

The “Ramifications” of John 14:6

Introduction

Without a doubt, one of the most famous verses in the New Testament is John 14:6. The context of that verse is that Jesus is speaking to his disciples, about salvation. The English Standard Version of the Bible translates that verse as follows:

John 14:6 (ESV):

⁶ Jesus said to him, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

That verse is very profound, of course – it tells us that the *only* way for us to approach God is to go through Jesus. In other words, there are no other ways for people to be saved, other than through Jesus.

Jesus made a very similar statement in John 17:3. In that verse, Jesus is praying to our Heavenly Father, about his disciples:

John 17:3 (ESV):

³ And this is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.

The apostles also made many statements, which reaffirm the necessity of Jesus in salvation. Here are a few of them:

Acts 4:11-12 (ESV):

¹¹ This Jesus is the stone that was rejected by you, the builders, which has become the cornerstone. ¹² And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.”

1 Corinthians 8:5-6 (ESV):

⁵ For although there may be so-called gods in heaven or on earth—as indeed there are many “gods” and many “lords”—⁶ yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist.

1 Timothy 2:5-6 (ESV):

⁵ For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus,
⁶ who gave himself as a ransom for all, which is the testimony given at the proper time.

All of the above passages speak of the necessity of Jesus’ sacrifice, in our salvation. In other words, all of those verses tell us that the *sacrifice of Jesus* – not anything else – is what gives people the opportunity to be granted everlasting life.

Those verses raise *another* question, though – a question about their “ramifications”. In other words, the question has to do with the “practical consequences” of the above verses.

For example, John 14:6 tells us that Jesus is the *only* way to salvation. The question is: **what** does that mean that people have to do, in order to be saved?

In other words, what relevance does John 14:6 have to people’s **actions**, if people want to be saved?

From my experience, there are two main doctrines about this issue. In other words, there are two main ideas about how John 14:6 affects people’s salvation. Those two doctrines are described below.

The “Mainstream” Doctrine

Historically, most mainstream Christian denominations have held this type of belief, about John 14:6:

In order for a person to be saved, he must **believe** that Jesus is the Christ, during his lifetime. If a person dies, without *ever* acknowledging that Jesus is the Christ, then that person will **never be saved**.

In other words, our brief lifetimes - in this current age - comprise our *only* opportunity for salvation. So, if a person’s life ends, *before* he comes to believe in Jesus, then his hope for salvation is **permanently** forfeit.

Of course, during the 2,000 years since Jesus walked the earth, **millions** of people have lived and died, without ever hearing about him. In other words, those people had no idea about Jesus, during their entire lives - and as a result, those people never had *any* opportunity to believe that Jesus is the Christ.

According to the “mainstream” doctrine, above, all of those people will never be saved – because those people never believed in Jesus during their lifetimes. Of course, it was **impossible** for those people to believe in Jesus – because they never heard about him!

As a result, the mainstream doctrine basically states the following: Every person who never **heard** about Jesus will never be **saved**. In other words, all of those people will be condemned to *everlasting death* – solely because no one ever *told* them about Jesus.

So, is the above doctrine consistent with Scripture? In other words, does Scripture tell us that God only wants people who have heard about Jesus to be saved? Consider the following verses:

1 Timothy 2:3-4 (ESV):

³This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, ⁴who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.

2 Peter 3:9 (ESV):

⁹The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.

The above verses tell us that God wants everyone to be saved – i.e., He does not want anyone to perish. That certainly seems to indicate that God wants people who *never* heard about Jesus to be saved - just like He wants people who *did* hear about Jesus to be saved.

Some groups claim that the phrase “all people” listed in 1 Timothy 2:4 does **not** actually refer to all people. Instead, they claim that that verse (as well as 2 Peter 3:9) *only* refers to people who *currently* believe in Jesus. In other words, they assert that the “all people” in 1 Timothy 2:4 only refers to “all **Christians**”.

So, is that assertion true? As it turns out, the phrase “all people” occurs in another passage in 1 Timothy as well:

1 Timothy 4:10 (ESV):

¹⁰ For to this end we toil and strive, because we have our hope set on the living God, who is the Savior of **all people**, especially of those who believe.

The above verse makes it clear that “all people” actually refers to every single person – *not* just to every Christian. This is clear because the verse states that God is the savior of **all** people – especially (but not only) of those people who believe.

As a result, the mainstream doctrine does not appear to be consistent with Scripture. This is because the mainstream doctrine claims that people who never heard about Jesus will never have any opportunity to be saved – but Scripture explicitly states that God wants all people to be saved.

