

Straight Bible Talk

Manchester Church of Christ, Share Christ's Love and Share His Message

Why?

Why does rain fall from the sky? Why does it not circle the earth or escape into outer space? The answer is found in the law of gravity (or, something like that). Why do birds migrate? Why do animals mate at a particular season of the year? Why do bears hibernate and who tells them that it is time to go to bed?

The answers to all such questions lie in the counsels of God. God has determined all such things. God has also determined who will be saved and who will be lost.

Some believe that the matter of one's salvation is wholly up to God. They believe that people are totally evil and cannot do anything good until God changes their heart. They believe that there are no conditions to be met for one to be saved. They believe that Jesus only died for those who will be saved. They believe that it is impossible to resist the grace and call of God. They believe (based on the above) that it is impossible for one who has been saved to be lost in eternity.

Then there are some who believe only the last of the above five theories. They reject the others. That is like having a roof without the house and the foundation, theoretically possible, but in practice completely unsupported by the "facts."

Consider for example the idea that one cannot do anything good until God changes the heart. Is it good when an alcoholic gives up drunkenness for sobriety? If so, is it impossible for that to happen unless the person is a Christian? If one is born totally evil, then how can the Psalmist describe the sacrifice of children by the Canaanites as the shedding of inno-

cent blood. Can one be totally evil and still be considered innocent?! How is it that Jesus said, concerning the children who were brought to him, "The kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these?" Does the kingdom belong to the totally depraved or must we assume that the parents somehow knew that their children had been regenerated before they brought them to Jesus?

Someone has argued, based on Paul's statement to the Ephesians, that a man who is dead in sin cannot respond to God and do what He commands. Perhaps his problem lies in a misunderstanding of what Paul meant by "dead." For example, in the story of the prodigal son recorded in Luke's account of the gospel, the Father says, concerning his son who left and returned home, "We had to celebrate and rejoice, for this brother of yours was **dead** and has begun to live, and was lost and has been found." The son was not brought home by an act of the father, rather he "came to his senses" and decided to return home. The "dead" son had the power to do what was right. He was "dead" because he was separated from his father, not because he was powerless. To use the illustration of Lazarus in the tomb, raised by Jesus, to prove the powerlessness of one dead in sin, is to compare apples and gophers.

If there are no conditions for salvation then why does Paul give a long list of things that he calls the "works of the flesh" in his letter to the Galatians and then says, "Those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God?" The same problem is observed in applying the command of Jesus to his apostles, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all crea-

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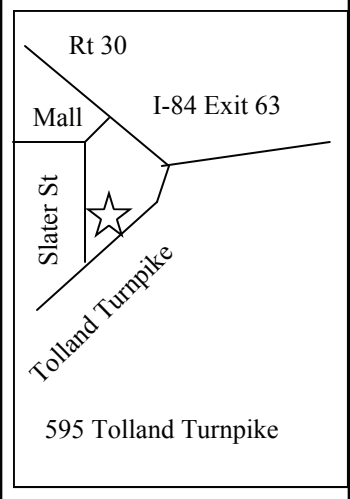
Meeting at
595 Tolland Turnpike

Sun Bible Classes—9 AM
Sun Worship—10 AM
Sun Eve Worship—6:00 PM
Wed Bible Class—7:00 PM

"Therefore having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is now declaring to men that all people everywhere should repent, because He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead."

Acts 17:31

All scripture quotations are from the New American Standard Bible unless otherwise indicated.



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tion. He who has believed and has been baptized shall be saved; but he who has disbelieved shall be condemned." Jesus specifies two conditions necessary for salvation, believing the gospel and being baptized. You cannot very well chose one without choosing the other. For in choosing one, you admit there are conditions for salvation. It is simply a matter then of determining all the conditions that God has specified.

If Jesus died only for those who are saved, then how can the Bible claim "God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that **whoever** believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life?" And why did John write, "He Himself (Jesus) is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world?" But just as the first goat of the Day of Atonement did not take away the sins of the people, so the death of Jesus on the cross is only the first step toward the taking away of our sins. There was a second goat, called the scapegoat. There remains a moment in my life when God takes away my sins. The atonement makes forgiveness possible just as it did in the Old Testament.

If it is impossible to resist the grace

of God, then will everybody be saved, or does God discriminate, choosing some and rejecting others? (And if one replies that God does not reject those not chosen, as a practical matter what difference would that make since not being saved they are doomed to eternal destruction.) If God discriminates, then what did Peter mean when he said, "I most certainly understand now that God is not one to show partiality, but in every nation the man who fears Him and does what is right is welcome to Him?"

If it is impossible for a saved person to be lost, then it must be impossible for a believer to become an unbeliever. But if believing is something that I choose to do, and Jesus said it was, then disbelieving is also something that I may choose to do. (Just as one may choose to believe or disbelieve what is written in this article.)

Jesus said, "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; and I give eternal life to them, and they will never perish; and no one will snatch them out of My hand." Jesus' sheep will never perish because they listen and follow Him. Jesus does not discuss the case of a sheep who ceases to

listen and follow. No one, besides you, can make you quit listening and following Jesus, but you can just as certainly quit as you began. Again, there are those sticky things called conditions. Jesus specified them. Are the conditions meaningless? Are we free to ignore verse 27 because we like verse 28?

In a recent conversation, someone told me, "I have my verses and you have yours." He seemed to suggest that one is free to use whatever suits him from the Bible and ignore everything else. That works fine for a buffet, but the Bible is not "buffet." It is **all** the word of God and the verses that I do not like are probably exactly the verses that I need!

Why do you believe what you believe? Is it because you have checked it all by the Bible? Or, have you just found a system of belief that makes you comfortable? Jesus did not come to make people comfortable. He came to make people right with God.

"You shall know the truth and the truth shall set you free." But if you have believed a lie, you will serve time with Satan and will miss out on the glory and joy that is reserved in heaven for those who believe God.