

How are Good Works and Salvation Connected?

People love the idea of earning stuff. There are trophies awarded in sports for winning a competition. Money earned by doing some sort of work. Students get a good grade for doing well on a test. The list goes on and on. Most of the time earning what you get is not wrong at all. In fact, much of the time it is good, right, and biblically-based. However, the mindset of needing to earn rewards explains why it is so hard to accept how salvation really works.

What All Christians Need to Accept

As indicated, we didn't and don't earn Salvation. That's a very good thing because it would be impossible for any human to actually do so. It is equally true, however, that now that we have been saved, we should be compelled to do good works for the person and cause of Jesus. Scripture tells us that a faith that does not result in good works is dead (James 2:14-26).

Accepting What You've Already Accepted

Sometimes this is a truth that is hard to really accept even for those of us who have already supposedly accepted it. Sometimes, if we are not careful, we who have known this truth for years can drift into backward ways of unbiblical thinking. Biblical Christian thought goes against the natural way most of society thinks today in so many ones. This idea that we don't have to and can't earn this really good thing, this salvation, is just one of those things. Like so many other Christian counter-cultural thoughts, we will likely be struggling with this issue for the rest of our Christian

lives.

Accepting the counter-cultural teaching of Scripture is something I have had trouble with in the past. Not just this particular truth, but many other biblical truths as well. If we are not careful and alert, unbiblical “spiritual” practices and ideas can become a lazy habit. For myself, sometimes along the road of the Christian life, while I thought I had fully accepted a truth, the Holy Spirit will lead me to take a long look at myself and show me that, no I hadn’t actually and fully accepted it yet, just some of it and that that some of it needed to be revitalized and more fully rounded. This kind of spiritual growth is what happens on the lifelong climb of sanctification.

The Short Story of Salvation

The whole need for human salvation in the first place started in the Garden of Eden. There was one particular tree there known as the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. This tree was exactly what its name implies. It embodied our free will to choose good or evil, to either willfully obey God or to willfully disobey Him. Adam and Eve, the first couple, chose evil, sin, disobedience of God’s one rule. Therefore, through them all humanity from that day forward was sentenced to death, eternal death.

The entirety of the rest of the Old Testament is God’s path toward the redemption of mankind through Jesus in the New Testament. We’re talking His own beloved Son here – His only Son. God the Father sent His only Son to die for a people who spat in His face and deserved exactly what they got. He did this so that we could be reunified with Him and have access to everlasting life (John 3:16; Ephesians 2:4-5, 8-9). Doing what God did would be an unthinkable, mind-boggling sacrifice for any parent—and this was our Creator!

After he arose from the dead, Jesus went to heaven to intercede on our behalf before the Father. For our benefit, he left the Holy Spirit to guide His believers to the end. We did not deserve access to the Holy Spirit; He was freely given (Titus 3:4-5).

Yes, acceptance of this sacrifice of God's Son Jesus was and still is the **only** way for us to begin on that Holy Spirit-led path. As Romans 3:23 points out, all of us have sinned and therefore fall short of the glory of God. Because of this, we are completely unworthy to stand in the presence of God. Accepting the sacrifice of Jesus cleanses our sin and makes us able to stand in His presence. It is then that the Holy Spirit leads us up the road of salvation. It will prove to be an up and down road for us, with lots of hills and valleys, but thankfully His work on our behalf does not depend on our constant spiritual highs. His infinite love and grace have got our back.

The Final Answer

Going back to that first question about the connection between good works and salvation, while the two are definitely connected, it's not like one might first assume. Salvation is nothing any human will ever earn by doing good. It was given to us. We were freely given the gift of salvation through the death of Jesus (Romans 6:23). With an authentic salvation experience, we are now bound for heaven, on the road of sanctification with the guidance of the Holy Spirit to the end of final glorification in the eternal presence of God. And how does that authentic salvation experience work? It is by fully confessing complete and lifelong acceptance of Jesus as Lord and Savior in your heart and through your mouth (Romans 10:8-9). That is how salvation comes about. Now we do our good works not to earn salvation, more salvation, or continued salvation, but because Christ saved us, because He commanded

us to do so, because we love, honor, and praise Him for everything He has done for us and for humanity. Now we do so for the rewards awaiting us after this life with Jesus in eternity.

Now we obey His words and do our good works because He is truly our Lord today and forever (Luke 6:46).

My Eyes Have Seen Your Salvation

He had a promise.

