Christ validates directly the *Old Testament*, but indirectly it includes the *New Testament* as well. Our Lord constituted His disciples as His witnesses who should follow Him. He promised to guide them into all truth (*John 16:13*). He assured them of confirming signs of their apostolic authority in predictive prophecy and miracles. After His death and resurrection, His apostles claimed to represent their Lord and to have the right to speak with authority in the Church of Christ (*Galatians 1:2*). Their claims were confirmed by diverse miracles and gifts of the Holy Spirit (*Hebrews 2:4*).

Since the question of people's lostness outside of Christ is an article of biblical faith, we go back to the basic question: "What do we think about Christ?" Do we accept Him as the King of Truth? Do we accept His position on the inspiration and authority of Scripture?

If we do accept Jesus as Truth, to be consistent we must accept and submit to His teachings and those of the fully attested Word on this so-important subject of mankind's lostness. If we acknowledge Jesus Christ as Savior, Lord and Truth, we must accept the Scriptures He enjoined upon us. They are the means we have of learning the Lord's will. Furthermore, His teachings have complete, final, and binding authority over us as His disciples.

Conversely, to ostensibly accept Christ as sovereign Lord and Supreme Teacher and at the same time reject what He says about the Bible and mankind's lost condition is grossly inconsistent.

Indeed, to quote William G. T. Shed:

The strongest support of the doctrine of endless punishment is the teaching of Christ, the Redeemer of Man.... Jesus is the person who is responsible for the doctrine of eternal perdition. He is the Being with whom all opponents of this theological tenet are in conflict.

We must accept, therefore, the Bible's presentation of man's condition without reservation. We must require no other validation. On the basis that Jesus is Lord and Truth, we must accept the Bible as our only but completely authoritative and trustworthy source of knowledge about people's spiritual condition.

## **The Present State of People without Christ**

Jesus likened lost people to a lost sheep for which the shepherd searches in the thorny wilderness. The sheep has severed itself from the one who was its guide; it has removed itself from the fold, gone its own way and become lost. It is devoid of any bearings and without homing instinct (see *Luke 15:4-7*).

At other times, Jesus pictured lost people as patients on whom the doctor gives up (*Luke 5:31*); worse, like criminals on whom the sentence of death is carried out (*Matthew 13:40-42*). He compares their lostness to death (*Luke 15:24*), to destruction (*Mark 12:9*), to damnation (*John 5:28-29*). Jesus thus presents lost people as going astray and being

condemned, lost in such a way that it requires more than that they simply be found—they must be awakened to eternal life and saved.

The whole of Jesus' mission was to find lost people, to rectify their sinful acts, to place them in the right path. He came for this purpose. Jesus, King of Truth, taught that His mission to earth was "to seek and to save what was lost" (*Luke 19:10*). Indeed, His mission cannot be defined without speaking of people as being lost.

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### **Lost people are alienated from God**

There can be no doubt that Jesus had the same concept of lost people as that set forth in *Genesis 3* where, as one writer termed it, we find in embryo almost all the great doctrines about mankind's plight which appear in the remaining portions of the Bible: the divine explanation of the present ruined condition of our race, the subtle devices of our enemy the devil, our utter powerlessness to be righteous in own strength.

Here we discover the spiritual effects of sin—our seeking to flee from God and our futile effort to cover our moral shame by devices of our own handiwork. Here, too, we discern the attitude of God toward the sinner.

### **Lost people practice wickedness**

By their sin Adam and Eve detached themselves from God. They became sinners. They and their posterity became full of sin—both the principles and acts of sin. "The Lord saw how great man's wickedness on the earth had become,

and that every inclination of the—thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time” (Genesis 6:5).

Two things are here laid to the charge of these sinful people. First, they practiced wickedness, great wickedness. We understand this to mean outward wickedness, for it is plainly distinguished from the wickedness of their hearts. They had made—and people continue to make—the earth a sink of sin, a stage on which they act out their wickedness in defiance of heaven. Second, “every inclination of the thoughts of [their] heart was only evil all the time.” All their wicked practices are here traced to their fountainhead; corrupt hearts are the source of it all. People who had been created upright in all their faculties are now wholly disordered. Their hearts are the reverse of what they originally were. They are affections, storehouses of all impiety. Whatever the inclination of the thoughts—whether judgments choices, purposes, devices, desires—they are only evil, and continually so. Evil is ingrained in their hearts, interwoven in their very natures, sunk into the marrow of their souls.<sup>3</sup>

### **Lost people are totally depraved**

Ever since Adam and Eve sinned in the Garden of Eden, the Bible presents people as totally corrupt—in their faculties, in the principles of their nature, in their understanding, in their will and in all their disposition and affections. Their heads and their hearts are totally depraved. All their senses—seeing, hearing, tasting, touching, smelling, are only instruments of sin and channels of corruption. Within them is nothing but sin and no good at all.

