


GERRY BEAUCHEMIN

WITH

D. SCOTT REICHARD

THE TRILOGY



HOPE
Beyond HELL

“FEAR NOT, I ...HAVE THE KEYS OF HELL
AND OF DEATH.” - JESUS CHRIST

What others are saying...

“The magnificent love and wisdom of God has not been written about with such clarity since the days of the patriarchs. I applaud Gerry Beauchemin for producing this important book. I have waited twenty-five years for it.”

Michael Wm. Gross, D.D., Th.D., Ph.D., Maryland

“Everyone should read and study *Hope Beyond Hell*, a book of hope. Read it, understand it, and share its message with others.”

Harold Lovelace, M.Th, D.D. Author *Read and Search God’s Plan*, AL

“With great spiritual discernment and a heart attuned to the transforming love of God, Gerry Beauchemin has written a book that will, if you permit it, inspire love, peace, joy, and hope – all the fruit of the Spirit – in your own heart.”

Thomas Talbott, Professor Emeritus, Willamette University, Oregon. Author of *The Inescapable Love of God*

“I first learned, espoused, and taught the truths presented in this book over 40 years ago. *Hope Beyond Hell* encapsulates them better than any I have read.”

Bill Boylan, Ph.D., Author, Speaker, South Dakota

“This is an excellent book. Many who attend the churches of our day would do well to read *Hope Beyond Hell* and to study and think for themselves.”

Bob Evely, M.Div., Asbury Theological Seminary, Author of *At the End of the Ages*, Kentucky

“*Hope Beyond Hell* answers the questions we have been afraid to ask about God’s unfailing love and inexhaustible patience.”

Pastor Ivan A. Rogers, Former Bible College President, Author of *Judas Iscariot: Revisited and Restored*, Iowa

“As an instructor in Church History, *Hope Beyond Hell* is one of the most balanced studies available on the remedial judgments of God and the great truth of the restoration of all things in Christ. The author has done it in a logical, common sense way the average layman can understand. This is a book about the love of God.”

Rev. Terry Miller, M. Phil, Former Pres., Bethesda Mennonite Institute of the Bible, Former member of the House of Representatives, SD

“*Hope Beyond Hell* is a bold and impassioned plea for Christians of every stripe to consider the grand proposition that God’s goodness, grace and love reaches farther than most of us have ever dared to imagine. Gerry’s comprehensive research of the biblical record and extra-biblical sources is powerfully, even overwhelmingly compelling. All who read this book with a spiritual mind and listen with spiritual ears will receive a deepened revelation of Christ in God.”

Dr. Bruce A. Gerlach, Professor, College of the Ozarks, Missouri

“*Hope Beyond Hell* is a ‘must-read’ for those who have lost their way because they couldn’t reconcile a Bible declaring ‘God is Love,’ while simultaneously teaching that the fate of the sinner is eternal damnation. Layer by layer, concept by concept, this book will loose the

bonds of insanity that has plagued the Church for centuries.”

Grady Brown, M.Th, D.Litt., Director and founder of Dayspring Bible Ministries, Texas

“Hope Beyond Hell is one of the most concise books covering the subject of the righteous purpose of God’s judgment. The reader will see that God will not rest until He will become All in all (1Cor 15:28).”

Dr. Marian Paul Kampik, Silesian University, Poland

“Hope Beyond Hell is an excellent and well researched book. I have no doubt that the Holy Spirit is using Gerry at this very important time in Church history.”

Rev. Rod Walton CJ: Anglican Independent Communion, Founder of Bereavement Rescue, United Kingdom.

“Hope Beyond Hell explains the facts of God’s limitless grace and boundless love. It truly offers hope beyond hell. Carry a case to all funerals! This is the book I’ve been waiting for!”

Pastor Robert Rutherford, Speaker, Teacher, Songwriter, Georgia

“For decades I have questioned the need for and the justice of eternal punishment in light of God being ‘love.’ This is a well-researched book, providing fresh insights into the teachings of the Church Fathers, and difficult texts like Mat. 25 and Luke 16. Even if one does not agree with his conclusion, one does feel reassured about the extent of God’s love in Christ.”

H. Peter Kuiper, M.Div., Fuller Seminary, Ed.D, Nova University, CA

HOPE
Beyond HELL

THE RIGHTEOUS PURPOSE
OF GOD'S JUDGMENT.

BY
GERRY BEAUCHEMIN
WITH
D. SCOTT REICHARD
THE TRILOGY

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THE PROBLEM

Picture yourself as a missionary to the Muslim nation of Senegal, West Africa. The date? September 26, 2002. About a year prior, you befriended your neighbor, Abdou Ndieye, a Muslim merchant. Only a few weeks ago, he graciously accepted your invitation to study the Bible with you. You are thrilled. Abdou is the first Muslim with whom you have begun sharing the Good News.

Today you prepare to explore another portion of God's Word with him, but something terrible has happened. You cannot believe what you are hearing and seeing on the news. The Joola, a Senegalese ferry, has capsized killing almost 2,000 people. You remember that Abdou's wife, Astou, and his 14-year-old daughter, Fatou, are on that ship. You are in shock and cannot believe what you are seeing—a ship's underside sticking up out of the sea with helicopters hovering overhead. You hurry next door. As you knock on the door, you hear deep groans and wailing. You slowly enter. Abdou is prostrate on the floor. He pleads before Yalla (Wolof for Allah), "Why? Why? How could you let this happen?" He goes into spasms of weeping, beating his hands against the floor.

Feeling utterly helpless, you pray, "God help me comfort my friend."

Abdou lifts his eyes, hardly able to recognize you for the tears. "My wife and daughter have died a terrible death! Tell me I will see them again; tell me they are safe in God's arms! Has your Jesus taken them to His heaven?" You are lost for words. The silence is deafening.

"Answer me, Christian, will I see them again? Are they in a better place? Tell me!"

You remain speechless. What can you say? Where is the "Good News" when you need it most? (1)

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I thank God for His unfailing, unending love for all humanity.

I thank God for my wife Denise. Thank you for the sacrifices you have made. I appreciate your love, courage, understanding, encouragement, patience, insights, hard work, and prayers.

I am deeply thankful to my daughter Renée. Thank you for your hard work in editing and formatting and for your patience with me. It was such a joy and pleasure to do this project together with you.

I thank my friends, John, Gary, Steve, Dave and Rick; John and Gary for your understanding and encouragement, Steve for introducing me to this Hope, Dave for spurring me on, and Rick as the Herald!

Thanks to Derek and Pat McLean for your work of love in cover design and editing.

Thank you Charles, for your partnership in printing and distribution and for your summary on judgment.

Thank you Scott, for *The Trilogy* and for your commitment to labor with us in making this Hope known.

Thank you Gary, for your testimony! You and Michelle inspire me. You have brought Good News to the world!

DEDICATION

I DEDICATE THIS BOOK TO:

Our awesome and amazing God!

Christ's Body—that we would love God with all our hearts.

All those afflicted, distressed, and terrorized by the idea of everlasting punishment.

My family.

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REFERENCE MANUAL

This book, in a sense, is a reference manual containing a wealth of information that you can come back to repeatedly. It is written for both theologians and the rest of us. Chapter I is the longest and most technical. It identifies the key points on which belief in eternal punishment is based and explains why they are in error. Initially, for a lighter read, it may be helpful to start at chapter II and come back to chapter I later.

In order to provide the weight of Scriptural evidence this study demands for theologians, I had to abbreviate many passages. This is not uncommon among Christian authors. Rick Warren writes:

“Verse divisions and number were not included in the Bible until 1560 A.D., I have not always quoted the entire verse, but rather focused on the phrase that was appropriate. My model for this is Jesus and how he and the apostles quoted the Old Testament. They often just quoted a phrase to make a point.” (1)

I quote a number of writers who strengthen key points in my thesis but who may not profess it. See Bibliography (2). Italics and bolding are added for emphasis.

Quotations are from the NKJV unless otherwise noted.

Abbreviation Key

Old Testament

Ge. Genesis	2Ch. 2 Chronicles	Da. Daniel
Ex. Exodus	Ezr. Ezra	Hos. Hosea
Le. Leviticus	Ne. Nehemiah	Joe. Joel
Nu. Numbers	Es. Esther	Amo. Amos
De. Deuteronomy	Job	Oba. Obadiah
Jos. Joshua	Ps. Psalms	Jon. Jonah
Jud. Judges	Pr. Proverbs	Mic. Micah
Ru. Ruth	Ec. Ecclesiastes	Nah. Nahum
1S. 1 Samuel	So. Song of Solomon	Hab. Habbakuk
2S. 2 Samuel	Is. Isaiah	Zep. Zephaniah
1K. 1 Kings	Jer. Jeremiah	Hag. Haggai
2K. 2 Kings	La. Lamentations	Zec. Zechariah
1Ch. 1 Chronicles	Ez. Ezekiel	Mal. Malachi

New Testament

Mt. Matthew	Ep. Ephesians	He. Hebrews
Mk. Mark	Ph. Philippians	Ja. James
Lu. Luke	Col. Colossians	1Pe. 1 Peter
Jn. John	1Th. 1 Thessalonians	2Pe. 2 Peter
Ac. Acts	2Th. 2 Thessalonians	1Jn. 1 John
Ro. Romans	1Ti. Timothy	2Jn. 2 John
1Co. 1 Corinthians	2Ti. 2 Timothy	3Jn. 3 John
2Co. 2 Corinthians	Tit. Titus	Ju. Jude
Ga. Galatians	Phil. Philemon	Re. Revelation

Translations

CLT Concordant Lit. Translation. 1926	NEB New English Bible 1970
CVOT Concordant Version O.T. 2007	NIV New International Version 1973
DBY Darby Translation 1890	NKJV New King James Version(1982
DSB Daily Study Bible 1978	PME Philips Modern English 1972
GNT Good News Translation 1992	ROTH Rotherham Emphasized 1902
JB Jerusalem Bible 1966	RSV Revised Standard Version 1947
KJV King James Version 1611	WEY Weymouth Translation 1912
NAS New American Standard 1960	YLT Young's Literal Translation 1898

FOREWORD

LOVE NEVER FAILS! (1Co. 13:8) Words of victory, power, hope and encouragement. Oh, do we dare believe? Can it really be possible? For most of my life, I have embraced teachings built on well-defined arguments for why LOVE SOMETIMES FAILS. Not that it wanted to fail or lacked the power to succeed; it just didn't work out sometimes. As a matter of fact, it didn't work out most of the time. The simple but profound truth in this study has radically altered the way I now see the One who is Love.

Friends have warned me that truth can be found in the strangest places. The truth in this book found me on the road back from a medical outreach in the Aztec villages of Mexico. For the past few years, I had watched Gerry labor in what he calls his "helps" ministry for the Kingdom—a dental ministry where he would labor for days well into the night, demonstrating practically the Father's love. As we went on different outreaches, I came to notice a pattern—one that to this day continues: Gerry would be the first one up and running, working late into the night, with a gentle, caring spirit throughout. On the day scheduled for return, when everyone else would be packed and waiting, he was finishing up one last patient. After watching him for several clinics, I had to know what made him tick. What was his secret? As the trips down would sometimes take 8 to 10 hours, we had plenty of time to talk. The study you hold in your hands reflects his view of God, and the life I saw lived is the fruit of that. It is a simple truth that can be summed up in three mighty words—LOVE NEVER FAILS!

I confess that when I first heard him expound on this, it hit me like a ton of bricks. So simple and yet so radically different from that which I had heard all my life. A truth that will, as all truth does, set you free. When this truth caught up with me, I was marveling at God's never-ending love for Israel as shared by the Apostle Paul in Romans, in spite of their persistence in unbelief. With two little words, Gerry turned my world upside down, or should I say right side up, "Why Israel?" And with that began a deeper study into this One who is Love, who is working out His victory and will not stop until He becomes "all in all."

