

Rev Brenda Brown “Billy Graham’s Hell?” Gunnison Congregational UCC March 24, 2009

Of all the modern day high priests (or ministers) chosen from among mortals William Franklin Graham Jr. (born November 7, 1918) is one of the greats. The man we know “as Billy Graham, is an American [evangelist](#) and an [Evangelical Christian](#). He has been a spiritual adviser to multiple [U.S. presidents^{\[1\]}](#) and was number eight on [Gallup's list of admired people](#) for the 20th century. (Wikipedia “Billy Graham)”

I can still hear his voice at a revival I attended in huge stadium in San Diego, “It only takes 3 minutes from the balcony!” This was part of his world famous altar call as the hymn “Just As I Am” played in the background.

He was famous for his preaching about salvation through Jesus’ work on the cross. This is a quote from his thriving revival days ...

“The cross is the only way to heaven, it is the only way to get forgiveness of sin. And if you haven’t come by faith to the foot of that cross renouncing your sins, I don’t care who you are or what you are, you’ll never be in heaven.”

He definitely had incredible crowd appeal, it is estimated that his ministry has reached over 2.2 billion people.

Certainly a great high priest among mortals.

You can imagine my shock when I ran across a sermon entitled ... “Why Billy Graham is on his way to hell.”

This provocatively titled sermon can be viewed on You Tube. I watched it this week. It is an excerpt from a sermon preached by Pastor Steven L Anderson at Faithful Word Baptist Church in Phoenix, AZ.

It was distressing to listen to this preacher’s energized remarks as he passionately relegated Billy Graham to the ranks of those going to hell.

Why would a good ole bible thumpin' preacher like Steven Anderson imagine Billy Graham on his way to hell?

It stems from something Billy Graham said in an interview on Robert Schuller's TV show. (You know, the guy who built the Crystal Cathedral in California.)

Mr Schuller asked Billy Graham ..

“Tell me, what do you think is the future of Christianity?”

Rev. Graham answered, “I think everybody who loves Christ or knows Christ whether they are conscious of it or not, they are members of the body of Christ.

And that is what God is doing today, he's calling people out of the world for his name. Whether they come from the Muslim world or the Buddhist world, the Christian world or the non-believing world - they are members of the body of Christ because they have been called by God.

They may not even know the name of Jesus, but they know in their heart that they need something that they don't have. And they turn to the only Light that they have and I think that they are saved – they're going to be with us in heaven.”

Schuller delighted in this response and said, “This is fantastic, I'm so thrilled to hear you say that. There's a wideness in God's mercy.”

Billy Graham is saying that he believes there is salvation outside of the work of Jesus on the cross.

In Billy Graham's world, the ultimate indication of a person's rightness with God is that they will be included in the heavenly community. And he said on the record that Muslims, Buddhists and non-believers alike can be expected in heaven.

What a radical shift, what happened to Billy Graham? What changed in the way this modern father of the faith sees God and the world?

In an interview with Larry King, an aged Rev. Graham said, “As I got older I guess I became more mellow, and more forgiving and more loving.”

Mellow, forgiving and loving... interesting attributes for a man who is on his way to hell.

So why are fellow ministers so concerned about the current ministries and positions of Billy Graham? Why are they warning people about him on the internet and from the pulpit?

For the same reasons there are negative campaigns smearing the good will of Oprah Winfrey, another modern day saint ... a lay spiritual seeker who has spread lessons of hope, tenacity and generosity around the globe.

Both are thought to be false prophets. Our scripture today tells us to beware of false prophets.

There is a big movement to let Christians know that Oprah, once considered a dedicated conservative Christian, is now the central figure in a movement leading countless millions of people to hell.

Why, because now she is a dedication Christian seeker of a universal God.

What does it mean to be a true Christian, a follower of the teaching of Rabbi Jesus? This question is at the forefront of the season of Lent because the church is honoring the life of Jesus as he literally walks to his execution. What could be so important to warrant this price paid?

When I think about the question Robert Schuller asked Billy Graham, “Tell me, what do you think is the future of Christianity?” I can’t help but look back to the life of Jesus for clues.

To the best of his ability Jesus worked to bring a shift in worldview to the culture he lived in. He strained to elbow out idea of exclusion. He struggled to bring a new mind to the understanding of who God is and who God is for ... and what God is against.

He was a reversal ... a religious about face if you will.

His message clearly communicated “We as God’s people used to think this, but now, now we know this other thing to be true.”

What would this “We used to think this, now we know this other thing to be true” message of Jesus look like today?

The answer to this question might shed light on the question about the future of Christianity.

I firmly believe that if Jesus was here today he would be saying, “We used to think there was only one way to God through Jesus’ work on the cross, but now we know that there are many paths to the Light. In Christ there is no Christian or Muslim, no Jew or Buddhist, no believer or non-believer. We are all one in the Light.”

To change course is to admit we were heading in the wrong direction at one point. And when you are in the public eye, it is a courageous thing to say “I once believed this, but now, I see that this is more true.”

Billy Graham was very clear on the Larry King Show that he still respects and cares deeply for his more conservative brothers and sisters in Christ. He embodies “Do not judge, so that you may not be judged.”

For him, it is not a debate, for him it is an old man’s personal reconciliation of the Gospel of Christ with what he has experienced in the “Still Speaking” world.

For Oprah, she just couldn’t imagine a God so small that he or she would be limited by what path someone used to arrive in the Light.

Oprah reflected we are always walking toward the direction of dark or light, fear or love, one or the other – it doesn’t matter what you name it.

Matthew 7 tells us we will know the false prophets by their fruits.

Billy Graham, forgiving and loving - Oprah Winfrey, generous and expansive.

Both bearing fruit in the world – Both pointing us to a future of Christianity and religion that conveys the need for respect and diversity as seekers move toward the Light.

These are actually radical ideas. They are ideas that represent a reversal of Christian understanding. They are the kind of ideas I can imagine Jesus getting in trouble for on the internet if he were alive today.

They are the hell shattering ideas that will allow Christianity to move forward as a relevant and healing agent in today's torn apart world.

And if they are the ideas that send me to Billy Graham's hell, to Oprah Winfrey hell, then I'm ready to go! The company is bound to be great; I'm guessing all the people who have made the world a better place will be there.

Hebrews 5:1-2

Every high priest chosen from among mortals is put in charge of things pertaining to God on their behalf ... ²He (the priest) is able to deal gently with the ignorant and wayward, since he himself is subject to weakness;

Matthew 7:1-29 (excerpts)

⁷“Do not judge, so that you may not be judged. ²For with the judgment you make you will be judged, and the measure you give will be the measure you get.

⁷“Ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you.

⁸For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened. ⁹Is there anyone among you who, if your child asks for bread, will give a stone? ¹⁰Or if the child asks for a fish, will give a snake?

¹⁵“Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves.

¹⁶You will know them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thorns, or figs from thistles? ¹⁷In the same way, every good tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears bad fruit. ¹⁸A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit. ²⁰Thus you will know them by their fruits.