



“What is the Gospel?” Online Class

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It is possible that despite best intentions, people have taught the Good News of Jesus in a way that is watered down and not as good as it really is. The early Church had a very different conception of the Gospel that has been lost over time, but rediscovered again and again by a few faithful in each generation. In this class, we will chat through and discover the answer to the question: “What is the Gospel and What is Its Scope?”

Learning Outcomes:

To know and understand the passages and the rationale for why the Good News of Jesus is not about individual salvation, but about the restoration, reconciliation, redemption, renewal, reparation, reclamation, and rescue of all things through Jesus of Nazareth, the self-revelation of God.

Content:

The content is shared through a series of videos and accompanying digital writings. Every section is connected to the topic of apokatastasis.

Personal Note from John:

Hello Friends!

This was 100% a work of love and an attempt to share with you the background work that I had to do in isolation and in fear of being fired from my church job. I thought that since I did all the hard work for myself, it would be a waste to not also share my discovery with you.

In churches and seminaries we are taught to take the Scriptures seriously, and as often as possible to read them in their original language. So that is what I sought to do. What you have before you is my own deep dive into the topic of what the Gospel truly is. I determined to not let any preconceived notion or idea drive my thinking but solely to go upon what the Scriptures say in their original language. Fortunately, I was more than surprised, I was happily confronted by a better Gospel than I had received anywhere else... and all by actually reading the Scriptures.

You will find in this series of videos an exploration of passages that you perhaps have never heard of, or at least, only heard of in passing. I fully believe that these passages are overlooked because they complicate and even directly challenge the Gospel as it is conventionally understood in the West. Again, all of this is a result of a deep engagement with the Scriptures in their original language.

I hope that this expands your heart, mind, and soul and helps you to step into a proclamation that truly is Good News for everyone and everything, everywhere.

Grace and Peace to you,
John Chaffee

PS, If at any point you have a question, query, quandary, or concern, feel free to email me at johnqchaffee@gmail.com.

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I. What is the Gospel?

A. *Why are There So Many Interpretations or Phrasings of “the Gospel”?*

1. We are prone to interpret or phrase the Gospel according to our own worldview, which includes our own spiritual maturity (or immaturity), and according to our understanding of God.
2. How we understand God sets the “ceiling” for our understanding of the Gospel. If we have a finite or limited God, we will have a finite or limited definition of the Gospel. If we have an infinite view of God, we will have an infinite definition of the Gospel.

B. *Puzzle Shapes and the Shape of the Gospel*

1. There is a sense in which we are reading the Bible as if we are putting together a puzzle. We have most of the pieces, but we are without the giant picture to guide us. The NT itself talks about other letters that were lost to the sands of time. We know of another letter to Laodicea, other letters to Corinth, and possibly others of which we are unaware.
2. Another way to look at the issue is this... It is as if we are trying to do a puzzle without ever having the edge pieces to frame the whole task. We have the large and easier spots together, but not the entirety. In order to fill in those other gaps, we need to look at the avoided passages (the framing edge pieces). It just so happens these pieces disrupt how we understood the earlier pieces.

C. *Reverse Engineering the Gospel*

1. One thing that makes the Gospel so interesting is that depending on what verses one prioritizes, we can come up with very different understandings of the Gospel. For instance, John’s Gospel does not mention the word Hell at all. If one only read the Gospel of John, how might one phrase it? Or what about Romans, which also does not make mention of Hell at all? The book of Acts does not mention it once, let alone how we conventionally talk about it today!
2. So let’s reverse engineer the Gospel. By looking at the overlooked passages, let’s see if we can come to a definition of the Gospel that could produce the entirety of the NT...

D. *So, What is the Gospel?*

1. The Gospel is that in Christ, God reconciled the world to himself, and in covenantal love always determined to be for, rather than against, the cosmos, and will ultimately and simultaneously destroy that which is evil while restoring, redeeming, reconciling, renewing, repairing, recovering and rescuing everyone and everything everywhere. So, reconsider everything you thought you knew (repent), return to your original very goodness, believe the Good News that God is for you rather than against you, and find yourself refreshed by the fact God is Love.

