

Smoky Mountain Reflections #185

“Paradox”: “a statement that is seemingly contradictory or opposed to common sense and yet is perhaps true.” This is one of Meriam Webster’s definitions for this word, but I would like to tweak it a bit for the purpose of this article on *biblical* paradox, which we may define as a statement that is seemingly contradictory or opposed to common sense and yet is *clearly biblically true*. There are many things that we believe, teach, and confess as members of the body of Christ that are biblically sound but challenge our limited ability to comprehend what God reveals.

There are a number of easy targets on this topic: miraculous events, Christ’s real presence in the supper, the monergistic nature of faith, and single predestination just to name a few. The last issue of *The Lutheran Witness* addressed some of these questions, but I would like to address one question this month and process it from a few angles. “Why some, but not others?” Even more specifically, the aggressive version of this question that seeks to paint God as an unjust bully by condemning God for condemning those who are never exposed to Christ or his Gospel. It is often asked something like this: “I do not like your god because he condemns people to hell for being ignorant of his rules. How can they believe in Jesus if they are never exposed to him or his Gospel?” This is not an easy question to respond to, if for no other reason than the fact that oftentimes the person asking is not really interested in hearing the answer. Rather, they judge you as being too judgmental. (See what I did there?)

However, there are biblical truths with which we can respond to this question. First, I want to point out that this question actually makes an unprovable assumption; namely, that some people are never exposed to Christ’s saving Gospel. This is a logical assumption, but an assumption all the same because we do not know how God, who created time and space, and functions outside of it, still works things out in accord with his nature. That being said, here are a few examples of what the Bible does have to say about this issue.

WARNING: those who do not believe the Bible to be God’s word may balk at its citation, but if the God described in the Bible is the topic of discussion, it is only fitting to refer to it as a source. Also, while we cite the Bible, a non-christian must cite themselves or the collective thought of people they agree with. (I will trust in God rather than man, thank you very much.)

God is Just: There are over 300 verses that directly or indirectly assert God’s just nature but here are just a few: Isaiah 61:8a “For I, the LORD, love justice”, Psalm 99:4 “The strength of the King loves justice; You have established equity; You have executed justice and righteousness in Jacob”, Deuteronomy 10:18 “He executes justice for the orphan and the widow, and shows His love for the alien by giving him food and clothing”, Psalm 140:12 “I know that the LORD will maintain the cause of the afflicted and justice for the poor.”

God wills that none should perish: 2 Peter 3:9 “The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.” It is not God’s will that any should spend eternity in a place he created for rebellious disobedient angels, however he does not force his will or forgiveness on anyone.

He suffered and died for all: John 3:16 “For God so loved the world (ALL of it) that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.” Romans 3:23-24 “For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.”

So even though we cannot understand and it saddens us that some reject salvation, we can still know that is not God’s will. Because he is just (fair), he wills that none should perish and he suffered and died so that none would have to.

The reason there is never a fully satisfactory answer to this question is because the all-powerful creator of the universe wills that none should perish and still some do. This is a paradox, illogical on the surface while at the same time biblical and true. And it should motivate us to share his good news whenever we have the opportunity.

In Christ, Pastor Portier