

## WILL THERE BE MANY, FEW, OR NO ONE IN HELL?

By Ron Christian

Of course, only God knows who will be saved in the end, and how many persons - but it is gratifying to know that the God of the universe is a "God of Love", as demonstrated by the Incarnation (i.e., the compassionate life and sacrificial death and glorious resurrection of God's Son who best demonstrates that the "wideness of God's love" is indeed very wide!)

The fact that God's light (of truth) shines, and with varying degrees of brightness, upon every person, at all times and under all circumstances, and the fact that God works in the conscience of every person (who has an innate sense of 'right and wrong'), and the fact that God is "not willing that anyone should perish", and the fact that God's Spirit (short of coercion) is powerfully influencing everyone to repent of sin and to turn in faith to the Creator God - these are some of the realities about God's character and merciful actions which cause me to rejoice that I will (by God's keeping grace) someday enjoy the presence of countless multitudes of persons who were ushered into heaven 'on the merits of Christ alone', even though these multitudes of persons were not fortunate enough on earth to hear about Christ and to make a personal and knowledgeable volitional commitment to Him as Savior. They were saved, not because they had proper or full knowledge of Christ on earth, but because their hearts responded to the "Light of Truth" (which was "Christ Concealed"), as they received God's Truth through "General Revelation" (Nature, Conscience, partial truth in various non-Christian Religions, etc.). It is not the accuracy of head knowledge, but the receptivity of the heart to the "light of God" (even if that "light" is very incomplete), that determines the ultimate destiny of the human soul - and only God, in the end, will be the Judge of each personal spiritual condition!

But, is there clearer "Biblical Grounds" for believing that, in the End, most (if not the overwhelming majority) of people will be "Saved" - and enjoy the glories of heaven (which was God's intention at the time He created the human race)?

John Stott, a long-time pastor and a highly respected Biblical scholar -preacher/writer/evangelist, in his extensive commentary on the Book of Romans, shares most wonderful insights on the "Wideness of God's Mercy" (when he expounds the meaning of Romans 5:12-21). "Romans 5:12-21 gives us solid grounds for confidence that a very large number will be saved and that the scope of Christ' redeeming work although not universal, will be extremely extensive...Although Adam's disobedience led to universal sin and death, there has been a lavish extravagance about the grace of Christ, in both quality and quantity, which was entirely absent from Adam and all his works...The work of Christ will in the end be seen to be much more effective than the work of Adam; that Christ will raise to life many more than Adam will drag to death; and that God's grace will flow in more abundant blessings than the consequences of Adam's sin...He (Paul) is affirming that Christ's work is superior to Adam's not only in the nature of his action and achievement, but in the degree of its success." (Romans, God's Good News for the World; pg. 159-161)

One highly respected theologian/writer of a bygone day, but whose writings are still read with

great profit (C.H. Hodge), affirms this belief in the “Wideness of God’s Mercy”. With conviction, he writes, “The number of the saved shall doubtless greatly exceed the number of the lost. We have reason to believe that the lost shall bear to the saved no greater proportion than the inmates of a prison do to the mass of the community.” (Ibid; pg.161)

Fulton Sheen, the highly respected T.V. and radio speaker to many millions, and probably the best known Catholic communicator during the 20<sup>th</sup> century, wrote some thought-provoking and insightful comments on Jesus’ words regarding compassion, in Matthew 25:31-46. “His (Jesus’) words even imply that philanthropy has deeper depths than is generally realized. The great emotions of compassion and mercy are traced to Him; there is more to human deeds than the doers are aware. He identified every act of kindness as an expression of sympathy with Himself. All kindnesses are either done explicitly or implicitly in His name, or they are refused explicitly or implicitly in His name...Only an Omniscient Will could ever judge the motives behind all philanthropy to decide when it was charity, and when it was self-praise. That He claimed He would do and with such finality that the repercussions would be eternal.” (Life of Christ’ pg. 209)