Both the prophet Isaiah and the apostle Paul confirm this assessment of mankind’s condition: *Your whole head is injured, your whole heart afflicted. From the sole of your foot to the top of your head there is no soundness. Isaiah 1:5–6*

*All of us have become like one who is unclean and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags. Isaiah 64:6a*

*I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. Romans 7:18a*

*The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him. 1 Corinthians 2:14*

*Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God. Romans 8:8*

*There is no one who does good, not even one. Romans 3:12b* These texts are indicative of a whole line of divine revelations about lost people which may be summed up in the Old Testament phrase: *The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Jeremiah 17:9* The Bible does not mean to say there is no good in people from the human point of view, but that there is no good in people from God’s point of view. People in their natural state cannot satisfy God, for He can require no less than perfection. As Thomas Chalme once said, “The righteousness of God is that righteousness which His righteousness requires Him

to require." It is in this respect that "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23).

**People "controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God."**

A comparison of Romans 8:8, just quoted, with Romans 8:9 leads us to the conclusion that being "controlled by the sinful nature" is the opposite of being "controlled . . . by the Spirit." The first results in sinfulness; the second results in holiness. Sin, then, is a property of the sinful nature—the human nature that was corrupted by the fall of Adam and propagated from him to us, in that corrupt state, by natural generation. Jesus called the corrupt nature flesh because it is received by carnal generation; and He called the new nature spirit because it is received by spiritual generation: "Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit" (John 3:6). People unborn of the Spirit are still and only in the flesh. And those who are in the flesh—that is, controlled by the sinful nature—cannot please God.

**By nature, lost people are "objects of wrath (Ephesians 2:3).**

Those who are lost have not the benefits of forgiveness for their sins or freedom from condemnation. In their present state—the natural state-God is against them.

**Lost people are "dead in [their] transgressions and sins" (Ephesians 2:1).**

They are not dying or mortal or, yet again, condemned to death. They are dead-now. People in their lost natural state not only lack the potential in themselves to be good, they are in fact dead. They can no more be brought to righteousness by the most vehement endeavors than a carcass can be brought to life by heat and rubbing. In one man, Adam—"sin entered the world . . . and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned" (Romans 5:12).

**Lost people follow "the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient" (Ephesians 2:2).**

"The ways of this world" describe the standard to which lost people in their natural state conform. "The ruler of the kingdom of the air" describes the master of all evil, the supreme ruler of the powers of wickedness-Satan himself—who rules those who are lost. The apostle John declares, "The whole world is under the control of the evil 'one'" (I John 5:19). And that "evil one" makes people disobedient. They are possessed by an obstinate opposition to the divine will. Disobedience is the very nature and essential character of those who are outside of Christ. They wholly belong to it.

**People who are lost are "fail the test" (2 Corinthians 13:5)**

Those who "fail the test" are rejected. Those lost outside of Christ—who do not have Christ within them—are rejected from partaking of God's salvation. The only test that satisfies God is Christ within. Without Him, people are lost, rejected.

**People who are lost are "separate from Christ . . . foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world"**

### **(Ephesians 2:12).**

These have no connection with Christ, no relation at all. They are strangers to God and to His covenant promises. They are not at home with God. They do not possess the rights and privileges of citizenship in God's kingdom and household. They are absolutely, utterly hopeless. Whether ignorant of or rejecting divine salvation as found in Jesus Christ, they have nothing to hope for beyond this world. They are in darkness and misery. Being without God, they are without His help, His mercy, His protection.

