

HOPEFUL INCLUSIVISTS BELIEVE IN DIVINE JUDGMENT

“Hopeful Inclusivism” – definition: 1. The belief, held by John Wesley, Billy Graham and many others, that while Christ alone is our means of salvation, those who have never heard his name might yet be saved by him because when they turn to the Light they do have, Christ is that Light.

2. The belief, taught by Hans Urs Von Balthasar, Kallistos Ware and Brad Jersak, that because Christ has conquered death for all, the event of death cannot separate us from God’s love (Romans 8) and God’s mercy indeed endures forever. Thus, in principle, Christ opens up the gates of possibility that all might turn to him.



Hopeful Inclusivists believe in Divine Judgment. What they challenge is the unbiblical assumptions, accretions and emphases of those who hold that God’s judgments are retributive rather than restorative. What we know of Divine

Judgment, we learn from the Scriptures. Rather than sweeping judgment under the rug, we can make the following assertions, rooted in Scripture.

1. **An accounting of our lives:** We believe that like the prophets before them, Christ and his apostles foretell a “Day of the Lord.” On that day, we will all stand before Christ and give an account for the one life we had to live and have to offer God. Facing the meaning of our lives could be cause for rejoicing or mourning, not unlike the “fearless moral inventory” upon which the recovery community asks all addicts to reflect with rigorous honesty.

2. **An assessment of our deeds:** Standing before Christ involves an examination of our deeds. I.e. Your life matters! This judgment of deeds is quite apart from the issue of saving faith in Christ for eternal life. The New Testament apostles (Paul, Peter and John) explicitly speak of a judgment according to our motives and deeds, resulting in reward or loss. See Matt. 25; Rom. 2:6; 1 Cor. 3:8; 2 Cor. 5:10; Col. 3:25; 1 Pet. 1:17; Rev. 20:12.

3. **The fire of cleansing:** Forgiveness for sin was accomplished at the cross. Period. Our guilt has been removed. But the stain of sin and all its consequences will also be purged when we meet Christ. Malachi prophesies that the Refiner’s fire will purge us of dross and bring out the gold of our true nature. He imagines a Launderer’s soap that will cleanse us of every stain. Similarly, Paul says in 1 Cor. 3 that the fire of judgment will consume all the wood, hay and stubble in our character (probably our worldly and fleshly attachments, including idolatry, resentments, regrets, etc.). Paul says some will pass through the fire with nothing to show for their lives, yet he adds, “they will be saved as through fire.” That sounds ominous, but here is the surprise:

4. Hebrews 12 identifies the fire as God himself. The fire in Christ’s eyes is the passion of his infinite love for his creatures. Triune infinite Love is the cleansing fire that purifies us and consumes everything in us that opposes love and anything foreign to our true selves in Christ.

5. **The glorification of our humanity.** The cleansing judgment includes a dramatically positive aspect: the Bible calls this transformation our GLORIFICATION (Rom. 8). The transforming presence of God’s glory transfigures us, grace upon grace, from glory to glory, into the image of Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 3).

6. Only Christ can save and a willing response of surrender to Christ is necessary. The Book of Revelation declares that entry into the heavenly city requires that our robes be washed in Christ’s blood. That is, all who are thirsty are welcome to enter the open gates of the New Jerusalem, but access is only given to those who willingly surrender to the Lamb’s sacrificial love.

7. Our repentance and confession are necessary. But because Christ has conquered death and its power, and because he now holds the keys to death and Hades (Rev. 1), death has lost its dominion. Christ's love is stronger than the grave (Song. 8), so death cannot separate us from the love of God (Rom. 8). Did you hear that? *Death cannot separate us from the love of God.* Thus, it is possible that repentance and confession may happen after death at the final judgment, just as Paul predicts in Philippians 2. He foresees every knee bowing and every tongue confessing (in heaven and on earth and under the earth) that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father.

8. The final judgment will be Christ's grand universal victory. When we see Christ face-to-face, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is (1 John 3). When *every* eye sees him (Rev. 1) and *every* knee bows and *every* tongue confesses, then, Paul says *every* enemy will be under Jesus' feet, *all* evil will be eradicated and Christ will hand over the kingdom to God the Father and God will be all and in all (1 Cor. 15).

