

Here We Stand: Is Everybody Saved?

Oprah Winfrey says, "Yes." Lutheran Walter Bouman said, "Yes," and added: "Difficult as it is – because I always think of it as unfair – I've come to accept God's universal salvation as the final consequence of Jesus' resurrection" (The Lutheran. Nov. 05, p.24).

Do we have God figured out? Is everyone saved in the end?

Some Bible verses suggest that everyone is saved. For example, "... one man's act of righteousness leads to acquittal and life for all men" (Rom 5:18). "For God has consigned all men to disobedience, that he may have mercy on all" (Rom 11:32) Case closed?

If everyone is saved, then there is no need to worry about being lost or damned. No need to worry about sin; it doesn't matter what we do. No need to distinguish law and gospel, as Luther did. No need for mission. No need to worry about church. Whatever happens there is not so serious – because God saves everybody anyway.

If everyone is saved, then it's also true that there is no justice for those who are slaughtered by tyrants, beheaded by terrorists, or those who impose on Christians required works or a priestly hierarchy and thus undermine the all-sufficient cross. Neither doctrine or denominations matter if everyone is saved no matter what.

Eternally Lost

Do we have God figured out? Not really. The Bible has other things to say:

Some "will go into eternal punishment" (Matt 25:46). And: "...[T]he gate is wide and the way is easy that

leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many" (Matt 7:13).

But what if those who go the wide way do so because they are confused, misled, or mentally ill? It seems unjust given the confusion and brokenness of life.

And what about those who have never had a chance to hear the gospel? What about the "righteous Gentile" (Acts 10:22)? Are they all eternally lost?

God's Justice

What is God's justice? The cross and the cross alone. Therefore – the following:

1. The cross is God's "No" to penetrating heaven. We don't have God figured out. "How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!" (Rom 11:33).

Who is saved is God's business, not ours, and we truly leave it up to him. We **really** do not know. We are not to wink and say, "The logical consequence of Jesus' resurrection is that all are saved."

We also do not announce: "Many will be damned." Rather, we **really** leave it up to the Lord.

With Paul we say, "I do not even judge myself. I am not thereby acquitted, it is God who judges" (1 Cor 3:4). We heed Paul's warning: "Therefore let any one who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall" (1 Cor 10:12).

Therefore we say "No" to all claims to have God figured out. As our Lutheran Confessions say:

"Hence if anyone so sets forth this teaching concerning God's gracious election that sorrowing Christians can find no comfort in it but are driven to despair, or when impenitent sinners are strengthened in their malice, then it is

clearly evident that this teaching is not being set forth according to the Word and will of God..." (FC SD 11:91-93; T 631-2, K/W 655).

2. Leaving judgments about salvation to the Lord, we live by faith alone. We do not even **infer** that everybody is saved. We do not even **infer** that many are damned. This is what it means to live by faith alone.

3. We let God be God. We let the Lord run the universe. We dare not try to solve the problem of evil. We let the Lord work out the mysteries of evil and salvation. What we know for sure is that his kingdom comes by his power alone, through the Word of the cross alone.

4. We rejoice in the certainty and freedom Christ has won for us. Our salvation is sure because God himself solved the problem of sin and death on the cross. He did it by himself, without our help, and it is finished (John 19:30).

Salvation is never our possession or our due. Rather, our salvation is certain because it is outside of us, in spite of us.

5. What about mission? Our task is to bring this message – not because it depends on us bringing it – for "God is able from these stones to raise up children" (Matt 3:9). Rather, we are given this calling through the Word. As Paul writes, "So faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes by the preaching of Christ" (Rom 10:17). Therefore our mission is to preach no other message "except Jesus Christ and him crucified" (1 Cor 2:2).