The apostle Paul in a summation cites Old Testament Scriptures to prove the present lostness and corruption of all people outside of Christ: *What shall we conclude then? . . . Jews and Gentiles alike are all under sin. As it is written:*

*"There is none righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands no who seeks God All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is none who does good, not even one." "Their throats are open graves; their tongues practice deceit" "The poison of vipers is on their lips" "Their mouths are full of cursing and bitterness." "Their feet are swift to shed blood ruin and misery mark their ways, and the way of peace they do not know." "There is no fear of God before their eyes." Romans 3:9–18*

The lostness that Jesus, the King of Truth, taught and that Paul describes is already the state of those who are outside of Christ. It is so while they yet live. They are lost with reference to God. They have removed themselves far from the Father. They have been condemned by the Judge. Already they are out in the darkness, already hopelessly wandering and weighed down with judgment (John 3:18–20). And to save them, Jesus states, was the reason for His mission to earth (Luke 19: 10).

### **The Intermediate State of People without Christ**

What does "lostness" mean when unsaved people pass into the next world? What happens when a person, saved or not, dies?

Thankfully, we are not left to vague conjecture on this most important subject. The declarations of the Scriptures, especially the New Testament, are clear—sufficiently abundant and decisive. They lie everywhere upon the surface of the text, precisely designed to supplement the imperfect guesses and feeble hopes of a humanity that naturally longs to know what happens after death.

That the human soul survives the shock of death we can affirm on the authority of the Scriptures. Both Old and New Testament writers fully expected the conscious survival of the soul-apart from the body-after death. With positiveness and directness, Job, possibly the earliest of the Old Testament writers (Job 19:25–27) and the Psalmist (Psalm 17:15; 49:15), declare that the life of the soul does not die when the body dies.

*I know that my Redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God; I myself will see him with my own eyes. Job 19:25–27*

The frequent expressions, “gathered to his people” (Genesis 25:17; 35:29; 49:33) and “rested with his fathers” (I Kings 11:43; 14:3 1) do not mean simply that the persons died, for the words are added to statements that properly express that idea. Neither do they mean that the persons were buried in the family cemetery, for this, too, is often stated specifically by the use of a different phrase. The expressions signified to the Hebrews a reunion with their forefathers in the other world, or, as David tenderly expresses it with regard to his deceased child, “I will go to him” (2 Samuel 12:23) The writer of Ecclesiastes, in referring to death, adds, “And the spirit returns to God who gave it” (Ecclesiastes 12:7)—further biblical corroboration of the survival of the human soul after death.<sup>4</sup>

Jesus' account of the rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19–31) is also legitimate and essential to our understanding of what occurs immediately upon death. Note that: Consciousness will continue after death, together with memory and the same instincts and sentiments as characterize people during the present life.

The good will be happy and the wicked miserable, and both from a recognition of their true character and what they deserved.

They will be aware of others' final destinies, as well as their own.

There is no means or possibility of a transition from the condition of the lost to that of the blessed.

All further efforts on the part of God for salvation after death are abandoned.<sup>5</sup>

Jesus said to the penitent thief dying beside Him at Calvary, “Today you will be with me in paradise” (Luke 23:43). Paul anticipated his own death as “be[ing] with Christ” (Philippians 1:23). The writer to the Hebrews saw in “Mount Zion, . . . the heavenly Jerusalem,” not only an innumerable company of angels “in joyful assembly,” but “the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven,” and “the spirits of righteous men made perfect” (Hebrews 12:22–23)

From these Bible references, by no means exhaustive, we can be certain that the soul will be conscious in the disembodied state. The faculties that constitute or belong to the soul—thought memory, feeling, imagination—will remain after death, unaltered and unimpaired in their nature We are also warranted in saying that during this interim period, pending the reunion of soul and body, the saved will be occupied with unalloyed delights of a spiritual nature.

Those, however, destined to everlasting condemnation will suffer misery. As if their present incarceration in the agony of hell's fire was insufficient, they suffer the suspense of their anticipated eternal doom. They are like criminals in the interval between conviction and execution. Theirs is the “fearful expectation of

judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God” (Hebrews 10:27).

Article 40 of the Church of England, adopted during the 16th century reign of Edward VI, states the case briefly and clearly:

The souls of them that depart this life do neither die with the bodies nor sleep idly. They which say that the souls of such as depart hence do sleep, being without all sense, feeling, or perceiving, until the day of judgment . . . do utterly dissent from the right belief declared to us in Holy Scripture.

The Bible does not give us further detailed information about the intermediate state of either the lost or the saved. This, no doubt, is due to the tentative, temporary nature of this intermediate state. The sacred writers prefer to hasten on to the resurrection state-mankind's final and eternal condition.

