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Do These Verses Support the Idea That Everyone Will Be Saved?

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#STRask - Stand to Reason

Question about whether Romans 5:18, 1 Corinthians 15:22, and 1 John 2:2 support the idea that everyone will be saved (universalism) as a New York Times opinion piece by David Bentley Hart claims.

* Do Romans 5:18, 1 Corinthians 15:22, and 1 John 2:2 support universalism (i.e., the idea that everyone will be saved and the doctrine of Hell is incorrect) as a New York Times opinion piece by Dr. David Hart claims?

Transcript

This is Amy Hall. I'm here with Greg Koukl and you're listening to Stand to Reason's hashtag S-T-R-S-C-Podcast. Welcome, Greg.

Thank you, Amy. I feel welcome. I think you say that.

I want to make sure I feel good about these things. So today, Greg, we have a couple questions about Hell, and we're going to start with one from James G. In a New York Times opinion piece on January 10, 2020, Dr. David Hart seems to believe all will be saved and the doctrine of Hell is incorrect. He quoted Romans 5, 18, 1 Corinthians 15, 22, and 1 John 2, 2, to support this view.

What are your thoughts? I have a preliminary thought. I don't know what Dr. David Hart's specialty is. He's a PhD of what? No, he may have probably listed there, but I don't know.

But even if he's a PhD of theology, it's so odd that he would isolate these verses, which all kind of amount to say the same thing and make the same mistake. As I've already looked at him, we'll go over him a little bit. Because he says the doctrine of Hell is incorrect, but the concept of Hell was not made up out of thin air by people.

They believe in Hell because the Bible seems to teach about it. So why would you have all of these references to wailing and gnashing of teeth, of burning and fire and eternal

damnation, and the wrath of God abides on those who don't believe, and on and on and on and on, if the whole notion is just fabricated. If there was no reference to Hell, the final end of the wicked, who did not take refuge in Christ for forgiveness, if there was no mention of that, and all we had are these three verses or something like them, well then we would conclude that, yeah, everybody's wicked, but everybody gets saved.

But the thing is, the Bible is filled with these kinds of things, the New Testament in particular. I mean, these references are all over. It isn't like, where did you ever come up? Christian, what is wrong with you? Where did you ever come up with this notion? You invented this Hell thing? Haven't you ever read these passages? So these passages must be understood with the backdrop of the teaching of the New Testament, which includes the teaching of Jesus in Matthew chapter 25 in the sheep of the goats, for example, and depart from ye, you who work in equity, I never knew you.

And by the way, that depart from me is pretty aggressive. It doesn't mean, go away for a little while until I welcome you in for whatever. And it also doesn't mean, disappear.

It says depart into a place of punishment. Okay, so that disqualifies that passage, itself disqualifies even annihilationism. But let's go back to these passages.

So keep in mind that there is a backdrop here of the judgment of God on wicked people, which would be everyone, unless they've received the pardon God graciously offers through his son. Everybody's wicked. We all deserve this.

Okay. And the idea of judgment is not new. I just finished reading Jeremiah, the longest book of the Bible, and laments.

And now I'm going through Isaiah. Oh my gosh, it's dreary. It's dreary because God is so angry at all these people for all the bad they've done, and not just the Jews, but everybody around them.

So this idea that God is going to judge, rather than save everybody, starts very early in the text and is a major theme all the way throughout the Bible. So it is unlikely someone can cherry pick a couple of verses that will overturn the force of all of that teaching. So let's see which verses they have in mind.

The first one is in the book of Romans chapter five. Hmm. I remember Romans chapter five is about the fall of man through Adam includes that.

And that because of Adam, we are born of Adam, and one consequence follows the fact that we are born of Adam. And that is that we are sinners by nature, and then subsequently under judgment by nature. But there is a rescue.

There are those who are, and by the way, everyone born of Adam is lost in Adam, but there's a solution. Jesus, he's the second Adam, where the first Adam brought life, rather

death. Everybody in Adam brought death.

