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# A Critique Of Free-Will Theism, Part Two

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Free-Will Theism, also known as open theism or relational theism, is a relatively recent teaching that has occasioned significant debate among American evangelicals. Free-will theists differ from classical theists by rejecting divine timelessness, meticulous providence, and exhaustive foreknowledge, and they differ from process theists by affirming God's transcendence and His ability to act unilaterally in the world. The first article in this two-part series responded to the major assumptions and many of the biblical arguments used to support free-will theism. This article focuses on several remaining issues, particularly relating to theological method and soteriology.

## A Review Of Major Arguments

The first article identified and answered four assumptions that seem foundational to free-will theism. First, free-will theists believe humans must have libertarian freedom, for genuine personal responsibility, they say, is incompatible with any kind of determinism. In response it was argued that a spontaneous view of



freedom upholds the compatibility of human depravity, practical freedom, human responsibility, and divine providence in a way that is both reasonable and consistent with Scripture. Free-will theists do not seem to have given adequate consideration to this view, which has been carefully articulated by classical theologians for centuries.

Second, free-will theists believe a genuine relationship with God (as with any person) excludes any idea of control or domination, demanding instead the "give and take" of mutual trust, concession, and freedom. In response it was argued that this understanding of relationships depends on definitions grounded simply in the

common experience of persons, which may or may not have relevance to divine-human relationships.

Third, free-will theists believe evil must not be regarded in any way as the sovereign plan of God, who has the capacity to intervene but does not normally impose His will on the world. In response it was argued that free-will theists are correct in affirming God's ability to intervene in the world, but such an affirmation demands a higher view of providence than they will admit—a providence that describes God's purposeful permission or ordination of all things. Both classical and process critics have noted this fundamental inconsistency in free-will theism.

Fourth, free-will theists believe that the Scriptures should be read literally whenever possible, so that statements implying divine ignorance of the future should be taken at face value. In response it was argued that such literalist language is often misleading and could easily prove too much. Read in isolation, particular passages might be understood "literally" to favor grossly inaccurate conclusions. Of particular relevance to this debate, Genesis 3:9–13 could imply that God does not know the past (Adam's sin) or the present (Adam's hiding). One could reach a similar conclusion from Genesis 18:20–21, which might also imply that God has a body and is limited to time and space.



To their credit free-will theists sense that such "straightforward" readings of these verses would likely be out of bounds. Saying that God does not know the past would contradict other Scriptures and would disallow any understanding of divine omniscience. However, their hesitation raises some important questions. What boundaries govern an evangelical interpretation of Scripture, and how are those boundaries determined?

## Theological Method And The Question Of Orthodoxy

### Experience, Objectivity, and Tradition

The authors have argued that classical theism is more biblical than free-will theism. However, this argument should not be regarded as a claim to untainted biblicism, which would be particularly suspect in the present day. Under the influence of modernism, evangelicals have too often affirmed objectivity and rationality in inappropriate, unrealistic, and unbiblical ways. Assuming that individuals know truth most accurately when they themselves are value-neutral, ahistorical, and impersonal, Enlightenment rationalism taught that all legitimate knowledge claims must begin from universally acknowledged foundations (as opposed to basing them on parochial premises, authorities, or experiences, such as divine revelation). The Enlightenment claimed that science is the best example of a discipline based on such knowledge and thus should be the paradigm for all other disciplines. One of the most significant conclusions of "postmodern"

thought is that this "objective" model must be rejected. It does not rightly describe how humans are to know or in fact how they do know.

There is such a thing as "objectivity," if one is talking about metaphysical (or ontological) objectivity, in which an external reality exists independently of the observer. This is quite different, however, from an *epistemic* objectivity, which claims that people can be detached and uninvolved in the act of knowing, maintaining a kind of universal perspective of the objects of knowing and describing things as they really are. As historical, embodied, and affective persons, everyone perceives and interprets from specific



vantage points in all kinds of ways. Thus human knowing is subjective (though not subjectiv*istic*) in that a human *subject*—a person, as opposed to a machine—accomplishes it.

Human subjectivity helps determine the shape of biblical exegesis as each individual is guided by perceptions that are often more personal than impartial. Contrary to modernist expectations, this is neither avoidable nor bad. One cannot feign objectivity, and human experiences, in their glorious diversity, often yield fresh perspectives that rightly challenge traditional interpretations. For example modern theology has been enriched by the writings of Jürgen Moltmann, who, in the midst of great personal despair as a prisoner of war, read about the sufferings of Jesus and determined that "the Christ for me shall always be the crucified Jesus." And Gustavo Gutiérrez will always speak of freedom through the eyes of the poor. As one who has been physically disabled, Joni Eareckson Tada paints pictures of hope in the midst of stormy trials. As one who lost his father when he was a child, Philip Yancey writes of disappointment in a way that few others can.

