

Holistic Ministry Articles

- **Full Salvation: Toward a Biblical Approach to Soteriology & Evangelism**

Full Salvation: Toward a Biblical Approach to Soteriology & Evangelism

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ABSTRACT: Traditional soteriology has generated ineffective and often unbiblical methods of evangelism and has therefore become perceived as irrelevant to Western culture. The heart of this dilemma is Exclusivism's divergence from the biblical meaning of salvation located most comprehensibly in Jesus' message of the kingdom of God. Approaching soteriology biblically and not systematically provides persuasive evidence for the "Full Salvation" of all creation as well as effective, relevant methods of evangelism.

INTRODUCTION: ENTERING THE CONVERSATION

"If you died tonight, where would you spend eternity, in heaven or hell?" This question is representative of the soteriology that has driven traditional evangelism for centuries. Salvation, according to this stream of tradition, is concerned with the individual going to a post-mortem destination either to be with God in heaven or to suffer eternal punishment in hell. In this simple, dualistic approach to salvation, traditional evangelism has distorted the matter that is most beautiful to Christian theology: God's salvific love for all creation. We see evidence of this distortion in our daily lives. From the militant signs endorsing hell at Christian rallies (e.g. Westboro Baptists) to the sarcastic cartoons in pop culture (e.g. The Far Side) to the visceral reactions to anything that smells like Universalism (e.g. recent backlash to Rob Bell), it is plain to see that God's love has become somewhat of a conditional algorithm. But is this really as good as the Good News gets? If so, there are millions who find Christianity's message wanting. Nowadays, our opening question is more likely to receive a recalcitrant and postmodern "Niether" than an authentic opening up to the Good News of Jesus Christ. I believe that the ineffectiveness of traditional evangelism is rooted in its divergence from the biblical meaning of salvation that is most clearly revealed in Jesus' message of the kingdom of God.

In the following essay I aim to explain that our approach to evangelism is determined by our soteriology. As such, I will argue that a Universalist soteriology allows for a more biblical and thereby more effective means for evangelism. Immediately one may question whether Universalism and evangelism together yield an oxymoron. That is, why evangelize if all of humanity will be saved? This inquiry stems from the attempt to fit Universalism into the old wineskin of traditional soteriology. But, as we shall see, Universalism and evangelism can and must be harmonized when fitted into the biblical narrative, particularly the good news of the kingdom of God.

Because a thorough defense of Universalism cannot be offered within the scope of this paper, the ultimate goal is to offer a solid foundation that enables us to enter current conversations on salvation and evangelism. With groups like the Westboro Baptists on one hand and Universal Unitarians on the other, it is imperative that Christians be able to dialogue with others on matters of salvation, after-life and ultimate hope. To offer this foundation I shall: (1) Wrestle with the weaknesses of the traditional view and its negative effects on evangelism; (2) Submit a biblical case for God's "Full Salvation;" and (3) Propose how this latter view generates more effective evangelism.

Before moving further we may define what Universalism is and what it is not. Universalism is the belief that "all [humankind] will eventually be reconciled to God." Universalism is not the belief that non-Christian religions are sources of ultimate salvation; that is, to decentralize the uniqueness of Jesus Christ as the one and only Way, Truth and Life to God (John 14:6). In contrast to Universalism is what is called Exclusivism (sometimes referred

to as Particularism). This is the belief that only bona fide believers in Jesus will be saved. With these clarifications we may explore the differences between Exclusivism and Universalism and how each affects evangelism.

“WHAT WILL HAPPEN?” OR “WHAT HAPPENED TO WILL?”

The fundamental difference between Exclusivism and Universalism is to be found in their distinct emphases. While both views wrestle with the same set of questions, their schism is eventually caused by an explanation of God’s election. We shall first examine Exclusivism. Ultimately, the exclusivist is forced to reconcile the seemingly contradictory nature of God as both compassionate and just. That is, if God is loving, how can God send the lost to suffer eternal punishment? Tradition has dealt with this question by explaining that God must punish the lost because God must deal with sin justly. Sin, which causes an infinite fragmentation between humankind and God, leads to our own destruction (Rom. 6:23). Therefore, God simply lets humankind receive what we deserve.