The second Adam brings life, and everyone in the second Adam receives that life. Now, this is a very important point. Everyone in the second Adam receives the life the second Adam gives, not everyone, those that are in Christ.

So let me read the passage. Chapter five verse 18, let me start in verse 17, just to give a little bit of context, although there's more above it. If by the transgression of the one, that would be the first Adam, death reigned through the one much more those who receive the abundance of grace and of the fruit of righteousness will reign in life through the one Jesus Christ.

Notice the modifier, those who receive the abundance of grace, and they're reigning what? In life through Christ. So then, as through the one, so then, notice these are connected. Sorry for the grammar, but it's not that hard.

If you pay attention, sorry for chuckling. I don't mean to be derisive, but sometimes surprises me that people miss the grammar. So then, as through one transgression, they're perished.

I'm sorry, they've resulted condemnation to all men, which all men, all men better in Adam. That's what he's been arguing. Even so, through one act of righteousness, they've resulted justification of life to all men, which all men, all men who have received Christ verse 17.

You have to always take into consideration the frame of reference when you see expansive language like this. So when the gospel writers say, all of Israel were down at the Jordan, where John was baptizing, well, that means it didn't mean the country was empty or all those, blah, blah, blah. It's those in that context, and that's what we face here.

It doesn't mean all men of every sort at every time no one accepted. It means all the men he's talking about in verse 17, those who receive the abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness. That's the old men.

And if you go on into chapter six, it talks about being joined to Christ, dying with him and being raised with him. So it's even more clear that we're talking about a subset of people here. It's interesting here.

It says for as through the next verse verse 19 asked through the one man's disobedience, the many were made sinners, even so through the obedience of the one, the many were made righteous, which many, the many that are being referred to in the first case, the many that are in Adam, which is every human being and the second case, the many who are in Christ, which is not every human being. It's those who have received. Anyway, so that dispatches that I think, handily, and not gloating here.

I'm just saying this isn't hard. It doesn't take any profound insight. Just read the text.

Okay, so it's number two, first Corinthians. First Corinthians 15:22. Okay, so this is the second verse that was in the New York Times article by the good Dr. David Hart.

I don't know his discipline. But even if he's a Bible expert, he can't undo the grammar of the text. Even this is the Rhodes scholar argument.

Maybe he's got a PhD in New Testament studies. Fine. Good for him.

But he's misunderstanding this verse. How could you say that? Read the verse. A PhD can't undo the words.

Okay, so that's why sometimes it's not hard. First Corinthians 15:22, 22.

Now, this is a passage chapter 15 of First Corinthians, the whole chapter is about the resurrection. Okay. And Paul first deals with the claim that Jesus hasn't been raised.

And he basically says if Jesus hasn't been raised, we're liars and we're idiots. It's the summary of the first half of the chapter. Read for yourself.

It's a fair summary. Verse 20 starts. But now Christ has been raised.

Okay, we've established that. He has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who are asleep. For since by a man came death, who would that be? Adam.

By a man also came the resurrection of the dead. Who would that be? Jesus. Oh, we got the same contrast here, the first Adam to the second Adam.

And, by the way, the same author, Paul of both books. Hmm. I wonder if he's going to come up with something different here than he did in Romans.

For as in, oh, here it is, in Adam, all die. So also in Christ, all will be made alive, which all, all those who are in Christ, just like all those are in Adam. Now, he doesn't specify in this passage right there that all those who are in Christ are those who have received Christ, like he does in verse 17, a chapter five of Romans.

But it's clear that he's got the same theology. There's no reason to think he's changed his theology. In fact, I'm not scanned this whole text here, but I bet you if I did, I'd find more exclusive language regarding those who are saved.

All right. In fact, but we see the, we see the, we see the same kind of comparison that's made here as in Romans five. Those are in Adam, all lost.

Those are in Christ, all saved. Frame of reference in Adam or in Christ. I'm just scanning down here to see, I guarantee you in the rest of chapter 15, there is some exclusive language that makes it clear that not all are saved.

But in any event, it certainly is Paul's theology. And you can't strain at this particular net with a, with a novel interpretation of it, of the word all here, and the judgment that follows. That's part of Paul's theology.