If we understand the amazing impact of Jesus’ teaching, in Matthew 25, it seems quite apparent that Jesus, as a Judge in the End, will judge each person’s HEART RESPONSE to the needs of one’s fellow men, even if some of the compassion givers do not have a so-called ‘evangelical conversion’. Jesus said of the compassionate persons (who do all kinds of good deeds) that ‘inasmuch as ye have done it unto the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.’ There will be those, after they have died physically, who will be surprised that they were welcomed into God’s eternal abode (heaven). It is the condition of the HEART (whether it is compassionate or not; whether it is self-preoccupied or instead others-oriented), not the theological accuracy of the MIND. It is not how much we know about God (although mental comprehension is not to be despised), but how available we are to love others. We must be DOERS of the Word, and not simply HEARERS.

A TENDER HEART which issues forth in COMPASSIONATE ACTIONS determines the authenticity of our lives - and (apparently from Jesus’s teaching in Matthew 25) it will be the tender heart and the active hand that will determine the eternal destiny of each person. I believe (according to Jesus’ teaching in Matthew 25) that there will be countless multitudes of persons in heaven who did many works of compassion on earth, without them truly understanding that their motivation for these loving and kind deeds was the ‘heart of God’. Without realizing it, they were ‘walking in all the light’ that they had, without realizing that it was the Compassionate Christ who was the One who gave them both the desire to do loving acts and also the power and energy and zeal and endurance to consistently do their ‘acts of mercy’. Many will be surprised that, in eternity, they were praised and accepted by the Christ of Mercy whom they, ignorantly, imitated imperfectly but sincerely on earth! Only compassionate persons make it to heaven, but there are many truly compassionate people on earth who will go to heaven when they die - because their heart was a ‘channel of Christ’s mercy’ on earth, even though they did not have a personal ‘evangelical conversion’. Some compassionate persons are truly born again (living

compassionate lives, pale but sincere reflections of Christ's compassion), but these same persons could never be able to outline theologically the 'steps in becoming a Christian'. All they know is that they desire to help people, to alleviate their terrible sufferings, to befriend the lonely, to give a listening ear to the troubled words of persons, to give a generous portion of their money to help the poor, to visit those who are grief-stricken, to share their presence with those in prison, to give away their talents to bless the despairing, and so much more. You may respond to these compassion-oriented persons that they could not do all these 'acts of charity' unless they are 'born-again Christians'. Precisely! These 'fruits of godliness' come not from mere 'sentimental inclinations'. No. The one who is humbly compassionate (i.e. the one who has sincere motives, not to glorify his own 'ego', but instead to genuinely help others, with no desire for personal profit or praise) - I say, the one who is humbly compassionate is the same one who is a 'child of God' - truly 'born again'. Such a person has surrendered his heart and his will to others - to serve and to care and to empathize and to be an instrument of healing. Such a person (and there are multitudes of these kinds of persons, among all classes and races and religious affiliations throughout the world) whose life is largely defined by voluntary works of charity, would be dumbfounded if you asked him if he had been 'born again'. Because such persons cannot 'pinpoint' a time of personal conversion, and they cannot intelligently describe the meaning of 'repentance', 'confession', 'justification', 'regeneration', and all the other difficult theological (salvation) terms, does NOT mean that these persons are unconverted. When I accepted Christ (many years ago), all I said was "Save my Soul!" (I repeated that simple prayer about 4 times) My life was drastically changed - resulting in a great desire to pray and to read and to memorize the Bible. (The next few years following my conversion, I spent hundreds of hours alone, memorizing large portions of the New Testament, and praying and meditating, in a quiet environment near an old creek on an old rock; God changed my desires radically, and I was no longer a dull and purposeless individual). So, I believe heaven will be inhabited, not only by the well-informed and deeply-spiritual evangelicals, but also by the compassionate persons who are saved (even if they would be unable to properly describe the 'how' and the 'when' of their genuine connection with God). Whether we know a lot (theologically) with our HEADS or not, the only persons who will enter the 'pearly gates' of heaven are those whose HEARTS are tender and compassionate.

