



Changed in the Presence of Pure Love

QUESTION

When a person dies, is their eternal destiny locked in? How could a soul or spirit stand in the presence of PURE LOVE and not be changed? Is death the end of God's pursuit of us or will we have an after-death chance to respond to his love?

After over fifty years of fear and mistrust of God because of teachings that he is bloodthirsty and vengeful and would kill his own son to satisfy HIS displeasure with HIS creation, I have come to believe God is not like that AT ALL. If God has put it into my heart to love my children enough to die for them, surely he is capable of more love than I have or can even imagine. Even if in this earthly life we have made horrible choices and decisions, wouldn't God's divine love and mercy offer more opportunities to be "transformed"?

RESPONSE

Some great thoughts—they are biblically coherent and Christological. Here are some of my thoughts on this topic:

I do not believe eternal destiny is "locked in" at death. Nothing in Scripture would lead us to assume this, but of course much dogma within Christendom insists upon it. Many believe that their attempts to proclaim the gospel and "save" people are the primary if not the only way God uses to channel his grace and to illuminate the minds of those whose hearts and minds are darkened. I say to that—if eternal destiny depends on religion, then God is not God!

I believe that physical death is not the end of God's pursuit of us, and I base that belief primarily on the full and complete (as I understand it) revelation of God within the pages of the Bible. I base that belief on the natural revelation of God, in creation and within life experiences—he is not bound by time and space, he is not owned or operated or controlled by religion. He has not rewarded any earthly religion the sole franchise to

represent him on earth and to make specific reservations in the afterlife, somewhat like a travel agent or Expedia.com, if you will. He is God and we are not. Thank God for that!

My hopeful perspective of God's pursuit of all of us—and I do mean ALL—is that he will do whatever it takes to win us. However, I also think he allows us to make choices and respects our choices—many biblical passages speak to this, perhaps none better than the Prodigal Son, when the father "lets" the son leave his house. He honors the son's request for his inheritance—he respects his son's decision, though of course he knows it will lead to heartache and misery. The son is not, it seems, a small child—but a full-grown adult. That said, I dogmatically do not agree with the universalism that insists God will "save" everyone no matter what—such a view is akin to a forced marriage.

While I did not spend 50 years of fear and mistrust of a bloodthirsty god of violence and wrath and vengeance, I put in almost 40 years in such a religious hell on earth ... and with you, I absolutely believe that God is not at all like what many people think he is. That is, in my opinion, perhaps the greatest sin of Christendom—a warped and twisted view of God, which of course then distorts all perceptions of those who would worship him.

My sense of his love, mercy and grace is that what we have done is entirely immaterial to his love—our behaviors, good or bad, do not predispose him to like us more or less than he already does. His love is consistent, equal and favorable to all—he knows exactly who we are, what we have done, and what we are capable of. He made us. He is our heavenly Father. We do not surprise him or scandalize or shock him. That does not mean he is displeased with anger, lust, indifference, violence, hatred and the like—he is of course more pleased when our lives resemble the Sermon on the Mount than they do by what we see exemplified and glorified in the kingdoms of this world. □