

“Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil; who put darkness for light, and light for darkness; who put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter!” (Isa 5:20)

✠ Lecture II: The Scope of Salvation ✠

1. Universalism: “All will be saved”.

According to this view, all people (**good & bad**) and **Satan** will be saved. The most significant early exponent of this view was Origen who was deeply suspicious of any form of dualism – that is, any belief system that acknowledged the existence of two supreme powers, one good and one evil. This belief was characteristic of many forms of Gnosticism, and was very influential in the eastern Mediterranean world in the late second century.

To reject dualism is to reject the idea that God and Satan rule over their respective Kingdoms for eternity. In the end, God will overcome evil, and restore creation to its original form; being subject to the will of God. It therefore follows, on the basis of this ‘restorationist’ soteriology, that the final redeemed version of creation cannot include anything along the lines of ‘a hell’ or ‘Kingdom of Satan’.

✠ Refutation:

Hell is not Satan’s Kingdom; it is the place where he and his angels will suffer forever. In the Holy Book of Revelation, St. John said, “The devil, who deceived them, was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone where the beast and the false prophet are. And they will be **tormented day and night forever and ever**” (**Rev 20:10**). Our Lord will say to those on His left, “Depart from Me, you cursed, into the **everlasting fire** prepared for the devil and his angels” (**Mt 25:41**). The demons themselves know their fate, they said to our Lord, “What have we to do with You, Jesus, You Son of God? **Have You come here to torment us before the time?**” (**Mt 8:28**). Notice that there is no dualism here, for Satan is being punished in this fire and not ruling over it. Moreover, this fire is everlasting which makes the suggestion of restoration flawed contradicting Holy Scripture.

Concerning people, St. Jude said, “Sodom and Gomorrah, and the cities around them in a similar manner to these, having given themselves over to sexual immorality and gone after strange flesh, are set forth **as an example**, suffering the vengeance of **eternal fire**” (**Jude 7**). Our Lord said about the people who refuse the faith, “It will be more tolerable in that Day for Sodom than for that city” (**Lk 10:12**). Again this fire is eternal for sinners and unbelievers. Therefore, our Lord said, “Fear Him who has power to cast into hell” (**Lk 12:5**). Indeed, “If the righteous one is scarcely saved, where will the ungodly and the sinner appear?” (**Prov 11:31; 1Pet 4:18**).

2. Limited Atonement: “Only the Elect will be saved”.

The basis of this view lies in the Protestant heresy of salvation by grace alone. According to this heresy, people are saved through the grace of God alone without any human role. Calvinists believe in what they call ‘**Irresistible Grace**’. When these heretics could not explain why there were sinners still remaining in the world if indeed salvation depended on grace alone, they fell into the heresy of ‘**Limited Atonement and Predestination**’. According to this heresy, God has chosen some people (The Elect) and our Lord Jesus Christ died only for them. All the people who perish are simply not fortunate enough to be among these elect who were predestined for salvation (by grace alone). They did not stop at this point but went so far as to say that the salvation of these elect is guaranteed no matter what they do wrong. Hence, they fell in a third heresy called ‘**Eternal Security**’. They argue along the following lines. Let us suppose that our Lord Jesus Christ died for all people. But not all people will be saved. Therefore, it follows that our Lord Jesus Christ died to no effect for those who are not saved. This, in their view, raises questions concerning the efficacy of His death. But if our Lord Jesus Christ died **only** for those who are to be saved, He will have succeeded in His mission in every case. Therefore, they conclude that our Lord Jesus Christ died only for those elect.

✚ Refutation:

We are dealing with three related heresies:

1. Salvation by grace alone.
2. Predestination and Limited Atonement.
3. Eternal Security.

Each one of them will be refuted separately, but now we just want to highlight the following: The principle of predestination and election implies injustice and partiality. It leads sinners to despair, feeling that their striving is in vain and useless since they are predestined to perish. As for the righteous, it leads them to slackness and negligence. This view leaves many questions unanswered, why is there a need for commandments? Why would the devil toil in tempting the elect if they will certainly be saved? On what basis would reward be given to the elect if they had no choice in their destiny? Why would God punish a person predestined to perdition? This idea leads the world into confusion and contradicts God's love and justice and man's free will.