Come hear again the Good News shared by the angel with some shepherds one night outside of Bethlehem—Good News of great joy to all people! Rekindle the fire as you hear again of the One who is making all things new. Rejoice again as you ponder our Father who will not rest until all His children are safely home. Marvel at His wisdom in working out His master plan for the ages to see His will accomplished—that none should perish. Worship afresh the living God, who is the Savior of all men. Watch the Word unfold before you, as the mystery (hidden for ages) brings a peace that passes all understanding. Stand in amazement as you experience the One who is Love, doing what He does best—transforming His creation into His likeness. Our God truly is an awesome God and this study is another affirmation to His never-ending, never-failing LOVE.

My prayer for you as you journey through this was expressed so well by the Apostle Paul—"that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of Him, having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which He has called you....that according to the riches of His glory He may grant you to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man, and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may have power to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. Now to Him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to His power that is at work within

us, to Him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever. Amen!” (Ep. 1:17-18; 3:16-19 RSV; 3:20-21 NIV).

David Nuckols – 2006
Bread of Life Frontier Missions,
Brownsville, Texas

INTRODUCTION

Are you at peace regarding the eternal destiny of your children, parents, brothers, sisters, and grandparents? Are you experiencing abundant joy in your “personal” salvation while unsure if some of your dearest loved ones might suffer throughout eternity? How is that possible if you really love them as much as you love yourself? You see, we Christians have a problem, a very serious problem. The problem is our belief that hell is “eternal” and that most of humanity will suffer endlessly. Deep inside we know something is not right, but we suppress our questions and doubts because we “think” the Bible teaches it. What inner conflict rages within us! It is futile to find satisfying answers to the problems this issue raises. For example:

How can an all-powerful, all-knowing, and all-loving God create billions of people, knowing most will be tormented in hell forever?

Is the power of our “free will” to damn ourselves for eternity really absolute, exceeding the power of God’s “free will” to save us, His very own property? “All souls are mine” (Ez. 18:4). If so, who suffers most in eternal damnation, man or God who loves man with an everlasting love (Jer. 31:3)?

“How can Christ be considered greater than Adam if Adam has the power to condemn more people than Christ has the power to save?”

Please do not accept pat answers to these critical questions. Jesus commands us to judge for ourselves what is right (Lu 12:57). What is right about a punishment that never ends?

How has this teaching affected the spread of the “Good News”—the Gospel? Think about it. An “eternal” hell...

maligms God’s character before the world.

contradicts His unending and unfailing love for all people.

makes our worship stem more from fear than of true affection.

denies His unlimited power to accomplish all His will.

makes man’s will greater than God’s will.

infinitely minimizes Christ’s triumph over death and the evil one.

denies that Christ fully accomplished His mission on earth.

violates God’s divine witness revealed in every conscience.

negates the most glorious promises in the Bible.

ignores the testimony of the early Church.

robs most of us of true and lasting peace and joy.

affects what we become; like parent—like child.

hinders world evangelism. (Remember Abdou?)

“Test all things” (1Th. 5:21). Have you tested this teaching?

For most of my life the fear of hell stalked me, ever waiting for an opportune moment to raise its ugly head. Just the idea was like a sword slicing through me. It has been the greatest stumbling block to my faith. In fact, I almost gave up on Christianity because of it.

Hell is a horrifying thought. Millions have been terrorized by it. Some have even killed their children to spare them such a fate; remember Andrea Yates from Houston who drowned her five children? If we would truly grasp the horror of it, we would go insane. Our every waking moment would have to be spent snatching whoever we can out of the fire or nothing but constant guilt would torment us. Can you imagine the horror of suffering “forever?” What is a billion years? It is but a second in eternity. Who could possibly imagine such horror? What if you or one of your loved ones should go there? Does this thought affect how you feel about God?

This theme has gripped my heart as it afflicts millions of people and dishonors God before the world. After years of wrestling with this topic, studying the Bible, and reading the works of others, I have found that hell, whatever it consists of, is a judgment given from the disciplinal hand of a loving Father. Though the symbolism surrounding it seems severe, it ultimately serves a good and remedial purpose. One of our greatest presidents agreed. In *Abraham Lincoln the Christian*, William Johnson, stated:

Abraham Lincoln did not nor could not believe in the endless punishment of anyone of the human race. He understood punishment for sin to be a Bible doctrine; that the punishment was parental in its object, aim, and design, and intended for the good of the offender; hence it must cease when justice is satisfied. All that was lost by the transgression of Adam was made good by the atonement. (1)

That is the message of this book. It is indeed good news for those tormented over the destiny of lost loved ones! Millions in our land can relate. Though the subject is hell, the book is really about God. What is He like? A popular Christian cliché some time ago was: “God is good—all the time!” Well, you will find solid support for it here. God is good even in His judgments! They are not infinite and horrendously cruel, but just, righteous, and remedial.

If you think that I am manipulating the Scriptures in this book, then please leave it. But if not, be ready to fall in love with an amazing and wonderful God!

Tradition

*You invalidate the word of God
for the sake of your tradition.
(Mt. 15:6 NAS; Mt. 15:3,9)*

If religious leaders of Christ’s time could invalidate the word of God for the sake of tradition, is it not possible today? Is the Church somehow immune? Only in 1995 did the Southern Baptist Convention finally submit an official apology regarding their stand on slavery. (2) Yes, slavery used to be accepted in Christendom. Many debates took place for and against slavery with each side quoting the Bible. However, when one considers that the letter kills and the Spirit gives life, and our beliefs must harmonize with the spirit and tenor of the Bible as a whole, the argument against slavery takes on new force. The same applies with the case against an “eternal” hell.

Traditions endure for generations, are highly revered, and are extremely difficult to change. There are no harder forms of error to confront and correct. When Paul and Steven declared to their fellow Israelites that God’s mercy extended to the Gentiles, they were

stoned! Do we hold to any traditions for which Christ might rebuke us for? If we refuse to acknowledge any inconsistencies in our beliefs, how will we ever know?

This book examines the Augustinian tradition of everlasting punishment, so-called because it stems principally from the theology of Augustine, who is said to be the father of the western Church. (3) This tradition assumes that the vast majority of the human race will never be saved. This is based on passages such as, “Narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it.” (See #9 Appendix V). However is this what Christ meant by these words? This book presents abundant Scriptural evidence why this could not be what Christ and the Apostles taught.

Most Christians have not fully thought through the serious implications of this tradition. In essence, it teaches that an all-powerful and all loving God has created a world knowing full well the majority of His creation would spend eternity in suffering. How can this be?

Although this is what tradition assumes, most Christians, in their heart of hearts, do not embrace it. In *Hell Under Fire*, Daniel Block, professor of systematic theology at Westminster Theological Seminary, wrote, “The traditional doctrine of hell now bears the marks of *odium theologicum*—Its defenders are seemingly few.” (4) Though its defenders may be few, the doctrine itself continues to terrorize millions.

The tradition that an all-knowing, all-loving, and all-powerful God would create a world where the majority of His human creatures are destined to spend eternity in suffering is incomprehensible. What greater horror has the world ever known?

Implications

These people draw near with their mouths and honor Me with their lips, but have removed their hearts far from Me, and their fear toward Me is taught by the commandment of men.
(Is. 29:13)

What is this passage saying? It is warning us about a fear toward God taught by the commandment of men. Could Augustine’s teaching on hell be just such a commandment? Certainly, it removes our hearts far from God! Can we honestly say our affection toward God has not been influenced by this horrid doctrine? Has the thought that God might punish you or your loved ones forever in hell ever hindered your love toward Him?

This tradition seriously affects our understanding of God, including our whole outlook on life and how we relate to people. Do we not reflect, at least to a degree, the character of the God we worship? If we think seriously about the implications of this teaching, it will lead to certain undeniable conclusions as mentioned on page 15.

Confronting Our Tradition

A tradition begins when someone’s interpretation (in this case Augustine’s) is accepted by others and passed down through the generations. How many Hindus, Buddhists, Muslims, and Christians hold to beliefs solely because they have been passed down to them? Should we not critically evaluate for ourselves our traditions? “Test all things; hold fast what is good” (1 Th. 5:21). “Why do you not judge for yourselves what is right” (Lu. 12:57)? Christ strongly warns us about our traditions (Mt. 15:3, 6, 9). Perhaps you have struggled with hell as I have. Maybe you have longed that somehow, in this case, tradition is wrong. If so, read on. But before starting, let us consider one important point.

The Scriptures

The Bible has been translated from ancient tongues and cultures by men who carry their own ideas into their translations. They cannot help reading the ancient manuscripts through the lens of their personal theology. They are only human. Since most of our translators have held the doctrine of eternal torment, they unwittingly filtered all they translated from that mindset. That is why we must constantly be on our guard, like the Bereans (Ac. 17:11), comparing Scripture with Scripture based on the original Greek and Hebrew words. “Ye do err, not knowing the Scriptures...” (Mt. 22:29 KJV).

Unless God gives us ears to hear, the Bible will remain a mystery (Pr. 20:12; Lu. 8:8). For unless He opens our minds and hearts, we toil in vain. “For our sufficiency is from God and not of the letter...for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life” (2Co. 3:5, 6). The Ku Klux Klan is known to have based its evil actions on the “letter” of Scripture, but did the Klan know its Spirit? (5) “Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth” (2Ti. 2:15).

To help you rightly divide the word of truth, I submit to you the following five principles of interpretation for your consideration:

Pray for understanding.

Trust Scripture to interpret Scripture, not man.

Base your beliefs on the total forest of Scripture, not a few trees.

Put aside what your spirit reveals is not right or good until the Lord resolves the issue in your heart (1Th. 5:21; Lu. 12:57).

Remember that the ancient eastern custom was to use language in the most vivid possible way. (6) (Appendix V, #18)

“Are you not therefore mistaken, because you do not know the Scriptures nor the **power** of God?” (Mk. 12:24)? I encourage you to meditate on the Scriptures presented in this study, for they focus strongly on God’s power. Follow the example of the Bereans, who were “more noble” than the rest, for they did not just take someone’s word for it, but searched it out for themselves (Ac. 17:11). You may find *The Word Study Concordance*, by George Wigram and Ralph Winter helpful as it lists words according to Greek usage, not English. You do not need to know Greek to use it. Winter explained:

The Word Study Concordance traces not English but Greek words. You can find listed every passage where a given Greek word occurs regardless of how many different ways it may be translated into English. Even the best lexicons are basically some scholar’s reflections on the data drawn from a concordance. Once you have read these Bible passages yourself, you have acquired something no dictionary can easily give you—a certain instinctive feel for the word. You have become conditioned by the actual use of the word (which is the most normal and reliable way to learn any word in any language), not to equate it to some other word. Students often try to short-circuit this process and go directly to a lexicon. (7)

Since this book has no index, we invite you to download the book free from our website. Use the “find” feature on your computer to look up words, topics, and Scriptures.

With a humble spirit and prayerful attitude, let us look intently into God’s written revelation seeking to understand His character and purpose in His judgments. We will start by critically examining the key points (pillars) on which belief in everlasting punishment is based.

CHAPTER ONE

PILLARS

Examining the scriptures...to see if these things were so.
(Ac. 17:11 NAS)

Test all things: hold fast what is good” (1Th. 5:21). The doctrine of everlasting punishment, in my view, is erroneously supported by four pillars. These pillars represent a misunderstanding of three key Greek words, and one concept. They are *Aion*, *Gehenna*, *Apollumi*, and “Free” Will. Once these are understood as the biblical writers understood them, our comprehension of God’s judgments take on a glorious new meaning.