9. The Gospel of John treats divine judgment as already. While the Day of the Lord is frequently pictured at the end of the ages, Jesus in John's Gospel disregards death as a deadline and does not treat the judgment as future. The Jesus of John's Gospel declares that judgment (not "heaven" and "hell" but "eternal life" and "perishing") is already experienced as our current state of existence (John 3). The judgment of eternal life versus perishing occurs NOW as we turn from the Light or turn to the Light. The judgment seat of Christ in John is the Cross itself, where Christ's final verdict is mercy, forgiveness and reconciliation. At the same time, like the two thieves crucified with Jesus, *our* verdict about Christ (now, for or against) determine how we experience the divine life (now) or alienation (until we make that turn).

10. God never did and never will remove our choice. God is deeply committed to our freedom to say YES or NO to him (a precondition of authentic love). If God could have removed our choice to say NO in the Garden of Eden, our YES would never have been a willing YES of love. But neither is God ever going to allow the event of death to take away our choice to say YES, especially when he knows our choice to turn from him was based in deception and dysfunction. But at the Final Judgment, when deception and dysfunction are removed, when we see Christ with unveiled eyes and hearts, won't everyone turn to Christ? I hope so. But the principle of human freedom should give us pause: we cannot presume that all will turn to Christ or that even one will not. But we are called to preach, pray and hope that God's revealed will would take place: "that none would perish and all would say yes to eternal life."

REFLECTION

As we review these 10 points, there should be no real issue with Jesus-only salvation, the necessity of a faith response or the reality of divine judgment. Critics misrepresent these facts repeatedly: “So, you’re saying Jesus doesn’t matter, faith doesn’t matter, and there is no judgement.” Of course not! Indeed, that charge is sloppy and slanderous.

The ONLY real bone of contention is whether post-mortem repentance/salvation is a biblical possibility. Here is the hopeful inclusivist’s contention: *Just as death cannot separate us from the love of God, nor is it the terminus of our ability to willingly return that love.*

BIBLICAL HOPE OF POST-MORTEM SALVATION?

Here are a few key examples:

The Prophet Isaiah 2

^{2:22}And they [the kings of the earth] shall be gathered together, as prisoners are gathered in the pit, and shall be shut up in the prison, and after many days shall they be visited [LXX: *episcope*— personal visitation, oversight].

Book of Jonah 2

^{2:2}“I cried out to the Lord because of my affliction, and He answered me. *Out of the belly of Sheol* [LXX: *Hades*] I cried, and You heard my voice. ³For You cast me into the deep, into the heart of the seas, and the floods surrounded me; all Your billows and Your waves passed over me...

⁶I went down to the moorings of the mountains; *the earth with its bars closed behind me forever; yet You have brought up my life from the pit, O Lord, my God.*

The Prophet Zechariah 9

¹¹As for you also, *because of the blood of my covenant with you, I will set your prisoners free from the waterless pit.*

Paul in Ephesians 4

^{4:7} But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it. ⁸This is why it says: “When he ascended on high, he took many captives and gave gifts to his people.” ⁹(Now this, “He ascended”—what does it mean but that He also *first*

descended into the lower parts of the earth? ¹⁰ He who descended is also the One who ascended far above all the heavens, that He might fill all things.)

Peter in 1 Peter 3 & 4

^{3:18} For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive in the Spirit. ¹⁹ After being made alive, *he went and made proclamation to the imprisoned spirits*— ²⁰ to those who were disobedient long ago when God waited patiently in the days of Noah while the ark was being built. In it only a few people, eight in all, were saved through water, ²¹ and this water symbolizes baptism that now saves you also—not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a clear conscience toward God. It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ, ²² who has gone into heaven and is at God's right hand—with angels, authorities and powers in submission to him.

^{4:4} In all this, they are surprised that you do not run with them into the same excesses of dissipation, and they malign *you*; ⁵ but they will give account to Him who is ready to judge the living and the dead. ⁶ *For the gospel has for this purpose been preached [literally 'evangelized'] even to those who are dead, that though they are judged in the flesh as men, they may live in the spirit according to God.*