One thing is certain - the multitudes of compassionate-oriented persons in our world (i.e., those who obviously minister to the hurting ones, in a selfless and genuinely caring way) - these persons are the servants of Christ, doing the work of Christ, energized by the power of Christ, affirmed by the praise and blessing of Christ. When did these selfless persons meet Christ? When did they become 'born again'? In the 'case' of many of these compassionate persons (with no 'evangelical connection'), perhaps they were 'converted' when they first laid their eyes upon some suffering person. We don't know the 'how' and 'when' of their conversion, but Jesus said "By their fruits ye shall know them". The fruits of Christ-like compassion means that they definitely belong to Christ.

Although, of course, I cannot prove it, I personally believe (based on the teaching of Jesus in Matthew 25) that there will be a multitude of persons in heaven who, while they lived on earth, did not profess a deep and personal relationship with Christ, but who are in heaven (apparently to their own surprise), because they 'walked in all the light of truth' that they knew - namely, the

'light of true compassion' towards their fellow man on earth. They did not realize, while they carried on their active life of compassion on earth, that the very origin (fountainhead) of their compassion was the 'compassionate heart of Jesus Himself'! Such persons responded to the 'saving grace' of Jesus rather ignorantly, when they committed their entire life and energies and talents and skills and training and motivations to caring for the imprisoned and the starving and the weak and the oppressed and the widow and the poor and the injured, etc. etc. They manifested the 'fruits of Christlikeness', so, indeed, they surely possessed the very person of Christ (the Holy Spirit) in their hearts, even though they never really understood the (theological) dynamics of 'evangelical conversion'. Even though some 'sheep' in the Shepherd's fold may not personally know the Shepherd very well (intellectually), nevertheless all 'sheep' who are doing the will of the Shepherd (i.e. loving acts of compassion towards their fellow man) definitely 'belong' to the Shepherd and are loved by the Shepherd, and all sheep, regardless of the uniqueness of their 'condition', will be wonderfully rewarded (Matthew 25) after they die physically.

Jesus said, "By their fruits you shall know them." Yes, it is not hard to discern the 'fruits of godliness' in the lives of many Christians (and even in the lives of many 'God-fearing persons' like Cornelius in Acts 10, who believed in God before he believed in Jesus). But Jesus also said: "Judge not that ye be not judged." (Matthew 7:1) No one is wise enough or holy enough or powerful enough to judge the 'spiritual life' of any other human being. C.S. Lewis believed that, regardless of the outward appearances of people, no one knew for sure just where another person was in his 'spiritual life'. Lewis believed that all persons, at all times, were either 'getting closer to God' or were 'moving farther away from God' - and that some of the 'most religious ones' might be the very ones who, in reality, were 'moving away from God' at that time! In his very popular book 'Mere Christianity' this greatest of the Christian apologists of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, wrote: "The world does not consist of 100 per cent Christians and 100 per cent non-Christians. There are people (a great many of them) who are slowly ceasing to be Christians but who still call themselves by that name; some of them are clergymen. **THERE ARE OTHER PEOPLE WHO ARE SLOWLY BECOMING CHRISTIANS THOUGH THEY DO NOT YET CALL THEMSELVES SO.** There are people who do not accept the full Christian doctrine about Christ but who are **SO STRONGLY ATTRACTED BY HIM THAT THEY ARE HIS IN A MUCH DEEPER SENSE THAN THEY THEMSELVES UNDERSTAND..** There are people in other religions who are being led by God's secret influence to concentrate on those parts of their religion which are in agreement with Christianity, and who thus **BELONG TO CHRIST WITHOUT KNOWING IT.** For example, A Buddhist of good will may be led to concentrate more and more on the Buddhist teaching about mercy and to leave in the background (though he might still say he believed) the Buddhist teaching on certain other points. Many of the good Pagans long before Christ's birth may have been in this position. And always, of course, there are a great many people who are just confused in mind and have a lot of inconsistent beliefs all jumbled up together. Consequently, it is not much use trying to make judgments about Christians and non-Christians in mass....When we are comparing Christians in general with non-Christians in general, we are usually not thinking about real people whom we know at all, but only about two vague ideas." (Mere Christianity; C.S. Lewis; pgs. 163, 164; 1952, By the Macmillan Company)

God judges all persons on the basis of the light they have received and how they have responded (and are responding) to that light. The great Presbyterian scholar, J. Gresham Machen, said, "No one knows how little a person can believe and still be saved." Let's leave the determination of people's 'eternal destiny' in the hands of the all-wise, all-knowing, all-loving and all-merciful God!