### **The Resurrection State of People without Christ**

The Bible teaches that all the denizens of earth will be resurrected, irrespective of their moral qualities or their final doom. Jesus declared: *A time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear [the Son of Gods] voice and come out those who have done good will rise to live, and those who have done evil will rise to be condemned.* John 5:29 The apostle Paul expressed before Felix, the Roman governor, the universal Jewish expectation “that there will be a resurrection of both the righteous and the wicked” (Acts 24:15).

Even Christians have an incomplete, inadequate understanding of the resurrected body itself and its relation to the soul by which it is forever to be inhabited. A sufficient explanation, therefore, is essential.

*Resurrection* is from the Latin “re,” meaning again and “surgere,” to rise; thus, “to rise again.” The dictionary defines resurrection as the fresh bringing forth of the selfsame thing that was before. Paul spoke of it this way: “He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit.” (Romans 5:11).

If, then, the body that died does not rise again, as some maintain, we shall have to relinquish the word *resurrection* and find some other word to explain what does happen. But the church from its beginning has consistently held to the unaltered meaning of *resurrection*. From the days of the apostles, without a missing link, the unbroken testimony of the church creeds maintain that the human body that died is the body that will be raised.

Note: The Apostles' Creed“

(Previous to A.D. 600) the flesh. and the resurrection of (As it now reads) the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting.

## The Athanasian Creed

(5th century-accepted by the Greek, Roman and English churches) “at whose coming all men shall rise again with their bodies, and shall render an account of their own works.”

## The Scots Confession

(Adopted A.D. 1560 and Part I of the Constitution of the United Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A.) “In the general judgment there shall be given to every man and woman resurrection of the flesh. The sea shall give up her dead; the earth, those that are buried within her. Yea, the Eternal, our God, shall stretch out His hand on the dust, and the dead shall arise incorruptible, and in the very substance of the self-same flesh that every man now bears, to receive, according to their works, glory or punishment.”

## The Belgic Confession

(A.D. 1561) “For all the dead shall be raised out of the earth, and their souls joined and united with their proper bodies in which they formerly lived. As for those who then shall be living, they shall not die as the others, but be changed in the twinkling of an eye, and from corruptible become incorruptible.” Confession of the Eastern Church

(A.D. 1643. Greek and Russian Orthodox churches) “There will be a resurrection of human bodies, alike of the righteous and the wicked, from the death that has passed upon them. . . . They shall be altogether the same bodies with which they lived in this world.”

## The Heidelberg Catechism

(A.D. 1563. German Reformed church and Part I of the Constitution of the United Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A.) “Question: What comfort does the resurrection of the body afford thee? Answer: That not only my soul, after this life, shall be immediately taken up to Christ its Head, but also that this my body, raised by the power of Christ, shall again be united with my soul and made like unto the glorious body of Christ.” The Westminster Confession

(A.D. 1647. All Presbyterian churches) “At the last day such as are found alive shall not die, but be changed; and all the dead shall be raised up with the self-same bodies and none other, although with different qualities, which shall be united again to their souls forever.”

In the ultimate, however, the proof that all people will be resurrected is not in the dictionary meaning of resurrected or the testimony of the church creeds, but in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. The biblical argument is that Christ predicted His own resurrection and actually arose in the manner He said He would. He thus proved both His power to do as He said and His veracity in all His declarations.

And He has further promised that He will raise up at the last day all that are in their graves. Not only is Jesus' own resurrection proof of His power to raise the dead, but it becomes the model of what we may expect when our bodies are resurrected. We therefore examine Jesus' resurrection and, as well, His resurrection body.

On the day of Pentecost the apostle Peter said of Jesus whom the Jews had crucified, "God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of the fact" (Acts 2:32). If Christ had been completely changed after His resurrection, the apostles could not have recognized or identified Him. Thus they could not have been witnesses to His resurrection. It was necessary that Christ should be recognized, and that so unmistakably that His previous predictions might be established and Christianity proved true.

Christ's resurrection was at once the testing point and crowning evidence both of His Sonship and His Messiahship. Unless His resurrection had been completely proved, Christianity must have failed. As Paul would later put it, "If Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith. . . . You are still in your sins" (I Corinthians 15:14, 17). Recognition, then, is not a trivial matter. Had the disciples and others not recognized the risen Jesus, they could not have testified to His resurrection; ultimately, they would have been forced to deny that He rose from the dead.