Such experiences produce questions that must be addressed, but by themselves they do not yield answers. Not every prisoner of war becomes a Moltmann; not every minister to the poor becomes a Gutiérrez; and not everyone who suffers loss becomes a Yancey. John Sanders's turn toward free-will theism began when he was driven by his brother's tragic death to reconsider the doctrine of providence, but others have responded to similar experiences by embracing classical theism.

The pervasiveness and unpredictability of such individual subjectivity could easily lead a theologian to despair. Since unbiased biblicism is unavailable and unaided experientialism is unreliable, how can anyone claim to know the truth? Such concerns should not be overstated. The dispassionate, universal conclusions anticipated by modernity are unattainable, for personal subjectivity is unavoidable, but that does not mean truth is unknowable. It may, however, mean that individual truth claims should always have a view toward both coherence and consensus. If truth is internally consistent, then one's beliefs should not be

contradictory. If varying perspectives contribute to a collective knowledge of the truth, then one's beliefs should reflect interaction with the



conclusions of the broader community.

Free-will theists demonstrate a desire for both coherence and consensus when they claim support for their view from contemporary science and philosophy. However, in Christian theology the search for consensus demands more respect for tradition than free-will theists have demonstrated to date. Rather than reaffirming tradition as members of a theological community, they act independently in calling for a new kind of theism. Along these lines, Grenz recently wrote:

> What is perhaps even more disquieting about Sanders's proposal is that it seems to require the rejection of such a broad swath of the Christian theological tradition. He intimates that on something as fundamental as our basic conception of God nearly everyone from the fifth century to the present has deviated so far from the true understanding of biblical texts. Proponents of the "openness of God" rightly



> critique the neo-evangelical Calvinist "establishment" for reading the Bible solely through Reformed eyes, and thereby effectively sidelining other aspects of the broader evangelical tradition. But by rejecting categorically Christian theology's long tradition of appropriating Greek philosophy, Sanders's work risks replacing one neo-evangelical sectarianism with another. And it comes dangerously close to the typical evangelical temptation to claim to be able to jump directly from the text to the contemporary situation.

In other words Sanders rejects the way the omni-attributes of God have been understood throughout most of church history, and he and other free-will theists also seem disturbingly content in doing so.

The self-conscious affirmation of tradition yields another benefit—protection against heresy. Unfortunately, and contrary to the expectations of many evangelicals, belief in biblical authority alone has never been adequate for that task. As almost every major cult in America demonstrates, well-intentioned people who say they believe the Bible may still be heretics.

## The Standard of Orthodoxy

Many believers claim to follow no tradition but *sola Scriptura* and to have no creed but the Bible. However, the boundaries of orthodoxy are often more closely related to creedal formulations than to exegetical arguments. The early church debated many issues, especially in Christology. Based on their collective understanding of the biblical text, they drew some hard boundaries in the ecumenical creeds. Those who come later may reconsider those boundaries, perhaps even redraw them, but they do not have the



freedom to redraw the boundaries and still describe their work as Christian theology. As Pannenberg wrote with reference to the creed affirmed by the Council of Constantinople, "If we want to alter the text or replace it by a different text, the question unavoidably arises whether we are in one and the same church for which the fathers at Constantinople in 381 tried to state the faith of all Christianity representatively, and in fact did so, as the universal reception of this symbol across so many centuries has shown."

Applying these standards to the debate on free-will theism, it is both appropriate and necessary to ask whether free-will theism is heretical. Here the question is *not* whether the free-will theists believe their teaching to be biblical, and the question is *not* whether their arguments have any biblical merit. The question is whether they have remained in the Christian tradition. Are their teachings *orthodox*?

As Pannenberg's statement contends, questions of orthodoxy should focus on the language of the ecumenical creeds, which free-will theists do affirm. However, Pannenberg's own theology demonstrates that one may affirm traditional language while changing the way language has traditionally been understood. Others rightly question whether such redefinition truly constitutes an affirmation



of the creed itself, and that is the question that must be asked with regard to free-will theism.