***Aion* and *Aionios* (adjective)**

The first pillar we will examine is the Greek words, *aion* and *aionios*. They are mostly translated “eternal,” “everlasting,” and for “ever” in the King James Version. However, some translations read “age-abiding,” “age-during,” or “eon,” as noted below. “Robert Young, author of the highly respected *Young’s Analytical Concordance*, in his literal translation of the Bible, always translates it ‘age’ and never once as ‘everlasting,’ or ‘eternal.’” (1)

Old Testament (Greek Septuagint)

In *History of Opinions on the Scriptural Doctrine of Retribution*, Edward Beecher, D.D., pointed out:

The Septuagint is the Greek translation of the Old Testament and was the Bible of the early church. The word *aion* occurs in it about four hundred times in every variety of combination. The adjective *aionios* derived from it, is used over one hundred times....*Aion* denoted an age, great or small, so the adjective *aionios* expressed the idea pertaining to or belonging to the *aion*, whether great or small. But in every case this adjective derives its character and duration from the *aion* to which it refers. (2)

In the Septuagint the Greek word, *aion*, is used to translate the Hebrew word *olam*. Thus, if we want to get a sense of the N.T. meaning of *aion*, we need to understand the meaning of *olam* in the O.T. Numerous passages referring to *olam* show clearly it cannot mean “never-ending” in those texts. Note these few:

Jonah was in the fish forever [*olam*]. But only *until* he left three days later (Jon. 1:17; 2:6).

Sodom's fiery judgment is eternal [*olam*]. But only *until* God returns them to their former state (Ez. 16:53-55; Ju. 7).

A Moabite is forbidden to enter the Lord's congregation forever [*olam*]. But only *until* the 10th generation. (De. 23:3).

Hills are everlasting [*olam*]. But only *until* made low and the earth is burned up (Ge. 49:26; De. 33:15; Is. 40:4; 2Pe. 3:10).

Mountains are everlasting [*olam*]. But only *until* they are scattered (Hab. 3:6).

A slave serves his master forever [*olam*]. But only *until* death ends his servitude (Ex. 21:6).

The Mosaic covenant is everlasting [*olam*]. But only *until* it vanishes away (Le. 24:8; He. 8:7-13).

The Aaronic priesthood is everlasting [*olam*]. But only *until* the likeness of Melchizedek arises (Ex. 40:15; Nu. 25:13; He. 7:14-22).

These "stones" are to be a memorial forever [*olam*]. Where are they now (Jos. 4:7)?

The leprosy of Naaman shall cling forever [*olam*]. But only *until* his death, of course (2K. 5:27).

God dwells in Solomon's temple forever [*olam*]. But only *until* it is destroyed (2Ch. 7:16; 1K 8:13; 9:3).

Animal sacrifices were to be offered forever [*olam*]. But only *until* ended by the work of Christ (2Ch. 2:4; He. 7:11-10:18).

Circumcision was an everlasting [*olam*] covenant. But only *until* the new covenant (Ge. 17:9-13; 1Co. 7:19; Ga. 5:6).

Israel's judgment lasts forever [*olam*]. But only *until* the Spirit is poured out and God restores it (Is. 32:13-15).

I will make you an eternal [*olam*] excellence. But only *until* many generations (Is. 60:15).

As we can see, *olam* does not mean "eternal" though it can last a very long time. Also, "forever and ever" is not an accurate translation. How can you add "ever" to "forever?" The literal translation is "*for the eon [olam] and further.*" This makes sense. The Concordant Version Old Testament is consistent here. Consider two examples:

He [David] asked life from You; You will give it to him: Length of days for an eon [*olam*] *and further* (Ps. 21:4 CVOT).

He has founded the earth on its bases. It shall never slip for the eon [*olam*] *and further* (Ps. 104:5 CVOT).

Even passages that do not use the word *olam*, but signify unchanging, are not so when God is involved. Nothing can deter Him from achieving His purposes. For example:

Israel's affliction is incurable. But only *until* the Lord restores health and heals her wounds (Jer. 30:12, 17).

Samaria's wounds are incurable. But only *until* the Lord brings them back and restores them (Mic. 1:9; Ez. 16:53).

Egypt and Elam will rise no more. But only *until* the Lord brings back their captives (Jer. 25:27; 49:39; Ez. 29:14).

Moab is destroyed. But only *until* the Lord brings back the captives of Moab (Jer. 48:4, 42, 47).

New Testament

Consider the N. T. use of *aion*. Does "eternity" make any sense in the following passages? To make my point unmistakable, I have translated the Greek word *aion* with the English word "eternity."

What will be the sign...of the *end of the eternity* (Mt. 24:3)?

I am with you...to the *end of the eternity* (Mt. 28:20).

The sons of *this eternity* are more shrewd (Lu. 16:8).

The sons of *this eternity* marry (Lu. 20:34).

Worthy to attain *that eternity* (Lu. 20:35).

Since *the eternity* began (Jn. 9:32; Ac. 3:21).

Conformed to *this eternity* (Ro. 12:2).

Mystery kept secret *since the eternity* began *but now* made manifest (Ro. 16:25-26).

Where is the disputer of *this eternity* (1Co. 1:20)?

Wisdom of *this eternity*, nor of the rulers of *this eternity*...ordained *before the eternities*...which none of the rulers of *this eternity*... (1Co. 2:6-8)

Wise in *this eternity* (1Co. 3:18).

Upon whom the *ends of the eternities* have come. (1Co. 10:11)

God of *this eternity* has blinded (2Co. 4:4).

Deliver us from *this present evil eternity* (Ga. 1:4).

Not only in *this eternity* but also in that *which is to come* (Ep. 1:21).

Walked according to *the eternity* of *this world* (Ep. 2:2).

In *the eternities* to come (Ep. 2:7).

From the *beginnings of the eternities* (Ep. 3:9).

Hidden *from eternities*...*but now*...*revealed* (Col. 1:26).

Loved *this present eternity* (2Ti. 4:10).

Receive him *for eternity* (Philemon.1:15). Does this mean forever or only until Onesimus dies?

Powers of *the eternity* to come (He. 6:5).

At the *end of the eternities* (He. 9:26).

We understand *the eternities* have been prepared by a saying of God (He. 11:3).

How can we say...

“Before eternity” or “eternity began”? Eternity has no beginning (Jn. 9:32; Ac. 3:21; 1Co. 2:7; Ep. 3:9).

“Present eternity,” “eternity to come,” and “end of eternity?” Eternity transcends time. Only God is eternal (Mt. 24:3; 28:20; 1Co. 10:11; 2Ti. 4:10; He. 6:5; 9:26).

“This eternity,” “that eternity,” or “eternities”? There is only one eternity (Lu. 16:8; 20:34-35; Ro. 12:2; 1Co. 1:20; 2:6-8; 3:18; 10:11; 2Co. 4:4; Ga. 1:4; Ep. 1:21; 2:2, 7; 3:9; Col. 1:26; 2Ti. 4:10; He. 11:3).

“Eternal secret” if the secret is revealed? (Ro. 16:25-26; Col. 1:26). It is no longer a “secret” at that point.

Onesimus will be Philemon’s slave for eternity? Is he still his slave (Phil. 1:15)?

Scores of passages demonstrate that *aion* is of limited duration. In his book *God’s Methods with Man*, G. Campbell Morgan (scholar, associate of D.L. Moody, and a highly respected expositor of Scripture), said:

Let me say to Bible students that we must be very careful how we use the word “eternity.” We have fallen into great error in our constant use of that word. There is no word in the whole Book of God corresponding with our “eternal,” which, as commonly used among us, means absolutely without end. The strongest Scripture word used with reference to the existence of God, is—“unto the ages of the ages,” which does not literally mean eternally. (3)

In his *Word Studies in the New Testament*, Marvin Vincent, D.D., Baldwin Professor of Sacred Literature at Union Theological Seminary, New York, explained:

Aion, transliterated *aeon*, is a period of longer or shorter duration, having a beginning and an end, and complete in itself. Aristotle (*peri ouravou*, i. 9, 15) said, “The period which includes the whole time of one’s life is called the *aeon* of each one.” Hence, it often means the life of a man, as in Homer, where one’s life (*aion*) is said to leave him or to consume away (Il v.685; Od v.160). It is not, however, limited to human life. It signifies any period in the course of the millennium, the mythological period before the beginnings of history. The word has not “a stationary and mechanical value” (De Quincey). It does not mean a period of a fixed length for all cases. There are as many aeons as entities, the respective durations of which are fixed by the normal conditions of the several entities. There is one *aeon* of a human life, another of the life of a nation, another of a crow’s life, another of an oak’s life. The length of the *aeon* depends on the subject to which it is attached... The adjective *aionious* in like manner carries the idea of time. Neither the noun nor the adjective, in themselves, carry the sense of endless or everlasting. They may acquire that sense by their connotation....*Aionios* means “enduring through” or “pertaining to a period of time.” Both the noun and the adjective are applied to limited periods....Out of the 150 instances in LXX, [Greek Old Testament] four-fifths imply limited duration. For a few instances, see Gen. xlvi. 4; Num. x. 8; xv. 15; Prov. xxii. 28; Jonah ii.6; Hab. iii. 6; Isa lxi. 17. (4)

So what if the Greek word *aion* has been erroneously translated “eternal” instead of “age”? What does that have to do with everlasting punishment? It has much to do with it, since one of the key texts used in defense of the Augustinian view of hell is Mt. 25:46: “And these will go away into everlasting [*aionios*] punishment.” Does *aionios* mean everlasting in this passage? The Biblical evidence I have found reveals that it does not.

Consider how the following translations word this phrase:

Young’s Literal Translation: “punishment age-during.”

Rotherham Translation: “age-abiding correction.”

Weymouth Translation: “punishment of the ages.”

Concordant Literal Translation: “chastening *eonian*.”

These reputable translations use the word “age” and not “eternal.” These two concepts are diametrically opposed to one another. They are not the same by any means. An age has a beginning and an end; eternity does not.

Augustine raised the argument that since *aionios* in Mt. 25:46 referred to both life and punishment, it had to carry the same duration in both cases. (5) However, he failed to consider that the duration of *aionios* is determined by the subject to which it refers. For example, when *aionios* referred to the duration of Jonah’s entrapment in the fish, it was limited to three days. To a slave, *aionios* referred to his life span. To the Aaronic priesthood, it referred to the generation preceding the Melchizedek priesthood. To Solomon’s temple, it referred to 400 years. To God it encompasses and transcends time altogether.

Thus, the word cannot have a set value. It is a relative term and its duration depends upon that with which it is associated. It is similar to what “tall” is to height. The size of a tall building can be 300 feet, a tall man six feet, and a tall dog three feet. Black Beauty was a great horse, Abraham Lincoln a great man, and Yahweh the GREAT God. Though God is called “great,” the word “great” is neither eternal nor divine. The horse is still a horse. An adjective relates to the noun it modifies. In relation to God, “great” becomes GREAT only because of who and what God is. This silences the contention that *aion* must always mean forever because it modifies God. God is described as the God of Israel and the God of Abraham. This does not mean He is not the God of Gentiles, or the God of you and me. Though He is called the God of the “ages,” He nonetheless remains the God who transcends the ages.

In addition, Augustine’s reasoning does not hold up in light of Ro. 16:25, 26 and Hab. 3:6. Here, in both cases, the same word is used twice—with God and with something temporal. “In accord with the revelation of a secret hushed in times *eonian*, yet manifested now...according to the injunction of the *eonian* God” (Ro. 16:25, 26 CLT). An *eonian* secret revealed at some point cannot be eternal even though it is revealed by the *eonian* God. *Eonian* does not make God eternal, but God makes *eonian* eternal. “And the everlasting [*aionios* – Greek Septuagint] mountains were scattered...His ways are everlasting [*aionios*]” (Hab. 3:6). Mountains are not eternal, though they will last a very long time. God’s ways however, are eternal, because He is eternal.

