

# **A Warning to Pastors about Their Uninformed Support of Young and *The Shack***

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Recently I read a posting by a Southern Baptist leader from Oklahoma, Rev. Wade Burleson, who endorses Paul Young's newest book, *Lies We Believe about God*. Burleson claims that Paul Young, the author of *The Shack*, expresses just another, optional viewpoint about the atonement. He cited Al Mohler and Paul Young as both believing in the atonement but differing only on the issue of its extent. Mohler, following Calvin, believes that the atonement, the sacrifice of Christ for sin on the cross, was limited to providing atonement for believers only. Young believes it is for all human beings. At least this is how Paul Young has explained it to pastor Burleson.

Recently, John MacMurray, a supporter of Paul Young (note that he is named on the last page of the book, *Lies*), argued similarly and criticizes those who fault Young's theology.

Now my discussion is not just about what Burleson believes. For I suspect that many pastors are in the same position that Burleson is. They are influenced by their personal experience with Paul Young and give him the benefit of the doubt when it comes to understanding his theology. They fail to ask the right questions. But with his most recent publication Young has erased all doubt as to what he believes and how far apart he and Mohler truly are. For Burleson and other pastors to fail to recall their evangelical theology and church history is an inexcusable failure. They are uninformed how universal reconciliation has brought havoc to the church.

## **Paul Young's History and Mine**

Many pastors are being misled. I've known Paul Young probably far longer than most of them. Paul and I go back at least two decades. And in this time Paul has twisted the truth to accommodate his reputation as a "Christian" writer. Here is a summary of events. He renounced his "evangelical paradigm" and converted to universal reconciliation (UR) (in a 103-page forum paper in 2004); reaffirmed his new belief to me and my wife in a church foyer (probably in 2006 or so); wrote for his kids *The Shack*, which was full of universalism (about 2006); with two pastor friends took a year to remove the UR (2006-2007?); in my home before many witnesses said that he no longer believed UR (in 2007); published *The Shack*; then has written two more novels with UR as an undercurrent throughout (*Crossroads*, 2012; *Eve*, 2015). See my reviews and other articles at **[burningdowntheshackbook.com](http://burningdowntheshackbook.com)**.

During all this time, I've tried to warn Christians about the subtle propagation of UR that exists in his novels and now in the movie. I wrote my book, *Burning Down the Shack*, to clarify both what universalism is all about and how it has deceived many in the church and to show how it is embedded chapter by chapter in Paul's novel. Many people have neglected my warnings or downplayed them. Again my web site clarifies the heretical points of this universalism.

Now Paul's latest release confirms all my warnings. In *Lies We Believe about God*, Young deliberately takes on 28 statements that we Christians affirm and he dismisses them all as lies. He openly confesses allegiance to "universal reconciliation," that all people are already saved (p. 118). It is no longer a "hope." He writes this under the "lie" stated as "You need to get saved" (chap. 13).

So I say to Pastor Burleson and others like him: the argument is not just about the extent of the atonement. It is a question about whether there was an atonement at all! Young does not believe that

Jesus Christ took sinners' place to make an atonement for their sins on the cross—to provide propitiation. Young explicitly rejects penal substitution. If you don't believe me, ask him. Yes, Jesus died there. But it was not a place of judgment. Paul expands on this under a couple of other "lies": "The Cross was God's idea" (ch. 17; rather, Paul says that it was man's idea); "God requires child sacrifice" (ch. 19; here Young denies that the death of God's son was necessary to pay the penalty that God's justice required); "Hell is separation from God" (ch. 15; no, God is in hell, and he uses "fiery love" to bring all people to himself from there); "Sin separates us from God" (ch. 27; no, nothing including sin can ever separate any human being, whether a believer or not, from God; no one has ever been separated from God; all are "in God"); "Not everyone is a child of God" (ch. 24; no, all human beings are children of God: all were in Christ in his death and resurrection, and because Christ is in God, then all are in God); and "God is One alone" (ch. 28; here Young rejects his understanding of the Trinity as derived from his "evangelical Christian fundamentalism").

### **When Are Enough Lies Enough?**

So now I speak more directly. Pastor Burleson, and others, do you not see how these attacks on what we Christians "lie" about go to the very heart of the Gospel of the NT? Do you not see that there is no gospel or good news for you to preach, of how God judged our sins on the cross (Rom. 3:23-26), if you embrace these corrections of the "lies" that Christians make? Do you still think that this is simply a matter of the extent of the atonement? Do you preach that all people are equally children of God? How many more "lies" would Paul Young have to attack before you have finally had enough? How can you be a faithful shepherd of your flock if you deceive them with Young's teaching or downplay it the way you do? Note the Apostle Paul's words about distorting the gospel in 2 Cor. 2:17 and 4:2ff.

### **Some Final Concerns**

A couple other things you should note. First, you need to recall some history. UR has been a heresy propagated by heretics from the third century on, beginning with Origen. It was condemned as heresy in the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> centuries. It declined. Then with the freedom of inquiry that the Reformers promoted it found new life. It came to Colonial America in 1740 in the person of John Murray and became so popular that one out of every five *Baptist* ministers, it is said, converted to it. But God raised up other Baptists, such as Isaac Backus, to begin exposing it. It went into decline from 1850 or so for a hundred years. Now it is experiencing a resurgence again, through the writings of Young, McLaren, Talbott, and Bell, and others, and their apologists. I've written an entire book refuting UR.

Finally, one more thing you should note from my history with Paul Young. In 2007 he said before many witnesses including my pastor that he had given up his universalism but refused to tell us what he did believe. Now, with the book, *Lies*, he confesses (p. 118) that he has believed UR all along.

Does this account not reveal deceit? Does this not identify the author of *Lies* as a liar himself? Should this affect our understanding of his character?

These are heart-wrenching questions. But as a pastor you need to clarify where you stand—with Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior as revealed in the Bible or with Paul Young? It is the truth vs. *Lies*.

The Lord Jesus will keep building his church, in spite of *The Shack*. But it may be without you.

Some of you say that you "hope" or wish that universalism is true. To hope for something that God has never said, and contradicts what God says, makes one a friend of Satan and an enemy of Christ.

And don't ever align Paul Young with C.S. Lewis!