Yet this explanation only leads to more questions. Firstly, if God foreknew that human beings would fall into sin, why create them in the first place? Or is it God’s desire that human beings suffer? Augustine answered this question by stating that “God would never have created a man... if He had not known at the same time how He would put such creatures to good use, and thus enrich the course of world history;” and similarly: “He judged it better to bring good out of evil, than not to permit any evil to exist.” Here we begin to see that the emphasis of Exclusivism is on God’s sovereignty, particularly a form in which God can do whatever God pleases so we’d better acquiesce.

A second question for the Exclusivist view is how God may permit infinite suffering for a finite amount of sin. Tradition has addressed this matter similarly:

“God is indeed merciful, but He is likewise just; wherefore his justice requires that sin, which is committed against the most high majesty of God, be also punished with extreme, that is, with everlasting punishment of both body and soul (Heidelberg Catechism of 1563, Q.11).”

God, according to this view, is just in sentencing sinners to eternal punishment because a sin against God is an infinite offense. Again, we may see the emphasis revealed: What God will do is not a matter of our business; we must put up or shut up.

But a third and perhaps more troubling question arises from the Exclusivist view on grace. As a result of the infinite rift caused by sin, human beings can only be saved by God’s grace. This means, correctly, that God wills the salvation of those who are saved. Extremely troubling, however, is the logical corollary that is present in Exclusivism: God also wills non-salvation. If God is able to “conquer the stubbornness of the people by his grace... it does not happen because he does not want it to happen.” Here is the ultimate example of the weakness in Exclusivism’s emphasis on God’s election. Jan Bonda sums it up well:

“Submit - for he is God! Accept, acknowledge, and agree that he is good even if he wants our children to be punished throughout eternity. That is what the tradition wants to teach us. It is forced to teach us that, as long as it accepts eternal punishment as a biblical doctrine. Augustine was the first to grasp this and to express it in words. After him no one could deny it: If there is eternal punishment, it is because that is how God wants it to be. And if God wants it, we can only submit.”

As the summary illustrates, a refusal to submit to this tenant of traditional Christian theology is nearly tantamount to the refusal of God – or at least the “truth” about God. How many men and women throughout history have been excluded from the Church because they refused to accept that God allows the perdition of many? How many people in our world today are yearning for God, yet cannot submit to the picture of God painted by traditional soteriology? This is where Exclusivism leaves many, myself included, wanting. This deficiency is made plain when we consider how Exclusivism affects evangelism.

What is obvious from the start is that the main objective of evangelism in the exclusivist paradigm is to confirm that the individual is bound for heaven after death. This is a result of the soteriological emphasis on post-mortem reward/punishment. Part of our issue with this already is that evangelism becomes as much about escaping hell as it does about entering heaven. But more concerning are two other repercussions for evangelism. The first is

an over-emphasis on existence after death, which thereby de-emphasizes the here and now. This orientation produces an unhealthy neglect of the present world. Moreover, it has generated some of the most unbiblical speculations about the afterlife, which become terrible hindrances for Christian discipleship. The second and corollary is a Platonic body/soul dualism that over-emphasizes the soul due to the over-emphasis on the invisible hereafter. Thus, Christians who subscribe to the exclusivist view are less inclined to worry about the physiological needs of their neighbors: "We're going to heaven when we die so why worry about those starving in Sudan?" Missiologically, what matters for those in Sudan is that their soul be saved for heaven.

Perhaps most troubling is that an exclusivist evangelism along these lines has very little need for the life and ministry of Jesus. What is most necessary is simply Jesus' atoning death on the cross that allows sinners to go to heaven. As we shall see, this is a tragic distortion of salvation. Yet for most exclusivists, the teachings of Jesus become merely supplementary – except, of course, when he warns of eternal damnation!