Matthew 25:46 contains an additional clue confirming the temporary nature of God’s judgment. The Greek word, translated “punishment,” is *kolasis*. William Barclay, world-renowned Greek scholar, translator, and author of the popular Bible commentary, *The Daily Study Bible and New Testament Words*, noted:

The Greek word for punishment here [Mt. 25:46] is *kolasis*, which was not originally an ethical word at all. It originally meant the pruning of trees to make them grow better. I

think it is true to say that in all Greek secular literature *kolasis* is never used of anything but remedial punishment. (6)

Thomas Talbott, philosophy professor at Willamette University in Oregon and author of *The Inescapable Love of God*, explained:

According to Aristotle, there is a difference between revenge and punishment; the latter (*kolasis*) is inflicted in the interest of the sufferer, the former (*timōria*) in the interest of him who inflicts it, that he may obtain satisfaction. Plato also appealed to the established meaning of *kolasis* as support for his theory that virtue could be taught: “For if you will consider punishment (*kolasis*)...and what control it has over wrong-doers, the facts will inform you that men agree in regarding virtue as procured.” Even where a punishment may seem harsh and unforgiving, more like retribution than parental chastisement, this in no way excludes a corrective purpose. Check out the punishment that Paul prescribes in I Corinthians 5:5. One might never have guessed that, in prescribing such a punishment—that is, delivering a man to Satan for the destruction of the flesh—Paul had in mind a corrective purpose, had Paul not explicitly stated the corrective purpose himself (“that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus”). So as this text illustrates, even harsh punishment of a seemingly retributive kind can in fact serve a redemptive purpose. (7-9)

“And these will go away into everlasting [*aionian*] punishment [*kolasis*], but the righteous into eternal [*aionian*] life” (Mt. 25:46). Isn’t it ironic that the passage most often used to support everlasting punishment is in fact one strongly opposing it when accurately understood?

Dr. Helena Keizer is a trustworthy authority on the definition of *aiōn* in ancient Greek literature, including the Bible in the time of Christ. Keizer published a 315-page doctoral dissertation titled: “Life, Time, Eternity – A Study of *Aiōn* in Greek Literature and Philosophy, the Septuagint and Philo.” Presented on September 7, 1999 in Holland, at Amsterdam University. Keizer stated:

“*Olām* and hence *aiōn* in the Biblical sense is time constituting the human temporal horizon.” (29) “Our study has led to the conclusion that infinity is not an intrinsic or necessary connotation of *aiōn*, either in the Greek or in the Biblical usage (*‘olām*).” (30) “To speak of ‘this *aiōn*’, its ‘end,’ and ‘the *aiōn* to come’ clearly lends to *aiōn* the meaning of a limited time.” (31) “The following description of Gregory of Nyssa...makes a good finishing point for now: ‘*Aeon* designates temporality, that which occurs within time.’” (32)

I am pleased to say that Dr. Keizer has given me permission to share her book with others in electronic format.

Terms for Eternity is another scholarly work on *aiōn* by David Konstan and Ilaria Ramelli. Konstan is the John Rowe Workman Distinguished Professor of Classics and Professor of Comparative Literature, at Brown University in R.I. Ramelli is Assistant Professor of Ancient Philosophy at the Catholic University of Milan, Italy. They agree with the conclusions of Dr. Keizer. They wrote:

“Apart from the Platonic philosophical vocabulary, which is specific to few authors, *aiónios* does not mean “eternal”; it acquires this meaning only when it refers to God, and only because the notion of eternity was included in the conception of God: for the rest, it has a wide range of meanings and its possible renderings are multiple, but it does not mean “eternal.” In particular when it is associated with life or punishment, in the Bible

and in Christian authors who keep themselves close to the Biblical usage, it denotes their belonging to the world to come.” (Page 238)

These scholarly works are important, as the key defense of eternal punishment depends on this word meaning absolute eternity. For more on the meaning of *aiōn*, see our website: HopeBeyondHell.net; Further Study; Eternity, and Church History.

Alternative Views

Aionian (eternal), when associated with God, may simply refer to that which comes forth from Him and relates to His purposes; a quality of essence rather than of duration. Is this not what our Lord intends in John 17:3: “And this is eternal life, that they may know You.” If this is so, perhaps the Matthew passage could be paraphrased this way: “And these will go away into the chastisement of God, but the righteous into the life of God.” Professor Talbott confirmed this:

When the letter of Jude describes the fire that consumed Sodom and Gomorrah as “eternal fire,” the point is not that the fire literally burns forever without consuming the cities; it is not that the fire continues to burn even today. The point is that the fire is a form of divine judgment upon those cities...that has its causal source in the eternal God himself. And similar for Jesus’ reference to “eternal fire” in Matthew 25:41 and to “eternal punishment” in Matthew 25:46. The fire to which he alludes is not eternal in the sense that it burns forever without consuming anything—without consuming, for example, that which is false within a person (see 1 Co. 3:15)—and neither is the punishment eternal in the sense that it continues forever without accomplishing its corrective purpose. Both the fire and the punishment are eternal in the sense that they have their causal source in the eternal God himself. (10)

Similarly, Barclay wrote:

The simplest way to put it is that *aionios* cannot be used properly of anyone but God; it is the word uniquely, as Plato saw it, of God. Eternal punishment is then literally that kind of remedial punishment which it befits God to give and which only God can give. (11)

Talbott continued:

The Gospel writers thought in terms of two ages, the present age and the age to come, and they associated the age to come with God himself; it was an age in which God’s presence would be fully manifested, his purposes fully realized, and his redemptive work eventually completed. They therefore came to employ the term, “*αἰώνιος*,” [*aionios*] as an eschatological [doctrine of end times] term, one that functioned as a handy reference to the realities of the age to come. In this way, they managed to combine the more literal sense of “that which pertains to an age” with the more religious sense of “that which manifests the presence of God in a special way.” Eternal life, then, is not merely life that comes from God; it is also the mode of living associated with the age to come. And similarly for eternal punishment: It is not merely punishment that comes from God; it is also the form of punishment associated with the age to come. Now in none of this is there any implication that the life that comes from God and the punishment that comes from God are of an equal duration.” (12)

Likewise, Beecher demonstrated that in the days of the early church the idea was “punishment of the world to come.” The early Church establishes that fact through the

ancient creeds. In fact, in none of its creeds did the early Church teach everlasting punishment. (13)

Arguing that eternal punishment must be of unending duration because it is contrasted with eternal life (Mt. 25:46), misses the point. It fails to recognize that eternal life is a quality of relationship with God (Jn. 17:3), and is an end in itself; while eternal punishment is God's corrective discipline and a means to an end. In any case, whether *aion* means "age-abiding," "of God," or "of the world to come," none of these expressions state, imply, or require that the punishment be never-ending.

So then, if *aion* does not strictly mean eternal, what word does? There are a number of Greek words that imply eternal. They are usually translated "indestructible," "imperishable," "unfading," "immortality," and "incorruptible." See Ro. 1:23; 2:7; 1Co. 9:25; 15:42, 51-54; He. 7:15-16; 1Pe. 1:3-4; 5:4; 1Ti. 1:17; 6:16; 2Ti. 1:10.

Our hope of immortality does not reside in the word *aion* but in God's very nature (unfailing love and unlimited power) and promises. (See Appendix I). So long as we have a flawed understanding of this four letter Greek word, we will remain blinded to the truth in relation to God's judgments.

I recommend that you also read *The History of Opinions on the Scriptural Doctrine of Retribution* by Dr. Edward Beecher. I found his findings conclusive. You may read it on our website: HopeBeyondHell.net, Further Study, Church History.

Fire of Gehenna

The second pillar in support of the doctrine of everlasting punishment is *Gehenna*. It is one of three words translated "hell" in the New Testament. It is the most common, used twelve times. *Hades* is used eleven times, and *Tartarus* only once. William Barclay stated:

Gehenna...means the Valley of Hinnom, a valley to the southwest of Jerusalem. It was notorious as the place where Ahaz had introduced the fire worship of the heathen God Molech, to whom little children were burned....2 Chronicles 28:2-4. Josiah had stamped out that worship and ordered that the valley should be forever after an accursed place...it became the place where the refuse of Jerusalem was cast out and destroyed. It was a kind of public incinerator. Always the fire smoldered in it, and a pall of thick smoke lay over it, and bred a loathsome kind of worm which was hard to kill (Mark 9:44-48). So *Gehenna*, the Valley of Hinnom, became identified in people's minds with all that was accursed and filthy, the place where useless and evil things were destroyed.(14) See #1 Appendix V.

Hades is the Greek word for the Hebrew, *Sheol*, which the *New Strong's Concise Dictionary* defines as "unseen," the place (state) of departed souls. (15) Throughout the Old Testament it refers to the state following death for both righteous and unrighteous. The NIV translates it "grave" or "death." *Tartarus* is a holding area prior to judgment for angels who have sinned (2Pe. 2:4).

Gehenna is not mentioned in the Old Testament or by John, Paul, Peter, Jude, or James in all their writings (except once indirectly regarding the tongue—Ja. 3:6). Nor is it mentioned in the book of Acts or Hebrews. Jesus uses the term on what seems like only four occasions. (A few times He seems to refer to this judgment but without using the term. Mt. 3:10-12; 7:19; 13:40-50; 25:41) If *Gehenna* were truly eternal and purposeless agony as claimed, how can such a horrible fate—to which most people are destined—not be warned against everywhere? How can we explain this?

The First Time “*Gehenna*” Is Used by Christ

[Turn to Mt. 5:21-22.]

At the very outset of the New Testament, Christ established the limited nature of the *Gehenna* judgment. This is extremely significant. For in the context of His first mention of it, He confirmed the Mosaic code of justice: “An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth” (Mt. 5:38 derived from Ex. 21:24; Mt. 5:17-19). This code established that each crime merits a just and fit punishment, one obviously measurable: “You shall give life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burn for burn, wound for wound, stripe for stripe” (Ex. 21:23-25). If Christ understood *Gehenna* to be everlasting, He could not have associated it with the Mosaic code. What is measurable about everlasting? And furthermore, He specifically confirmed this by saying that the same measure we use on others will be used on us! (Mt. 7:2). This indicates *Gehenna* is not eternal. For example, no derogatory remark (fool) afflicts everlasting pain, and therefore cannot merit everlasting punishment in return.

[Turn to Mt. 5:23-26.]

“Prison” here is a metaphor for *Gehenna*. This harmonizes with the “prison” of 1Pe. 3:19, and the Father’s sentence of Mt. 18:34-35. It is directly linked to *Gehenna* in the preceding verse (Mt. 5:22) by the word “therefore,” and it is immediately followed by another *Gehenna* judgment in the very next passage (Mt. 5:27-32). Thus, Mt. 5:23-26 is “sandwiched” between two *Gehenna* judgments. The final clincher is that the Lord identifies the *Gehenna* judgment as a most serious judgment we are all to fear. He says, “Truly (Assuredly NKJV) I say unto you.” That is serious. What other judgment could he possibly be referring to in this context but the *Gehenna* judgment?

“Truly I say to you, you will not come out of there [*Gehenna*] until you have paid up the last cent.” The word “until” unmistakably confirms *Gehenna* is of a limited duration. Once the penalty is exacted, release follows, but not before. Note He addressed these words to a mixed audience of believers and unbelievers (Mt. 5:1; 7:28; 8:1). (See also Mt. 18:34-35).

[Turn to Mt. 5:27-30.]

Here, He describes the consequences of sinning lustfully. We can all imagine the scene—not pleasant. Nevertheless, these are concepts we can identify with in this physical world. With *Gehenna*, however, we know little. We have to trust Christ implicitly. So what does He say? It is “more profitable” to lose an eye or a hand, than to experience *Gehenna*. That’s it. That is all He chose to say. If *Gehenna* were truly unending and horrible beyond what we can imagine, how could He describe it merely as “less profitable”? Is this all He could say to contrast momentary and unending pain? Such a phrase can only describe another finite penalty, though to a degree more severe.

For the continuing exposition of Christ’s use of *Gehenna*, including: “Fire not Quenched,” “Refining Fire,” “Undying Worm,” and “Lake of Fire.” See Appendix V #1.