There are certain "foundation stones" upon which the entire superstructure of salvation rests. Namely: (1) God loves every person whom He has created, even though all are creatures of a "fallen race", (2) God wants to save every human being from the "bondage of sin", in life and after this earthly life, (3) Jesus alone provides salvation for the human race, through His atoning death and His powerful resurrection, (4) Every person (sinner) is "savable", that is, capable of being saved by Christ - all because of God's gift to every person of "prevenient grace" - the grace that "goes before" to prepare every human being for the convicting and the convincing works of the Spirit, which are prerequisites to a person being saved; (5) the Holy Spirit gives the gift of repentance and the gift of faith to every human being, but each human being (a God-created "free moral agent") is capable of either accepting or of rejecting God's gift of saving grace.

God has a "perfect will", namely, the salvation of every human being. God has no "mysterious, divine decree" by which He decided (elected before the "foundation of the world") to save a select number of humans and consequently to damn the remainder of humans in His creation! Such explanation of "God's predestination" is both unbiblical and blasphemous and is an outrage against both God's justice and His love!

In light of everything that has previously been 'discussed' in this short paper, is it possible to give any definitive and Biblically-based answer to the lead question (title of this paper) - "Are there many, or few, or no one in Hell?" This question, I suppose, has been debated endlessly through the ages of Christianity, but it appears from a careful study (especially Romans 5, carefully expounded by the famous John R.W. Stott) of Biblical passages that the grace of God is so great and the persuasive (not coercive) influence of the Holy Spirit is so great, that the vast majority of human beings (in the end) will finally be in heaven! Only God knows, obviously, but the focus in the Scriptures is not on sin but on God's grace. "Where sin abounds, grace super abounds." What we humans lost in the 'first Adam', we more than gain in the 'second Adam' (Jesus Christ).

The Bible does not explicitly teach that there will be no human in hell, but the Bible clearly teaches that it is not God's will that any human being should perish in hell. God is doing everything He can (short of coercion) to keep every person out of hell! His grace is much stronger than sin. Christ's victory over Satan is offered to every human being. We may share in Christ's victory - the victory of His resurrection. Satan is a defeated foe, and someday he will be a totally vanquished foe (in the Lake of Fire). Hell was not prepared for human beings, but only for Satan and his demons.

Even though we cannot dogmatically and Biblically declare that no human being will ever go to hell, we (as loving Christians) can at least HOPE that, finally, God's grace shall in some way persuade all humans (in the end) to surrender to God's love and, thus be rescued from eternal

destruction. God is so merciful that I believe, as long as there is human breath in a person (and any kind of rationality, consciously or unconsciously), the blessed and merciful Spirit of God offers forgiveness and eternal life to a dying sinner. Again, (as I like to repeat) “God is not willing that any should perish, but that all come to repentance.” I am sure that, like the dying thief on his cross, near to Jesus’ cross, who was ‘saved’ in the last moments, there have been multitudes of dying sinners who have found mercy and forgiveness in their last hours, because they ‘confessed their sins’ in contrition and surrender. Even though the ‘life’ of the thief was ‘lost’, nevertheless his ‘soul’ was saved for eternity! Christ loves the ‘foulest’ of sinners, and died to save them. Christ died for all persons - ‘up-and-out-sinners’ and also ‘down-and-out-sinners’! There is ‘level ground’ at the ‘foot of the Cross of Christ’! God loves all, and Jesus died for all, and everyone is capable (by God’s grace) of being saved!