The LORD had given him assurance – he would see the Messiah before his death.

Simeon lived with something more than hopeful expectation. He knew. As firm as the ground beneath his feet – he knew.

All his years of righteous devotion found their ultimate reward when he saw that face. That small, innocent face.

The Christ child.

The light and revelation to the world. And so he proclaimed for all the hear:

“My eyes have seen your salvation.”

She was nothing.

She was lowly and humble, yet the LORD had chosen her among all women.

Mary had nothing to offer but her obedience and praise. When the Maker of the world became the fruit of her womb, she responded in the only manner that made sense:

“My soul magnifies the Lord.”

He was a prophecy.

His life had been ordained from beyond his birth. He was the voice crying out in the wilderness making straight the way of the Lord.

In the womb, John jumped for joy when his Lord drew near. In life, he proclaimed the coming of the Kingdom. When he saw his Savior approach, he gave witness of all that had been made known to him:

“Behold, the Lamb of God!”

What about us?

We are faced with unspeakable evil every day. We are confronted with injustice, pride, greed, and apathy. The world is broken, seemingly beyond repair.

But we have seen the Lamb of God. He has been revealed to us in our lowly state. The darkness of our lives has been transformed by the truth and love of the great Light of the world. Our broken ways have been made straight. Our souls magnify the Lord for we have seen with our eyes His salvation.

But it cannot end there.

We are now faced with the same truths and the same impetus at Simeon, Mary, and John. Now that we have seen salvation with our eyes, it is for us to share this good news of great joy to

the world. Our sins have been washed by the blood of the Lamb of God, so it is for us to proclaim his coming. We have been visited by the Great I AM, so our souls magnify the Lord.

We, who have been given this greatest gift, are now the gift-givers. We carry the light to a world stumbling in the darkness. We cry out to the lost that the Lamb of God has come and salvation is here. We live lives of praise to the only one who is worthy. How can we do anything less? Our eyes have seen His salvation and our spirits rejoice in God our Savior!

Merry Christmas from Rambling Ever On!

Is There A Biblical “Age of Accountability”?

Recently for Rambling Ever On I dealt with the hot-button issue of “What About Those Who Have Never Heard of Jesus?” This topic really gets people in Christianity talking because it creates a head-on collision of one obvious fact about the world—that not everyone has heard of Jesus—with a crucial piece of Biblical theology: Jesus is the only way to God. Trying to think through that collision and maintain that God is fair in how he judges people makes for some lively discussion and debate.

You can read that article [here](#).

Yet as a result of my thoughts on that topic a side conversation invariably comes up when I bring it up in public:

What about an age of accountability?

This is a fair question. I lean toward believing there are no exceptions to the "Jesus is the only way to God" truth in terms of people from remote villages or really any place where the Gospel is not shared. Yet, if I am inclined to not believe in exceptions in this way, can I believe that a 1-month old baby who has minimal cognitive and moral development would go to Hell if he or she died?

Logic, of course, guides me to believe that a baby or very small child being accountable to God for their sin is perverse. Yet, I have chosen to follow the Bible wherever it leads because it has proven that often human logic can fail us because humans are fallible (for example, it may sound logical that since "God is love" that he would not eternally punish people, but biblically this is not so).

So the question is: does the Bible speak to this? I think in some sense it does. Not nearly as clearly as I would like, but I gave up a long time ago trying to get God to do what I think he should. Yet, I want to look at five passages that I think help guide me to being satisfied that up to a certain age, people are not held accountable for their sin in terms of being judged by God for it.

Isaiah 7:16-17

He will be eating curds and honey when he knows enough to reject the wrong and choose the right, for before the boy knows enough to reject the wrong and choose the right, the land of the two kings you dread will be laid waste.

I have a very specific aim in this article so I will not be dealing with the bigger meaning of this passage. But suffice it to say that it sounds like God is saying that there is a point in this child's life where he is too young to *choose*

right from wrong. That sounds, especially in Old Testament vernacular, like choosing to follow God. At the very least it speaks to a developed morality, but I think it's closer to the former. I have heard parents and child experts tell me that children have a concept of right and wrong at a very young age. But the idea of choosing right as in choosing God is something more complex and involves higher order thinking, self-awareness and a developed biblical morality[1. In other words, I can believe a child learns much more quickly that it is bad to touch something when they are told not to, than they can learn that there is a God, that we are sinners and that Jesus died to reconcile us to him.]. The Isaiah verse sounds more like this.