This, this is not complicated. Well, he does say at the very beginning of the chapter, this is the gospel by which you are saved. If you hold fast the word, which I preached to you.

Oh, there you go. Yeah, that's exclusive. Yeah, there you go.

Yeah, there's a, there we go. If you hold fast. And they said, but don't worry about that because all are saved.

Okay, so now are, we have a third reference. Notice the first two are kin to each other. There's comparing the first Adam with the second Adam, Adam in Jesus, and all, and all, all who are in Adam.

One thing applies, all who are in Christ, another thing applies. Very simple, very straightforward, not tricky, completely consistent with each other and consistent with Paul's teaching and other passages. There's uniformity there.

Okay, final passage, first John chapter two and verse two. And by the way, this follows one of my favorite, well, there's actually a couple here, but this is, this is a very powerful passage, chapter two of first John. And he starts my little children.

Now he's speaking to a particular group of people, believers. In fact, it's not everybody because he says some later, he says some went out from us to show that they were not with us. Okay, then he condemns people who later, who are consistently willfully sinning.

In other words, living in sinful patterns instead of, instead of fighting against them. He said, these people who, nobody who's a Christian continues this kind of life. It's my paraphrase of it, but I think that's his point.

And those who are not are, are condemned is the point. So here he's writing to little children, my little children, I'm writing these things to you so that you may not sin. Good.

Okay, this will help. But what if we sin? Oh, okay. And if anyone sins, we have an advocate with the father, Jesus Christ, the righteous.

Okay. So now what is the antidote to sin for the little children that John identifies as part of his party there with the word we, the antidote to sin is Jesus. He is our advocate.

He is the righteous one who argues on our behalf and the nature of that argument is I paid so they don't have to. That's not details are not right in this verse, but it's part of the broader theology of substitutionary atonement. Okay.

And verse two, the one in question, he himself, and this makes the theological point I

just made, he himself is the propitiation for our sins. Okay. What's propitiation being satisfaction? Satisfaction.

He paid the price for our sins, which is why we can be forgiven even when we sin and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world. All right. Now that's our problematic phrase.

Wait a minute. He's the propitiation for the whole world. Okay.

That's what John is saying here. Now, if John is saying that everyone's saved, it is inconsistent with the rest of his theology about the distinction between believers and non-believers in this book, John was not a universalist. Well, why does he use this language? Okay.

Well, first just understand this that when we read these passages, like just the one before it in chapter one, if we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us. Next verse, if we confess our sin, he is faithful righteous to forgive us our sins and declines us from all unrighteousness. In other words, there's a contrast between those who say they have no sin and those who acknowledge they do.

Now, remember, John is writing in a circumstance where there is Gnostic heresy is beginning to develop. And so this is a implicit, this is a kind of a, we're not looking for not implicit, but a kind of a young form of Gnosticism. Gnosticism had a lot of different beliefs, but one of them was that we're not responsible for sin.

There was dualism that was involved. And there was special knowledge and he speaks to those issues later on in the spirits that say that Jesus the Christ has not come in the flesh. Why? Because they didn't believe that God could inhabit physical flesh, which was sinful.

That's the error of docetism. So it's clear in first John that he is writing with Gnostics in mind. So at the end of the chapter first of chapter one, and this is going to be a surprise for a lot of people who take chapter one, verse nine, if we confess our sins, he's faithful righteous to forgive our sins and cleanses us of all we're in righteousness to be a verse that is dictating the Christian discipline of confessing sins is not.

That's not what that's there for. It doesn't fit the context, though gazillions of people believe that the antidote for sin is not chapter one, verse nine is chapter two, verse one. Just keep reading what it's dealing with here in this first chapter is somewhat evangelistic and you start in chapter one, verse one, you can see that there's a witness being offered by John and he's inviting people to have fellowship with him as he has fellowship with the Father.

But there's a problem. The problem is sin. If you confess that you have sin, let me back up and put it in order here.