What about those loving (saintly) persons throughout history who have strongly HOPED that, in the end, no one would be in hell? Is it wrong (unBiblical) for such persons to hope and to pray that, because of God’s very powerful grace (persuasive wooings), ALL humans will finally yield to God’s love and grace and mercy - and thus be saved from the horrible destiny of hell?

The “Church Doctor Catherine of Siena” (1347-1380) wrote, “If I were wholly inflamed with the fire of divine love, would I not then, with a burning heart, beseech my Creator, the truly merciful One, to show mercy to ALL my brethren (fellow humans)? How could I ever reconcile myself, Lord, to the prospect that a single one of those whom, like me, you have created in your image and likeness, should become lost and slip from your hands? No, in absolutely no case do I want to see a single one of my brethren (fellow humans) met with ruin, not a single one of those who, through their like birth, are one with me by nature and by grace. I want them ALL to be WRESTED FROM THE GRASP OF THE ANCIENT ENEMY, so that they ALL become yours to the honor and greater glorification of your name.”

Hans Urs Von Balthasar (a prolific writer) was considered one of the very greatest Christian theologians of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In his insightful book entitled “Dare We Hope ‘That All Men Be Saved’”? he struggles a lot with the issue of eternal punishment (seemingly taught at times in the New Testament), and the issue of widespread (if not even universal) salvation of mankind (which seems to have a serious ‘backing’ by many other New Testament Scriptures). How can these two seemingly ‘different sets of Scriptures’ (that, on one hand, speak of eternal punishment, and, on the other hand, speak of possible universal salvation) be reconciled? No place, of course, for dogmatism on this crucial issue (regarding eternal punishment), but this ‘deep’ and thoughtful theologian believes there is at least SOME STRONG HOPE THAT MOST, IF NOT ALL, PERSONS WILL SOME WAY FINALLY BE SAVED FOR HEAVEN!

This tension (between eternal punishment and ultimate universal salvation) is real in the New Testament. A very great scholar and writer (Karl Rahner) notes, “We have to preserve alongside one another.... the power of God’s general will for salvation, the redemption of all men through Christ, THE DUTY TO HOPE FOR THE SALVATION OF ALL MEN and the principle of the real possibility of becoming eternally lost.”

Notes Hermann-Josef Lauter, “Will it really be ALL MEN who allow themselves to be

reconciled? No theology or prophecy can answer this question. But love HOPES ALL THINGS (I Corinthians 13:7). It cannot do otherwise than to HOPE FOR THE RECONCILIATION OF ALL MEN IN CHRIST. Such unlimited hope is, from the Christian standpoint, NOT ONLY PERMITTED BUT COMMANDED.”

The Holy Spirit cannot coerce (force) persons (sinners) to repent and to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, for salvation, but the Spirit nevertheless has great persuasive influence in His convicting and in His convincing power with sinners. I believe the Bible teaches that the Spirit cannot, finally, override and overpower the will of a sinner. In the end, Christ will have to say to God-rejecters - to the rebellious and the unrepentant ones - “Not my will, but thine be done” (as C.S. Lewis points out). No one can really understand the mystery of the human will - why some choose wisely to respond to Christ’s love and offer of life, and why others choose foolishly to refuse Christ’s offer of eternal life. However, the Spirit wills that all repent, and the Spirit uses great influence (and reason) to try to persuade ALL sinners to surrender to Christ. “Come, let us reason together”, saith the Lord. “Though your sins be as scarlet, they can be made pure and white as snow. Your sins can be hid in the ‘sea of God’s forgetfulness’”.

The Holy Spirit convicts of sin - showing the nature and the reality and the horror and the consequences of sin. Seeing what sin and Satan do to a person should be VERY CONVINCING TO SINNERS THAT IT DOES NOT PAY TO LIVE IN SIN. Simple reason should compel a hell-bound person to turn to Christ, who alone can forgive and reconcile and impart abundant life! Why would anyone want to be a “double loser” instead of a “double winner”? To live in sin may give temporary pleasure, but soon sin results in a miserable life - a life that eventually leads to greater misery after physical death! Though Christians have their trials and their temptations and their sorrows in this mortal life (and sometimes have even the inflictions of unexplainable tragedies, similar perhaps to the afflictions of the ancient Job), a Christian is nevertheless promised an abundant life on this earth, followed by an indescribable life of joy after physical death! This observation of the way of the sinner compared with the way of the godly person, should be a strong incentive for all sinners to run to the arms of the all-loving and all-merciful Savior, who died for all and who desires all to be saved!