Deuteronomy 1:39

And the little ones that you said would be taken captive, your children who do not yet know good from bad—they will enter the land. I will give it to them and they will take possession of it.

This is basically the same as the previous verse except it expands the thought to include all the children of Israel, instead of just one child. This is a crucial point of hermeneutics to me—that just because something was true for one person in the Bible does not mean it is true for all people everywhere[2. For example, I do not think putting out a fleece to test God as Gideon did is something for all people in the US in 2017 to practice]. But the broader the application of any truth in the Bible, the more easily I can believe it is a truth not confined by time or culture or specific circumstances. This verse speaks to many children who are too young to know good from bad, contrasting how the adult Israelites rejected God and could not enter the Promised Land. Again, this sounds like God didn't hold small children accountable for the sins of their community because they were

too young to know better[3. And while I will not add it as its own entry because I am still not sure I agree with it, some interpreters believe the comment in Jonah about the Ninevites not knowing their right hand from their left is about the children without a developed morality that God was showing compassion to. This would go beyond even Israel to a Gentile people, meaning its application lying outside of time and culture would be more likely.]

Romans 9:10b-11a

When [Isaac] married Rebekah, she gave birth to twins. But before they were born, before they had done anything good or bad, she received a message from God.

Bringing up Romans 9 in the context of any theology discussion is like bringing up Donald Trump on Facebook. Yet the fact that God through Paul here acknowledges here again that these two unborn children had not done good or bad leads me to believe that children are protected from judgment by God while in the womb. To say it one way, they are not “saved” but they are “safe”[4. I realize that if you adhere to some form of Calvinism these verses probably don’t support my thesis at all since the thought is that God chose them independently of anything other than His good will. Yet I go a different way—God didn’t choose them according to good or bad but according to His promise, eventually realized in Jesus Christ, and which still leaves room for human choice. But this article is not about this argument and if you’d like more you can [read this](#) or I always recommend Brian Abasciano’s book *Paul’s Use of the Old Testament in Romans 9:10-18* and Robert Picirilli’s *Grace, Faith, Free Will*].

2 Samuel 12:22-23

David replied, "I fasted and wept while the child was alive, for I said, 'Perhaps the Lord will be gracious to me and let the child live.' But why should I fast when he is dead? Can I bring him back again? I will go to him one day, but he cannot return to me."

David here seems to say that he will one day be reunited the baby Bathsheba lost, presumably in Heaven. The hermeneutical danger here still stands; Just because David says something here doesn't mean it is an eternal truth, or even true at all. Yet, when somewhat obscure Bible passages remain without contradiction in the rest of Scripture and align with basic human logic and our sense of fairness, then I am more inclined to believe they are true for all people everywhere. I have little struggle believing God probably used David here to communicate an important truth about babies that are lost as Bathsheba's was. Wise people I know have used these verses to comfort grieving parents and I think they do so with integrity.

Matthew 19:14

Jesus said, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these."

I'll be clear again: I do not think passages like these seal the deal on an age of accountability, but that they may support it. I am not 100% positive about what Jesus meant here other than I am sure he is saying that to follow him you have to take on the humility of a child. Yet is he saying something else? Is he wanting these little children to come to him because they have nothing in them to keep from him, that older children and adults do, i.e., sin and rebellion?

I stop short of saying I'm certain he is saying that. But that it is possible. Jesus loved children and it appears without a

disclaimer and without commands like “repent” and “believe”.

I close by saying that I have a hard time believing there are exceptions to coming to God through Christ for those who are in remote villages where there is no Gospel presence precisely because verses like Acts 17:26-30 appear to preclude those exceptions. They seem to be making the point that “You cannot be excused because of where you live.” But small children are different biblically. They go the opposite way—that they can be too young to know right from wrong and to choose to follow God. For that reason, I believe in an age of accountability.

What is that age? I have no idea. I know of some children that began following Christ at the age of 3. I will guess that in cultures with less Christian presence the age is probably higher than in places where children go to a Gospel preaching church three times a week essentially from birth.

But at the end of the day, I think human logic and God’s justice in the Bible on the issue are square. And that is enough for me for the moment. I will keep thinking and keep searching on the issue. I hope you will too.