Because of these characteristics, exclusivist evangelism produces a "believe the right thing" theology. That is, salvation is confirmed by the response of faith to God's grace expressed in the form of believing 'X' – most commonly that Jesus died for one's sins. Thus, the emphasis on the soul produces an evangelism that targets the rational mind and persuades it to assent. Upon confirmation of belief, the important stuff is taken care of! The rest, it seems, is just Christian sub-culture. Unfortunately, this approach to evangelism couldn't be further from the message of Jesus.

Another flaw in the exclusivist approach to evangelism is less obvious but no less harmful. As we noted above, Exclusivism explains the horror of eternal punishment by arguing that God is both compassionate and just. Yet it is this picture of God as both compassionate and just that subtly influences those who endorse it. For example, it influences Christians to neglect injustice and/or administer punishment by way of the implicit reasoning, "If God punishes sin in the name of justice, why can't I?" Of course very few people think this specifically, but there is ample evidence that what we ultimately believe about God affects how we live. Such is the very heart of this essay. Furthermore, Exclusivism incidentally squelches human feelings, which are essential to our salvation as God's people. Augustine called those who question God's perdition of the lost "tender-hearted" believers. Likewise Dante and Aquinas, from whom tradition has inherited much of its views on heaven/hell, encouraged Christians to leave behind their sympathy and simply accept the truth of God's eternal doom. Such suppression of human feeling is the opposite of salvation in the kingdom of God. Further still, the view of God as a righteous judge who separates humanity into two categories seems to cultivate the same kind of Pharisaic scapegoating that Jesus adamantly condemned (Matt. 23). Being judgmental is the second most common perception of evangelicals.

While there are other deficiencies in the kind of evangelism that Exclusivism produces, these are the major flaws that I believe inhibit the true meaning of salvation and a subsequently effective approach to evangelism. But my final critique of the evangelism generated by Exclusivism is this: With whom do converts fall in love? As I read the Bible, I am compelled to believe that God desires that we fall in love with Him in the person of Jesus Christ. It seems to me that Exclusivism produces Christians who have fallen in love with heaven, not God. It is, after all, difficult to fall in love with a God who threatens eternal damnation to those who do not respond adequately: "The theologian who succeeds in convincing believers that the doctrine of eternal punishment does not lead to a terrifying image of God has yet to arise." Perhaps this impasse is indication that it is time for our theology to change. Perhaps we need to read Scripture afresh. Perhaps it is time for Christians to quit speculating about "What will happen" and start considering, "What does God will?" It is this latter question that I believe provides the foundation for the "Full Salvation" of God and healthy evangelism for the kingdom of God.

NUMBER THE STARS: THE FULL SALVATION OF GOD

Universalism has received a great deal of criticism over the course of history – and rightfully so. Recurrent censures include the following:

"It trivializes the radical sinfulness of fallen humanity, and plays down the penalties due for such sin; it compromises morality by denying that good or evil choices make any ultimate difference, and undermines the missionary mandate of Christ by implying that evangelism and conversion are incidental to salvation."

These criticisms deliver a deathblow when Universalism is fitted into the soteriological paradigm of tradition. When Universalism is defined only as the doctrine that one day all of humanity will be reconciled to God, then

these criticisms may well apply. However, such Universalism is not biblical Universalism – what we shall hence refer to as God’s “Full Salvation.” These criticisms divert the emphasis from what God wills for creation to anthropocentric speculations about final outcomes. As Christians, we cannot speculate about what will eventually happen until we understand what God wills. Thus, our argument for Full Salvation can only stand on the foundation of what God wills. This must be understood in the context of the biblical narrative, particularly the kingdom of God.