Therefore, it certainly does **not** appear correct that God will permanently exclude people, who *never heard* about Jesus, from **any** opportunity for salvation.

The “Live and Let Live” Doctrine

There is another doctrine about John 14:6 as well. This doctrine tends to be prevalent among more “progressive” Christian groups. In essence, this doctrine states the following:

The sacrifice of Jesus – by itself – is what allows people to be saved. In other words, that sacrifice – alone – allows people to gain everlasting life – **regardless** of whether people *believe* that Jesus is the Christ.

In other words, this doctrine states that it is not necessary for anyone to *believe* that Jesus is the Christ. Instead, people can believe whatever they want; because the sacrifice of Jesus – **all by itself** – allows a person to obtain everlasting life.

In essence, this doctrine asserts the following: As long as a person sincerely tries to love his neighbor, then he will be saved – because that will allow the person to be “covered” by the sacrifice of Jesus. This is true *whether or not* the person actually **believes** in Jesus.

So, for obvious reasons, I refer to this doctrine as the “live and let live” doctrine. Basically, this doctrine states that as long as we all try to be “nice” to each other, we will all be granted eternal life - no matter *what* we believe.

To be fair, there are some passages in Scripture, which proponents of this doctrine use to try to advance their position. Here are two such passages:

Matthew 19:16-19 (ESV):

¹⁶ And behold, a man came up to him, saying, “Teacher, what good deed must I do to have eternal life?” ¹⁷ And he said to him, “Why do you ask me about what is good? There is only one who is good. If you would enter life, keep the commandments.” ¹⁸ He said to him, “Which ones?” And Jesus said, “You shall not murder, You shall not commit adultery, You shall not steal, You shall not bear false witness, ¹⁹ Honor your father and mother, and, You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”

Romans 2:13-16 (ESV):

¹³ For it is not the hearers of the law who are righteous before God, but the doers of the law who will be justified. ¹⁴ For when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do what the law requires, they are a law to themselves, even though they do not have the law. ¹⁵ They show that the work of the law is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness, and their conflicting thoughts accuse or even excuse them ¹⁶ on that day when, according to my gospel, God judges the secrets of men by Christ Jesus.

In the first passage, Jesus gives the man a list of commandments that he must follow, in order to obtain everlasting life. Most notable among them is the commandment to “love your neighbor as yourself” (Leviticus 19:18).

In the second passage, the apostle Paul tells us that in some cases, Gentiles follow the *principles* of the law – even though they have never *heard* the law. That, in turn, demonstrates that the law is “written in their hearts” – i.e., those Gentiles are following the commandments because it is part of their “conscience”, or “personality”.

Some proponents of this “live and let live” doctrine assert the following, about the above two passages:

Jesus gave us a list of commandments that we must follow to obtain everlasting life; and Paul told us that some Gentiles follow those commandments, even though they never heard them. That, in turn, indicates that people can obey the commandments – and be saved – even if they do not accept Jesus as the Christ.

So, is the above assertion correct? Is it actually possible to obtain everlasting life **solely** by trying to love your neighbor – *without* believing that Jesus is the Christ?

First of all, there are many *other* passages in Scripture which tell us that **belief** in Jesus is required, in order to obtain everlasting life. For example, consider these passages:

John 3:16 (ESV):

¹⁶ “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever **believes** in him should not perish but have eternal life.

John 20:30-31 (ESV):

³⁰ Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; ³¹ but these are written so that you may **believe** that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

In addition, Scripture tells us that everyone needs to acknowledge Jesus as our Lord (not just a “subset” of people who believe in him):

Philippians 2:9-11 (ESV):

⁹ Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, ¹⁰ so that at the name of Jesus **every** knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹ and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Finally, if belief in Jesus is *not* required for salvation, then there is absolutely *no reason* for anyone to spread the gospel about Jesus to the world. In other words, if people can believe whatever they want – and still be saved – then there is **no need** for them to hear about Jesus.

Of course, Scripture is abundantly clear that the whole world must hear about Jesus. In fact, the next age **cannot** begin, *until* the gospel has been spread to the whole world. As a result, Jesus *commanded* the apostles to spread the gospel – and the apostles spend their lives doing just that.

In addition, Scripture explicitly states that people *must* hear about Jesus, in order for people to be *saved*. That completely contradicts the idea that people can believe whatever they want, and still be saved. Consider these verses:

Matthew 24:14 (ESV):

¹⁴ And this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.