Here Where Dogs Bite and Bees

Sting: Part Three

When All Things Are Made New

It has been said God is not doing anything about evil in nature or humankind in any of its forms, therefore, He must be either evil or powerless. God is doing something about all forms of evil. All of history has been His work against evil. First, He'll deal with the troublemakers who started it all. Namely, us. Paul says "the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness" (Romans 1:18a). If that is the case, which it is, we are all in lot of trouble "for all have sinned and come short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23).

But there is hope for us because although we don't deserve it, God loves us dearly and will do He anything He can to save us. Paul says, "But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8). God fully acknowledged that "the wages of sin is death," but in His stupendous grace, he took the penalty for us. He came down as the God-man Jesus Christ to suffer and die, experiencing disgrace and death in order that we might be able to choose the gift of "eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Romans 6:23).

The judgment, therefore, will be the final act of God's purging the earth of sinful man. Our path rests on another choice that will literally change our world forever: To accept Jesus' death and resurrection or to reject it. This path of acceptance is simple. Dr. Robert Picirill names four basic things we must accept in order to be saved: 1.) We cannot save ourselves. 2.) We can only be justified by obedience in Jesus Christ. 3.) It is completely free for all. 4.) Justification is through the suffering and death of Jesus Christ (The Book of Romans, 58-60).

This path means a full acknowledgment that God is a completely perfect God and that our disobedience means we deserve His wrath. It means accepting that this God of perfect wrath is also a God of perfect, supreme goodness. We, as Christians, must accept both of these aspects of God. C.S. Lewis made this easy to understand. He was a master at making complex, theological concepts like this easy enough for anyone to understand. He embodied this skill in his famous children's fantasy series, *The Chronicles of Narnia*. In his book *The Lion, The Witch and the Wardrobe*, God is represented by the lion Aslan. Before coming face to face with him, Lucy and her siblings have a conversation with Mr. and Mrs. Beaver concerning this God-figure:

"...said Mrs. Beaver, 'if there's anyone who can appear before Aslan without their knees knocking, they're either braver than most or else just silly.'"

"Then he isn't safe?" said Lucy.

"Safe?" said Mr. Beaver; "don't you hear what Mrs. Beaver tells you? Who said anything about safe? 'Course he isn't safe. But he's good. He's the King, I tell you" (*The Lion, The Witch, and the Wardrobe*, 80).

We can be assured of this: Like Aslan, God is thoroughly good but He is not safe. He is perfectly good, but He is also a God of perfect holy wrath. He is not a feeble, spoiling grandfather figure; He's a perfect Lord. This perfect Lordship means He is all-powerful, all-wise, all-loving, and completely just all at the same time. All of this culminates in His thorough grace. The appearance of this grace is sometimes fearsome to behold. Sometimes it may even appear evil to us. But what may appear so is His way of battling the true evil forces of darkness. Sometimes our finite minds may not see an end of all that we see as evil (whether or not it really is), but our hope must always be in Him. Always. This is true regardless of what happens in this life. Piccirilli says:

"...we cannot always understand God's ways. They are too

wonderful for us. We are assured he controls history so as to make mercy available to all in the most opportune way, but we cannot see this in our limited understanding of the changing historical scenes. We have to accept God at His word” (Book of Romans, 236).

While God is in this process of bringing true evil to damnation, He is using it to accomplish His ends. But rest assured it will end. Revelation 21 says that God’s plan will culminate in a brand-new heaven and brand-new earth with all of the many imperfections of this universe completely wiped away. In this chapter, John tells us that in this new kingdom tears and death will be completely non-existent. This is coming. I am convinced of it. But if we want to have any chance at all of living in this renewed universe, we must first accept the gift of eternal life through Jesus the Son of God. We must fully accept Him as the Lord and Savior of our lives. When we do this, our lives are renewed right now in the inner man. But this renewed man will continue in a world that has not yet been renewed. We will continue to get hurt, get old, die, and be tempted to sin. Until that time when all things are made new again, we must persevere with full faith on and in full service of God here where dogs bite and bees sting.

Read Part One [here](#).

Read Part Two [here](#).

Why I Still Say “Ask Jesus Into Your Heart” and other similar phrases

“The hardest thing to achieve in the Christian life is balance.”

So says my mentor, David Potete. I open with this because I am often very critical of how Christians take complex theology and boil it down to simple platitudes. Yet I also believe Christians have a tendency to be a tad overly critical at times. So for the sake of keeping my personal pendulum from swinging too far in the critical category I am going to defend some oft-critiqued Christian cliches.