II. How Did I Start This Journey Toward Apokatastasis?

A. *The Seeds Were Sown Many Years Ago*

1. My Pastor Winked at the Question of Hell...
 - a) "I wouldn't be surprised if God has an ace up His Sleeve..."
2. My Professor at College
 - a) "One day, after guest preaching at a church, a congregant came up to me. With a worried and angry look on his face he inquired, 'Excuse me, Pastor, you aren't one of those people that dismisses the idea of Hell.' I replied, 'Don't worry friend, I believe every word the apostle Paul says about Hell.' 'Oh, thank goodness.'"
 - b) Now, perhaps this was less than truthful, but it also showed that most people do not know what the Bible says (or doesn't say), but also that it is possible to be accosted for knowing the Bible better than the average congregant.
3. A Lecture in Seminary
 - a) "For God has bound everyone over to disobedience so that he may have mercy on them all." (Romans 11:32)
4. Discovering the Absence...
 - a) Hell is not mentioned in the book of Acts, the Gospel of John, or the writings of Paul in any way close to what conventional Western Christianity holds. Why is it that it was left out of the preaching and teaching of the early Church in Acts? Why is it that the Gospel of John, with its high Christology does not speak of it? Why is it that Paul the Apostle speaks of the infinite love of God from which we cannot be separated, to the exclusion of some comment of eternal punishment or estrangement from God?
5. Deep down there was always the question or doubt that if God truly was unconditional and infinite love, then the idea of God denouncing anyone and not restoring them was utterly inconsistent with the image of Jesus I received in Sunday School as a child.
6. Let us be clear, the infernalist deity cannot live up to 1 Corinthians 13.

The impatient, unkind, joyless, boastful, proud, shaming, self-seeking, easily angered, false deity who keeps account of wrongs and is unfortunately preached from "Christian" pulpits is no match or comparison for the actual God of Love revealed in Jesus.

III. 3 Overlooked Passages that Point Toward the Universal Restoration of All Things (Apokatastasis)

A. 3 Overlooked Passages of the New Testament

1. “The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him *to reconcile to himself all things*, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.” (Colossians 1:15-20)
 - a) Αποκαταλλαζαι (*Apokatallaxai*), is often translated as, “completely reconcile.”
 - (1) *Apokatallaxai* derives from Αποκαταλλασσω (*Apokatallasso*), meaning, “to reconcile completely.”
2. “Jesus said to them, “Truly I tell you, at *the renewal of all things*, when the Son of Man sits on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or fields for my sake will receive a hundred times as much and will inherit eternal life. But many who are first will be last, and many who are last will be first.” (Matthew 19:28-30)
 - a) Παλιγγενεσία (*Palingenesia*), sometimes translated as, “the regeneration/rebirthing/renewal of all things.”
 - (1) *Παλιν* (*Palin*) means, “anew, again.”
 - (2) *Γενεσία* (*Genesia*) derives from Γενεσις (*Genesis*) meaning, meaning, “source, origin, birth.”
3. “Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord, and that he may send the Messiah, who has been appointed for you—even Jesus. Heaven must receive him until the time comes for God *to restore everything*, as he promised long ago through his holy prophets.” (Acts 3:19-21)
 - a) Αποκαταστάσεως παντων (*Apokatastaseos panton*), sometimes translated as, “the restoration of all things.”
 - (1) *Apokatastaseos* derives from Αποκαθιστημι (*Apokathistemi*), meaning, “to (completely) restore to its former state.”
 - (2) *Panton* derives from Παν (*Pan*), meaning, “all, the whole, every kind of.”

B. Questions

1. Think back, can you think of a sermon or bible study in which these passages were highlighted and taught upon?
2. Why do you believe these passages might have been unintentionally or intentionally overlooked?
3. How does it sit within yourself to hear that the New Testament, while drawing upon the Old Testament, points toward the restoration, reconciliation, renewal, redemption, reparation, reclamation, and rescuing of all things in Jesus?

IV. Why Do We Keep the Gospel Personal Rather than Cosmic?

A. A Few Possible Reasons

1. We are prone to confining the scope of the Gospel to our level of concern. However, God's scope has always been cosmic... which transcends yet includes the personal.
2. Studying the topic seriously challenges the common status quo and "orthodoxy" of popular understanding, and directly challenges how many Christian organizations and denominations define the Gospel.
3. There is a whole industry of publishing that profits off of instilling fear of Eternal Estrangement from God, by then producing products that assuage that fear and project it onto others.
4. We rarely engage in topics and ideas that challenge us. It takes careful work to challenge one's worldview, and some do not have the energy or the effort to open that box. For some, the Good News is at first completely overwhelming and would require a massive reframing of everything, a task of which they may not have the courage. It could also be a task in which they know if they publicly acknowledged, people might reject them... just like the early Apostles.
5. When you work at a church, as I have, the topic of damnation can either be completely avoided or it is completely overemphasized in the wrong way (the experience of some people I know).

To talk about the restoration of all things, inevitably would cause people in either camp to leave and put the regular tithing at risk. However, to some, they will sit at ease when they find out that their deepest and secret conviction was true: God is Love.

V. Dragging in the Cosmic Fishing Nets

A. Let's Talk about Fishing Nets

B. Let's Talk about Jesus' Own Words

1. *“And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will drag all people to myself.” (John 12:32)*

a) Ελκυσω (*Elkyso*), is often translated as “draw” to soften the passage.

(1) *Elkyso* derives from Ελκυω (*Elkuo*), meaning, “I drag, draw, pull, persuade, unsheathe.”