3. Pluralism:

Due to the rise of multiculturalism in western society, the question of the relation of Christianity to other religious traditions has assumed a new importance. Pluralists argue that if God wishes everyone to be saved, it is inconceivable that the divine self-revelation should be effected in such a way that only a small portion of humanity could be saved. For this reason, non-Christian religious traditions are valid and capable of mediating the saving grace of God. Christians, in their view, have no special access to God, who is universally available through all religious traditions. A similar approach is associated with the claim that all Christian traditions are valid despite their radically different beliefs and practices.

✚ Refutation:

✚→ Holy Scripture testifies that the will of God is for the entire world to be saved. God in His love and justice offers salvation to everyone:

- "I have **no pleasure in the death of the wicked**, but that the wicked turn from his way and live." (Ezek 33:11)
- "This is acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires **all men** to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth." (1Tim 2:4)
- God so **loved the world** that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life." (Jn 3:16)
- "And He Himself is the propitiation of our sins and not ours only but also for **the whole world**." (1Jn 2:2)
- "Go into **all the world** and preach the gospel to **every creature**." (Mk 16:15)

✚→ Holy Scripture also testifies that there is no salvation except through our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. In other words, unbelievers (non-Christians) will not be saved (will go to hell):

- "He who believes in Him is not condemned; but **he who does not believe is condemned** already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God." (Jn 3:18)
- "**He who does not believe will be condemned**." (Mk 16:16)
- "He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and **he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him**" (Jn 3:36)
- "If you do not believe that I am He, **you will die in your sins**." (Jn 8:24)
- "Having been **justified by faith**, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." (Rom 5:1)
- "Without (Christian) faith it is **impossible to please Him**." (Heb 11:6)
- "**He who does not have the Son of God does not have life**." (1Jn 5:12)
- "**Nor is there salvation in any other**, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved." (Acts 4:12)

- “The master of that servant will come on a day when he is not looking for him, and at an hour when he is not aware, and will cut him in two and **appoint his portion with the unbelievers.**” (Lk 12:46)
- “The cowardly, **unbelieving, ... shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone.**” (Rev 21:8)

✠→ Holy Scripture affirms that God gave people a free will and that He doesn't force anybody to be good or to believe:

- “I have set before you today life and good, death and evil ... therefore, **choose life.**” (Deut 30:19)
- “**If anyone desires** to come after Me, let him deny himself ...” (Mt 16:24)
- “**If you want** to enter into life, keep the commandments.” (Mt 19:17)
- “**If you want** to be perfect, go sell what you have and give to the poor.” (Mt 19:21)
- “How often **I wanted** to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but **you were not willing!**” (Mt 23:37-38)
- “But **you are not willing** to come to Me that you may have life.” (Jn 5:40)
- “The Kingdom of heaven is like a certain king who arranged a marriage for his son, and sent out his servants to call those who were invited to the wedding; and **they were not willing to come.**” (Mt 22:2-3)

✠→ Truth can be disturbing at times, therefore, truth as recorded in Holy Scripture **and not what makes us comfortable** should be our quest. Some truths are disturbing like eternal, conscious torment in fire and brimstone (Rev 20:10), but it is still true. Another disturbing truth is the fact that **only a few will escape that fire!** Our Lord said, “Do not fear **little flock** for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the Kingdom” (Lk 12:32). One the disciples asked our Lord, “Lord, are there few who are saved?” and He said to them, “Strive to enter through the narrow gate, for **many**, I say to you **will seek to enter and will not be able**” (Lk 13:23-24). He also said, “Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are **few who find it.**” (Mt 7:13-14).

Q.1 St. Peter said, “God shows no partiality. But in every nation whoever fears Him is accepted by Him” (Acts 10:34-35). Does this mean that non-Christians would be saved?