Accordingly, we find Christ affording to all His disciples the fullest possible evidence that He was still the same Jesus they had known before His crucifixion. In many ways He proved indubitably that He had undergone no essential change. By His voice, by his hands and feet pierced by the nails, by the spear wound in His side, by His eating food in the presence of His disciples, letting them touch and feel his "flesh and bones," Jesus convinced them all that He was indeed the same Jesus whom they had known and not an apparition.

All of the external marks and traits of Christ's resurrection body substantially agreed with the body that was put in the tomb. "Look at my hands and my feet," Jesus said to His disciples, likely drawing their attention to the nail wounds. "It is I myself. Touch me and see; a ghost does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have" (Luke 24:39). Jesus' resurrection body corresponded in minute detail with His preresurrection body.

All of this is in exact accord with what we are directly told in Scripture as to the kind of resurrection body all of us will have. There is every reason to believe, both from revelation and the nature of the case, that for both the just and the unjust the same body that died will come forth in the resurrection. At that time the soul will return to inhabit the same body it was in before death.

About the post-resurrection state of the lost the Bible discloses considerable information. And it is enough to cause us to shudder with horror.

**In their resurrection bodies the lost will be judged.**

“Man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment” (Hebrews 9:27). Concerning them, the sentence has already been promulgated: “Let him who does wrong continue to do wrong; let him who is vile continue to be vile” (Revelation 22:11).

**The lost will be punished in hell.**

The English word hell is used to translate three words found in the Greek language of the original New Testament: Hades, the place of the unregenerate dead; Gehenna, the post-resurrection place of their punishment; and Tartarus, the deepest abyss of Hades. Writes Herbert Lockyer:

In the word Gehenna, occurring 12 times in the New Testament, 11 of which are in the first three Gospels, we come across a picture word having an historic origin. It is a shortened term for the Vale of Hinnom—Ge-Hinnom—a valley south of Jerusalem. The story of this place is told in Second Chronicles 28:3.

In earlier days it was a fair garden, but under two kings became a place of idolatry. Little children were placed within a heated metal image, thus being made to pass through the fire as an act of worship. In good King Josiah's time, he abolished this repulsive and cruel form of idolatry and defiled the Vale of Hinnom by making it the great rubbish-heap of Jerusalem. Dead animals, unburied bodies of criminals were consumed therein. Fires continually burned with an intense burning on that immense pile. It was still used that way in our Lord's day.

Now this word Gehenna is clearly used by Christ as the name for the place of punishment of wicked men (Matthew 5:22, 29, 30; 10:28; 18:9; 23:15, 33). In His use of it He did not mean the Gehenna burning outside the Jerusalem walls, but used it as a symbol of utter ruin. It means consignment to something equivalent to the great rubbish-heap of Gehenna.<sup>6</sup>

**The lost will suffer in hell in their bodies.**

The bodies of the lost that are laid in the ground shall be raised again in order that the same body that sinned on earth shall suffer in the hereafter. It is neither logical nor biblical that the body that sinned should be replaced by another body to suffer in hell for that sin. The body that was the soul's companion in sin on earth should not lie forever in the dust while another body, that took no part in the sinning, should be the soul's companion in torment.

Then, too, since the Savior Himself will forever bear the marks of the conflict through which He passed on the cross, would it not be unreasonable and unjust for the ungodly not to everlastingly bear the stigmata of their abuse of their bodies? Further, since they would have none of Christ and His saving benefits in this life, should they expect to have any of His redemptive benefits for their bodies in the resurrection life to come? If, therefore, the bodies of the righteous will be glorious, then those of the wicked will be repulsive.

Indeed, the profligate, the drunkards, the debauchees will bear a natural penalty in their bodies no less than a moral penalty in their souls. Those tongues that in this life were employed in mocking religion, in cursing and swearing, in lying, backbiting and boasting will long for water to assuage the eternal flames (Luke 16:24). The same feet that stood in the way of sinners and carried them in their ungodly activities shall stand in the burning lake (Mark 9:45). And the same covetous and lascivious eyes shall smart from the smoke of the pit. The ears which refused to hear sermons or seasonable exhortations, admonitions and reproofs will hear the abundant weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth (Luke 16:27-31; Matthew 24:30). They will suffer in their bodies— not ethereal, gaseous bodies, but solid bodies of flesh and bone.