C. *Where Else Does This Verb Show Up?*

1. John 21:1-11

D. *The 153 Fish*

1. “Jesus said to them, “Bring some of the fish you have just caught.” So Simon Peter climbed back into the boat and dragged the net ashore. It was full of large fish, 153, but even with so many the net was not torn.” (John 21:10-11)

2. Both Jerome and Augustine, figures of the early Church, maintained that the number 153 was symbolic. This is because back then they believed there were 153 species of fish. Meaning, the 153 fish were symbolic of every kind of human being. No kind of person is left out of Jesus’ fishing nets.

E. *The Good News is Far More about Jesus Dragging in the Cosmic Fishing Nets (Don’t Worry, the Cosmic Nets Can Handle It)*

VI. The Gates of Hell Didn’t Prevail... Already?

A. *Most of Us are More Influenced by Dante Alighieri’s The Divine Comedy Than by the Actual Scriptures and We Don’t Even Know It.*

1. The Divine Comedy (written 1321AD) by Dante Alighieri was an epic Italian poem, in which the protagonist is led by divine beings and receives lessons the whole journey long. The main character, Dante, is led by Virgil down into the circles of Hell, up the spire-tower of Purgatory, to then be led by Beatrice and Bernard of Clairvaux ascending through the Heavens to God.

2. The Divine Comedy is a piece of poetic literature and, while drawing from the Scriptures, is not considered of divine origin. Not only that, much of Dante’s writings were influenced by Aristotle’s ethics! It has captured the imaginations of many artists and painters since, not least of which modern Hollywood. The Good News is that the Gospel is nothing like Dante’s Divine Comedy.

B. *A Number of Names for “Hell.”*

1. Hell - The Greek word that has become a catch-all term for the place of punishment in the afterlife.

2. Hades - The Greek God of Death and his realm.

3. Sheol - The Hebrew Word for the waiting place of the dead.

4. Tartarus - A Greek Word for the waiting place/holding cell for disobedient deities/servants of deities.
5. Gehenna - Likely a Reference to the Valley of Gehinnom, from the Jeremiah Tradition, and where pagan practices and sacrifices were held. It was a place of unholiness and placing oneself outside of God's commandments.

C. The Early Church and the "Harrowing of Hell"

1. Holy Saturday is the day between Good Friday and Easter Sunday. Most Protestant denominations overlook this holy day, but other traditions focus on all three (Good Friday, Holy Saturday, and Easter Sunday) with equal importance.
2. A harrow is a piece of farming equipment, usually behind an animal or a tractor that is used to "level" the ground out to make it ready for planting and then harvesting.
3. The idea that the descent into hell was a jailbreak was common in the first few centuries of the Church!

D. A Question for You

1. What does it do to you, personally, to believe that Christ has actually defeated Hell, Sin, and Death already?

VII.What About the Parable of the Sheep and the Goats?

A. The Parable of the Sheep and the Goats -

1. "When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his glorious throne. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left.

"Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.'

"Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?'

"The King will reply, 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.'

“Then he will say to those on his left, ‘Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me.’

“They also will answer, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help you?’

“He will reply, ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.’

“Then they will go away to *eternal punishment* (κολασιν αιωνιον), but the righteous to eternal life.” (Matthew 25:31-46)

B. The Latin Vulgate

1. Supplicium Aeternum - Supplicium is the Latin word for “a corporal punishment ordained by law; the punishment of death.” Aeternum is the Latin word for “Eternity.”

C. The Greek New Testament

1. Κολασιν Αιωνιον (*Kolasin Aionion*) - *Kolasin* is the Greek word for “the process of pruning.” *Aionion* is the Greek word for “age/era/eon.”

D. Questions

1. If God’s plan is for people to go through an “age/era/eon of pruning”, how might that make you want to clean up your life in the here and now?
2. How does the “age/era/eon of pruning” sit with you as you contemplate the people that have actively or passively hurt you?

VIII. What about John 3:16?

A. Binary Oppositional Thinking

1. Our brains love to organize information and ideas in oppositional contradistinctions. We have up and down, left and right, black and white, etc. We then, understandably apply that same dualistic thinking to Heaven and Hell. If there is Heaven, there must be Hell. If there is Bliss, there must be Pain.
2. However, what if the Gospel is better than that dichotomy? Are those two options really, the only options?

B. What is the Difference Between Prescriptive and Descriptive?

1. Prescriptive - relating to the imposition or enforcement of a rule or method.

2. Descriptive - describing in an objective or non-judgmental way.

C. Reading John 3:16

1. “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because they have not believed in the name of God’s one and only Son. This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but people loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that their deeds will be exposed. But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what they have done has been done in the sight of God.” - John 3:16-21
2. It is possible to read this passage in a prescriptive way, that is establishing a rule, or in a descriptive way that is simply naming something. Everything in this paragraph is descriptively true. And, this famous paragraph does not negate the possibility that at a later point in John’s Gospel Jesus says that he will “drag all people to himself.” Just because it is saying something positively, that does not mean the negative inverse is equally true.