Whatever judgment fire entails, we can be confident it conforms to the character of our Father. “He is like a refiner’s fire...He will sit as a refiner and a purifier of silver; He will purify the sons of Levi...that they may offer to the Lord an offering in righteousness”(Mal. 3:2-3). Please note that His judgment fire is administered in the presence of the Lamb who was slain for us *from the foundation of the world* (Re. 14:10; 13:8). He certainly will not rest day and night as He looks on our sufferings with His unchanging heart of compassion (Mt. 9:36; He. 13:8). Everything God does was planned before the world began. *Gehenna* was not something God was forced to create because man surprised or disappointed Him. Nothing is an afterthought. All things serve His good purposes for His creation, a creation which He declared to be, “indeed” very good (Ge. 1:31). God controls world! (1Pe. 1:18-20; 1Co. 2:7; Ep. 1:4; 2Tim. 1:9; Titus 1:2.)

(For the following three references, see #1 Appendix V)

Apollumi

(Greek for “destruction”)

The third pillar, death and destruction, is thought by most Christians to refer to an eternal hell of suffering or to a state of annihilation. Thus, they are understood to be a permanent state. I think if we closely compare Scripture with Scripture, line upon line, we will see this falls short of what God is all about. Even in death and destruction, God will not be defeated. His promises to restore all (Ac. 3:21; 2Co. 5:19; Ep. 1:10; Col. 1:19-21) will come to pass in their appointed times (Ep. 1:9-11; 1Ti. 2:6). In *An Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words* regarding *apollumi*, W. E. Vine stated: “The idea is not extinction but ruin, loss, not of being, but of well being....” (16)

Andrew Jukes, graduate of Harrow and Trinity College, Cambridge and pastor of St. John’s Church, was a well-respected Christian author in 19th century England. Also, the author of *The Law of the Offerings, Four Views of Christ, Types in Genesis, The Names of God, and the Restitution of all Things*, he wrote:

Death for man is simply an end to, or separation from, some given form of life which he has lived in... We must... by Christ die to this dark spirit-world [Mk. 8:35], to return to live in God’s light-world [Jn. 8:12; 12:46]... [It] is a ceasing from some particular form of life which has been lived in by man [Ro. 6:11], yet it is never non-existence absolutely [Jn. 12:24]; rather the means to bring the fallen creature into a new life [Ro. 6:4], a chaos being ever the necessary condition for a new creation [2 Co. 5:17]. (17)

Here are a few passages for you to think about:

You [Adam] shall surely die (Ge.2:17).

You [Israel] shall surely perish [apollomi—Septuagint (18)] (De. 30:18).

I kill and I make alive; I wound and I heal (De. 32:39).

He destroys [apollumi—Septuagint (19)] the blameless and the wicked (Job 9:22).

The righteous perishes [apollumi—Septuagint (20)], and no man takes it to heart (Is. 57:1).

The wineskins are marred [apollumi] (Mk. 2:22 KJV).

He is not the God of the dead... for all live to Him (Lu. 20:38).

If it [grain of wheat] dies, it produces much grain (Jn. 12:24).

He who has died has been freed from sin (Ro. 6:7; 7:9; 8:6; 2Co. 4:11; Ep. 2:1; 1Ti. 5:6).

Neither death nor life...shall be able to separate us from the love of God (Ro. 8:38-39).

What you sow is not made alive unless it dies (1Co. 15:36).

Death is swallowed up in victory (1Co. 15:54).

Please take a moment to reflect on what we have just read. Adam died on the same day he sinned, yet lived 900 more years. Israel perished. The blameless were destroyed. The righteous perished. Wineskins were marred. The dead are alive to God. Death produces grain and frees from sin. Death cannot separate from God’s love. What is sown is not made alive unless it dies. Utter or permanent annihilation cannot be the true meaning of death and destruction in any of these cases. Destruction is the prerequisite for subsequent change. Is this

not what the cross is all about in the life of the believer? He kills and makes alive. He destroys to make new.

The Cross

Andrew Jukes wrote:

The meaning of Christ's cross is not understood, but rather perverted and therefore death is shrunk from. It is not welcomed as God's appointed means to deliver us from him that has the power of death...Christians misunderstand destruction and judgment are the only way for fallen creatures to be delivered from their bondage, and brought back into God's life... This is a point of all importance. It lies at the very root of the cross of Christ and of His members. It is the clue to all His judgments, who "kills and makes alive," who "brings down to the grave and brings up" [1Sa. 2:6; Dt. 32:39]. The way of life is and must be through death...and cannot be otherwise. (21)

As followers of Jesus Christ, we have been called to carry our cross, to die (Mk. 8:34; Jn. 12:24-25). Unless we do, we will not have His life abiding in us (Jn. 15:4-5). We are to partake of the divine nature (2Pe. 1:3-12). What does this mean except that we are to die? Our salvation is not brought to perfection until we have died to sin and live to righteousness (Ro. 6). Death is not optional. Only in dying to our self-will do we truly live and bear fruit to God (Jn. 12:24). Scripture frequently alludes to this purpose in salvation (Ro. 6:3; 8:13; 12:1, 2; 2Co. 4:11, 16; 5:15; Ga. 2:20; Ph. 3:10; 2Ti. 2:11; He. 5:7-9; 1Pe. 2:21, 24; 1Jn. 3:16).

Scripture Interprets Itself

Often in Scripture, two statements are made side by side that together shed greater light on a given theme. Consider 1Co. 1:19; Ro. 2:12; 14:15, 20-21. "I will destroy [*apollumi*] the wisdom of the wise; I will bring to nothing ["set aside"—NAS] the understanding of the prudent" (1Co. 1:19). Here *apollumi* is used in the same sense as "set aside" or "bring to nothing." "For as many as have sinned without law will also perish [*apollumi*] without law, and as many as have sinned in the law will be judged by the law" (Ro. 2:12). Scripture is clear that all are judged including unbelievers who have sinned without law (Re. 20:12-13). Thus, to "perish" here cannot be utter annihilation, for judgment must follow.

Consider Ro. 14:15: "Do not destroy [*apollumi*] with your food the one for whom Christ died" (Ro. 14:15). Read a little further to see Paul's own definition of *apollumi*. "Do not *tear down* the work of God for the sake of food" (Ro. 14:20 NAS). "It is good neither to eat meat nor drink wine nor do anything by which your brother *stumbles* or is *offended* or is *made weak*" (Ro. 14:21). Paul defines *apollumi* as "tear down," "stumble," "offend," and "make weak." What better commentary is there? Do you think *apollumi* means we can cancel out another's eternal redemption paid for by Christ by our diet? And consider as well 1Co. 8:11: "Because of your knowledge shall the weak brother perish [*apollumi*] for whom Christ died?" Can we annihilate others for whom Christ died by our knowledge? Of course not! God is righteous and just.

In all the above, whatever is meant by death and destruction, it cannot be unending torment or annihilation. Could Jukes be right in saying death for man is an end or separation from some given form of life in which he has lived? What did our Lord mean when He said that in order to save our life, we must lose *apollumi* it (Mk. 8:35)? Is this not to end living a self-centered life and instead to live for God—to stop being ruled by sin, but instead by righteousness?

Did you realize that the very ones Christ came to save are the “destroyed” ones? “For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost [*apollumi*]” (Lu. 19:10). *Apollumi* is the very condition qualifying us for salvation! Are the lost (*apollumi*) ones then, the annihilated ones or those not yet found? At what point does *apollumi* become so permanent it exceeds God’s power and will to save? What justifies us to put limits on Him who is able to turn stones into worshippers (Lu. 3:8)?

What gives God greater glory: annihilation or restoration? Stop! Think about that a moment. Lu. 20:38 says “God is not the God of the dead, but of the living for all live to Him.” Lu. 1:37 says, “With God nothing will be impossible!” Is He able to do all things except restore the destroyed for whom Christ died? Really? For more documentation on *apollumi*, see our website: Further Study; Destruction.

Free Will

This last pillar is not difficult to resolve. What father holding his little girl’s hand crossing a busy street would ever let it go? The more she pulls, the tighter he squeezes. There is no way she is going anywhere! Is God any different? The argument that a person can choose hell by rejecting God as a result of “free” will is in effect saying a little girl has more strength than her dad. God has given man a “measure” of free will, but certainly not to the degree that He would allow him or her to damn themselves forever in torment. Is God less of a parent than we are (Mt. 7:11)? We extend increasing freedom to our children as they mature. Too much too soon is disastrous. He knows just how much freedom we need for our development.

God, as Creator, is owner of all things (Ps. 2:8; Ez. 18:4; Col. 1:16; He. 1:2), and that includes you and I. He has never relinquished that title. Only He has absolute “free” will over His property. Should we be forever lost, He would be the loser and God is not a loser!

Many say hell is locked on the inside. But how? Christ has the keys! (Re. 1:18).

Many believe God’s hands are tied; as much as He would like to keep us, He is unable. But, is our power to destroy His property really greater than His power to preserve or restore it? How “free” and powerful are we? What role did we play in controlling our life experiences that have made us what we are? Will we deliberately choose what sufferings we will undergo in the future that inevitably will affect what we become? What intricacies of our reasoning processes, which determine our decisions, do we fully control?

Is the Bible right in saying no one seeks after God, that our natural mind is at odds with Him and not subject to His law? “Indeed it cannot be subject,” said Paul (Ro. 3:11; 8:7). How can a naturally hostile mind, which “indeed” cannot subject itself to God, of its own “free” will do so? Is there not a contradiction here? Only God can give us faith and draw us to Himself; we cannot muster it up. See He. 12:2; Ro. 12:3; Jn. 6:44; 15:16; Ph. 1:29; Mt. 11:27; 16:16-17; Jn. 1:13; Ac. 13:48; 1Co. 4:7; Ep. 2:8-9; 3:16-17; Ph. 1:6; 2:13; Col. 1:12; 2 Th. 3:2; 1Ti. 1:14; Tit. 1:1; Ez. 36: 26-27; Jer. 24:7; 31:33-34; 32:39-40. To idolize “free” will as though it were the crux of our salvation contradicts the Bible and fosters a boastful attitude! (1Co. 1:26-31; 4:6-7).

What are we implying when we infer that God is helpless in the face of man’s “free” will? It intimates that our salvation depends on human power, not divine. Thus, God is stripped of His power and glory leaving the blood of Christ powerless to save those for whom it was shed (all sinners). In fact, it negates the very definition of God as “Almighty,” leaving us with no real God at all. In *Exploring the Attributes of God* Dr. Robert Morey stated:

God’s sovereignty was viewed as an essential attribute by the early Church and anyone who dared to deny it was called an atheist. This is one of the most misunderstood and

maligned attributes of God. Yet, it is an essential attribute that makes God GOD. The Scriptures always describe God as actively controlling and guiding the entire creation. It is never viewed as bare potential. Where should we begin when studying God's sovereignty and man's responsibility? Should we begin with man and establish his free will and then define divine sovereignty in such a way it does not conflict with man? Or, should we begin with God and His free will and then develop our understanding of man from that viewpoint? We must begin where Scripture begins....The Bible begins with GOD. He is the great I AM, the Alpha...Omega, the Beginning...End. (22)

The story of Joseph pictures God powerfully working behind the scenes influencing the wills of men. Who of these men thought their will was not solely their own? Yet God, in His infinite power, was at work accomplishing His purposes through their decisions (Ge. 45:5). While the king of Egypt decreed all male Hebrew babies should die, God was all the while orchestrating His plan for putting Moses at the head of the kingdom! Even while Pharaoh resisted Moses, God was at work according to His plan. Where was Pharaoh's "free" will? Consider what Isaiah wrote about Assyria:

*Woe to Assyria, the rod of My anger...I will send him against...the people of My wrath...will give him charge.... **Yet he does not mean so, nor does his heart think so....**For he says: "By the strength of my hand I have done it....Shall the ax boast itself against him who chops with it?" (Is. 10:5-7, 13).*

Assyria was being used by God and was totally unaware of it. In all these cases, we see men doing, but God orchestrating. Please carefully reflect on these passages.