### **The lost will continue to sin in their resurrection bodies.**

When Satan was cast out of heaven, he manifested his intense hatred of God and eventually his vehement malice toward mankind by seducing our first parents and destroying the world. Peter informs us that since that time, “the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour” (I Peter 5:8). John declares that the same malignant being—leads the whole world astray (Revelation 12:9). What a dreadful picture the Bible paints of this evil, hungry being, roaring with rage, going about to devour rational, immortal people throughout the earth.

It is plain that the evil desires of Satan are not diminished by his banishment and sufferings. On this account it is reasonable to believe that all other evil beings will sustain in the next world the same character, the same desires and the same practices that caused their banishment.

That the lost will continue their sin in the next world is attested to in Revelation 22:15: “Outside are the dogs, those who practice magic arts, the sexually immoral, the murderers, the idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices falsehood.” These sinful drives of the lost will be exceedingly powerful and unrestrained.”

### **The lost have no options; their state and condition as sinners is fixed**

For them there will be no alternative. No sacrifice for sins is left, but only a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God” (Hebrews 10:26–27). God has already offered His ultimate Atonement; what further provision could He possibly make?

### **The lost will suffer forever**

Jesus Himself describes hell (Gehenna) as a place “where the fire never goes out” (Mark 9:43).

In several places (for example, Daniel 12:2, Matthew 3:12; 13:36–43) the Bible sets forth the happiness of the righteous and the sufferings of the wicked in what may be called a parallel manner. No intimation is given that the duration of one will not be equal with that of the other. The words eternal, everlasting, forever as employed in the New Testament refuse to be despoiled of their content by

linguistic analysis. As used by the Savior and the apostles, they are to be taken at face value. Thus they convey an intelligible and reliable, however awful, truth concerning the duration of the impenitents' punishment. If heaven is unending, so is hell, for the words are applied to both in the same manner and without any hint of a distinction in their use.

**The doom of the lost is inescapable.**

To the rich man in hell Abraham said, "Between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, so that those who want to go from here to you cannot, nor can anyone cross over from there to us" (Luke 16:26). Mercy will not be extended, paroles will not be issued. Over the entrance of hell stands the inscription, "Abandon Hope All You Who Enter Here."

Those who die outside of Christ will suffer irremedial loss. They will have lost forever the grace of God—His unmerited favor and proffered mercy. They will be irretrievably gone and that forever.

The unsaved will never hear another gospel message. Church, the prayers of Christians, the stirring hymns will be past. Godly parents, children, husband or wife will be missed, their company and faces never to be enjoyed again. The lost might have had a haven of rest; they exchanged it for an everlasting lake of fire and an abode of woe. They might have had glorified bodies; in their place are unredeemed bodies full of sin, corruption, disease and filth. They might have mingled with the saints in the celestial Jerusalem; instead they mingle with beings filled with every imaginable evil. They had opportunity to be children of the heavenly King; they are now vessels of wrath fit only for eternal torments.

It must not be overlooked that this irremedial loss is the unsaved's own deliberate and continued choice personally and freely made. It is, in fact, not so much an infliction of punishment as a withholding of that which could not be received, or if received would be a compulsory bestowal—an act of tyranny. The situation of the lost will be truly of a piece with all their previous conduct and chosen pursuits. Their condition in the future state has all along been in their own hands, freely determined by themselves. The question, therefore, is not what God imposes on them in the next life but what they—by disposition, character and nature—take into it. They carry themselves into it; they can take nothing else with them there. The penalty is inherent in the pride, envy, selfishness and all evil passion which continue in the surviving, rejoined soul and body. Their enormous losses in hell are but God's ratification of their decisive choices in this life.

## **What about Those Who Have Not Heard of Jesus?**

Almost all biblically centered Christians accept the justice of punishment meted out to gospel-hardened people who have ignored or obstinately rejected Christ's offer of salvation. But what about those who by geographic or historical accident live in cultures where Jesus is un-Known? What about those who, although they may have a rudimentary knowledge of Jesus, have never been meaningfully evangelized? Is it fair that they should be in unspeakable torture? May there not be in the depth of the divine mercy opportunity for them in the future state?