Disclaimer, up front: Any time you quote someone, as I do below in reference to these popular American church phrases, you risk misrepresenting what they say. I have attempted to avoid that by trying to understand the speakers in context. I then find that I do not disagree with the person to any significant level. The only reason I am addressing this is because famous people get quotes attributed to them and those doing the attributing often do not see the issue with as much nuance and balance as the original author.

I aim to help us communicate God’s truth as accurately and humbly as possible. So with that in mind, here are three phrases that have come under fire in mainstream Christianity the last few years that I have no problem saying when I preach.

“Asking Jesus into your heart”

Paul Washer: **“Then they ask, ‘Do you want Jesus to come into your heart?’ Does it bother anyone that this formula or**

Language is not found in the New Testament?"

Behind Tony Evans, Washer is probably my favorite famous preacher. I respect his desire to provide searing rebuke to terrible theology. As I have listened to him explain the quote above, I am positive that his biggest issue is that we teach people to pray a superficial prayer as fire insurance against living like a pagan. As he says, we make the decision to follow Christ a flu shot, when in reality it is a lifelong commitment to the Lord of the Universe.

So why do I bring it up? Because people may think that we should eliminate the expression "asking Jesus into your heart" from our vernacular completely, which I would not agree with. Perhaps Washer would advocate for a complete whitewashing of the phrase, but I am not going to put those words in his mouth.

The reason I am not going to stop saying it is because it truly is not unbiblical. The idea of Christ being in our hearts is stated plainly in verses like Ephesians 3:17 and strongly implied in verses like 2 Corinthians 4:6 and 2 Peter 1:19. And as long as a phrase is biblical in some sense, I would be very slow to denounce it[2. Having said that, there are cases where even true Christian cliches can do more harm than good, as when a person is grieving.]

However, I add that it can be dangerous to present a sinner's prayer or a phrase like "ask Jesus into your heart" without other soteriology supporting it. Frankly, the Bible gives a variety of seemingly conflicting ways that a person becomes a Christian: by grace through faith, by confessing Jesus as Lord, by repentance, by taking up your cross, by believing the resurrection, etc[2. For a thorough investigation into resolving the tension between all of these phrases, I recommend *Discipleship: The Expression of Saving Faith* by Dr. Robert Picirilli.]. As a pastor I have the advantage of preaching to the same people every week and therefore some

weeks I focus on some phrases and other weeks I focus on others. Too much focus on any of them can lead to bad theology at worst or confusion at best. So if one week I focus on the point of decision and praying for forgiveness, the next time I may focus on denying yourself.

As a result, I have no issue using the phrase "Ask Jesus into your heart."

"Accepting Jesus"

David Platt: "Should it not concern us that the Bible never uses the phrase 'accept Jesus into your heart'?"

This is extremely similar to the one above. I respect David Platt about as much as I can and I marvel at how he speaks so boldly and humbly at the same time. In trying to understand him in context I feel similarly as with Washer; he's not complaining as much about the phrase as the philosophy of easy-decision salvation that produces no fruit.

He is even more nuanced than Washer in how he explains that the Bible does have allusions to phrases like "Jesus coming in our hearts" so it is not the exact phraseology as much as that there are more biblical phrases we can use for salvation.

He may be right about that, but in regards to the idea of "accepting" Christ, Jesus used that verb in his parable of the sower so I am not ready to take the verb "accept" totally out of my Gospel presentations. Again, as long as I explain it with other biblical verbs like "repent" and "believe" if I can. In the rare cases where I cannot, I find comfort in the range of Paul's explanations of salvation in Acts and that the Holy Spirit can compensate for my limitations. I have no doubt the jailer could have been saved in Acts 16 even if Paul didn't tell him to count the cost of following Jesus.

“Christianity isn’t a religion, it’s a relationship”

Matt Walsh: “The phrase ‘it’s a relationship, not a religion’ is almost always used by people who want Christianity without any of the moral duties.”

In fairness, many Christians I know have not gone as far as this but instead have found balance in saying that Christianity is a relationship *and* a religion. I think that is much wiser, and true, yet I still have no issue at times saying the phrase as I wrote it above.

The reason is that to my audience, often people need to be absolutely clear that Christianity is not rules, rituals or works. Chicago is modern day Athens in how religiously pluralistic it is. And I have reached the conclusion that it is much more likely that people in my neighborhood needs to understand the covenantal basis to salvation in Christianity before they understand what God expects of them. They need to understand that people enter into relationship with God by grace. Some people have so much religious baggage coming in that they need to hear grace preached dozens or even hundreds of times to grasp it.