While overstating the distinction between Greek philosophy and biblical theism, Sanders rightly acknowledges that the church fathers consistently affirmed God's timelessness, omniscience, immutability, and impassibility. At the same time, he implies that the Council of Nicea, at least, returned briefly to a more relational theism.

To the contrary, it is much more likely that Nicea and the other ecumenical councils simply assumed classical theism in their affirmations. Not only was no challenge made against that model (in which case one would have expected more explicit statements regarding it), but also classical theism seems to be expressed in the language and concepts of the creed itself. The church professed belief in the

Father "all governing," the παντοκράτωρ. By παντοκράτωρ Nicea (and every subsequent creed that borrowed its language) affirmed God as Creator, distinct from His creation, infinite and eternal as opposed to finite and time-bound. This axiomatic concept stood behind the creedal affirmations of the Son's eternal generation and His fundamental role in creation—the presence of the Son makes creation possible, while preserving the absolute transcendence of the Father.

God's foreknowledge of future contingents was not denied in



the early church, and His eternality and transcendence seem to have been assumed and implied in the ecumenical creeds. Later councils, however, responding to teachings current in their day, affirmed classical theism much more explicitly. For example the Fourth Lateran Council (1215) stated, "There is only one true God, eternal, incomprehensible, omnipotent and ineffable." The Augsburg Confession (1530) describes God as "of infinite power, wisdom, and goodness." The Genevan Confession (1536) states, "In him alone is contained all wisdom, power, justice, goodness, and pity." The Confession of Faith used in the English Congregation at Geneva (1536) affirms that God is "eternal, infinite, immeasurable, incomprehensible and invisible . . . who by his almighty power and wisdom . . . also governs, maintains, and preserves." The French Confession of Faith (1559) describes God as "eternal, invisible, immutable, infinite, incomprehensible, ineffable, omnipotent; who is all-wise, all-good, all-just, and all-merciful."

The Scots Confession (1560) affirms that God is "eternal, infinite, immeasurable, incomprehensible, omnipotent, invisible," and it refers to His "eternal wisdom, goodness, and justice." The Belgic Confession (1561) describes Him as "eternal, incomprehensible, invisible, immutable, infinite, almighty, perfectly wise, just, good and the overflowing fountain of all good." The Thirty-Nine Articles (1571) state that He is "of infinite power, wisdom, and goodness." The Westminster Confession (1746) concludes that God is "infinite in being and perfection, without body, parts or passions, immutable, immense, eternal, incomprehensible, almighty, most wise, most absolute, working all things according to the counsel of



his own immutable and most righteous will, for his own glory; most loving, gracious, merciful, long-suffering, abundant in goodness and truth. . . . In his sight all things are open and manifest; his knowledge is infinite, infallible, and independent upon the creature; so as nothing is to him contingent or uncertain."

Free-will theists would have a difficult time affirming these historic confessions without significant redefinition. However, they do not seem to be particularly troubled by the disagreement. After all, they say, Protestants are always out of step with one another and with some elements of church tradition.

But these are not peripheral issues. In rejecting the consistent teaching of the church (from the apostolic fathers to the modern era) concerning the nature of God, free-will theists adopt a position that most of Christendom would have regarded as heretical. Are they really that certain they are reading the Bible correctly?

## Free-Will Theism and Soteriology

### A Logical Tendency toward Inclusivism

The assumptions that are so central to free-will theism's doctrine of God will likely have a profound effect on one's doctrine of salvation. The implications go far beyond traditional distinctions between Arminianism and Calvinism. Different as those systems may be, they both affirm exhaustive divine foreknowledge and they both support an exclusivist understanding of world evangelism. Free-will theism, as its more vocal advocates demonstrate, is more compatible with soteriological inclusivism.

The difference between these approaches may be seen in their answers to the question, Must all people, regardless of their geographical isolation, believe in Jesus Christ in order to be saved? *Exclusivists* answer yes. While often making allowance for infants and others who die before reaching a level of mental competency (i.e., accountability), exclusivists maintain that all persons must actually hear the gospel and respond to Christ in faith in order to



receive salvation. *Universalists* answer no. They believe that all persons are saved regardless of their response to Christ. *Pluralists* also answer no. While they differ from universalists in that they do not typically believe that all persons actually will be saved, pluralists believe that there are many potential ways of salvation. *Inclusivists* answer the question yes and no. They differ from pluralists by saying that no one is ever saved apart from Christ, but they differ from exclusivists by saying that the individual being saved may or may not have knowledge of the gospel message. According to inclusivists one's trust in the mercy of God is ultimately counted as faith in Christ, whether or not one has heard of Christ.