D. So What is the Other Option than Infinite Bliss in Heaven?

1. A process of liberation, restoration, and preparation for heaven.

IX. Judgment Day in Malachi: The Refiner’s Fire and the Launderer’s Soap

A. What about the Old Testament’s Description of the Day of the Lord?

1. “I will send my messenger, who will prepare the way before me. Then suddenly the Lord you are seeking will come to his temple; the messenger of the covenant, whom you desire, will come,” says the Lord Almighty.

But who can endure the day of his coming? Who can stand when he appears? For he will be like a refiner’s fire or a launderer’s soap. He will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver; he will purify the Levites and refine them like gold and silver. Then the Lord will have men who will bring offerings in righteousness, and the offerings of Judah and Jerusalem will be acceptable to the Lord, as in days gone by, as in former years.

So I will come to put you on trial. I will be quick to testify against sorcerers, adulterers and perjurers, against those who defraud laborers of their wages, who oppress the widows and the fatherless, and deprive the foreigners among you of justice, but do not fear me,” says the Lord Almighty.” (Malachi 3:1-5)

2. Who can stand? Who can say, “I do not need to be refined? I do not need any washing?”

None.

B. Two Important Things to Notice...

1. Refiners do not throw out the whole clump of metal. Instead, they burn out what does not belong so that what is left is what is good and pure and desired!
2. Laundry day is not about throwing out clothes with a stain or blemish. Laundry day is about running something through the wash as many times as needed so that the clothing can be kept!

C. This is an Incredibly Hopeful Passage, and It is in the OT!

X. The Main Idea Throughout the Parables of the Lost Coin, Sheep, and Sons in Luke 15

A. The Parable of the Lost Sheep -

1. "Now the tax collectors and sinners were all gathering around to hear Jesus. But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, "This man welcomes sinners and eats with them."

Then Jesus told them this parable: "Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them. Doesn't he leave the ninety-nine in the open country and go after the lost sheep until he finds it? And when he finds it, he joyfully puts it on his shoulders and goes home. Then he calls his friends and neighbors together and says, 'Rejoice with me; I have found my lost sheep.' I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent."

B. The Parable of the Lost Coin -

1. "Or suppose a woman has ten silver coins and loses one. Doesn't she light a lamp, sweep the house and search carefully until she finds it? And when she finds it, she calls her friends and neighbors together and says, 'Rejoice with me; I have found my lost coin.' In the same way, I tell you, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents."

C. The Parable of the Running Father -

1. "Jesus continued: "There was a man who had two sons. The younger one said to his father, 'Father, give me my share of the estate.' So he divided his property between them.

"Not long after that, the younger son got together all he had, set off for a distant country and there squandered his wealth in wild living. After he had spent everything, there was a severe famine in that whole country, and he began to be in need. So he

went and hired himself out to a citizen of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed pigs. He longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything.

“When he came to his senses, he said, ‘How many of my father’s hired servants have food to spare, and here I am starving to death! I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired servants.’ So he got up and went to his father.

“But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him.

“The son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.’

“But the father said to his servants, ‘Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let’s have a feast and celebrate. For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.’ So they began to celebrate.

“Meanwhile, the older son was in the field. When he came near the house, he heard music and dancing. So he called one of the servants and asked him what was going on. ‘Your brother has come,’ he replied, ‘and your father has killed the fattened calf because he has him back safe and sound.’

“The older brother became angry and refused to go in. So his father went out and pleaded with him. But he answered his father, ‘Look! All these years I’ve been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders. Yet you never gave me even a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends. But when this son of yours who has squandered your property with prostitutes comes home, you kill the fattened calf for him!’

“‘My son,’ the father said, ‘you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. But we had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.’”

D. Questions

1. Did the sheep or coin do anything to be found?

Nope. The onus is upon the searcher, the shepherd, the woman, and the father.

2. Did either son have to do something to “reclaim” the sonship they thought they “lost”?

Nope. The father already considered everything as his also theirs.

3. How long did the shepherd, woman, and father look for or search out the object of their love?

Until they were found.

XI. Let's Be Real, Do We Actually Mean Unconditional Love?

A. The Protestant Reformation Was All About This Question

1. Is the Gospel of Jesus, and the favor of God *actually* unconditional? Because the instant that we make it anything other than a proclamation of a new reality, we shrink it down to conditional “good advice” (in the words of NT Wright).

B. Conditional -

1. This is a Conditional Statement.
 - a) “If you do X; *Then*, Y will happen.”
 - b) Everything is conditional upon what YOU do.
2. This is a Conditional Gospel.
 - a) “If you do say the right prayer/believe in Jesus; *Then*, you will be saved/forgiven.”
 - b) Again, everything is conditional upon what YOU do.

