

WILL YOU BE THROWN BACK?

By Bill Irby

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Imagine that at the end of our lives we are caught in a great fishing net and pulled up on the dark sand of a spectral shore. As we are all flopping around men pick us up one by one, inspect each of us closely, keep a few and throw the rest back into the sea, which by this time is on fire.

This strange picture is from Matthew 13:47-50: Again the kingdom of heaven is like a dragnet that was cast into the sea and gathered some of every kind, which when it was full, they drew to shore: and they sat down and gathered the good into vessels, but threw the bad away. So it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come forth, separate the wicked from among the just, and cast them into the furnace of fire. There will be wailing and gnashing of teeth.”

Jesus asked his hearers if they understood what He was saying (verse 51). They said they did. I suppose we might say the same thing. There is, as is always the case, more to this parable than first meets the eye. It is a summation of the dilemma of modern religion.

The ideas in the parable of the dragnet are in stark contrast to modern perspectives in religion. Religion in our world, even here in the South, has become relativistic. Religion is whatever one wants it to be. There is no right. There is no wrong. There are no saints because there are no sinners. Sin has been abolished.

Today, people become nervous and uneasy at the mention of Jesus Christ as man's Savior. In the church we are used to having to defend our faith and practice in connection with baptism, for instance. In the larger religious world people are being moved away from the mere suggestion of the idea that Jesus might just be the Son of God. “You can't say that! It might offend the Muslims or the atheists!” thunders the ridiculous mainstream media. It is amazing to me that while those in “Christian” circles give in to a molycoddling relativism where

nothing is right or wrong, atheists and Muslims (for two contradictory examples) are becoming increasingly strident in their demands to be seen as the only way.

Christianity, properly understood, allows for no relativism. We are either saved or lost. All are sinners (Romans 3:23) and the only way to be saved is to be in Christ (Ephesians 2) and the only way into Christ is to be baptized into Him (Galatians 3:26-28). According to the Bible, there is no hope any other way. Unless we are in Christ, we will be thrown back into a burning furnace of fire.

There is another thing about this parable that gives me pause. These are "Kingdom parables." I take that to mean that Jesus taught them to correct misunderstanding about the nature of the coming church (which is God's kingdom here) and to prepare the disciples for membership therein.

As such it makes me think about me. Now, I am sure of my salvation, not because of my own activities, but because of God's promises, which I know to be true. But I am just as sure that I can put my salvation at risk by being unfaithful to the Lord. If I become "hardened through the deceitfulness of sin" (Hebrews 3:13), I am at risk of being thrown away into that hot furnace. I don't want that to happen to me; how about you?

So, are you a "keeper" or will you be thrown back?