Contrary to the hermeneutics of Exclusivism, the Bible is not the story of God saving some while rejecting others. The Bible is the story of God’s faithfulness to the unfaithful. It is the story of God keeping God’s covenant with Israel, despite Israel’s infidelity. And what exactly is this covenant to which God remains faithful? It is the covenant that was made with Abraham:

“I will make you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who curses you I will curse; and in you all of the families of the earth shall be blessed.” (Gen. 12:2,3)

“The word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision, ‘Fear not, Abram, I am your shield; your reward shall be very great. But Abram said, ‘O Lord, what can you give me since I remain childless and the one who will inherit my estate is Eliezer of Damascus?’ And Abram said, ‘You have given me no children; so a servant in my household will be my heir.’ Then the word of the Lord came to him: ‘This man will not be your heir, but a son who is your own flesh and blood will be your heir.’ He took him outside and said, ‘Look up at the sky and number the stars—if indeed you can count them.’ Then he said to him, ‘So shall your offspring be.’ Abram believed the Lord, and he credited it to him as righteousness.” (Gen. 15:1-6)

Here we see that election means not God’s giving of salvation as a kind of reward, but as an invitation to participate in God’s salvific mission. God’s desire is to form a community that outnumbers the stars! However, God desires to do this through Abraham and his people. Upon closer examination we may see why God chose Abraham to be the patriarch of Israel (the first evangelist!).

In Genesis 18, the Lord approaches Abraham about Sodom, a city of great sinners (Gen. 13:13). After the Lord pronounces judgment upon Sodom we are told that Abraham intercedes on their behalf. Instead of accepting that God can do whatever God pleases or that Sodom’s sin deserves punishment, Abraham pleads with the Lord for their salvation. This is why God chose Abraham! “By asking for the salvation not only of the righteous but of the entire city, Abraham does exactly what God wants.” This is further evidenced in the story of Jacob. Like Sodom, Jacob’s brother Esau has been traditionally branded as an example of God’s double election. Yet the story of Jacob beautifully displays the reality that God intends the salvation of those who are considered un-elect. We see that Jacob was at first pictured as the one who wanted God’s blessing at the expense of his brother. But the story posits that God’s blessing comes only when Jacob includes his brother. Indeed, Jacob becomes Israel – a blessing to the nations – only when he understands his true mission.

This theme of intercession for and inclusion of the “un-elect” is found throughout Scripture in the person of Moses (Exod. 32), the prophets (Isa. 56, Jer. 14, Ezek. 16) and the Apostle Paul (Rom. 9-11). The theme concerns us here because it is indicative of God’s ultimate purpose to save all of creation and our role as bearers of this good news. Nowhere is this more explicit than in the person of Jesus of Nazareth.

“I WILL DRAW ALL MEN TO MYSELF”

God’s Full Salvation must be considered in light of the kingdom of God. Contrary to streams of Exclusivism, biblical salvation has very little to do with post-mortem destinations. Instead, salvation has to do with a this-world reality. That reality is the kingdom of God. It is undisputed that this was the crux of Jesus’ message (Mark 1:14-15; Matt. 4:23, 9:35; Luke 4:43, 8:1, 16:16). This phrase, βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ, is often translated the ‘reign of God’ as it denotes the manifest rule of God. Thus, by employing kingdom language, Jesus was invoking the ultimate hope of Israel: that one day God would act decisively within history to restore the world to right and rule over it with Israel as God’s covenant people. Salvation, therefore, is the fulfillment of God’s mission in the world that was begun in the Abrahamic covenant and sealed by Christ’s death and resurrection.

In his life and ministry Jesus inaugurated the Full Salvation of God by welcoming the “unelect.” If this were not the heart of Jesus’ ministry then there would have been no early church mission to the Gentiles (a.k.a. the

“unelect”). But this is what history affirms and it can mean nothing less than that God desires the inclusion of all in the kingdom community. Certainly Jesus had stern warnings of judgment for some. However these judgments were not suggestive of final conclusions; they were harsh assessments of current praxis that inhibited the Full Salvation of God. What is unquestionable, however, is that Jesus’ life and ministry – the very presence of salvation – broke down the exclusivism of his day. In Jesus, who is the very image of God (John 1:18, Heb. 1:3), we find the God who wills the salvation of all.

Perhaps most telling are Jesus’ own words about his death. What Exclusivism employs as the criterion for dividing humankind is, for Jesus, the means for inclusion: “And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself” (John 12:32). So too does Paul see the cross as God’s final and inclusive “Yes” to creation: “So also one righteous act resulted in justification and life for all people” (Rom. 5:18). In the death of Christ, therefore, we see not only God’s faithfulness to justify the ungodly (Rom. 4:5) but also God’s eschatological substitution for the sin of all (Rom. 5:6). And if the death of Christ is seen as God’s eschatological substitution for sinners, then the resurrection of Christ may be interpreted as God’s eschatological seal of the Full Salvation.