Not all free-will theists are inclusivists, and not all inclusivists are free-will theists, but the most prominent free-will theists, Gregory Boyd, Clark Pinnock, and John Sanders, are all inclusivists. Thus the connection between free-will theism and inclusivism is perhaps not a necessary one, but it is more than coincidental, as further examination will demonstrate.

Free-will theism and inclusivism rely on some of the same beliefs, especially regarding freedom, responsibility, and God's activity in the world. Both argue that people are not truly responsible for their choices unless they make those choices freely, and choices are not free unless individuals are presented with genuine options. Thus individuals who are held responsible for their choices must have

had an alternative made available to them. Applying this assumption to soteriology, if everyone is accountable to God for his or her response to Christ, then everyone must also be a recipient of His saving message in one form or another. For those who have not heard the gospel of Jesus Christ, that saving message evidently takes the form of general revelation (a fundamental tenet of inclusivism).



A similar conclusion may be reached through the idea that God is a loving God who strives to accomplish His purposes in the world without imposing His will on free creatures. Consider the following five statements, adapted from an article by David K. Clark:

1. God is striving for the salvation of all persons.

2. Salvation is available only through Christ.

3. Salvation in Christ must be received through conscious faith in the gospel.

4. God is powerful enough to make sure that all persons come into contact with the gospel.

Not all persons in human history have come into contact with the gospel.

6.

Pluralists resolve the apparent tension between these statements by rejecting the second statement. They believe that God is striving for the salvation of all persons, but that salvation may come through a variety of means. Those who are saved through Christianity are saved by conscious faith in the gospel, which God could certainly make available to all persons. However, He does not make the gospel universally known because it is not universally necessary.

Inclusivists resolve the tension between these statements by rejecting the third one. They believe that God is striving for the salvation of everyone, which is available only by means of the death of Christ. However, since salvation in Christ may be received without explicit faith in the gospel, God need not exercise His power to insure that all persons come into contact with the gospel.

Augustinians resolve the tension between these five statements by rejecting the first. They believe that salvation is available only through Christ, and that it must be appropriated through explicit faith. However, God does not exercise His power to insure that all persons come into contact with the gospel because He is not actually striving for the salvation of all persons, but is accomplishing the salvation of His elect.

If one is to be consistent, there are two ways in which all five statements may be harmonized. First, one may affirm exhaustive divine foreknowledge (perhaps stated as middle knowledge) as the means by which God determines how to exercise His power in



making known the gospel. Advocates of this view could say that God is striving for the salvation of all persons, which is available only through Christ and must be received through conscious faith in the gospel. However, knowing who will believe the gospel and who will not, He makes sure that the gospel is communicated to those who will believe.

One may also uphold all five statements by affirming the possibility of postmortem conversion. From this perspective, God is actively striving for the salvation of everyone, which is available only in Christ and must be received by explicit faith in Christ. Not all persons hear the gospel in this life, but God is powerful enough to ensure that they do hear it, and they eventually will, perhaps after they have died.

Of all these options, consistent free-will theists seem to be limited to two—postmortem conversion and inclusivism. First, since they reject the notion of exhaustive divine foreknowledge, it seems as though they may embrace all five statements only by affirming the possibility of postmortem conversion. Second, they are committed to statements 1, 2, 4, and 5, but they could reject statement 3 and affirm inclusivism. Either way, they stand on rather shaky ground.

## A Brief Assessment of Inclusivism

More complete critiques of inclusivism may be found elsewhere, but it seems appropriate to offer a brief assessment here in light of the logical connection between that doctrine and free-will theism. A brief assessment of free-will theism's other apparent option, postmortem conversion, will follow.

Affirming that God desires all people to be saved (1 Tim. 2:4),



inclusivists contend that He likely saves many people by grace through their faithful response to natural revelation. Offering biblical examples of "pagan saints" who were rightly related to God but not a part of the covenant community (Job, Melchizedek, Abimilech, Jethro, Rahab, Cornelius), they argue that faith in God, not the possession of specific information, brings salvation. Inclusivists find further support in the fact that Old Testament believers did not know of Christ, yet were ultimately saved by Him as they trusted God for mercy based on what they did know (Rom. 3:25; Gal. 2:21; Heb. 9:15).