Matthew 28:19-20 (ESV):

¹⁹ Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

Acts 5:42 (ESV):

⁴² And every day, in the temple and from house to house, they [the apostles] did not cease teaching and preaching that the Christ is Jesus.

Acts 28:30 (ESV):

³⁰ He [Paul] lived there two whole years at his own expense, and welcomed all who came to him, ³¹ proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hindrance.

Romans 10:14-15 (ESV):

¹⁴ How then will they call on him [Jesus] in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone

preaching? ¹⁵ And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, “How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!”

As a result, this “live and let live” doctrine does not appear to be correct. In other words, Scripture tells us that salvation is **not** just a matter of trying to love your neighbor – belief in Jesus is also required.

A Third Alternative

As listed above, there are two main doctrines about John 14:6:

- One doctrine states that a person must believe that Jesus is the Christ, during this current age. If the person dies, without believing that Jesus is the Christ, then he will be condemned to eternal death – even if he **never heard** about Jesus.

- The other doctrine states that belief in Jesus is not required *at all* for salvation – all that is required is that people try to love their neighbors. If a person does that, then he will be “covered” by the sacrifice of Jesus – **regardless** of whether he believes that Jesus is the Christ.

From my understanding, **neither** of those doctrines is supported by Scripture. The first doctrine asserts that everyone must believe in Jesus during this **current** age; but millions of people never heard about Jesus during this age - and as a result, it was *not possible* for those people to believe in him. The second doctrine states that believe in Jesus is *not required* for salvation; but Scripture states that belief in Jesus is required – and besides, if belief in Jesus was not required, then there would not have been any reason for the apostles to spread the gospel.

So, is there any alternative, to the above two doctrines? In particular, is there any doctrine which can explain the overall salvation process, in a way that is consistent with the entire body of Scripture?

From what I can see, the following doctrine appears to correlate with *all* of Scripture. In other words, this doctrine recognizes the requirement to believe in Jesus, in order to be saved; and it *also* recognizes the fact that God wants **everyone** to be saved – even those people who never heard about Jesus during this current age.

Here is a brief synopsis of this doctrine:

- When Jesus returns, he will *resurrect* people who **followed** him during this age; and he will *immediately* grant those followers immortal life.

- In addition, at some point *after* Jesus returns, people who **never heard** about Jesus will also be resurrected. However, those people will be resurrected with mortal life – i.e., life similar to what we have right now.

- Then, those people will be given a **limited** period of time, to *learn* about Jesus – and to develop faith in him. I refer to this period of time as their “judgment period”.

- If those people become *followers* of Jesus during that period, then they will be granted everlasting life. However, if those people explicitly *refuse* to follow Jesus during that period, then their lives will simply end.

This doctrine appears to be consistent with the entire body of Scripture. On one hand, this doctrine *affirms* the requirement to believe in Jesus, in order to obtain everlasting life. On the other hand, the doctrine also allows people who *never heard* about Jesus during this age to be saved – because it allows those people the opportunity to hear about Jesus in the next age.

I refer to the above doctrine as the “Kingdom Age Salvation” doctrine – because it allows for some people to be saved during the age to come.

As it turns out, there is *another* article on this site, which goes into more detail about this “Kingdom Age Salvation” doctrine. That article can be found at the following URL:

http://ncbf.homestead.com/Is_any_Knowledge_Required_for_Salvation.pdf

Conclusion

The two primary doctrines listed above – the “mainstream” doctrine, and the “live and let live” doctrine – highlight two *separate* areas of overall Christian belief. The mainstream doctrine highlights the requirement for people to *believe* in Jesus, during **this** age, in order to be saved - while the “live and let live” doctrine highlights the importance of *loving one’s neighbor*, as a part of salvation. Of course, both of those areas are extremely important; but both of those areas are not – by themselves – consistent with the **entire** body of Scripture.

To a certain extent, this overall issue reminds me of the Jewish rejection of Jesus, as listed in the Gospels. Basically, *some* Jews did not believe that Jesus was the Messiah, because those Jews were completely focused on the Scriptural verses that speak of the Messiah as the “conquering king”, who will restore the kingdom of Israel. In other words, those Jews basically “ignored” the Scriptural verses that refer to the Messiah as the “suffering servant”, who would be *rejected* by his people – and who would die for *their* sins.

So, I hope that this post will encourage everyone to investigate the entire body of Scripture, when you are trying to find answers to questions about God!