To be the Body of Christ thus demands that the church embraces soteriology and evangelism that resemble Jesus Christ, the One who wills Full Salvation. We are no longer concerned with a systematic “What will God do?” but rather a missiological “What does God will?” I believe this is the correct approach considering that Jesus taught us to pray “Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.” If this is our prayer, then evangelism can be nothing less than the present hope in God’s will to include all of creation in the kingdom of God.

GOD WILL NOT REST: THE GOOD NEWS OF FULL SALVATION

When we understand salvation as life in the kingdom of God and not simply a post-mortem destination, then we may better comprehend the biblical notion that God wills the salvation of all; what we have heretofore called “Full Salvation.” We remember that salvation in the kingdom of God is no less than the fulfillment of God’s call to Abraham because it is through Jesus, Abraham’s seed, that the nations of the world are blessed (Rom. 5:18). Not only this, but also we may note that salvation in the kingdom of God is a pneumatological reality (Acts. 1:6-8). That is, salvation in Christ comes through the Holy Spirit (John 3:5). With these recognitions we may discover the church’s unique role in Full Salvation and consider their impact on our methods for evangelism.

Firstly, our understanding of biblical salvation changes the way we define evangelism. Instead of “saving souls” or “accepting Jesus into your heart,” evangelism is the invitation to live in the kingdom of God. This means that all and sundry are invited to join the community of God’s kingdom and begin living under the Lordship of Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit. This has an immediate and momentous impact on the church: we must be that community to which we invite others! Evangelism in light of God’s Full Salvation fundamentally includes living the reign of God (which, not coincidentally, demands we discern God’s will!). This is precisely why salvation cannot wait until after death. Salvation in this paradigm is the invitation to begin living now the way that God’s community shall be forever. Evangelism, then, is not just a verbal invitation to those yet to be included; it is the relational reaching out by which we include those who are not yet a part of the kingdom community. This sufficiently refutes the ludicrous accusation that Universalism “undermines the missionary mandate of Christ.” Universalism is the missionary mandate of Christ! God’s Full Salvation demands evangelism.

Secondly, because salvation is a present reality, evangelism ought to focus on immediate, holistic needs. Contrary to the censure above, God’s Full Salvation does not “trivialize the radical sinfulness of fallen humanity” via the naïve optimism that things will one day be OK. Instead, Full Salvation invites us to respond to those starving in Sudan with compassion because God desires their salvation – and that salvation means becoming what Jesus and the early church modeled: the kingdom of God. Evangelism in this paradigm cannot compartmentalize human existence into body/soul or physical/spiritual. Evangelism matters here and now because salvation is here and now.

Third, the belief in God’s Full Salvation overcomes the impasse of perdition. Christian evangelism has no place for the desire of hell. “As soon as we find ourselves wanting to believe in hell we find ourselves in great danger.” Exclusivism has yielded many Christians who resemble the elder brother in Jesus’ parable of the prodigal son. At the very least, shouldn’t biblical Christians subscribe to Arminian Universalism? We have seen above the kind of evangelism that results from the lack of hope in traditional soteriology. Contrastingly, God’s

Full Salvation allows for a foundational message of hope: “The Creator will not rest until the human race has reached the destiny for which it has been created.”

Fourth, and in rebuttal to the criticism above, God’s “Full Salvation” actually enables Christians to address sin, not ignore it. This has two components. The first is that it enables us to speak of the “elephant in the room” because no longer does this elephant equate to eternal damnation. Instead we may speak of sin in light of God’s love, which ultimately opens us up to see sin all the more clearly as that which inhibits salvation under the reign of God. A second component is that we may speak of sin in terms of present reality because salvation is a matter of present concern (not just future, as is assumed by the criticism above). Like Jesus, we may use this-world realities to elucidate the seriousness of sin. For example, as Jesus compared the road of sin to Gehenna, a burning pile of human waste, so too may we speak prophetically against the sinful realities in our world. What is sin? Sin is human trafficking. What is hell? Hell is Auschwitz. Hell is starving children in a world of abundant resources.