Every nonuniversalist who believes in God's omnipotence has some difficulty with verses like 1 Timothy 2:4 and 2 Peter 3:9. After all, if *anyone* is ultimately lost, it appears as though God has instituted a plan of salvation that does not fulfill His stated desire. Even free-will theists acknowledge that God could have asserted His will in universal salvation, contending that He did not do so out of respect for the freedom of His creatures. Augustinians have a different explanation, but share the same conclusion—at one level God desires the salvation of all persons, but He has knowingly chosen a plan of salvation that will not satisfy that desire. It seems necessary, then, to understand two kinds of willing in God, distinguishing between His stated desire and His determined choice. That does not mean He is "schizophrenic," as suggested by Sanders (who apparently does not realize he is condemning his own position). Rather, it rightly distinguishes between God's revealed and hidden purposes. That same distinction should prevent one from identifying too confidently the recipients of divine wrath, but a number of arguments suggest major flaws in the inclusivist model.

First, many of the "pagan saints" identified by Pinnock and others were actually recipients of special revelation. Regarding the others the biblical text is simply silent. However, in no case do the Scriptures describe persons who entered into a right relationship



with God on the basis of natural revelation alone.

Second, even in the Old Testament, foreigners who were to be rightly related to God were expected to come into the covenant (Isa. 56:6). That belief constituted the precedent for the problems Paul addressed in Galatians—many Jewish Christians apparently expected Gentile converts to take on the Law and receive circumcision. They failed to see that Christ was "the end of the law for righteousness" (Rom. 10:4), but they rightly believed in the normative status of canonical revelation.

Third, if there were individuals who would be "included" because of their faith (or their faithful service) within another system of belief, one would think they would be first-century Jews. However, before their conversion Paul and his peers were enemies of God because of their estimation of Jesus (Rom. 10:1–2; Phil. 3:1–11). Likewise Paul told a "religious" audience in Athens that these are no longer the times of ignorance, that "God is now declaring to men that all everywhere should repent, because He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world through a Man whom He has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead" (Acts 17:30–31). Such repentance in Luke-Acts constitutes saving faith in the gospel (Luke 24:47; Acts 2:38), for which all persons are declared accountable.

Fourth, the concept of faith is irrelevant apart from revelation. As J. Gresham Machen argued in his response to early twentieth-century liberalism, "The whole

trouble is that faith is being considered merely as a beneficent quality of the soul without respect to the reality or unreality of its object; and the moment faith comes to be considered in that way, in that moment it is destroyed." Someone could say to a friend, "I have faith that you will buy me a new car." But unless the friend has communicated an intention to buy the car, the hopeful recipient's statement of "faith" is nothing more than presumption. Likewise, responding to God in faith means trusting Him to do what He has promised to do or to be what He has revealed Himself to be. Apart from special revelation, "faith" is nothing more than presumption.

Fifth, inclusivism comes very close to salvation by works. This problem is exacerbated as inclusivists attempt to give more concrete meaning to their description of a saving faith that is disassociated



from God's revealed promise. For example Pinnock states, "One can make a faith response to God in the form of actions of love and justice." If actions of love and justice constitute faith, it is difficult to distinguish between Pinnock's viewpoint and that of Fernando Cardenal, who spoke of atheists who had genuine faith. "I'm convinced that the biblical concept of the atheist is the correct one. In the Bible, the atheist is the one who doesn't love. That's really who denies God. I have comrades who say that they 'don't believe,' they they 'don't have the faith.' But they've been living a life of love, a life of commitment—they've given the gift of self and of sacrifice—for twenty years now in the cause of the poor. Certainly this will be acknowledged on the Last Day as genuine faith."

To the contrary, acts of compassion should follow from saving faith, but they do not constitute faith.

Sixth, inclusivism assumes a higher view of human ability (or a lesser view of depravity) than is biblically justified. People are not naturally seeking God. They are naturally blind (2 Cor. 4:4), foolish, and rebellious to the things of God (Rom. 1:18–32). As Paul wrote, "There is none righteous, not even one; there is none who understands, there is none who seeks for God; all have turned aside, together they have become useless; there is none who does good, there is not even one" (3:10–12).

In addition to these arguments against inclusivism, one should also consider the biblical passages that suggest individuals must have explicit faith in the gospel of Jesus Christ in order to be saved. According to Romans 8:9, individuals do not belong to Christ if the Spirit of God does not dwell in them in regeneration. How does that indwelling take place? According to Galatians 3:2, it is not by works of the Law, but "by hearing with faith." Those who respond to the gospel in faith receive the Spirit and belong to Christ. Works are not sufficient to establish one's own righteousness (Rom. 3:20), and zeal for God is not salvific without knowing the righteousness of God that has been manifested in Christ (10:2–3; cf. 3:21).