C. Un-conditional -

1. This is an Un-Conditional Statement.
2. “Because I did X; *Therefore*, Y Will Happen.”
3. The outcome is not conditional upon something you have done.
4. This is an Un-Conditional Gospel.
 - a) “Because God has already reconciled you to Himself in Christ; *Therefore*, God will bring you to Himself/save you/forgive you.
 - b) The outcome is not conditional upon something you have done but completely upon what God has done in Christ.

D. Questions

1. When we say “unconditional”, do we actually mean “unconditional”?
2. Is it possible to use the language of “unconditional” but actually still infer “conditional”?

XII. Is Apokatastasis in Romans?

A. *I Would Like to Posit that Apokatastasis is the Presupposition through which the Entire Letter Should be Read and Makes the Most Sense!*

B. *Ch. 1-8, A Rising and Rousing Discourse on the Equality of Jews and Gentiles Before God.*

1. “You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God’s wrath through him! For if, while we were God’s enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life! Not only is this so, but we also boast in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.” (Romans 5:6-11)

2. “Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all people, because all sinned—

To be sure, sin was in the world before the law was given, but sin is not charged against anyone’s account where there is no law. Nevertheless, death reigned from the time of Adam to the time of Moses, even over those who did not sin by breaking a command, as did Adam, who is a pattern of the one to come.

But the gift is not like the trespass. For if the many died by the trespass of the one man, how much more did God’s grace and the gift that came by the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, overflow to the many! Nor can the gift of God be compared with the result of one man’s sin: The judgment followed one sin and brought condemnation, but the gift followed many trespasses and brought justification. For if, by the trespass of the one man, death reigned through that one man, how much more will those who receive God’s abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ!

Consequently, just as one trespass resulted in condemnation for all people, so also one righteous act resulted in justification and life for all people. For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous.

The law was brought in so that the trespass might increase. But where sin increased, grace increased all the more, so that, just as sin reigned in death, so also grace might reign through righteousness to bring eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.” (Romans 5:12-21)

3. “For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.” (Romans 8:38-39)

C. *Ch. 9-11, A Rabbi Debating with Himself on Inclusivism or Exclusivism.*

1. “For God has bound everyone over to disobedience so that he may have mercy on them all.

Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God!

How unsearchable his judgments,

and his paths beyond tracing out!

“Who has known the mind of the Lord?

Or who has been his counselor?”

“Who has ever given to God,

that God should repay them?”

For from him and through him and for him are all things.

To him be the glory forever! Amen.” (Romans 11:32-36)

D. *Ch.12-16, A Discussion of “How, Then, Should We Live, in Light of this Mercy?”*

1. “Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.” (Romans 12:1-2)
2. “You, then, why do you judge your brother or sister? Or why do you treat them with contempt? For we will all stand before God’s judgment seat. It is written:

“‘As surely as I live,’ says the Lord,

‘every knee will bow before me;

every tongue will acknowledge God.’”

So then, each of us will give an account of ourselves to God.” (Romans 14:10-12)

3. “Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God. For I tell you that Christ has become a servant of the Jews on behalf of God’s truth, so that the promises made to the patriarchs might be confirmed and, moreover, that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy.” (Romans 15:7-9)

E. *Questions*

1. Which of these passages stands out to you? Can you think of a time when these passages were taught, or have these passages been avoided?

XIII. The Letter of Hebrews and Religion 2.0

A. *The Great Upgrade from Religion 1.0 to Religion 2.0.*

1. Similar to an iOS update on an iPhone or similar technology. Programs are updated every so often as they are improved and as particular limitations are discovered and solved.

B. The Mathematical Theory of Strange Attractors

C. Hebrews is a Letter of “Transcend and Include”

1. Ch. 1, Oh? Do you worship angels? Well, Christ is worshipped by the angels.
2. Ch. 2, Christ is human, but more than a human.
3. Ch. 3, Christ is just like Moses, but greater than Moses.
4. Ch. 4, Oh? Do you like the Sabbath? Well, Christ’s Sabbath is even greater.
5. Ch. 5, The priesthood of Aaron and Melchizedek were great, and Christ is of the same order, but better.
6. Ch. 6, The greatness of God’s promises.
7. Ch. 7, Again, Christ transcends and includes what Melchizedek was.
8. Ch. 8, Oh? Did you like the Old Covenant? Well, in Christ is the New Covenant.
9. Ch. 9, In Christ there is a Tabernacle similar to the Earthly one. Plus, Christ’s sacrifice is just like and yet greater than the sacrifice of the Earthly Tabernacle.
10. Ch. 10, Christ’s sacrifice was ONCE for ALL, NOT MANY TIMES for SOME.
11. Ch. 11, Have faith just like the saints and figures of old.
12. Ch. 12, The Mountain of Fear (Sinai) and the Mountain of Joy (Golgotha)
13. Ch. 13, Stay true to the faith, do not go back to the old ways.