The reasoning and loving and influential God draws us to the Savior for salvation - draws us, not irresistibly, but nevertheless strongly. As Balthasar notes, God strongly appeals to our human free will, using man’s God-given ability to reason. “Tentatively, we can say this: that the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of absolute freedom, allows us to see, within our Free Spirit, what our own true freedom would be, that is, by confronting us with our self, with our own highest possibility. We would not be able just to say ‘Yes’ to ourselves; also, the meaningfulness of such a ‘Yes’ and the desire for it are set before us, indeed, INSPIRED IN US. DO YOU REALLY WANT TO EXIST FOREVERMORE IN CONTRADICTION WITH YOURSELF?” (Dare We Hope “That All Men Be Saved”?; pg. 209)

The Spirit will do everything He can - using all the influence of love and fear and justice that is possible - to bring every person to the “foot of the Cross of Christ” for forgiveness and for glorious salvation! But the Spirit, in the final analysis, cannot use brute force or coercion to compel any person to accept Christ’s offer of eternal life! It is the fool among fools who would

refuse the tender voice of Christ, and who would coldly turn his back in unbelief away from the One who died for the sins of all the world, and who is the Essence of Holy Love! If any person finally decides in the end to spurn the boundless love and mercy of God and the multiple invitations from the Spirit to enjoy eternal life - thus, making it his choice to dwell in the pits of Hell - then one thing is sure: the Holy Trinity will be the 'chief mourner' for that 'wretched person'!

There is, according to Jesus' standards for His followers (disciples), a 'high cost' in serving Christ (self-denial and active obedience to Christ), but there is a 'higher cost' in not serving Christ (loss of personhood, loss of fullest potential, loss of significance and meaning, etc.). Why would anyone want sorrow instead of joy, loneliness instead of fellowship, discord instead of peace, heartbreak instead of healing, frustration instead of fulfillment, weakness instead of strength, inferiority instead of confidence, shame instead of dignity, self-despising instead of self-respect, poverty instead of prosperity, despair instead of hope, self-centeredness instead of Christ-centeredness, confusion instead of clarity, ignorance instead of wisdom, doubt instead of assurance, sacrilege instead of sanctity, boredom instead of creativity, division instead of unity, cruelty instead of kindness, hard-heartedness instead of tender-heartedness, double-mindedness instead of single-mindedness, chaos instead of order, hate instead of love, grudge-bearing instead of forgiveness, indifference instead of compassion, sorrow instead of joy, wickedness instead of righteousness, lust instead of moral purity, death instead of life!

Simple reason would say that, to turn down Christ's offer of an abundant life here and an eternal life hereafter, would be the height of foolishness - the greatest tragedy possible! Christ requires certain steps in order for a human being to be saved: (1) Grand Awakening, (2) Grand Repentance, (3) Grand Confession, (4) Grand Surrender, (5) Grand Faith and Trust, (6) Grand Restitution (asking forgiveness of others that you have wronged), (7) Grand Obedience as a true disciple of the living God.

Yes, these seven steps must be taken (decisively in some cases, and over a longer period of time in other cases), but, because the "price" is never too great for a person in order for him to receive a whole new life, a person (sinner) must experience the "godly sorrow" before that glorious new life can be found. There is some "pain" involved in becoming born again, but that "pain" is productive and that "pain" issues forth in new life, whereas the "pain" of sin leads to destruction and death! James (the brother of Jesus), talking about the necessity of sincere repentance, uses vivid language in his short letter: "Weep and howl" over your sins, in a spirit of true repentance - rather than being light-hearted ("laughing") about your sin! There is an abundant life coming for the sinner who "pays the price" of genuine repentance, and who has a humble spirit - "a broken and a contrite heart". Putting one's faith (trust) in Christ will eventually bring a new confidence and dignity and joy to the Christ-follower!

