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Dear Gospel worker:

In this issue of *GC2 equipper*, we continue discussing how Christ-centered/Trinitarian theology informs ministry.

The questions we receive concerning this theology often relate to the topic of “*final judgment*.” Here are two typical questions:

- If all humanity has been reconciled already to God in Christ, why preach the Gospel?
- If the final judgment presents an opportunity for people to turn to Jesus, why worry about them now?

In this issue, we answer a couple of related questions that were submitted to CAD and Dan Rogers, CAD director, provides answers. We think you will find Dan’s answers helpful in understanding the nature and importance of our calling to proclaim to the world the Good News of our life in Christ.

If you have questions about Christ-centered/Trinitarian theology, do not hesitate to email them to church.administration@wcg.org. We are here to serve you.

Thanks for all you do in the ministry of the Gospel.

Grace and peace as you work,

Ted Johnston, editor
GC2 equipper



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Question:

In seeking to understand Trinitarian theology, I have found help reading “*An Introduction to Torrance Theology*,” edited by Gerrit Scott Dawson (T&T Clark, 2007). The book is a series of short papers by Trinitarian theologians. In the chapter/paper titled, “*Who is the Incarnate Savior of the World?*” Andrew Purves begins by addressing the **universal** (objective) inclusion of all humankind in the Atonement:

Salvation penetrates to the depth of the human condition...There is nothing here of an incarnation and atonement only for some, but not for all...It is precisely in Jesus...that we are to think of the whole human race, and indeed the whole of creation, as in a profound sense already redeemed, resurrected and consecrated for the glory and worship of God...[This] gospel perspective is graciously inclusive...the gospel is about grace upon grace (p. 31).

The Gospel perspective is graciously inclusive.

Then Purves switches gears to address the **personal** (subjective) experience of this inclusion:

Right here...the Church insists on a degree of soteriological reserve, in some measure always aware of the ugly messiness of our sin and of the consequences for both God and us, not the least of which is Calvary's cross. We are confronted with a great mystery that is certainly not reducible to our theological formulas, or indeed ever adequately solvable, and which we can only talk about under our breath with quiet respect for the staggering sweep of the grace, the holiness and the majesty of the Lord God who, while he loves us in freedom, will not be mocked. The problem may be stated thus: Jesus lived, died, rose again, and ascended for all; union with Christ and faith in Jesus our Lord is by the gift of the Holy Spirit; [however] the faithless, those who resist life in Christ and refuse to confess him, will be judged unto damnation by God.

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How can some who, with all humankind, are included already in Jesus' Atonement, later be “judged unto damnation by God”?

Answer:

Purves is addressing different descriptions of the same experience. If, in their created freedom, one ultimately says “no” to God's “YES” for them in Jesus, one ultimately alienates oneself in “hell” – the result of willful unbelief and free choice to oppose God's atoning love for them. Biblical phrases implying God's “judging” and “condemning” of those to “damnation” who reject his grace are alternate ways of describing this same process.

Biblical phrases implying God's “judging” and “condemning” of those to “damnation” who reject his grace are simply ways of describing the same process.

What we know from Scripture is that *all* will stand before the judgment seat of Christ. In one sense, we are always standing there, as everyday is the “Today” where Christ meets us redemptively. Those who choose not to believe will be “judged.” The result of turning away from God, in whom we live and move and have our being, is by nature self-destructive. Jesus does not have to pronounce a sentence literally – the consequences are part and parcel with “life” or existence in denial. “Condemnation” is the natural state of “living” or existing in rejection of God's love. Those who ultimately choose not to believe (insist on maintaining disbelief) will be consigned to the “lake of fire,” which is a metaphor for the ultimate existence in rebellion against God and the ultimate choice of alienation from God. See Matthew 25:41; Romans 2:5-8.

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Question:

Purves also writes the following:

Our task then, while it is day, is to proclaim the gospel that Jesus Christ is the incarnate Savior of the world, and to pray for the grace of the Holy Spirit upon those who hear us preach, for the night will come when no one can work, and when perhaps, it will be too late for response. The mystery of the final judgment is not for us to unravel. But of this there is no doubt: "There is no other name under heaven...by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12), for Jesus Christ, son of Mary, is the incarnate Savior of the world (p. 32).

The night will come when no one can work, and when, perhaps, it will be too late for response.

Here Purves seems to advocate the idea that *now* is the only time (day) of salvation and that people must come to faith now, before time runs out. Is this true?

Answer:

I will note a couple of things here. First, when CAD recommends non-WCG books or articles, our recommendations do not mean that we agree with everything the author writes (though we agree substantially, or else we would not make the recommendation).

Second, note that Purves remains tentative in his conclusion on the matter of timing. He states, "PERHAPS it will be too late for response" and then calls the issue of the final judgment a "mystery" (my emphasis added).

I believe that Purves wisely hedges his statements here. These "day" and "night" metaphors can neither be ignored nor overly interpreted. To place a particular "time" reference on the expression "night" would, in my estimation, be overly interpretive.

These "day" and "night" metaphors can neither be ignored nor overly interpreted.

I agree with Purves in admonishing those of us in the Church to take seriously our opportunity to bear witness to Jesus during our time in history. However, in the section you have quoted, Purves does not mention that Jesus, through the Holy Spirit, subsumes the work of the Church. Therefore, in the context you quote, Purves does not make explicit that it is, in reality, the Holy Trinity through Jesus and in the Holy Spirit who has saved humanity. God in his sovereign freedom creates a hearing of the gospel and opens the human heart to respond "however and whenever" (e.g. Acts 16:14).

In studying the issue of final judgment (and I commend you for your diligent study on this important topic), I recommend doing a Google search of the Worldwide Church of God website at www.wcg.org. Search for "judgment" and "salvation" and you will find links to the following relevant articles:

- *The Last Judgment*
- *Is This the Only Day of Salvation?*
- *WCG statement of belief on Eternal Judgment*
- *Getting Real*
- *Hell*
- *The Gospel is Good News*