But I adapt if the situation demands it. If I am talking to a 60-year old Muslim, I am very inclined to say “It’s not a religion” but if I am talking to a 19-year old young woman who has been told her whole life that Jesus should be her boyfriend, then I’ll probably describe it as a religion. We can err when we approach everyone with the same method.

Some people quote James 1:27 to me and to that I say that the word James used it is not quite like what many people within my reach think of when they hear “religion.” The word James used can easily be translated “devotion,” which we understand relationally and that is different than “Do X and X or you will not reach God.” I have heard adherents of other religions say that they never know if they have done enough to merit God’s approval and that is so utterly opposite Biblical

Christianity that they desperately need to know the difference. And while I will eventually speak to what it means to be devoted to God so that I feed orphan and widows and avoid worldly pollution, I have no issue saying “Christianity isn’t a religion, it’s a relationship” in a sermon.

What do you think? We encourage thoughtful feedback below.

What About Those Who’ve Never Heard of Jesus?

“You’re in some remote part of the earth and you never heard the name of Jesus, you cannot get to Heaven, you think?”
[Oprah Winfrey]

According to the Joshua Project, there are about 3,000 people groups in the world that have essentially zero Christian contact. It is nearly impossible to determine the exact number, but based on this we can safely assume there are millions, and perhaps billions, of people who have never heard the name of Jesus.

When you juxtapose this with what the Bible teaches about how a person is saved from eternal damnation, it can cause cognitive dissonance to the Christian mind.

And trying to reconcile basic New Testament theology with the practical reality of where the Gospel hasn’t been preached makes for intense discussion and debate. The quote from Oprah above happened [during her former show in a lively](#)

[conversation between her, her guest speaker and a woman in the audience](#). Oprah presents a “fair” view of those who’ve never heard, that God cares more about their heart than if they’ve heard of Jesus. This is a popular view, even within the evangelical church. But is it correct?

I want to tackle this issue, but not in a “Here is the final and authoritative answer to problem” way. The Bible speaks to this, but not in an expositional manner. In other words, I can’t give you an interpretation of one passage that clears it all up.

No, I think this mystery is better viewed as a puzzle of about ten pieces that have to be seen together in order to see a more complete image. Yet even with the truths I present below, I am still not advocating an answer that ends the discussion. This issue is far too complex. But these truths do help me relieve the dissonance to a great level and help start the discussion. They may leave you with more questions than answers. That will not offend me. I hope it encourages you to add to the dialogue.

But to at least get it started, I offer these as things that I am absolutely convinced the Bible teaches. If I can’t have a final authoritative answer to this issue, I can at least focus on things that are clear and go from there. Here are the ten:

1. Jesus is the only way to God (John 14:6; Acts 4:12).

2. Those who do not follow Jesus end up in Hell (John 3:36).

These two are the basis for why the question of “What about those who’ve never heard?” exists. Without them there is no issue.

3. God is just (Deuteronomy 4:32; Romans 3:5b-6).

Whatever the answer to the question is, I think we have to believe that God is fair. This matters because the issue at

its heart is that it is unfair to condemn someone for knowledge they do not have. But the Bible describes God as a just judge.

4. God is not far from anyone (Acts 17:26-27).

This matters because with this topic it appears we are dealing with people who are far from the truth about God, when in reality no one is actually far from God. Note that Paul in these verses is dealing precisely with where people live geographically.

5. God can be known through the created world so men are without excuse (Romans 1:18-20).

Even without the Bible and a Christian witness, every person that lives now is accountable to God in some sense because they can see him through creation.

6. God can be known from human morality (Jeremiah 31:31-34; Romans 2:14-15).

Similarly, because we know right from wrong and that a general sense of justice transcends culture and time, we know there has to be a standard of right and wrong we are all accountable to. We know there is a God because His law is ingrained within us.