This last point naturally leads to the question of how the proponent of Full Salvation interprets New Testament passages used to endorse the traditional view of hell. While the scope of this paper cannot begin to deal fairly with these texts, three remarks may be made. First, the explicit teachings of Jesus on hell must be interpreted in their original context. Not only do these occurrences make use of Gehenna as a rhetorical device, but also Jesus’ stern warnings to the religious elite contrast his kingdom soteriology with that of the Pharisees, for whom the earliest form of Exclusivism had become ‘orthodoxy’. Secondly, hell is certainly real as both a present and future state, but not an everlasting state. Hell, as we mentioned above, is the road of sin that leads to death. It does not take long to see these realities in our present world just as it was real to Jesus in the First Century. However, present hell screams for punitive cleansing (cf. Gen. 4:10) and thereby divulges its transience. As a future reality, we must make a third remark about hell. Like the biblical notion of salvation, Jesus’ teachings on hell must be interpreted in light of Old Testament theology. The Hebrew scriptures largely remain silent on ideas of post-mortem punishment. Moreover, Old Testament notions of judgment, from which Jesus drew his teaching, contain no hints of the unending punishment that we find in modern Exclusivism. Instead, judgment in the Old Testament – even God’s “eternal fire” (Jer. 17:4) – is not the final word but a means to reconciliation with God (cf. Jer. 31:38-40). There are substantial grounds for arguing that God’s judgment is itself salvific. This does not, however, mean that biblical teaching on hell may be glossed over as a “means to reconciliation.” Paul makes clear that all will be judged (Rom. 14:10-12, 2 Cor. 5:10) and that the man whose work is burned up “will suffer loss” (1 Cor. 3:10-15). Yet, Paul also claims that those who suffer loss “will be saved, but only as through fire.” Here, as in the Old Testament, hell may be a terrible – yet purposeful – experience that God uses to achieve God’s one, true purpose: the salvation of all.

A fifth and final affect on evangelism is that Full Salvation offers a wider vision of what God is doing in the world. We see glimpses of God’s inclusive intentions every day in the many “anonymous Christians” who do not associate with Christianity but are themselves instruments of God’s salvation. These men, women and children arise in all cultures and in all world religions and live, unknowingly, under the reign of God by the gracious power of the Spirit. Instead of seeing them as excluded and dividing humankind into neat categories, we may engage with them and say, “Look at what God is doing! Look at where the God of the Bible wants us to go – together!” Such an approach enables us to explore hopes and possibilities with non-believers, not simply dole out religious formula or advice. For example, questions like If Jesus were running the world, what might it look like? might instigate creative ways to discover God’s Spirit leading us toward Full Salvation.

CONCLUSION: THY WILL BE DONE

In our study we have seen the adverse and often unbiblical effects that traditional soteriology has on evangelism. These effects include a de-emphasis on Jesus’ teaching about the kingdom of God and kingdom ethics; little need for presence of the Holy Spirit; Platonic body/soul dualism and unhealthy speculation about the after-life; individualism; judgmental attitudes and exclusivity; decreased sensitivity to emotions; neglect of present sin and suffering; and the inability to fall in love with the God of Exclusivism. I believe that the decreasing relevancy of this form of evangelism communicates its weaknesses. With a fresh reading we may see that the God of the Bible wills the Full Salvation of creation. This is not pie-in-the-sky-by-and-by optimism that one day

God will flip a switch and all will be hunky dory again. Such universalistic hopes are, in actuality, a response to the shortcomings of traditional soteriology. Instead, we have presented a biblical form of Universalism, here designated "Full Salvation," in which salvation is defined as life under the reign of God, which is both now and still to come. This affords us a more rounded soteriology that is eschatological, pneumatological and Christocentric.

