

# **“The Cruellest Hope”**

**(Luke 16:19-31, part 2)**

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## **I. Introduction**

### **A. On the cover of Time Magazine**

1. The reality of Hell
2. For us, the battle is more than a theological question
  - a. For us....it's “personal”
    1. Not a day goes by for me
    2. My friends and family
  - b. Putting souls at risk
    1. What if the author's wrong?
    2. His would be “*The Cruellest Hope*”
3. God has placed us here for such a time as this
4. Part of a much larger battle
  - a. Has God revealed himself to us through the Bible?
  - b. Can the Bible be trusted?
  - c. Is the Bible the final authority in our church?

### **B. The need to stand and be counted**

1. If pastors won't stand on this issue, when will they?
  - a. Jews being shipped to concentrations camps

1. Cries coming from the box cars of trains
  2. Churches sang louder so they wouldn't hear the cries
- b. Shame on those who watched in silence
  - c. Quote by Shlomo Riskin on the Holocaust Memorial

***“One cannot love good without despising evil; those who are silent in the face of evil are ultimately collaborators.” (Shlomo Riskin)***

2. Attacks on the authority of the Bible
  - a. Allowing anything to take authority over the clear teaching of God's word
3. You may be surprised at what some of these things are

## **II. Text**

### **A. The Authority of the Bible**

#### **1. II Timothy 3:14-17**

***(14) But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, (15) and how from infancy you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. (16) All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, (17) so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.***

#### **2. II Peter 1:20-21**

***(20) Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation, (21) For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.***

3. This morning, the “*Authority of Scriptures*”

### **B. Stealing Authority from God's Word**

#### **1. Additional Books or Writings**

- a. The Mormons
  1. Mormons accept the Bible

2. But believe the Book of Mormon trumps the Bible

***b. All other books and writings must submit to the clear teachings of the Word of God***

1. That includes “Love Wins”

## ***2. Church Councils or Traditions***

a. Not just the Roman Catholics and Eastern Orthodox

b. Our churches also

1. “But we’ve always done it that way”

***c. Councils and traditions must always submit to the clear teachings of the Word of God***

## ***3. Pastors or Leaders***

a. Its not just about the Pope and the Council of Cardinals

b. The Pastor or Elders

***c. Your pastors and elders must always submit to the clear teachings of the Word of God***

## ***4. Church Covenants, Constitutions or Statements of Faith***

a. Man made

1. Written by sinners just like us

2. If we discover anything inconsistent with the clear teaching of the Word of God....we will change it

***b. Church covenants, constitutions and statements of faith must always submit to the clear teachings of the Word of God***

## ***5. Personal Feelings or Wishes***

a. What you wish was true

1. None of us want people to suffer in Hell

2. I cringe at the idea
- b. I can “wish” everybody eventually gets out of hell
  1. But to give false hope is *the Cruellest Hope*
  2. The first lie in the Garden
    - a. **“No Death”**
  3. The latest lie
    - a. **“No Hurry”**
  4. Don’t worry, you’ll get an opportunity to get out of hell...and it won’t be as bad as some have made it out to be
- c. The scene in Revelation 20
  1. Too late there is **“No Escape”**
    - a. *“forever and forever”*
  2. The realization that this was the cruelest of lies
  3. Michael Wittmer, (“Christ Alone” page 31)
 

*If God wanted people to know they would have a second chance after death, He would have told them.*

*Since he didn’t—and since his repeated warnings about hell run hard in the other direction—those who assert there is a chance for postmortem salvation inadvertently claim to know better than God what God should have revealed in his Word.*
- d. ***Our feelings and wishes must always submit to the clear teachings of the Word of God***

## **6. Personal Beliefs or Opinions**

- a. Many expected God to conform to their principles of morality.
  1. An eternity of suffering didn’t seem right from a God of love
  2. Didn’t care that:

- a. Jesus spoke more than anyone else about hell, or
  - b. Every New Testament author taught the final punishment of the wicked
3. Forced the Bible to bend to their feelings of right and wrong
- b. God's truth is found by starting with the Bible
    - 1. Why we teach verse-by-verse
    - 2. We talk about "Inductive Bible Study"
      - a. Start with the Bible
      - b. Discover God's principles of truth
  - c. Can't start with a personal opinion
    - 1. And then pull verses out of context to support your opinion
    - 2. How cults are started
  - d. ***Our personal beliefs and opinions must always submit to the clear teachings of the Word of God***

### ***7. Personal Bitterness or Baggage***

- a. Many of you have been deeply scarred
  - 1. The impact of the 3-H's
  - 2. The truth spoken with harshness, hypocrisy or holier-than-thou attitude
- b. The truth must be spoken with love
  - 1. What so many are searching for
  - 2. We want to be that church
- c. But don't over-react by throwing out the baby with the bath water
  - 1. Let's clean up the bathwater
- d. Those who refuse to forgive...but are told they must

e. *Our personal bitterness and baggage must always submit to the clear teachings of the Word of God*