7. God desires that everyone be saved (2 Peter 3:9).

8. God demands repentance from everyone to be saved (Acts 17:30).

These two are crucial because the first one teaches us about God's heart on this issue and the second, at least in theory, eliminates exceptions. Like those who've never heard. If there is an exception there better be a clear explanation in the Bible.[1. A shout out here to the students at a leadership conference I helped lead in 2014 for asking tough questions in a Q&A after this presentation. This event caused me to add an

addendum, footnoted here, to this presentation on the concept of an age of accountability. Logically it is hard to believe God demands repentance from a 3-month old baby. Biblically, we can see in Isaiah God acknowledging that a particular child is not old enough to know right from wrong; we see Nathan telling David he will see his deceased newborn in Heaven one day and that Jesus loved children with qualification. Does this mean, biblically, that there is an age of accountability? I am not 100% convinced this is so. Yet I believe it has to exist for God to be fair. This opens up a can of worms of course about what the age is and I only bring it up here because if it exists, I would guess it is at least possible that children are accountable at a younger age in a culture where they hear the Gospel more often than in a place where Jesus' name is never even spoken.]

9. God can get a missionary to a searching person (Acts 10:1-48).

If a person is living a God-fearing life with no knowledge of Jesus, God can get a missionary to them. It is true that sometimes people groups do not have missionaries because people do not go, but sometimes they do not because they are hostile to Christianity.

10. God can reveal himself in dreams to lost people (Genesis 41; Daniel 2).

This is huge, especially in the Muslim world. There are many stories I encourage you to read about it if you have not. You can begin [here](#), [here](#) and [here](#).

So again, without presuming that these ten things tie the issue into a nice little bow, I present them as giving us at least a picture of how we can begin reconciling the tensions of God's fairness, the necessity of confessing Christ, and the lack of Gospel witness in thousands of people groups. I doubt

I will ever feel completely confident in any answer to the question and I confess we may be asking the wrong question here. But at least it catapults us to search the Scriptures to learn more about who God is and what he is like, and fosters discussion on a complex topic that exercises the mind. That is rarely a bad thing.

The Tick Tock

A little away
the clock tick tocks
the time where
we know He knows
it tick tocks
the clock rocks

away
when all was lost
He left the stars
where love is lush to
touch our hands,
our heads, our souls,

standing
in His thunder
underneath in
the nothingness
of our ticking,
in the sea of our tocking,
in the ticking, the tocking,

away
when life was lost
and deliverance
crossed into our
land where love is losing,
where He touches our hands, our heads, our souls,
where He views this sphere so

away
ticking, tocking,
our sides
plumped with bumps
and clumps and thorny lumps
far away
from His sigh
of mercy,
of death, His death,
of life, His life,
of the tick tock
the clock rocks
today.

The Dove: A Story of Hope and Salvation

I. The Dove of Hope

“After forty days Noah opened the window he had made in the ark and sent out a raven, and it kept flying back and forth until the water had dried up from the earth. Then he sent out a dove to see if the water had receded from the surface of the ground. But the dove could find no place to set its feet

because there was water over all the surface of the earth; so it returned to Noah in the ark.”

Genesis 8:6-9a

The water
lowers, skims, parts, foams,
the boat bumping the dropping surface.

Curses to the flood after days and nights
spitting back the flesh and bones
of our friends without sound.

One day daylight zapped
the ancient tomb after an age of stuffy howls:

What sights, what feelings, what
sounds, what smells.

The sable raven,
the fair fowl, scoured the watery land
without a caw of contentment.

Therefore the dove,
white as their reclusive faces,
said, I will soar
and seek a
a land.

He viewed the water-crossed circle,
this domed and submerged miracle,
and brown-green weeds wafted to the surface.

Behold his empty hands
in a time of empty lands.

What did you see,
what, little dove, when we sent you forth?

The fowl who invited himself into the uninviting world,

do not despair, life is not forgotten.

The waters roar, the earth shakes,
the sky blurs with steam-borne lakes,

and the dove,

he is the dove of hope.

II. The Dove of Salvation

“When the dove returned to him in the evening, there in its beak was a freshly plucked olive leaf! Then Noah knew that the water had receded from the earth.”

Genesis 8:11

The water sounds like a receding end,
sinking in parts,
frazzled and flailing like feathers
with hollow bones.

I, the dove,
hearken to the end,
lowering myself into the never parting,
always beating wave's brown eyes.

My
flailing feathers
bump the half-drowned hills
with their sopping tops gasping for air.

I
hearken to the branch of hope
on the stark tree
in the brown waves and
foam.

My feathers dance.

I will bear salvation in the evening.

We see salvation in
the mountains and in the branches
and brown valleys,

in all the gray-green earth.

The waters recede, the earth subsides,
the sky shines with star-lit guides,

and I, the dove,

I am the dove of salvation.