More than this, however, Full Salvation allows for a more biblical and thereby more effective evangelism. The examples of Abraham, Jacob, and, most importantly, Jesus demonstrate that God's elect are eschatological people. "When God gives Abraham his promise, and when Abraham believes, the fulfillment is nowhere in sight. All has yet to happen." And yet Abraham believed and it was reckoned to him as righteousness. Might it be time that Christians begin believing in the promise of God, even when fulfillment is nowhere in sight? In his ministry Jesus always loved people ahead of time. Not only ahead of time, but across the orthodox divide. And not only across the orthodox divide, but beyond the chasm of sin and death! Evangelism that is biblical must not lose faith in God's eschatological love.

This is what God's Full Salvation is about. It is not about proving a conclusive, airtight solution to the doctrine of salvation; it is about seeking what God wills and praying "Thy will be done," even when fulfillment is nowhere in sight. And when we discover what it is that the God of the Bible wills for creation, we cannot help but fall in love. When the will of God is that all of creation be saved, Christianity is indeed Good News for the world.

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1 David J. Powys, 'Hell': A Hard Look at a Hard Question, (Carlisle, Cumbria, United Kingdom: Paternoster Press, 1997), 413. 2 J.R. Root, "Universalism," from *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Walter A. Elwell, (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001), 1232. This definition shall be nuanced below.³ Leslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 182.4 Brian D. McLaren, *The Last Word and the Word After That*, (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2005), 7.5 Ted Peters calls this the "theodicy problem in its eschatological form." Ted Peters, "Where Are We Going?" *Essentials of Christian Theology*, ed. William C. Placher, (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003), 360.6 Jan Bonda, *The One Purpose of God*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 23. 7 Bonda (1993), 10. 8 Also known as "Double Predestination." 9 Bonda (1993), 14, original italics. 10 Bonda (1993), 30. 11 "We've turned being like Jesus into knowing about Jesus," Philip Gulley and James Mulholland, *If Grace is True*, (New York: Harper Collins, 2003), 154.12 Bonda (1993), 21. 13 Bonda (1993), 26. Yet compare with the Gospel portrayal of Jesus as one intimately in touch with his feelings (e.g. Mk 6:34).14 See below. 15 David Kinnaman and Gabe Lyons, *Un-Christian*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2007), 34. 16 Bonda (1993), 27. 17 i.e. Not 'What could God do?' but rather 'What does God want to do?' cf. Bonda (1993), 47.18 David Hilborn and Don Horrocks, "Universalism and Evangelical Theology: An Historical Theological Perspective," *Evangelical Review of Theology*, no. 30 July, 2006, 216. 19 The term "full salvation" is borrowed from John Wesley's theology of the sanctification of the individual. Here I apply the term corporately to denote God's active mission within history to restore all of creation to God in Christ. See S. Philip Watson, "Wesley and Luther on Christian Perfection," *Ecumenical Review*. 15 no. 3 (April 1963): 291-302. 20 Bonda (1993), 82. cf. 95. 21 Exod. 32:11-14; 34:1-10; Jer. 31:1-3, 20, 31-37; Ezek. 16; Hos. 1:9-10; 11:1-4; Lk 23:34; Rom. 4:5; 5:8. Faithlessness and disobedience do not have the final word. God's covenant love (*hesed*) has the final word.²² Bonda (1993), 46. Though Sodom was eventually destroyed, this judgment does not have the final word on Sodom, see Ezek.16:53. cf. Bonda (1993), 48-54.²³ See conventional interpretations of Rom. 9:13. ²⁴ Bonda (1993), 143-144. ²⁵ cf. Psalm 106:23. ²⁶ "And all flesh shall see the salvation of God," (Luke 3:6). cf. Mark 1:15 and Luke 17:21.²⁷ The term 'kingdom of God' has in our day become virtually synonymous with the heaven of the afterlife due to the misunderstanding of the term 'kingdom of heaven' in Matthew's Gospel. As a good Jew, Matthew was merely employing reverence for God by replacing 'God' with the term 'heaven.' Therefore, it is widely attested that Matthew's 'kingdom of heaven' is the same as Mark's and Luke's 'kingdom of God.' cf. Craig Keener, *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company), 149.²⁸ cf. Acts 1:3 ²⁹ "βασιλεία" from the *Theological dictionary of the New Testament*, Vol. 1, ed. Gerhard Kittel, (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1964), 581.³⁰ N.T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), 199-204. ³¹ Matt. 9:9-13; Mark 5:24-34; Luke 6:27. ³² Mark 1:15, Luke 17:21. ³³ cf. 1 Cor. 15:22-28; 2 Cor. 5:16-19. ³⁴ cf. Gal. 4:4, Eph.