God will circumcise your heart to love the Lord your God with all your heart and soul (De. 30:6).

I know that thou canst do all things, and that no purpose of Thine can be thwarted (Job 42:2 RSV).

Blessed is the man You choose, and cause to approach You (Ps. 65:4).

A man's heart plans... but the Lord directs... (Pr. 16:9).

The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the Lord (Pr. 16:33).

There are many plans in a man's heart, nevertheless the Lord's counsel—that will stand (Pr. 19:21).

A man's steps are of the Lord; How then can a man understand his own way (Pr. 20:24)?

The king's heart is a stream...in the hand of the LORD; He turns it wherever He will (Pr. 21:1).

You will establish peace for us, for You have also done all our works in us (Is. 26:12).

I will do all my pleasure,...indeed...I will bring it to pass. I have purposed it; I will do it (Is. 46:10-11).

None who seeks for God....Where is boasting? (Is.53:6; Ro. 3:11, 19b, 27).

The way of man is not in himself; It is not in man who walks to direct his own steps (Jer. 10:23).

I will give them a heart to know Me...for they shall return to Me with their whole heart (Jer. 24:7).

I will put My fear in their hearts so that they will not depart from Me (Jer. 32:40).

I will...cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do them.... (Ez. 36:27).

He does according to His will among the inhabitants of the earth. No one can restrain His hand (Da. 4:35).

Those...were born...nor of the will of man, but of God (Jn. 1:12, 13).

No one can come to Me unless the Father...draws [drags] him (Jn. 6:44). See “Every Knee” in chapter six.

Without Me you can do nothing (Jn. 15:5).

You did not choose Me, but I chose you (Jn. 15:16).

Creation [people] was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who...subjected it in hope.... (Ro. 8:20).

It does not depend on the man who wills or the man who runs but on God who has mercy (Ro. 9:16 NAS).

You will say to me then, “Why does He still find fault? For who has resisted His will?” (Ro. 9:19).

God chose the foolish...God chose the weak...He chose the lowly...so that no man may boast... (1Co. 1:27-29 NIV).

Predestined man...to the purpose of Him who works all... according to the counsel of His will (Ep. 1:11).

God works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure (Ph. 2:13).

He is able even to subdue all things to Himself (Ph. 3:21).

God has put it into their hearts to fulfill His purpose, to be of one mind (Re. 17:17).

Who is in control here? Man or God? Whose will prevails? My friend David Nuckols said, “How ironic that those who believe God will not violate the ‘free’ will of man have no problem believing He will violate His own free will—that all men should be saved!” In “The Work of the Cross,” Ken Eckerty wrote, “How ironic that those who believe God will not violate man’s “free” will have no problem that He forces men—against their will—to confess and bow to Christ.” (23)

What are we saying to God in deifying the will of man? “Oh well, Lord, it is a sad thing that...

You cannot have what is yours (Ro. 11:36).

You cannot find what you have lost (Lu. 15:4).

Isaiah was wrong about your hand not being so short it cannot save (Is. 59:1).

The Bible exaggerates in saying nothing is too difficult for you (Jer. 32:17).

Man has robbed the keys of Hades from You (Re. 1:18).

He who is in the world is stronger than You (1Jn. 4:4).

Your propitiation for the whole world is really only for a few (1Jn. 2:2).

Your promises to reconcile all things are just exaggerated hopes (Ac. 3:21).

Your hands are tied. You cannot accomplish all your will (Is. 55:11).

All creatures will not really worship you like you hoped (Re. 5:13; Phil. 2:10-11).

What has happened to GOD? Our tradition has pawned His power off to man in the myth of “free” will. Are we better than the fools Paul referred to in Ro. 1:20-21? Why were they called fools? For failing to glorify God “as GOD.” Do we do the same?

God’s Will

Since Bible translators are human, they are naturally inclined to conform the text to their world view. Since the majority have believed in the sovereignty of man’s will, they must weaken the sense of certain phrases such as “to will” and “to purpose” when referring to God. Instead, they use terms like “to desire” and “to wish” relative to God’s intentions. As a corollary to this tendency, God is seen as merely “desiring” things instead of “willing” them into existence.

*This is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior; Who **will** have [“desires”—NKJV] all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus; Who gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time (1Ti. 2:3-6 KJV).*

God “will” have all men to be saved. Does this mean God purposes with intent to accomplish His will, or that He merely desires it with no power to make it happen? The Greek word “will” here is *thélō*, Strong’s #2309. *The Complete Word Study Dictionary New Testament* defines *thélō* at (I) (C) as “To will as the equivalent of to purpose, to be decided upon, seeing one’s desire to its execution...”(V) “*Thélō* indicates not only willing something, but also pressing on to action.” (24) Of more importance than what any lexicographer would say, is how the apostles understood Christ when He used the word.

*Jesus said to him, “If I **will** [thelo] that he remain till I come, what is that to you? You follow Me.” Then this saying went out among the brethren that this disciple would not die. Yet Jesus did not say to him that he would not die, but, “**if** I will [thelo] that he remain till I come, what is that to you? (Jn. 21:22-23).*

The disciples evidently understood Jesus statement, “If I will” as the equivalent of “to purpose,” “to be decided upon,” and to “seeing one’s desire to its execution.” That is why they went out and proclaimed that this disciple would not die. For them to believe such an incredible statement is especially relevant. Did Jesus’ hearers understand the word, “will,” differently than we are to understand it in 1Ti.2:4? I don’t think so. And for the sake of argument, even if it read “desire” instead of “will,” it does not change a thing, for Isaiah says: “My counsel shall stand, and I will do all My pleasure [“delight”—YLT]” (Is. 46:10).

Tradition has taught us that God will not save a person against his or her will. I agree. However, He has the power to orchestrate whatever circumstances are necessary to effect one’s will to change.

Quillen Hamilton Shinn, a Civil War soldier, teacher, and acclaimed Vermont minister, wrote:

He does not save men by arbitrary force. He saves by their wills, through moral influence. God has resources in his universe, the all conquering agencies of love, to make

the unwilling soul willing! He has light enough to make the blind see, and love enough to melt the hardened heart.” (25)

Pastor and author of *The Outcome of Infinite Grace*, Loyal F. Hurley, pointed out:

Again and again, when trouble stalks his path, a man turns back to the God he has despised. When his wife dies, or his children go wrong; when loss and disaster fall upon him, again and again he will seek the God he has neglected. That is not because God coerces the man, but because He brings upon him such experiences as change his attitude. And He brings such experiences upon men, not in anger, but in love. For love is the only ultimate power that is not coercive. (26)

The Myth of “Eternal” Rejection

We know in part...we see...dimly.
(1Co. 13:9-12)

No one has complete or perfect knowledge of God. So when a person rejects a given concept of God, they are not in truth rejecting the true God, but only their partial or flawed understanding of Him. Only Christ truly knows Him, and he to whom He wills to reveal Him (Mt. 11:27; Lu. 10:22; Jn. 6:46). If Christ has not revealed the Father in truth to someone, can that person be held accountable for rejecting what was not really made known?

Once a full revelation of God is received in the ages to come (Ep. 2:7), all will bow and confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, just as Isaiah and Paul prophesied (Is. 45:21-25; Ro. 14:11; Ph. 2:9-11). Who would want to continue in active and persistent rebellion knowing that God wants only what is absolutely best for them? Knowing then, the great goodness and love of God, along with the Holy Spirit working in each heart, all hardened hearts will melt before His glorious being. It is impossible that an omnipotent God can fail in His purposes, and some would forever resist unconditional love opting for everlasting pain. This would be totally irrational. And even if one were that irrational, such resistance would not arise out of a **free** will, but an **enslaved** will, a will in bondage to an insane mind.

Martin Luther declared:

I frankly confess that, for myself, even if it could be, I should not want free-will to be given me....But now that God has taken my salvation out of the control of my own will, and put it under the control of His, and promised to save me, not according to my working or running, but according to His own grace and mercy, I have the comfortable certainty that He is faithful and will not lie to me, and that He is also great and powerful, so that no devils or opposition can break Him or pluck me from Him. (27)

John Wesley claimed that everyone in the world could be saved without the loss of liberty, according to a sermon entitled, “The General Spread of the Gospel,” which he preached on April 22, 1783. He said a city, nation, or the whole world could become Christian, and it could take place without difficulty if only we were to suppose God acts irresistibly. “Now in the same manner as God has converted so many to Himself without destroying their liberty, He can undoubtedly convert whole nations, or the whole world. And it is as easy to Him to convert a world as one individual soul.” (28)

Free will? Have you prayed for light and revelation about this teaching? Are His hands tied by your free will? Your belief or disbelief in “free” will must inevitably be determined by your view of God’s sovereign will and power.

The biggest factor overlooked by those who say God will not violate man's "free" will, is the fact that man does not own himself. "All souls are mine" (Ex. 18:4). God wills all to be saved (1Ti. 2:4). If that does not happen, it is His will that is violated, not man's.

If you might dare, imagine putting to God this question: "Do you place a higher value on our self-destructive "free will" than you do your own loving will for us, your very own children?" Please think about the audacity of this question! He created us and our wills. We and they are subject to Him.

Why is it that our tradition only accepts our will as "free" if it leads us to eternal destruction, and not free when it leads us to life in God's predetermined will (Ph. 2:9-11; Ro. 14:11)? Unlimited freedom of will is an illusion. Such absolute freedom in man would be bondage of the worst kind imaginable.

If we, through our so called "free" will, can trump God's will forever, then Christ gave up His "will" in vain. This would unlawfully rob Him of His reward for sacrificing His life for all men. Listen to His heart wrenching prayer after falling on his face in the garden of Gethsemane: "Father...not as I will, but as **You will!**"(Mt. 26:39). Jesus yielded up His "will" to His Father and accepted a most horrible death to save each one of us. He came to save the **world!** (Jn. 12:47). Did Christ think for a moment that His Father's will to save all, and His ransom for all in due time (1Ti. 2:4, 6) would be meaningless? Not for a second! Please pause a moment and reflect on what was just said.

"Jesus...for the **joy** that was set before Him endured the cross (He. 12:2). What joy? There is only one thing that would give Him true joy; the total success of His mission. The Good Shepherd is not content until He finds each lost sheep. "He shall see the travail of His soul and shall be **satisfied**" (Is. 53:11 KJV)! He shall be **satisfied!**

I leave you with one final thought.

Charles Darwin said:

"I can indeed hardly see how anyone ought to wish Christianity to be true; for if so...my father, brother and almost all my best friends, will be everlastingly punished." See "Autobiography of Charles Darwin, New York. W.W. Norton, 1969. 87. Extract from Nora Barlow ed with original omissions restored. Sincere thanks to Graham Rogers United Kingdom.2009

Please think very carefully about what Darwin is saying here. If this man had known God's unfailing love for all, do you think he would he have sought an alternative explanation for life? How would this have impacted our world?

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The pillars supporting belief in infinite punishment have crumbled. Will you now consider more seriously this critical question, "Is there hope beyond *Gehenna*?" Might judgment have a positive purpose in God's unfailing plan for all? The answer, I believe, is found in the very nature of God Himself. Now, unshackled from fallacious arguments, will you look afresh with me at God's awesome and glorious attributes? What is He really like?

CHAPTER TWO

GOD'S NATURE

*I will sing of Your power...
I will sing aloud of Your mercy.
(Ps. 59:16)*

What is God really like? Is the ultimate destiny of the majority of the human race tragic? Our only hope as a race and as individuals lies in the nature of God, and more specifically, in His power and love. In this chapter, we will focus on the Scriptures relating to His nature—His power, love, fatherhood, and will. Does He have all power to do what He wills? Does He truly love all humanity impartially, or does He have favorites? Is He, as the Creator of all, also Father of all? What is the difference? What is His will for humanity? Will His will be accomplished?

