

Feeling Intimidated?

And it came to pass, when Jesus had ended these sayings, the people were astonished at his doctrine: For he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes.

[Mat 7:28-29]

“For he taught his disciples . . . But they understood not . . . and were afraid to ask him.”

[Mark 9:31-32]

SCENE 1

I’m sitting in a Sunday School class that has about nine people attending. This teacher is well prepared, enjoys teaching, and loves the Lord. Most of the class time has been spent nodding heads in agreement—and rightly so. The topic then turns to how sovereign and good is our God. Eventually, someone brings up Romans 8:28.

“And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.”

Sure, I know that most translations drop the word “the” (underlined) and that this makes a dramatic change in the application of the verse. The version of 8:28 quoted in class has also dropped “the,” but I’m sticking with the positive direction of this discussion and offer the following observation:

“It’s even better than it looks. The word “for”—as in “*work together for good*” is the primary preposition epsilon—iota—sigma (pronounced “ice”) and refers to a point *already* reached or entered. That is, from God’s perspective it’s not a future good. The future good is already a done deal in God’s eyes. The effects are already in motion. We just haven’t yet recognized its impact in our life.

When Christ died on the cross, look how many people sat around moping and saying how terrible it was, but God had actually worked a glorious event. They simply had not *yet* recognized its significance.

God is working in our lives like that every day. Now *that’s* a sovereign God!”

Someone in the class is now intimidated. Why?

SCENE 2

I’m visiting a men’s Sunday School class. One of the men has just related a touching story of an acquaintance at work—a very hard-living acquaintance—who died suddenly before this man could work up the courage to speak to him about the Gospel. The gentleman in class said that at the time it made him sick to his stomach to realize how he may have failed this acquaintance and that the experience had steeled his resolve to never

fail his friends again in matters of faith.

Wow! What an inspiring story.

Unfortunately, rather than leaving it there, the class commenced to console this person concerning the ultimate destination of the acquaintance's soul. A man next to me offered up that he had been reading from a book by C. S. Lewis and that Lewis postulated that when a sinner dies, he gets a post-death, second chance to accept Christ before being assigned to heaven or hell.

[I'm going to pause here for dramatic effect and let the significance of that statement circulate around in your brain for a moment...]

I chose that moment to address the group,

“No, I'm not sure that's true at all.

First, if God gave us all a post-death, second chance to accept Christ while we were staring at the finality of heaven or hell, then no one would ever choose to go to hell. Hell would be empty, and clearly it is not.

Second, we also know that this isn't the case because Scripture tells us that for the believer, *'To be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord.'* There is no second chance to choose your destination.

Lastly, Luke—in the story of the rich man and Lazarus—explains that after dying the unbelieving rich man awoke in the place of torments while the believing beggar was in Abraham's bosom. Sorry, but no second chance was offered.

I believe that if you read Lewis closer you will see that he was actually referring to the heathen-in-Africa question (as it is incorrectly, but frequently postulated). That is, exactly what is the bare minimum that a person can believe and still be saved? Asked from a historical point-of-view, one could phrase it as, 'Since the plan of salvation has never changed, and people in the old Testament knew far less about Christ than we do today, then what exactly *did* people in the Old Testament 'believe' for their salvation? That's what Lewis is really asking. He is asking, 'Do people need to understand *fully* the role and methods of Jesus or the mechanics of how His shed blood covers are sin debt (does anyone?), or, do they only need to recognize their sinful state and inability to make it correct it—as best they know under their individual circumstances—and then throw their whole trust upon the mercy of the God of all creation even without understanding exactly *how* it will take place?'"

To be sure, someone in class is now feeling intimidated. Why?

What is the source of the intimidation? To answer that, I would ask that you reread the "[Our History](#)" page on this web site. It relates how I felt when I met the person who would ultimately lead me to Christ. The exact words are,

“I was drawn to his presence and yet *feared* his company, knowing that my lifestyle and behavior would not meet his approval. Despite my reservations, I could not stay away.”

Intimidation

Immediately upon meeting the man that would be used by the Holy Spirit to lead me to Christ I knew that he knew something that I needed to know, but my human spirit was *very much* intimidated by the Holy Spirit. That incident happened a long time ago and, yet, the memory is still vivid today. At the time, of course, I did not recognize that the intimidation was caused by the inevitable friction between my worldly human spirit (which was controlling me) and the Holy Spirit (that was working through him). To the person who is thinking from a worldly perspective, the Holy Spirit *will* be irritating, intimidating, offending, and more.

Recall how the supposed “religious” folks of Christ's day responded to His truth—or that of His apostles.

Are you feeling irritated, offended, or intimidated by what I just said?

Honestly, whose fault is that?