A. No. St. Peter is referring to the universal saving will of God; Cornelius was from the Gentiles and yet was invited to believe by an angel in a vision (Acts 10:3-6). At this point the apostles were still under the impression that the Christian faith was for the Jews only. Hence St. Peter said, “God has shown me that I should not call any man common or unclean” (Acts 10:28). And, “When Peter came up to Jerusalem, those of the circumcision contended with him, saying: You went in to uncircumcised men and ate with them!” (Acts 11:2-3). But after St. Peter told them that the Holy Spirit fell upon them, “they became silent; and glorified God, saying, then God has also granted to the Gentiles repentance to life” (Acts 11:18). St. Peter did not say, “In every nation whoever fears Him will be saved”. He said, “Accepted by Him”. There is a difference between ‘**Salvation**’ and ‘**Preparation for Salvation**’. God prepared the Gentiles to accept the Christian faith through philosophy and He prepared the Jews through prophecies and Law. Did the Law save the Jews? No, St. Paul affirms, “That no one is justified by the Law in the sight of God is evident, for the just shall live by faith” (Gal 3:11). All the Old Testament righteous people did not go into paradise until our Lord died on the cross because “These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off” (Heb 11:13). Our Lord Jesus Christ is the **only way** for salvation, He said, “I am **the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me**” (Jn 14:6). Therefore, even though Cornelius was a devout man and one who feared God (Acts 10:2) he had to believe and be baptized in order to be saved.

Q.2 St. Paul said, “For when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do the things contained in the law, these, although not having the law, are a law to themselves” (Rom 2:14).

Does this mean that non-believers would be saved?

A. No. Let us consider the words of St. Paul:

“For as many as have sinned without law **will** also **perish** without law, and as many as have sinned in the law **will be judged** by the law (for not the hearers of the law are just in the sight of God, but the doers of the law will be justified; for when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do the things contained in the law, these, although not having the law, are a law to themselves, who show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and between themselves their thoughts accusing or else excusing them) in the day when God will judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ, according to my gospel” **(Rom 2:12-16).**

The misinterpretation of these verses leads people to false views concerning the scope of salvation. These verses do not speak of the salvation of the Gentiles if they live by their natural law; on the contrary, they speak about their condemnation; “For as many as have sinned without the law will also perish without law”. A Gentile - who is without a written law – will perish without the law. Therefore, a Jew will be condemned according to the written law, and the Gentile will be condemned according to the natural unwritten law. **These verses are not about salvation;** they are about judgment and condemnation. St. Paul never said that a Jew would be saved by the law or a Gentile without law. St. Paul’s argument in this chapter is that there is no salvation through the written law or the unwritten one. Therefore he said in the next chapter, “We have previously charged both Jews and Greeks that they are all under sin” **(Rom 3:9).** (Adapted from, ‘*Dogmatic Theology*’ Part VI. By Dr. Morris Tawadros).

Q.3 What is the fault of the people who lived before the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ or those who did not hear the message of the Holy Gospel? They didn’t know!

A. ✧) First of all, St. Paul affirms that, “The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown it to them. For **since the creation of the world** His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that **they are without excuse**” **(Rom 1:19-20).** Therefore, we need to believe in the justice of God for it is written, “The judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether” **(Ps 19:9).**

✧) **Secondly,** our Lord said about the people who rejected the message of the Holy Gospel, “Assuredly, I say to you, it will be **more tolerable** for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment than for that city” **(Mt 10:15).** These words imply that there are different levels of suffering and that one level is more tolerable than the other. The same applies to the reward as St. Paul said, “one star differs from another star in glory” **(1Cor 15:41).**

✧) **Finally,** assuming that they did not know, ignorance does not prevent punishment. Our Lord said, “That servant who knew his master’s will, and did not prepare himself or do according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes. But **he who did not know**, yet committed things worthy of stripes, **shall be beaten with few.** For everyone to whom much is given, from him much will be required; and to whom much has been committed, of him they will ask the more” **(Lk 12:47-48).** Notice that the servant who did not know was beaten but with fewer stripes!