Of all these questions, the most critical to our hope are those relating to His power and love. What is the extent of His power? Can He really do what His heart would like to do? If God is not in truth Almighty, then there is no God in the truest sense, and we are destitute of all hope. Yet, even if we believe Him to be Almighty, what hope does that bring us if we doubt His love for any of His creatures?

His Power

*Ye do err, not knowing the Scriptures, nor the power of God.
(Mt. 22:29 KJV)*

Notice the importance of knowing the Scriptures in relation to the power of God. It is a serious error not to respect this relationship. Without a firm belief in God as the “Almighty” (the one who can do all His will), the knowledge of Scripture is of little value. We must be convinced, like Paul was, that what God promises, He is able to accomplish (Ro. 4:21). This is what credited Abraham as righteous (Ro. 4:22). Have you taken to heart what Scripture declares regarding the power of God?

Is anything too hard for the Lord? (Ge. 18:14).

Whatever His soul desires, He does (Job 23:13).

You can do everything...no purpose of Yours can be withheld from You (Job 42:2).

He does whatever He pleases (Ps. 115:3).

*Whatever the Lord pleases He does, in heaven, earth, sea, and in all deep places [heart]
(Ps. 135:6).*

Surely, as I have thought, so it shall come to pass, and as I have purposed, so it shall stand (Is. 14:24).

The Lord has purposed, who will annul it? His hand is stretched out, who will turn it back? (Is. 14:27).

Through Your power Your enemies shall submit to You... All the earth shall worship You (Ps. 66:3-4).

Is my hand shortened at all that it cannot redeem? Or have I no power to deliver? (Is. 50:2).

My word shall not return to Me void, but it shall accomplish what I please (Is. 55:11).

You made the heavens and earth by Your great power. There is nothing too hard for You (Jer. 32:17).

Is there anything too hard for Me? (Jer. 32:27).

He does according to His will in heaven and earth; no one can restrain His hand or say to Him, "what have You done?" Who can be saved?...with men it is impossible, but not with God; with God all things are possible (Da. 4:35; Mk. 10:26-27;). (See also: Mt. 19:26; Lu. 1:37; 18:27).

Predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will (Ep. 1:11).

He is able even to subdue all things to Himself (Ph. 3:20-1).

God's purpose is unchangeable [immutable—NKJV] (He. 6:17 NAS).

He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him (He. 7:25).

I will put my laws into their minds and hearts...for all shall know Me (He. 8:10).

Jesus the Author and Finisher of our faith (He. 12:2).

God Can Change Anyone

Does God merely do the "best He can for every man" as our tradition implies? Thomas Allin, D.D., historian, author, and clergyman of the English Episcopal Church North London (late 19th and early 20th centuries), wrote in *Christ Triumphant*:

If the best an Almighty Being can do for countless myriads of His children is to force on them whether they will or not, an existence stained with sin from the womb, knowing that in fact this sin will ripen into endless misery—then such phrases are but dust thrown in our eyes. They are as argument beneath refutation. To force on me the gift of life, is to do for me not the best, but the worst possible. (1)

At the heart of my understanding of God's power is the conviction He can change anyone. This is His best! If He can change you and me, why not all? If God can take Paul, the chief of sinners (1Ti. 1:15), and make him the chief of Apostles and a world changer, is there anyone He cannot transform? Ezekiel 36:23-36 reads:

23 *"And I will sanctify My great name, which has been profaned among the nations, which you have profaned in their midst; and **the nations shall know that I am the LORD,**" says the Lord GOD, "when I am hallowed in you before their eyes...."*

26 *"**I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh.**"*

27 *"I will put My Spirit within you and **cause** you to walk in My statutes, and **you will keep** My judgments and do them...."*

29 *"I will deliver you from all your uncleanness...."*

31 *"Then you will remember your evil ways and your deeds that were not good; and you will loathe yourselves in your own sight, for your iniquities and your abominations."*

32 *"**Not for your sake** do I do this," says the Lord GOD, "let it be known to you. Be ashamed and confounded for your own ways, O house of Israel!"* For whose sake? The nations in verse 23 and 36.

35 *"So they will say, 'This land that was desolate has become like the garden of Eden; and the wasted, desolate, and ruined cities are now fortified and inhabited.'"*

36 *"Then **the nations which are left all around you shall know that I, the LORD, have rebuilt the ruined places and planted what was desolate. I, the LORD, have spoken it, and I will do it.**"*

In this passage (vs. 27) God causes unfaithful Israel to walk in His statutes. In verse 26, He will even give Israel a new heart and spirit. Wow, just think of it! Is there anyone on earth in due time God is unable to change? And as 1,000 years is as a single day to God (2Pe. 3:8), I have complete confidence He will accomplish all His purposes for every individual. Time is not a problem. He has the ages in which to operate. If He will do it for Israel, then He will do it for the nations as well, for He is not partial (See "His Love Is Not Partial" in chapter 2). In fact, in verse 32, He even states it is not for their sakes He will do this. Then for whose? Who else but for the nations on His heart in verses 23 and 36! This shows God blesses Israel in order to be His channel of blessing to the whole world (Ge. 12:3; 18:18; 22:18; 26:4; 28:14; Ac. 3:25; Ga. 3:8).

Is it really possible? Can God change people so they will do His will? Absolutely! But the question should not be, "Can God change people?" but rather, "Why does He?" Why? Love. Love that holds nothing back. Love itself became the propitiation for the sins of the whole world (1Jn. 2:2). Love paid the ultimate price and redeemed the world. These promises to Israel should bring us much hope. God's plan has always been to reach the nations. It will yet be fulfilled, for the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable (Ro. 11:29). Can God fail?

He Will Do It!

***I will** give them a heart to know Me...for **they shall** return to Me with their whole heart (Jer. 24:7).*

***I will** put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; ...**they all shall** know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them (Jer. 31:33-34; He. 8:10).*

*There is **nothing** too hard for You (Jer. 32:17).*

***I will** give them one heart and one way, that they may fear Me forever...**I will** put My fear in their hearts so that they will not depart from me (Jer. 32:39-40).*

***He will** again have compassion on us, and **will subdue** our iniquities (Mic. 7:19).*

It is most important to realize that God can and will change the hearts of people so they will repent and serve Him. What He does for a few, He does for all! Abraham did not waver at God's promise through unbelief, but was strengthened in faith. In this he gave God glory.

Abraham was fully convinced that God was able to do what He promised. Thus Abraham was accounted righteous (Ro. 4:20-22). Will we give Him glory and be accounted righteous too—or are we only partially convinced He is willing and able to do what He promised? Let us repent for not acknowledging God’s power as it is set forth in Scripture (Mt. 22:29).

His Love

Does God love all humanity or only some? Many believers do not realize that there exists a whole theological stream in Christianity that actually believes God does not in fact love all people. They believe God has only destined the “elect” to be saved. That means the vast majority of humanity are elected also (by default) to suffer in hell forever. This belief system (also known as “Calvinism” or “Reformed”) is becoming more and more embarrassing for pastors and theologians to outwardly profess. For example, my daughter had to directly ask her college chaplain (a Calvinist) to share frankly what he believed about predestination. You could not tell simply through his Sunday sermons. His sermons led her to think that God’s grace extended to all humanity, when in reality he did not believe it did. Thankfully this is not the majority view of the Christian world. In order to understand God’s love for all humanity, we must first understand that God, as Creator, is the Father of all.

Fatherhood of God

“Adam, the son of God” (Lu. 3:38). The genealogy of Jesus recorded in Luke goes back to Adam, the son of God. Can anyone deny Adam was God’s son? When has God ever disowned Adam, Israel, or the nations? When has He ever ceased to be the Father of all creation?

If God is truly a “Father” as we understand fatherhood, then it further confirms He would only discipline His children for their good, as every loving earthly parent does. To be made in God’s image (Ge. 1:26) is an affirmation we are His children. In the strongest possible sense, He, as “Creator,” is also “Father.” Allin wrote:

We are told God is not the Father of all men; He is only their Creator! What a total misapprehension these words imply. What do we mean by paternity and the obligations it brings? The idea rests essentially on the communication of life to the child by the parent. Paternity is for us largely blind and instinctive; but creation is Love acting freely, divinely; knowing all the consequences, assuming all the responsibility involved in the very act of creating a reasonable immortal spirit. It seems, then, very strange to seek to escape the consequences of the lesser obligation, by admitting one still greater; to seek, in a word, to evade the results of a divine universal fatherhood, by pleading that God is only the Creator. (2)

In Adam, we all are children of God. If our sin and rebellion caused our Father to disown us, how could He have said, “Return, you backsliding children, and I will heal your backslidings” (Jer. 3:22)? Or what was Jesus saying in His parable of the prodigal son in Lu. 15:11-32? Does the prodigal son not represent all the Father’s wayward children? Though he had fallen into sin in all its degradation, he never ceased being a son. Paul said to fail to provide for one’s own is to be worse than an unbeliever (1Ti. 5:8). What does that say of God who owns us all? “Behold, all souls are mine” (Ez. 18:4). All God has created is His own. It is inconceivable that God would be worse than an unbeliever. Allin stated:

The essence of Christianity perishes in the virtual denial of any true Fatherhood of our race on God’s part. Follow out this thought, for it is of primary importance. We lose

sight of the value of the individual soul, when dealing with the countless millions who have peopled this earth and passed away. What is one among so many? [But] each soul IS of infinite value, as if it stood alone in the eyes of God its Father. And more than this, we are altogether apt to forget whose the loss is, if any one soul perishes. It is God's loss: it is the Father Who loses His child. The straying sheep of the parable is the Great Shepherd's loss: the missing coin is the Owner's loss. In this very fact lies the pledge that He will seek on and on till He finds it. (3)

“Our” Father, is also “a” father to all men. God has never stopped being the Father of His creation. His love and purpose toward all people endures forever. However, we have left our Father's house to serve another. This severance came from the human side, not the divine. So, in one sense, and in one sense only, we have disowned our Father to become the children of another, by doing the deeds of the prince of this world (Jn. 8:41). But it is because of this, Jesus came. He came to restore this broken relationship (Ro. 5:10), and to destroy the works of the devil (1Jn. 3:8). Our Father has never disowned His children. The cross is proof of that. Note carefully these texts:

God created man in His own image.... (Ge. 1:27; 9:6).

I said...all of you are children of the Most High (Ps. 82:6).

You are our Father...our potter; and all we are the work of Your hand (Is. 64:8).

Have we not all one Father? Has not one God created us? (Mal. 2:10).

Seeing the multitudes.... in this manner pray: our Father... (Mt. 5:1; 6:9; 7:28).

Jesus spoke to the multitudes and to His disciples....one is your Father (Mt. 23:1, 9).

Men of Athens....For we also are His children. Being then the children of God... (Ac. 17:22, 28-29 NAS).

I bow to the Father...from whom the whole family in...earth is named (Ep. 3:14-15).

Be in subjection to the Father of spirits and live? (He. 12:9).

The expressions of Fatherhood used in these passages encompass unbelievers: “All of you,” “all we,” “we all,” “multitudes,” “people,” “men of Athens,” “whole family in earth,” and “of spirits.”

“My son, give me your heart...observe my ways” (Pr. 23:26). What a revelation this is! God regards us as sons and daughters even before we give Him our hearts.

“If you being evil...give good gifts to your children, how much more your Father...” (Mt. 7:11). Note this passage is in the context of the “multitudes” which include unbelievers (Mt. 5:1; 8:1). To those whom He termed “evil,” He calls God “your Father.” Will God do less for His children than we who “are” evil? Do we disown our kids as a result of rebellion? Do we not patiently and persistently do all we can to help them mature and amend their ways? Are we better parents than God?

The fatherhood of God over all creation is incontestable evidence that His love extends to all humanity. Contrary to what many think, to acknowledge that God is a “faithful” Creator who always does what is “right” (1Pe. 4:19 NAS), and then deny His impartial love for all people (by claiming He considers some merely as “creatures” as opposed to “children”) is preposterous. It contradicts all that Christianity and the Bible stand for.