D. ONCE for ALL, Not Many Times for Some.

E. Questions

1. Is it possible that Christianity is actually as good as it says it is? What changes when we read books in their totality, like Hebrews?

XIV. The Arche, Mesos and Telos of It All

A. The Arche: The Abrahamic Covenant.

1. “The Lord had said to Abram, “Go from your country, your people and your father’s household to the land I will show you. “I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.” (Genesis 12:1-3)

B. The Mesos: Christ in the Middle, Reconciling

1. Christ holds things together in the middle, as the Beginning and End personified and incarnated, revealed in the “Middle.”
2. Colossians 1:15-20 highlights Christ as the cosmic reconciler.

C. The Telos: The Gathering Up and Raising Up of All Things

1. “And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will *draw/drag* all people to myself.” - John 12:32
2. “In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God’s grace that he lavished on us. With all wisdom and understanding, he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, to be put into effect when the times reach their fulfillment—to *bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ.*” (Ephesians 1:7-10)

XV.What About Arminianism (Freewill) and Calvinism (Determinism)?

A. A Parable of a Middle School Romance

1. Once upon a time, there was a middle school boy who found out that the following month there was going to be a dance in the school gymnasium. He already knew whom he wanted to ask, another middle school girl whom he believed was the most lovely of all. One problem, though, was that she did not know who he was. So over the next few weeks, he left her anonymous flowers or cards as he worked up the courage to ask her to the dance. As the day for the dance drew closer, he knew he had to ask before someone else did. So he approached her, confessed that he was the unknown troubadour, and asked her to the dance. After a serious pause and seeing his earnestness, she accepts and they then plan to go to the dance together.
2. Who is responsible for them going to the dance? His decision to choose her or her decision to accept? This is the age-old question of Free Will or Election. Although this is a metaphor that still breaks down at some point, at least it maintains the idea that the whole ordeal is a matter of love, of romance. For many, and how they formulate the Gospel, it is not a matter of romance, it is a determination of blind luck or happenstance.

B. God is a Holy Lifeguard

1. A good lifeguard does not wait until there is consent to rescue someone. Plus, if someone goes unconscious in the water, within lifeguarding there is something considered “implied consent.” God saw that we were “dead in our sins” and therefore has chosen to rescue the whole of the cosmos because it gave its “implied consent.”

C. What about the Brain-Functioning of an Addict?

1. To anyone that has done recovery work, or cared about someone working through recovery, it is well known and documented that the brain functioning of the addict will never go away and will never not distort their perception of reality.
2. The same is true of the sin-addled brain. The addict is never fully free to choose to not be tempted. The same can be said of us as sinners, we are never fully free to choose shalom. And God recognizes this reality. As such, since we hold and love the addict differently, so does God hold and love each of us differently.

D. What About My Free Will?

1. You are not “free” in love and wisdom if you can still be seduced by something other than God.
2. Once your will has been “freed” from its bondage to deception, sin, and death, you are then finally “free” to choose God without infringement. (Reference Martin Luther.)
3. A “Will” that is able to say No to God, is not actually free, it is still bound to sin and death. After those are done away with, the will is “freed” to finally say Yes to God after all. Only a will that is completely freed from the temptation to a lesser good than God is actually free. And, once completely free, while looking at unconditional love face to face, who would want to say no to that?

XVI. What About Being a Good Person?

A. The Teaching of Apokatastasis is for the Mature, Said the Patristics.

1. The Early Church did worry that this could be abused and thereby enable spiritual or moral laxity. But that has always been the gamble! Unconditional love means knowing that the other person might abuse it, knowing that if they actually accepted it, it would rob them of the desire to be spiritually or morally lazy!
2. Yes, there is infinite and unconditional grace, but at the same time, there is full accountability (not punishment). The idea of justice here is that everyone will “suffer” some degree of correction, but no one will suffer needless punishment.

B. This Just Means People Can Do as They Want!

1. Of course! However, we should not forget that Romans 6 says we died to sin. To live in self-destructive ways that also harm those around us is the old way of being human, to be a Christ follower is to live the new way of being human.

C. Morality from the Internal Posture of Joy, Gratitude, and What is Healthy and Holy.

1. “‘I have the right to do anything,’ you say—but not everything is beneficial. ‘I have the right to do anything’—but not everything is constructive.” (1 Corinthians 10:23)

D. Questions

1. How can we reframe the reasons why you would repent, in light of the restoration of all things? What if we were to reframe Christian ethics completely around joy, thanksgiving, and love rather than fear of punishment or estrangement?

XVII.Wait, Everything Will Be Tested by Fire?

A. Everything Will Be Tested by the Fire of God

1. “By the grace God has given me, I laid a foundation as a wise builder, and someone else is building on it. But each one should build with care. For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ. If anyone builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, their work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each person’s work. If what has been built survives, the builder will receive a reward. If it is burned up, the builder will suffer loss but yet will be saved—even though only as one escaping through the flames.” (1 Corinthians 3:10-15)
2. The early Church held that all things will be tested by the Love of God as by fire. This harkens back to Malachi 3:2 in which on Judgment Day, it will be as a “Refiner’s Fire.” The Love of God is not bound to punish sin or evil, but to destroy it, so that the only thing left is what is Good, True, Beautiful, and done in Love.