The "pain" of repentance (as well as the various other kinds of "pain" connected with the other steps in one's movement towards God) will eventually, and sometimes rather quickly, be over, and instead of feeling the 'necessary pain' that is involved in becoming a true Christian, there will be in its place a glorious pleasure and freedom and joy and peace, and so much more! Jesus said, "I am come that ye might have life, and have it more abundantly." Yes, there are many

kinds of afflictions and adversities that a Christian experiences during his/her lifelong journey towards heaven. Jesus did not deny this reality. He said that, "In the world ye shall have many tribulations, but be of good cheer, for I have overcome the world." Amidst trials, Christ shares His victory with His followers. He promised that He would never leave us, nor forsake us, during life's pilgrimage. He said that His grace (strength) was sufficient for every loss and every grief and all heartbreaks and all adversities and temptations. Yes, we have (as believers) a cross to bear, but Jesus said He would give us power to cope and to endure and to overcome. He promised to give us strength for each day, wisdom for every decision, joy amidst all our tears, fellowship amidst our loneliness, and endurance for every trial and loss. He said His "yoke is easy" and His "burden is light". He promised a great reward for those who faithfully follow Him until the end of life. "Be thou faithful until death, and I will give thee a crown of life." I think it was Paul who wrote: "It has not entered into the mind of man, what God hath prepared for those who love Him." Heaven (as God's reward for those who truly love Him) will be more wonderful than the mind of man can imagine! God has not promised His followers (children) that life would always be 'easy', but He did promise that His grace (strength) would be sufficient for every one of the trials and tests and temptations which Christ-followers would confront.

There is an old song that my wife's grandfather liked often to have sung during the worship services (or prayer meetings) at the little country church where he worshiped in the sand hills of Nebraska, for several decades. He lost his wife when he was middle-aged, and he was a widower for many years. He knew what hardship was, but he was (because of God's grace) one of the most vital and happy Christians that anyone could know. A few of the words of that old song (his favorite song), are as follows:

"God hath not promised sun without rain,  
Joy without sorrow, life without pain.

God hath not promised smooth roads  
And wide; flower-strewn pathways.

Refrain:  
But God hath promised strength for the day,  
Rest for the labor, light for the way.

With all of these offers from the loving Savior, why would anyone want to say 'No' to Him? Who wants to choose evil rather than good, death rather than life, misery rather than joy and happiness and contentment and excitement and creativity and significance? Who wants to choose the bondage (slavery) of Satan rather than the glorious freedom found in Christ alone?

Joshua (Old Testament leader who took Moses' place after the latter died) said to all of the Israelites (some of whom were engaged in terrible idolatry): "Choose you this day whom ye will serve. As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord."

“God is not willing that any should perish, but that all should repent” and be saved for time and for eternity! God loves all! Jesus died for all! The Holy Spirit calls all to repentance! The gift of “prevenient grace” has been given to all, making all persons savable! “Today is the day of salvation; now is the accepted time.” As one famous Christian declared (Corrie ten Boon): “There is no pit so deep but what His love goes deeper yet.” Or, we could similarly say: “There is no sin stain so deep, but what the blood of Jesus goes deeper yet.” If Paul said of himself that Christ wonderfully saved him, and he called himself the “chiefest of sinners”, should we not conclude that Christ is able to save any other sinner? It cannot be reiterated enough: “Where sin abounds, grace super abounds”!

God is able to save to the uttermost, because Christ’s uttermost sacrifice on His Cross satisfies the justice of God. Because of Christ’s ‘finished work’ on the Cross of Calvary, God is now (forever) reconciled unto the entire human race! God’s arms of reconciliation and forgiveness are extended widely, to receive ‘whosoever will come’. God hates sin, but He is not angry with any sinner. He strongly pleads with every sinner to receive the gift of a new life - abundant life here and heavenly life hereafter. He does not want one single person to perish, to lose out on God’s Grand Offer of total life in Christ! Whether it is the Father, Son, or Holy Spirit who is making strong overtures of love toward lost persons, it is obvious throughout both the Old and New Testaments that the Trinity desires all to accept the offer of salvation.