If we say we have no sin, we're deceiving ourselves. The truth is not in his first days. But if we confess our sin by contrast to saying we don't have sin, then he's faithful and righteous to forgive us and to cleanse us from all our righteous.

That happens at salvation. And then Jesus is our advocate. So notice that chapter one indicates that those who are not confessing that they have sin are not under the cleansing that such acknowledgement before God provides.

So therefore, they cannot be under the propitiation of chapter two, verse two. Well, why does they say the whole world? Because Jesus is the propitiation for the whole world. There is no other source.

He's the one that God has provided, okay? And in classic reform sense, this is the way they characterize it, the reformers characterized it this way, that what Jesus did on the cross is sufficient for everyone, but it is only efficient for those who put their trust in Jesus, who satisfy the requirement. And so that's what's going on here. It's like the roads are for everybody.

You can't drive your car and people's lawn. There's only one place to drive your car on the roads. They're for everybody.

Does that mean everybody drives all the appropriate means for driving? Jesus is the propitiation. There's a solution that's sitting right there. He's the savior of the whole world.

He's the only one that is there as a savior. That doesn't mean the whole world benefits from what he does, or else that would be a contradiction of what in this case, John says, just for verses before. And this is what we always have to keep in mind.

We have to keep in mind the broad teaching of the scripture regarding these kinds of things to then try to understand what these verses that seem to go against that broad teaching might mean. Now we have a solution that is just fine. It keeps all these verses in harmony.

I don't know what David, David Hart is thinking. He's cherry picking verses. He does not understand them.

I don't care what his pedigree is, what his bonafides are. We just read the passage, we can do it ourselves. We're not missing anything here.

David Hart is. And just to point out, at that time, it was an unusual thing to say there was one God who is the solution for everyone, because every nation had their own gods. And especially the contrast between the Jews and the Gentiles, even the Jews thought in the sense of our God is for us, and that's it.

So the idea that John has to point out, for the whole world, not just for the Jews, not just for our area or whatever, it's for every nation, every person, he is the Savior. And that's it. That's your only option.

Right. Right. And we also see this is a book of Acts at the Ariapagos there, Mars Hill, and Paul is trying to clarify, you got all these gods.

Here's the unknown God. By the way, let me tell you about this guy. He's the God.

He's the one who made everything, all of you, and everything. And he's going to judge you. Okay, what does that mean? When you judge you, actually it's not going to judge you.

It's Jesus is going to judge you, the one who rose from the dead. What does that mean to judge you? Okay, you're bad. Go to heaven.

No, it means a judgment is enacted and punishment is meted out. Anyway, I think the impulse to accept things like universalism come from a mistaken understanding of judgment. Judgment is praised throughout the Bible.

Judgment is an occasion to praise God. His wrath against evil is our chance to praise God. Because of underscores, his goodness, his goodness, his justice, his hatred of evil.

You see this throughout the Bible, you see it in Revelation, you see the saints praising God for judging those who are put under his judgment at the end. This is something that God has praised for. And if you, and I know I've said this on the show before, but if you think about judges on this earth who have made bad decisions and not judge people, not put people in prison who deserve to go there, what you see as people being very angry with that person and thinking he's horrible.

So I think people just don't understand the goodness of judgment. And so they, they, I don't know, and there could also be people out there who just think that, okay, well, Jesus takes on the punishment for everyone and they still think that judgment is good. It's just that it applies to everyone that's different.

But I think, I think there are a lot of people that just think judgment is something that unseemly for God for a good only. That definitely is the progressive movement. That's why they call the blood atonement, substitutionary atonement, divine child abuse.

It's unseemly that God would require a punishment. That's barbaric. Yeah.

Well, thank you, James, for that question. If you'd like to send us a question, send it on, on Twitter or X. I've got to be able to say this without laughing. I know, but I mentioned this during a break.

X is the Greek letter chi, which is shorthand for Christ. All right. So you see an X just

think Christ.

All right. There you go. You can say that on X with the hashtag STR.

Ask, we look forward to hearing from you. This is Amy Hall and Greg Kockel for Stand to Reason.