George MacDonald quipped that when presented with Heaven, Purgatory, and Hellfire, the Protestant Reformation “got rid of the wrong one”!

XVIII.Why Bother Evangelizing? What About People Who Never Heard?

A. Why NOT?

1. Why not want to share with others this extremely Good News? Why not give people a better reason to want to clean up their own lives before too late? If everyone is already reconciled, then the impetus to want to change and repent shifts from being fear-based into being joy- and love-based.
2. Why not want to study the life of Jesus of Nazareth, the one through whom all of this Good News happens?
3. Why not be baptized into this mystery, and take the sacraments? Why not devote one’s life to living out this Good News in every way?

B. Why Does It Matter to Believe in Jesus, Then? Why Not Just Go About Believing Anything?

1. If Jesus is the one through whom all of this restoration, redemption, renewal, reparation, reclaiming, and rescuing happens, why wouldn’t you want to be in on that sooner rather than later? Wouldn’t you want to study and follow in the teachings as if

they were your Rabbi? People can go on believing something else if they want, but this means that someone chooses to believe and follow, not out of terror, but out of joy, gratitude, and wonder.

C. What About People Who Never Heard?

1. Christ has already harrowed Hell and set the captives free. Remember Jesus' word? "If you who are evil know how to give good things, how much more so does God?"

D. What About People Who Said No?

1. If they were only told about a god of conditionality and said No to that, then they really didn't say No to the unconditional love of God revealed in Jesus. They said No to a pagan and faulty understanding of the Gospel, which should be rejected and is right to be rejected. If someone was told an interpretation of Jesus that was condescending, judgmental, and vindictive, they would actually be acting out of spiritual health to say No to that understanding of Jesus!

XIX. Was This View Condemned at the Fifth Ecumenical Council, The Second Council of Constantinople, in 553AD?

A. What Happened at the Council?

1. The Roman emperor Justinian wrote to the attendees of the council advising them to condemn Origen, but there are no resulting documents that by the end of the council that they formally condemned the restoration of all things in Christ.
2. There is no record in the Latin text that the anathemas that Justinian wanted discussed were ever discussed, let alone agreed upon.

B. Some Further Questions about All of This...

1. Regardless of what later centuries debated, apokatastasis is in there, in the text itself and from the mouths of Jesus, Peter, and Paul.
2. The view of universal restoration held by Gregory of Nyssa (who was affectionately called the "flower of orthodoxy") and many other greats were never challenged.

XX. What About Judas?

A. Yep, Let's Go There.

1. The reality is that none of us are better than Judas, and Judas is no worse off than the rest of us. The unconditional Love of God truly comes to the stark reality when we contemplate the mercy of God even toward Judas. If there isn't hope for Judas, then there isn't hope for the rest of us.

XXI.A Few More Undeniable New Testament Passages

- A. “He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, *and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world.*” (1 John 2:2)
- B. “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. After being made alive, *he went and made proclamation to the imprisoned spirits...*” (1 Peter 3:18-19)
- C. “That is why we labor and strive, because we have put our hope in the living God, *who is the Savior of all people, and especially of those who believe.*” (1 Timothy 4:10)
- D. “But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. *For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive.* But each in turn: Christ, the firstfruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him. Then the end will come, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death. For he “has put everything under his feet.” Now when it says that “everything” has been put under him, it is clear that this does not include God himself, who put everything under Christ. When he has done this, then the Son himself will be made subject to him who put everything under him, *so that God may be all in all.*” (1 Corinthians 15:20-28)
- E. “When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. Then he placed his right hand on me and said: “Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last. I am the Living One; I was dead, and now look, I am alive for ever and ever! *And I hold the keys of death and Hades.*” (Revelation 1:17-18)

E Questions

1. Did you know these passages even existed? Which ones were new to you?

XXII.Openly and Joyfully Profess, Without Reservation

- A. “In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus:
Who, being in very nature God,
did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage;
rather, he made himself nothing
by taking the very nature of a servant,
being made in human likeness.
And being found in appearance as a man,
he humbled himself
by becoming obedient to death—

even death on a cross!