### 8. *Human Wisdom or Logic*

- a. Don't let human logic interfere with the clearly stated teachings of the Word of God
- b. Trusting current scientific truths over biblical truth
  - 1. Attempting to purge the Bible of the miraculous
- c. Trying to resolve mysteries and seeming contradictions
- d. Romans 11:33

*(33) Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out! (34) Who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor?*

e. *Human wisdom and logic must always submit to the clear teachings of the Word of God*

### 9. *Political Correctness or Church Correctness*

- a. Political Correctness
  - 1. Afraid to call sin for what it is
    - a. Afraid to offend
    - b. Pastors and churches trying to make everyone feel okay
  - 2. Disregard parts of the Bible that are politically incorrect
    - a. Like referring to homosexuality as sin
  - 3. *Political correctness must always submit to the clear teachings of the Word of God*
- b. Church Correctness
  - 1. Fear of hurting or offending people in your church
  - 2. Picking and choosing which sins to denounce

3. Ignoring parts of the Bible for fear of offense
  - a. Excusing the gossip and critical spirit
  - b. Ignoring the pride of hypocrisy and holier-than-thou
  - c. Won't mention the sin of gluttony
4. Afraid of offending a powerful or rich family
5. *Church correctness must always submit to the clear teachings of the Word of God*

#### **10. *Persuasive Preachers or Teachers***

- a. Speakers who play on the emotions of people
- b. Tell them what they want to hear
- c. 90% of what a false teacher teaches, is truth
  1. But the 10% is the poison
  2. Sandwiched in between the truth
- d. The damage done by one false teacher at Fuller Seminary
- e. *Persuasive preachers and teachers must always submit to the clear teaching of the Word of God*

### **C. Hermeneutics...How to interpret the Bible**

#### **1. *Begin by assuming a literal interpretation***

- a. Obvious metaphors
  1. "I am the door"
- b. Assume the literal until shown otherwise
- c. The simplest interpretation is usually the best

#### **2. *Study the whole counsel of God...and study it in context***

- a. It all needs to fit together

1. And every verse must be taken in context
2. For example....Will all be saved?
  - a. Compared to John 3:16-17

***(16) 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. (17) For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him***

- b. But don't forget the next verse... John 3:18

***(18) Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son.***

- b. Cultural context

1. Jesus and the parables

### ***3. Focus on the main intent of a passage***

- a. What is God trying to say
- b. Don't force it to fit your unique theory
- c. Start with the simplest interpretation
- d. Violations from "Love Wins"

1. Luke 16, The rich man and Lazarus

- a. Saw the chasm as an attitude problem

1. Treating the beggar like a servant

2. "Get me a drink of water"

2. John 14

- a. "I am the way and the truth and the life. No man comes to the father but by me"

- b. Claims the absence of when, how, who, where, etc.

3. "Will be more tolerable for Sodom on day of judgment"

- a. Showing the severity of judgment on Capernaum
- b. Even worse than Sodom's
- c. Used it to say that Christ is saying the people of Sodom will be saved

#### ***4. Listen to the counsel of godly men and women***

- a. If I come up with an unusual interpretation?
  - 1. Check commentaries (Those I trust)
  - 2. Call my counselors (My four advisors)
- b. If it's new it's probably not good...and if it's good it's probably not new
- c. Never build a new doctrine on an "iffy interpretation"
- d. Lazarus and the rich man
  - 1. The "attitude chasm"
  - 2. ***"Who else in church history has thought that this is the point of Jesus' story?"*** (Wittmer, p. 29)
- e. My compilation of opinions regarding hell (**email**)

#### ***5. Be careful with the Greek***

- a. Pastors and Greek in seminaries
  - 1. Most learn just enough Greek to be dangerous
  - 2. Good at reading fraternity signs
- b. Two Greek words in "Love Wins"
  - 1. Used to build a dangerous doctrine of universal salvation
- c. The sheep and goats in Matthew 25
  - 1. The sheep (believers) into heaven
- d. The author of "Love Wins" states that the goats (unbelievers) enter a period of pruning until they're ready for heaven

e. Yet your Bible says (Matthew 25:46)

**(46) Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life**

f. Argument built on two Greek words

1. “*aion*” of “*kolazo*”
2. “a period” of “pruning”

g. Statements in “Love Wins”

1. “Depending on how you translate *aion* and *kolazo*, then, the phrase can mean a “period of pruning” or “a time of trimming,” or an intense experience of correction” (“Love Wins” page 91)

- a. Like Purgatory
- b. Like detention for bad behavior
- c. A rehab program

2. “In a good number of English translations of the Bible, the phrase “*aion of kolazo*” gets translated as “eternal punishment,” which many read to mean “punishment forever,” as in never going to end.” (“Love Wins” page 91)

h. The problem

1. Wrong Greek words
2. Regardless of which Greek text used

i. Mike Wittmer (“*Christ Alone*” pp. 55-56)