The righteousness of God that comes through faith is for everyone who explicitly affirms the gospel in both word and heart (10:4, 9–10), and no one can do this unless he or she is the recipient of genuine gospel preaching (vv. 13–15).



## A Brief Assessment of Postmortem Conversion

Even those who affirm the possibility of salvation after death generally acknowledge that the doctrine has little scriptural support. However, the biblical verses most often connected with the view come from 1 Peter. "For Christ also died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust, in order that He might bring us to God, having been put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit, in which also He went and made proclamation to the spirits now in prison, who once were disobedient, when the patience of God kept waiting in the days of Noah" (3:19–20). "For the gospel has for this purpose been preached even to those who are dead, that though they are judged in the flesh as men, they may live in the spirit according to the will of God" (4:6). Some free-will theists say these suggest that "the dead are given opportunity to respond to Christ."

I. Howard Marshall identifies three prominent interpretations for the "proclamation" of 1 Peter 3:19.

1. Christ went to the place where disobedient supernatural powers are imprisoned. This is variously taken to refer to a journey (a) "down" to Hades before his resurrection or (b) "up" to a prison in the heavens after his resurrection. In either place he proclaimed to them his victory and God's judgment. On this view the incident is mentioned primarily to assure the readers that Christ is superior to all powers and that believers have no need to fear them.

2. Christ went to Hades (as in 1a) and preached to the spirits of the people who were disobedient in Noah's day. For some commentators (a) this was simply an announcement of victory and judgment (as in view 1); for others (b) it was a proclamation of the gospel, giving them a "second chance" in their postmortem state.

3. Christ entered into Noah and through him preached to those who were disobedient during the building of the ark. He preached the need for repentance, but the people refused to listen (only Noah's family being saved). They perished in the flood, and their spirits are now in prison. Thus Christ in Noah is an example and encouragement to Peter's readers to preach the gospel fearlessly.

Since "spirits" more likely denotes angelic spirits than humans in the intermediate state, and since a reference to the disobedience and confinement of angels prior to

the Noahic flood would have been consistent with other Scriptures (2 Pet. 2:4–5; Jude 6) and first-century speculation, it seems best to understand 1 Peter 3:19



as a proclamation made to angelic powers and authorities under judgment (view 1a). If that is the case, this verse makes no reference to postmortem encounter or conversion.

First Peter 4:5 anticipates the judgment of persecutors, who "shall give account to Him who is ready to judge the living and the dead." At that point there will be a grand reversal. Those who have been "judged in the flesh" (v. 6)—those who have lost their lives in persecution—will live "in the spirit" (or, perhaps better, "by the Spirit"). Those now living will face judgment. Marshall writes, "In [this interpretation's] favor is that only on this view does the verse make sense in the context. It draws the required contrast between the fate of persecutors and those whom they persecute. Those who judged others in their lifetime will one day be judged themselves; those who were judged and condemned in their lifetime will be upheld by God at the final judgment."

While 1 Peter does not seem to describe the possibility of salvation through postmortem conversion, other Scriptures actually stand against that possibility. According to 2 Corinthians 5:10, the judgment of Christ will recompense each individual "for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad." Also Revelation 20:12 speaks of the dead being judged "from the things which were written in the books, according to their deeds." Further, "if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire" (v. 15). In 2 Thessalonians 1:8 Paul described the coming judgment as bringing "retribution to those who do not know God and to those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus." There seems to be no room here for postmortem conversion "when He comes to be glorified in His saints on that day, and to be marveled at among all who have believed" (v. 10). Both judgment and blessing in the future hinge on a right relationship with God made available in the present through the gospel.



## Conclusion

When addressing the fate of the unevangelized, consistent free-will theists seem to be limited to two options: inclusivism or postmortem conversion. The fact that neither option is compelling may cause some to question the value of consistency. Not wanting to affirm either inclusivism and postmortem conversion, some proponents of free-will theism may choose to be inconsistent in reference to soteriology.

Individuals can and do hold certain beliefs in tension, and they may affirm beliefs that are actually contradictory. However, if theological assertions are to be

tested on the basis of internal coherence and correspondence with the truth as known through Scripture, tradition, and reason, the presence of actual contradictions should be regarded as a serious problem. When a proposal contradicts Scripture (discussed in part one of this series), tradition (discussed in this article), and other areas of doctrine (particularly in soteriology), that proposal is unacceptable.