There are those who have concluded that all such will be saved. They have substantiated their views, however, not by a contextual interpretation of all relevant Scripture but rather by fashioning their concepts of God's love, justice and morality after their own. Sometimes they have reasoned from assumptions that have no biblical support. They have resorted to human feelings, human sentiments, human intuitions. Where they have appealed to the Bible, it is to isolated "proof-texts" that only seem to confirm their wishful speculations.

The answer to this heart-rending question must come not from human reasoning and human sympathy, but from Jesus Christ and the Scriptures. What did the omniscient holy Jesus teach? What do the Christ authenticated Scriptures say? Any response not anchored in this bedrock of Bible truth has no more authority than the person who proposes it.

Jesus said: I am the gate, whoever enters through me will be saved. John 10:9

I am the way . . . No one comes to the Father except through me. John 14:6

I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again. John 3:3

Jesus declared Himself to be the only door and the only road to the Father. He has not opened a variety of ways to be saved. There are no optional alternatives. For a person to qualify for heaven, Jesus makes regeneration, that is, a spiritual rebirth, absolutely necessary.

The apostle Peter declared of Jesus, "Salvation is found in none one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12). It is not a question of whether there is good in other religions"; it is a matter of there being but one divinely appointed way of salvation. All who miss this one way of salvation are in peril.

The apostle Paul is equally unbending. To those in Colossae who had put their trust in Jesus Christ he wrote that God the Father "has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light." He adds, "For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins" (Colossians

1: 12-14). It is clear that those who go to heaven are they who qualify, and qualification is through Christ, who alone forgives sins. Paul has this to say about the effects of sin and its only remedy: "The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 6:23).

William G.T. Shedd comments:

Sin is the suicidal action of the human will. A man is not forced to kill himself, but if he does, he cannot bring himself to life again. And a man is not forced to sin, but if he does, he cannot get back to where he was before sinning. He cannot get back to innocency nor can he get back to holiness of heart.

In the early paragraphs of his letter to the Romans, Paul argues that all people outside of Christ are in such a situation:

The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness, since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities— his eternal power and divine nature— have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse. Romans 1:18-20

Citing Old Testament Scriptures, Paul concludes: "There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God. All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one." Romans 3:10-12

Pagans who have never heard of the true God and His Son Jesus Christ, Gentile moralists, Jewish legalists— whose case Paul has just taken up (see Romans 2:17-29)— all alike are under sin's power and sin's lethal remuneration and thus unable to achieve eternal life by any efforts of their own. They are all under God's judgment. The remedy— the only remedy God has revealed— is Jesus Christ, the Giver of eternal life.

For all members of the human family, the alternatives are two: eternal life and eternal death. There is no neutral territory between these two immeasurable destinies. The Bible makes these affirmations of all persons, whether they have heard of Christ or not.

It is hardly necessary to multiply quotations. This sense that salvation is only in Jesus and that people— whatever their status — are saved only by a conscious surrender to Him runs through the whole of the New Testament. In no place and on no account is it ever modified or set aside.

The wondrous fact of the gospel is that "everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved" (Romans 10: 13). But the Scripture can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they

have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them?" (Romans 10:14).

Devastating logic! God has ordained that people should be saved through the preaching of the gospel. And Jesus has commanded us to preach it to all people (Luke 24:47). There is not a word in God's Book that so much as intimates He saves human beings without using human agents to take the good news of salvation to them. Nothing in the Scriptures implies that God in His sovereignty and great love, will wink at the guilty of those who had no opportunity to know of Christ Jesus.

J. Herbert Kane puts the whole matter correctly and succinctly in his book, *Christian Missions in Biblical Perspective*.

To say, "God will take care of the heathen, and leave it there is to close one's eyes to the clear statements of the Bible and the hard, cold facts of history. The question is not whether God will take care of the heathen, but how He does it. He has made it abundantly clear in His word that it is His will and purpose to care for the heathen through the Church. The miracle of reconciliation was accomplished by the death and resurrection of Christ. The ministry of reconciliation has been committed to the church. If the church for any reason fails to fulfill its God-given ministry, the church, and not God blame. World evangelization can be achieved by human means and manpower. It is both futile and foolish to expect God to achieve by supernatural means what the church can accomplish by human means.

In one of his most haunting missionary songs, A.B. Simpson, 19th century founder of The Christian and Missionary Alliance, asks:

O Church of Christ, what wilt thou say  
When, in the awful judgment day,  
They charge thee with their doom?