“(Bell) says this is one possible way to read the phrase *aion of kolazo* in Matthew 25:46. However, the Greek text does not actually say “*aion of kolazo*,” but rather “*kolasin aionion*.”

j. The actual words in all Greek texts

- a. “*aionion (or aionios) kolasin (or kolasis)*”
- b. Words which always mean eternal punishment
- c. That’s why English translations say “*eternal punishment*”

k. Comments by Dr. Jim Samra, Senior Pastor of Calvary Church of Grand Rapids, Michigan)

*A central point Rob makes throughout the book centers on what he identifies as the Greek word *aion*. He writes that the word can mean “age” (which is true), but implies that *aion* cannot mean “forever” as in the sense of eternity. However, more than 50 times in the New Testament, and throughout ancient Greek literature, *aion* does refer to “a time to come of which, there is no end, known as eternity; according to the standard Greek lexicon in use today (known by the initials BDAG)*

*Also Rob seems to confuse *aion* with a different, though related, Greek word, *aionios*. Although they look similar, *aion* is a noun and *aionios* is an adjective. This makes quite a difference. While the noun *aion* can refer to a fixed period of time, *aionios* is never used that way in all the New Testament. *Aionios* always means “unending” or “without duration.” So English translations are right to use the words “eternal life” because the word is *aionios*, not *aion* as Rob would have us believe. Rob’s confusion of these two different words, contributes to an unusual interpretation of Matthew 25:46 in the third chapter. In the passage about the sheep and the goats, Rob tells us the goats are sent to “an *aion* of kolazo.” By saying it in this way, Rob is claiming that Matthew uses the word *aion* in this passage. He does not. Matthew uses *aionios*. Compounding the confusion, Rob writes *kolaza* (which is a verb) instead of *kolasis* (which is the noun that Matthew actually uses). Rob implies that this word is in the genitive case. It is not. So when Rob tries to tell us that Matthew wrote “an *aion* of kolazo,” which might mean “an age of pruning,” he has not correctly told us what Matthew wrote in Greek. What Matthew actually wrote is “into *aionios kolasis*,” which cannot mean “an age of pruning” but “eternal punishment.” The reason why no English translation has “an age of pruning” is not because the translators didn’t know what they were doing. It is because this is not what the Greek text actually says.*

*Rob makes authoritative statements and tries to use Greek to support his ideas; however, I found his use of Greek to be dangerously misleading.*

**6. Don’t believe everything you read in books**

- a. He argues that, “at the center of Christian tradition since the first church has been the insistence that history is not tragic, hell is not forever, and love, in the end wins.”
- b. Cited Origen
- c. But then dropped other names like Jerome, Basil, Augustine and Luther
- d. Let me clear the name of Martin Luther
  1. The author of “Love Wins” quoted Luther to support his view of Post-mortem salvation

2. He observes that Luther once wrote to a friend concerning the possibility of postmortem salvation,

*“Who would doubt God’s ability to do that” (“Love Wins, p. 106)*

3. And so the author concludes that even Luther was open to the possibility of a second chance for salvation. But he overlooks Luther’s very next words:

*“No one, however, can prove that he does do this.” (Luther 1968, pp. 53-54)*

### III. Summary

#### A. My calling

1. My job every Sunday morning is to deliver an accurate message from God

a. When I do, I carry the full authority of God

b. I can pronounce with confidence, “Thus saith the Lord!”

2. Luke 4:32

*(32) They were amazed at Jesus’ teaching, because his message had authority.*

3. My fear and passion each Sunday morning

a. Like it’s a once in a lifetime opportunity

b. There is never an “ordinary sermon”

4. My fear of abusing that authority

a. God’s warning in James 3:1

*(1) Not many of you should presume to be teachers, my brother, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly.*

5. Those teaching our children and youth

6. Nothing must escape the authority of the Word of God

a. Speak the truth in love

- b. The source of truth is the Word of God
- c. All we do at Chapel Pointe must submit to it

## **B. Our clear challenge is to warn the lost now**

### 1. Statement by Cornerstone/Grand Rapids Theological Seminary

*There is insufficient evidence in Scripture to believe that hell has a pruning or correcting influence on those who are there. Nor is there any biblical evidence that those who are just sent there will be given opportunities for repentance and salvation in the afterlife. Given the finality of hell, Jesus has charged his church with the duty of calling people to immediate repentance which explains why the urgency of the gospel message is a central theme of the New Testament.*

### 2. As “Judgment Day” approaches

- a. For many yesterday was
- b. Our calling is to warn them in love

### 3. Charles Haddon Spurgeon to his congregation (*Spurgeon*, pp.68-78)

If sinners be damned, at least let them leap to hell over our bodies. And if they perish, let them perish with our arms about their knees, imploring them to stay. If hell must be filled, at least let it be filled in the teeth of our exertions, and let not one person go there unwarned and unprayed for.