

*One Way – Are Jews Going to Hell?*

*Rabbi Simeon ben Nathaniel said: Do not make your prayer a fixed task, but a plea to God for grace and mercy. —Abot 2, 18.*

**A stumbling block for Jews**

The following excerpt from *The Gospel according to Moses* illustrates a difficulty Christians often face when discussing the Gospel with Jews. It is a direct quote from an actual conversation:

*"I stand near the main doors [of the temple] talking to Henry, a newcomer to Chever Torah who struck up a friendship with me before he knew I was a Christian. But now that he knows, the dreaded question has come up again.*

*'You people believe there's no other way to God, right? I mean, except for Jesus.'*

*'Yes. That's true.' I desperately try to keep smiling.*

*'So anyone who doesn't believe in Jesus is going to hell?'*

*'Uh . . .'*

*'Do you realize what that means? That means my grandmother is in hell! And my favorite aunt and my uncle!'*

*'Well . . .'*

*'They loved God! How can you believe he would send them to hell?'" (TGAM)*

Before Jews like Henry can sincerely consider the Gospel, somehow their concerns about the Christian doctrine of Exclusivism (often called "one way") must first be laid to rest. But how?

**"Do not judge"**

Jesus said, "No one comes to the Father except through me," (**John 14:6**) so traditional Christian theology holds that forgiveness for sins and a peaceful and loving relationship with God is impossible apart from the work of salvation done on the cross and in the empty tomb. Does this mean we can tell Henry his family has probably gone to hell?

"Do not judge," said Jesus, "or you too will be judged." (Matthew 7:1)

- ▶ Is Jesus saying Christians should not judge the behavior of others? (Hint: read on to **Mt 7:5**. Also see **1 Cor 6:1-6**)
- ▶ Is Jesus saying we should not judge the motives or intentions of others? (Hint: **Mt 10:16-17**)
- ▶ Is Jesus saying we should not judge the spiritual condition of others? (Hint: **Ro 2:1-3** and note that like **Mt 7:2** our judgment of others leads to God's judgment of us.)

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### “A whopper of a paradox”

In our study of the antinomies and paradoxes of the Bible we learned that, for those who believe every word of the Bible is true, the only faithful response to two apparently contradictory teachings within it is to embrace both teachings. This is true of the doctrine of Freewill and Predestination, for example, and the teaching that Jesus is both fully God and fully man, and many others. With that in mind, consider these two back-to-back statements by Jesus:

*But he who disowns me before men will be disowned before the angels of God.  
(Luke 12:9) NIV*

*And everyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven...  
(Luke 12:10a) NIV*

Where the NIV translates “disown” above, most other versions render the word, “deny.” So how can we reconcile these statements? Aren’t “disown/deny” and “speak against” much the same? Yet Jesus says one will result in being disowned ourselves, while the other will be forgiven. One possible interpretation is explained below:

*“Honest rejection of Christ, however mistaken, will be forgiven and healed—‘Whosoever shall speak a word against the Son of Man, it shall be forgiven him.’ But to evade the Son of Man, to look the other way, to pretend you haven’t noticed...this is a different matter. You may not be certain yet whether you ought to be a Christian; but you do know you ought to be a Man, not an ostrich, hiding its head in the sand.” (C. S. Lewis, “Man or Rabbit?” God in the Dock (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1970) 111)*

Yet Lewis leaves us with questions, because many other verses in the Bible that seem to teach that—contrary to **Luke 12:10a**—we must “speak a word” for the Son of Man to be forgiven (see **Ro 10:9** for example). Consider another quote by a giant of Christian thought:

*A partisan of the most rigid orthodoxy . . . knows it all, he bows before the holy, truth is for him an ensemble of ceremonies, he talks about presenting himself before the throne of God, of how many times one must bow, he knows everything the same way as does the pupil who is able to demonstrate a mathematical proposition with the letters ABC, but not when they are changed to DEF. He is therefore in dread whenever he hears something not arranged in the same order. (Søren Kierkegaard, The Concept of Dread, trans. Walter Lowrie (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957) 124)*

It may also help to consider the second half of **Luke 12:10**, which expands Jesus’ teaching on this subject:

*...but anyone who blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven.  
(Luke 12:10b) NIV*

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- ▶ What is Kierkegaard's point? (Hint: Who is safer in an airplane, the pilot who fully understands the science of flight, or a passenger with only a vague idea about how the airplane stays up in the air?)
- ▶ Are “disown,” “speak against,” and “blaspheme” much the same concepts when applied to any Person of the Triune God? If not, why not? If so, why does God have such different responses?
- ▶ What might it look like to “speak against the Son” while not blaspheming the Holy Spirit?

### How are we saved?

The following text explains the basis of reconciliation between God and many people of ancient Israel:

*13 All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance. And they admitted that they were aliens and strangers on earth. 14 People who say such things show that they are looking for a country of their own. 15 If they had been thinking of the country they had left, they would have had opportunity to return. 16 Instead, they were longing for a better country—a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them. (Heb 11:13-16) NIV*

The “country” and “city” referred to here are probably the new heaven, new earth and new Jerusalem prophesied in **Rev 21:1-4**, so this text means these ancient Israelites will join us in paradise (or we will join them).

- ▶ What is the basis of salvation today? (See **John 3:16-18** and **Eph 2:8-9**)
- ▶ What is the basis of the ancient Hebrews' salvation—the “things promised” in **Heb 11:13** above? (Hint: see especially **Gal 3:14**. Also **Luke 24:49**, **Acts 1:4** and **2:39**)
- ▶ Has God changed since their time? Is the human condition different today, or are people the same as they were in their time? What does this tell you about the basis of our salvation today, and theirs, then?
- ▶ If an infant dies today, will God condemn the child to hell? If an infant died in Abraham or Moses' time, would God have condemned the child to hell? What does this tell you about the basis of salvation now, and then?

### The New Covenant

Jesus initiated a “new covenant” on the cross, as He said at the last supper. This was a reference to the “new covenant” prophesied by Jeremiah:

*In the same way, after the supper he took the cup, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you. (Luke 22:20) NIV*

Some Christian theologians believe the new covenant represents a change in the way humanity is reconciled to God. Whereas before the cross, it was

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impossible to approach God based on faith in Jesus death and resurrection and God therefore made other accommodations for people of sincere faith die to their ignorance, after the cross no such accommodation is made. To examine this idea, read **Jer 31:31-34**.

- ▶ Does Jeremiah's prophecy seem to indicate that the new covenant will exclude more Jews from reconciliation with the Lord?
- ▶ How might verse 33 of this prophecy relate with Jesus' warning in **Luke 12:10**? (See **Ps 51:17**, **Acts 5:3-5 & 15:5-8** and **Ro 2:28-29**)
- ▶ Look for similarities between **Ro 2:28-29** and **Dt 30:6**. What does this suggest about the idea that there was a change in the way Jews are reconciled to God due to the new covenant?
- ▶ Note Paul's use of the word "Spirit" in **Ro 2:29**. How does this relate to Jesus' teaching in **Luke 12:9-10** and the "promise" seen and welcomed from a distance by the people in **Heb 11:13-16**?
- ▶ In view of the lessons learned today, what is your understanding of Paul's meaning in **Ro 11:26-29**? Does "all Israel" apply to every ethnic Jew? Does it apply only to Jews who have placed their faith in the historical facts of the Gospel (see **Ro 11:25 & 33**)? How does the story of **Jonah** compare to this passage in Romans?

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