

161 A bridge too far – CS Lewis

My friend John^[159,160] came back to me with a recent web-based “daily thought from CS Lewis” (see below) which I’ve struggled with for a week.

Lewis refers to how “*a Christian trembles [at] the thought of God’s judgement*”, and also speaks of “*the terrible parable of the Sheep and the Goats [which] can leave no conscience untouched, for in it the ‘Goats’ are condemned entirely for their sins of omission...*” (my bold)

As I admitted over two years ago,^[60] that parable is very confusing: it seems to say that we will go to “eternal punishment” if we don’t help the poor, the marginalised, the rejected. What?!

I reacted very strongly to Lewis’s comments above, and I have spent literally hours writing and rewriting this article, trying to show how Lewis is mistaken in his interpretation of Scripture.

But Lewis’s mistake – and my mistake! – is thinking in terms of **who is accepted and who is rejected**. We are back to that bridge analogy,^[158] which starts with our separation and says:

[REJECTED] + [Belief in Jesus] => [ACCEPTED]

Now, I know this goes against all I’ve ever been taught by the church, but I totally reject the bridge model and would claim that this is closer to Jesus’ teaching:

[ACCEPTED] + [Belief (trust) in Jesus] => [Living as ACCEPTED]

After all, as I have already said,^[159] I can’t see Jesus ever condemning anyone (other than the Pharisees) – unless you can see some other passage that I have missed?

And the bridge model is totally contrary to Jesus’ prodigal father teaching because the prodigal father **never rejected the son**; and the son **never stopped being his son**.

I think that insisting on the bridge model is a form of indoctrination that Christendom has inflicted on itself at least since the Reformation and probably for most of the second millennium.

Let’s rebel! Let’s get back to the *really good news*, as preached by the early church: that God loves us and, through the cross, God defeated evil; and God is constantly urging us, for our own sakes, to stop sinning because it harms us and harms others (Romans 6:23).

I have already shared my joy at being part of my new church and expressed it as being “such a welcoming church.” I now realise that’s because it’s a “prodigal father church” – everyone is accepted, regardless of where they are on their journey. We just accept each other and encourage each other to draw closer to our loving heavenly Father, through Christ who lives in us all.

No, we’re not universalists – people can and sadly do reject their prodigal father. And we’re not soft on sin because, as Paul says to the believers, “the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord” (op cit).

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CS Lewis, *Reflections on the Psalms* (my bold)

If there is any thought at which **a Christian trembles it is the thought of God's 'judgement'**. The 'Day' of Judgement is 'that day of wrath, that dreadful day'. We pray for God to deliver us 'in the hour of death and at the day of judgement'. Christian art and literature for centuries have depicted its terrors. This note in Christianity certainly goes back to the teaching of Our Lord Himself; especially to **the terrible parable of the Sheep and the Goats. This can leave no conscience untouched, for in it the 'Goats' are condemned entirely for their sins of omission**; as if to make us fairly sure that the heaviest charge against each of us turns not upon the things he has done but on those he never did—perhaps dreamed of doing.

It was therefore with great surprise that I first noticed how the Psalmists talk about the judgement of God. Judgement is apparently an occasion of universal rejoicing. People ask for it: 'Judge me, O Lord my God, according to thy righteousness' (35:24).

The reason for this soon becomes very plain. The ancient Jews, like ourselves, think of God's judgement in terms of an earthly court of justice. The difference is that the Christian pictures the case to be tried as a criminal case with himself in the dock; the Jew pictures it as a civil case with himself as the plaintiff. The one hopes for acquittal, or rather for pardon; the other hopes for a resounding triumph with heavy damages.