Therefore God exalted him to the highest place
and gave him the name that is above every name,
that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
and every tongue *openly and joyfully profess without reservation* that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father.” (Philippians 2:5-11)

1. Εχομολογησεται (*Exomologesetai*) is often translated as “should/will confess.”
 - a) It derives from the word Εχομολογεω (*Exomologeō*) which means, “to acknowledge openly and joyfully, to celebrate, to give praise to.”
 - b) The meaning of the passage is incomparably different as a result of translators choosing to use the word “confess” rather than “openly and joyfully profess, without reservation.”
 - c) There is not a hint of disappointment, reluctance, or admission of fault. It is through and through a positive event because for Paul the Gospel has always been about the reconciliation, restoration, redemption, renewal, reparation, rescue, and recovery of all things in Christ.
- B. This same verb happens again in Romans 14:11, and in the Greek translation of the Old Testament in Isaiah 45:23!
 1. “Turn to me and be saved,
all you ends of the earth;
for I am God, and there is no other.
By myself I have sworn,
my mouth has uttered in all integrity
a word that will not be revoked:
Before me every knee will bow;
by me every tongue will swear.” (Isaiah 45:23)
- C. Even the Old Testament that the writers of the New Testament knew, spoke of a day when everyone will openly and joyfully profess, without reservation that Yahweh is Lord!

XXIII.A Challenge to Read the New Testament with a Highlighter

A. Reading the Bible, Seriously

1. Give it a shot. Give yourself a full week or two to do this. It is exactly what I did.
2. Take your Bible and read through the New Testament, reading every single word, and simply highlight every possible passage that might leave the door open for this. The

reality is that English translations soften this language, but the universality and cosmic scope are unavoidably present in the original Greek.

XXIV. 5 Words to Describe the Love of God

A. These are 5 Words I Have Curated Over the Past 20 Years of Church and Camp Ministry

1. Intimate - The Love of God is incredibly close, humble, vulnerable, and intimate with us.
2. Infinite - The Love of God is inexhaustible.
3. Deliberate - The Love of God is intentional, and not accidental or “mandated” from God’s side.
4. Primal - The Love of God is the foundational and archetypal word communicated to us about us.
5. Final - The Love of God is the capstone and ultimate word communicated to us about us.

XXV. An Icon of the Resurrection

A. The Eastern Icons of the Resurrection

1. What are Some Noteworthy Parts of It?
 - a) Icons are not necessarily looking to be historically accurate, they are looking to be theologically accurate in what they communicate. This is because they were often made by and for illiterate believers in the early Church.
 - b) Jesus is not resurrected alone, He is simply the first, and He is resurrecting Adam and Eve (symbolic of all humanity) with Him by hand. (Romans 6:5-8)
 - c) John the Baptist, King David, and King Solomon are on the left, as witnesses.
 - d) Abel (with the staff), Moses, and Elijah are on the right, as witnesses as well.
 - e) The Gates of Hell are trampled beneath the feet of Jesus and make something like a cross. (Matthew 16:17-19)
 - f) There are broken chains and locks scattered in the Abyss/Hell because Christ descended into the Abyss/Hell and released all the captives in a divine jailbreak. (This is also known as the Harrowing of Hell)
 - g) Death personified is then bound up in the chains once used against humanity. (1 Corinthians 15:26)
 - h) The two mountains in the background might symbolize Sinai and Golgotha.

- i) Christ is shrouded in a darkening light, symbolizing that the deeper one looks into the mystery of Christ... the more mystery is discovered. A mystery is not something unknowable, a mystery is something endlessly knowable!
- j) Christ still has wounds on his hands and feet from the event of the Crucifixion.

XXVI. Figures from Church History

A. Who from Church History also Believed in the Restoration of All Things?

1. Gregory of Nyssa
2. Basil of Caesarea
3. Fyodor Dostoevsky
4. Julian of Norwich (Implied)
5. Soren Kierkegaard
6. Athanasius of Alexandria
7. Irenaeus of Lyons
8. George MacDonald
9. Billy Graham (Toward the End of His Life)
10. Teresa of Avila (Hell is Empty)
11. Macrina the Younger
12. Isaac of Nineveh (Isaac the Syrian/the New Theologian)
13. Maximus the Confessor (Using the Rhetoric of Logos)
14. Many Others

B. A Question to Consider...

1. Why do you think the greats of church history all taught and thought this way but it is not more well known that they did?

XXVII. Suggested Further Reading

- A. A Larger Hope Vol. 1: Universal Salvation from Christian Beginnings to Julian of Norwich by Ramelli and Bauckham
- B. A Larger Hope Vol. 2: Universal Salvation from the Reformation to the Nineteenth Century by Parry and Ramelli
- C. That All Shall Be Saved: Heaven, Hell, and Universal Salvation by David Bentley Hart

- D. You Are Gods: On Nature and Supernature by David Bentley Hart
- E. The New Testament by David Bentley Hart
- F. Her Gates Will Never Be Shut: Hell, Hope, and the New Jerusalem by Brad Jersak
- G. Christ the Conqueror of Hell: The Descent into Hades from an Orthodox Perspective by Archbishop Hilarion Alfeyev
- H. Destined for Joy: The Gospel of Universal Salvation by Alvin F. Kimel
- I. Unspoken Sermons by George MacDonald

XXVIII. Thank You!