1:10.35 What Jesus called “life of the ages” (trans. “eternal life”) and defined as knowing God in Christ (John 17:3) through the Spirit (John 3:5). 36 cf. Lk 3:10-14; 10:25-37; 18:18-30 and par. 37 We are not just saved from sin but saved to life in God’s kingdom community. 38 Niebuhr calls this “eschatological immediacy.” H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture*, (New York: Harper Row, 1951), 227. 39 cf. Acts 1:44-47. 40 N.T. Wright, *Following Jesus: Biblical Reflections on Discipleship*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 92, italics added. 41 Lk 15:11-32, esp. 25-32. cf. Matt. 20:1-16. 42 That is, to hope that God wills the salvation of all. Yet, once one begins to believe that God wills the salvation of all, there can be little question of what this means for evangelism! See above. (See also *Universal Salvation? The Current Debate*, ed. Robin A. Parry and Christopher H. Partridge, [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003], xvi.)⁴³ Bonda (1993), 116. 44 See Elaine A. Heath, *The Mystic Way of Evangelism*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 39-58. 45 Matt. 5:21-26, 27-30; 10:28; 23:15,33; Mk 9:42-50. ‘Gehenna’ is nowhere found in the Hebrew Bible but may be found in the Pseudopigrapha, Palestinian Targums, and New Testament. The term came to indicate a place of punishment or punishment itself. However, the ambiguity of the term allowed for many different interpretations. See Powys (1997), 177-194.⁴⁶ “During intertestamental times [Gehenna (Greek), or the Valley of Hinnom (Hebrew)] became the garbage and sewage dump of Jerusalem and a symbol of the place of punishment (1 Enoch 27:3; 4 Ezra 7:36) because worms and fires were always consuming the refuse,” James A. Brooks, *Mark: The New American Commentary*. vol. 23 (Nashville, Tennessee: Broadman Press, 1991), 153. 47 Matt. 5:21-26, 27-30; 10:28; 23:15,33; Mk 9:42-50.48 So Powys: “It is reasonable to conclude that the system of belief identified in the previous chapter as ‘individual post-mortem compensation’, with its key elements of ‘the world to come’, ‘reward and punishment’, Gehenna and Gan Eden and ‘judgment’, did stem from the Pharisees. ...The expectation of individual post-mortem compensation had become so established in the thought of the Pharisees that it had transformed their understanding of salvation,” Powys (1997), 216.⁴⁹ cf. Bonda (1993), ch. VII and Powys (1997) sec. II. 50 e.g. Mark 9:43-48 draws from Isa. 66:24. Matt. 25:46 from Dan. 12:2. 51 Many conventional interpretations are anachronistic in their import of modern definitions of “eternal” for the Hebrew “‘olam”, which is translated “forever” and “everlasting” but did not carry the same meaning in Hebrew. See Bonda (1993), 63-73, 211-219.⁵² cf. Bonda (1993), VII.353 Isa. 48:9-11; Jer. 9:25; 30:11-17; 31:10-11, 18-20, 31-37; Ezek. 16; Hos. 11:1-3; 14:4-9; Rom. 14:10-12; 1 Cor. 3:10-15. (See Bonda [1993], 196-219 for discussion on salvific judgment. cf. Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 3, [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963], 398-399.)⁵⁴ Is this what Paul means when he says, “From now on, we regard no one from a human point of view,” (2 Cor. 5:16)?⁵⁵ Bonda (1993), 95. 56 Rom. 6:10.