Says God to the lost ones, through the prophet Isaiah: “Say there! Is anyone thirsty? Come and drink - even if you have no money! Come, take your choice of wine and milk - it’s all free! Why spend your money on food that doesn’t give you strength? Why pay for groceries that do you no good? Listen and I’ll tell you where to get good food that fattens up the soul! Come to me with your ears wide open. Listen, for the life of your soul is at stake. I am ready to make an everlasting covenant with you, to give you all unfailing mercies and love that I had for King David.” (Isaiah 55:1-3 Living Bible)

Jesus cared deeply for the souls of lost persons - He wanted to comfort and to heal and to save all persons. He said, “Come to me and I will give you rest - all of you who work so hard beneath a heavy yoke. Wear my yoke - for it fits perfectly - and let me teach you; for I am gentle and humble, and you shall find rest for your souls; for I give you only light burdens.” (Matthew 11:28-30 L.B.)

Some of the very last words from the Holy Bible are dedicated to God’s invitation to all persons to come to God for eternal life! “The Spirit and the bride say, ‘Come.’ Let each one who hears them say the same, ‘Come’. Let the thirsty one come - anyone who wants to; let him come and drink the Water of Life without charge.” (Revelation 22:11 L.B)

When the burden of guilt (caused by sin) is so heavy it is almost unbearable to carry, day-in-day-out, is there any solution, any relief, any possibility of change? No solution except God Himself! Even before the ‘finished work’ of Christ on the Cross, God provided (in mercy) forgiveness to those who truly repented and who turned humbly to God in faith and surrender (all because of the eventual atonement for all sins, made possible only through Christ’s work on the Cross). “O people of Israel, you are saying: ‘Our sins are heavy upon us; we pine away with guilt. How can

we live?’ Tell them: As I live, says the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; I desire that the wicked turn from his evil ways and live. Turn, turn from your wickedness; for why will you die, O Israel?’ (Ezekiel 33:10-11)

In God and in God alone is there the salvation of the human soul! Says God (emphatically) through His prophet Isaiah: “Let all the world look to me for salvation! For I am God; there is no other.” (Isaiah 45:22)

Christ persistently ‘knocks’ on the heart’s door of every human being, waiting for a positive response from each person, desiring to enter the heart and home of every soul. But when Jesus enters the human heart (home), He intends to be, not a mere ‘guest’ but instead the Lord of heart of that person. He wants the ‘title deed’. Why? Because He created each person and He purchased each person - at the high cost of His own atoning blood! By right of creation and by right of His atoning death, Christ has the right of total Lordship of all human beings! So, when you hear Him knocking at your heart’s door, gladly and humbly answer that knock and invite Christ into your life to be the Lord of all! Says Jesus: “Look! I have been standing at the door and I am constantly knocking. If anyone hears me calling him and opens the door, I will come in and fellowship with him and he with me.”(Revelation 3:20)

Several times we have noted in the paper that it is God’s desire to seek and to save the lost ones - not a portion of predestinated humanity, but every single person (sinner) without exception. Paul the Apostle wrote about the universal provision of Christ’s salvation, many times. He believed that all could be saved - even himself ‘the chiefest of sinners’! Wrote Paul: “This is good and pleases God our Savior, for he longs for ALL to be saved and to understand this truth: That God is on one side and all the people on the other side, and Christ Jesus, himself man, is between them to bring them together, by giving his life for ALL mankind.” (I Timothy 2:3-5 L.B.)

One thing is certain: God wants heaven to be greatly populated by “redeemed sinners”, and He wants hell to be empty of ALL human beings, for “hell was only prepared for the devil and his demons” - NOT FOR GOD’S HUMAN CREATURES! God is doing everything, short of coercion, to KEEP EVERY HUMAN BEING OUT OF HELL! Are we, His followers, doing the same?