For more, including what adoption means in the New Testament, see: <http://hopebeyondhell.net/father-heart-of-god>.

God Loves All People

The love of God is evident in the Scriptural references of God as “Father of all,” and in countless other passages. In fact, the evidence of God’s love for all is so abundant in Scripture, it is beyond my comprehension that a whole system of Christian theology has been built around the denial of that Fatherhood. Consider just these few:

*He is **good to all**. His tender **mercies are over all** (Ps. 145:9).*

*Look to Me, and be saved, **all** you ends of the earth! (Is. 45:22).*

*God so loved the **world** (Jn. 3:16).*

*I came...to save the **world** (Jn. 12:47).*

*God gives to **all life**. ...He has made from one blood every nation of men (Ac. 17:25-27).*

I was sought by those who did not ask for Me; I was found by those who did not seek Me. I said, “Here I am, here I am,” to a nation that was not called by My name (Is. 65:1).

His will is for all people to find Him, even those who are not presently seeking Him. A time will come when they will, for God can orchestrate whatever circumstances are needed to change their hearts; for love never fails (1Co. 13:8).

His goodness and longsuffering...leads to repentance (Ro. 2:4).

God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners Christ died for us (Ro. 5:8). “Us” here includes all people. (See Jn 1:29; 6:51).

God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself (2Co. 5:19).

*God our Savior...**will have all** men to be saved (1Ti. 2:4 KJV).*

The grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men (Tit. 2:11 NAS).

And this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins (1Jn. 4:10).

*He...is the propitiation for our sins, and **not for ours only** but also for the **whole world** (1Jn. 2:2).*

*The Lord is...longsuffering...not willing that **any** perish (2Pe. 3:9).*

*The **longsuffering** of our Lord is **salvation** (2Pe. 3:15).*

The longsuffering of our Lord “is” salvation. What a thought! When does the longsuffering of our heavenly Father for His children ever end? Does it end sooner than yours toward your children? The love of God expressed in His longsuffering will do what His brute power could never do—win the hearts of His enemies (Ps. 66: 3-4) and make them His friends (Jer. 31:34; Jn. 15:15; Ro. 5:10).

His Love Is Not Partial

Some people receive many chances to get saved, others receive a few, but billions have never received one! If the opportunity to receive Christ were given in this life only, then God could be accused of being partial. The only way He would not be partial is if He lacked the power to give all the opportunity. But God is neither weak nor partial. All have the same

access to salvation, for God's will, power, and love guarantee it. And furthermore, Jesus paid the price for all. If all did not have equal access, it would especially be unfair to Him. Scriptural support abounds for God's impartiality. God loves all men equally. For example:

He is good to all (Ps. 145:9).

In truth...God shows no partiality (Ac. 10:34).

There is no partiality with God (Ro. 2:11).

There is no distinction between Jew and Greek (Ro. 10:12).

God shows personal favoritism to no man (Ga. 2:6).

There is no partiality with Him (Ep. 6:9; Col. 3:25).

God...wills [KJV] all men to be saved (1Ti. 2:3-4).

Wisdom...from above...is without partiality and without hypocrisy (Ja. 3:17).

The Father...without partiality judges... (1Pe. 1:17).

But, you may ask, "Why was Esau hated and Jacob loved? (Mal. 1:2), Was not this showing favoritism?" This was a play on words similar to Christ's command to hate our family (Lu. 14:26). Jesus wants us to love our families, but in our heart of hearts our deepest love should be for God. This is hyperbole—something very common in ancient eastern writings. God's hate regarding Esau relates to something about Esau that God disliked in a greater way than what God disliked about Jacob the "deceiver." When God elects someone over another, it does not mean He loves him or her more. Rather, He is delegating to them a greater responsibility in His service.

The same goes for God's chosen people, the Israelites. He did not choose them because He was impartial to the rest of humanity. On the contrary, He wanted a nation through which He could bless all peoples of the earth! "In you all the families of the earth shall be blessed" Ge. 12:3. (See also Ge. 18:18; 22:18; 26:4; 28:14; Ac.3:25, 26; Ga. 3:8).

God Is Love with NO "Buts"

When we say, "God is love, **but** He is also just and must punish sinners forever," we demean God's greatest expression of love: His Son's sacrificial death for all mankind. Talk about injustice! How unjust this is to Him who propitiated the sins of the whole world by giving His life as a ransom for all (1Jn. 2:2; 1Ti. 2:6)! To recognize God's righteous and remedial purpose in judgment in no way contradicts His holiness, justice, or the sacrificial nature of Christ's death. To the contrary, it magnifies them. How dare we qualify or limit a Love "that never fails" (or "ends" as the RSV puts it--1Co. 13:8)!

Scripture straightly declares God to "be" love (1Jn. 4:8, 16), but never to "be" vengeance. God is one; He is not divided within Himself. Augustinian theologians have pitted His love against His attributes of holiness and justice, not realizing that His very essence is Love. He "is" Love. When referring to God as love, they immediately qualify it with "but," as though His love was not compatible with holiness and justice. To justify this, they claim that His ways are not ours ways, quoting Is. 55:8-9. In so doing, they deny His unfailing love in order to maintain their flawed idea of judgment. However, they overlook what Isaiah was really saying in chapter 55: He was referring solely to God's abundant mercy (Is. 55:7). Elaborating on God's essence of love, Thomas Allin wrote:

God is not anger though He can be angry, God is not vengeance though He does avenge. These are attributes, love is essence. Therefore, God is unchangeably love. In judgment He is love, in wrath He is love, in vengeance He is love—“love first, and last, and without end.” Love is simply the strongest thing in the universe, the most awful, the most inexorable, while the most tender. (4)

God’s righteous judgments, like His acts of mercy, are a manifestation of His love—a love with no “buts.” Both His mercy and His judgments serve His one holy and loving purpose to draw (drag) all men to Himself. Scripture abounds with passages of God’s great love and mercy. Here are just a few to ponder:

The Lord is merciful and gracious; slow to anger, and abounding in mercy... (Ps. 103:8).

He is good! For His mercy endures forever (Ps. 136:1). (Repeated 26 times).

The Lord is gracious and full of compassion, slow to anger and great in mercy (Ps. 145:8).

The Lord upholds all who fall, and raises up all who are bowed down (Ps. 145:14).

You open your hand and satisfy the desire of every living thing (Ps. 145:16).

Through the Lord’s mercies we are not consumed, because His compassions fail not. They are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness (La. 3:22-23).

I know that You are a gracious and merciful God, slow to anger and abundant in loving-kindness, One who relents from doing harm (Jon. 4:2).

He delights in mercy....will again have compassion on us, and will subdue our iniquities (Mic. 7:18-19).

He is kind to the unthankful and evil. Be merciful, as your Father (Lu. 6:35-36).

Love suffers long and is kind...endures all....never fails (1Co. 13:4-8).

Blessed be the Father of mercies and God of all comfort (2Co. 1:3-4).

The Lord is very compassionate and merciful (Ja. 5:11).

God...only does wondrous things (Ps. 72:18; 86:10)!

God truly loves all humanity unconditionally, and if we should doubt this, even for a moment, we need only look at His Son, the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature (He. 1:3). Erasmus Manford, 19th century minister, publisher, and author wrote:

Jesus appeared on earth in the character of a Savior, not of a destroyer....When persecuted, He retaliated not; when reviled, He reviled not; when reproached and scoffed at, He did not curse His foes. His whole life was one continued exhibition of love, benevolence, and compassion. It is emphatically and truly said of Him, “He went about doing good.”...He gave health to the sick, feet to the lame, ears to the deaf, speech to the dumb, sanity to the lunatic, bread to the hungry, forgiveness to the sinful, salvation to the lost, and life to the dead....He wept at the grave of Lazarus, His friend, and also over the approaching woes of Jerusalem, where resided His bitterest foes; and even for His bloody and cruel murderers He prayed on the cross, and in the agonies of death at their unfeeling hands, besought His Father for their forgiveness....The character, then, of Christ is the character of God; the tenderness and compassion that Jesus possessed for all men, the good, the evil, is that which God possesses for all humanity. (5)

To sum up the theme of God's love, I encourage you to read Lu. 15:11-32. Please note carefully verse 20: "When he was still a great way off, his father saw him and had compassion, and ran and fell on his neck and kissed him." Jesus gave us this story so we would get a glimpse of the Father heart of God for all His wayward children. What a Father! The Psalmist also writes, "His anger is but for a moment, His favor is for life" (Ps. 30:5a). Why is it that on earth God's anger lasts but a moment and His favor is for life, but (tradition says) after death, His favor is not even a moment, and His anger is forever? How can God's love change so drastically at the beat of a heart?

God's Will

Most people believe God wills the best for every person on earth, but unfortunately, like us, He cannot get what He wants. We have brought God down to our level. Because we cannot always get our will, it must be the same with God. We make His will out to be something merely hoped for or desired. In this section, we will consider what Scripture declares is His will for all humanity, and what it says relative to His power to accomplish it.

He purposed...that in...fullness of the times He might gather together in one all things in Christ....who works all things according to the counsel of His will (Ep. 1:9-11).

This is a very deep and revealing passage. It shows God purposing His will to be done, and not merely hoping it is so. "No purpose of His will be thwarted" (Job 42:2 RSV). What is His purpose? To gather together in one all people in Christ. Paul also expressed it this way: "that God may be all in all" (1Co. 15:28).

In order for God to be "all in all," all must first be subjected to the Lordship of Jesus Christ (1Co. 15:28a). This cannot happen without Christ being formed in each person (Ga. 4:19; 1Jn. 3:2; 2Pe. 1:4). Thankfully, He has not left us on our own. He is committed to its realization and intimately involved in the process (Ep. 2:10; Ph. 1:6; 2:13). "He is able even to subdue all things to Himself" (Ph. 3:20-1). It will all take place in the context of the ages—the "fullness of the times" (Ac. 3:21; 1Ti. 2:6). See also page 42 on this theme.

Christ's Purpose

The Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil.
(Lu. 19:10; Mt. 18:11; 1Jn. 3:8)

Christ came to save "that which was lost." "That" includes all the lost. God sent Him "to save the world" (Jn. 3:17 NIV). The world is not a few only. The few whom our Lord refers to in Mt. 7:14 are His elect first-fruits who labor with Him now and in the coming ages to bring in the whole harvest. (See "Purpose of Election" chap. 5). The Father sent His Son as the Savior of the whole world, and not merely some out of it (1Jn. 2:2; 4:14). He, whose very name means Savior, came to save, not merely to "offer" salvation. He is the Good Shepherd who seeks those who are lost until He finds them (Lu. 15:4, 7, 20).

Our Lord's sacrifice on the cross was His supreme act in destroying the devil's work, but not His only act. In addition, He works in men's hearts and intercedes for them throughout all ages (He. 7:25) to draw them to Himself and conform them into His likeness.

Jesus' purpose on earth included modeling before a sinful world a holy and righteous life. At the very outset of His ministry, in His very first public address, He laid down exactly

what a model Christian life must be. In so doing, Christ revealed His heart of compassion for suffering humanity. Hear His wonderful words as He quotes from Is. 61:1-2a:

The Spirit of the LORD is upon Me, because He has anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed; to proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD... (Lu. 4:18-22; Is. 61:1-2a).

Jesus finished his quote in the middle of verse two. But look at what the passage goes on to say:

*“...to comfort **all** who mourn, to console those who mourn in Zion, to give them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness; that they may be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the LORD, that He may be glorified”* (Is. 61:2b-3).

This is a glimpse into the heart of our God and Savior. We see His deep concern for the anguish all people experience. He desires to deliver us from sorrow, heaviness of spirit, blindness, captivity, and oppression. But one thing seems to be lacking. Do you see it? He seems more concerned about the momentary afflictions of this life, than with eternal sufferings just a heartbeat away! Consider another text further revealing His heart.

When He saw the multitudes, He was moved with compassion for them, because they were weary and scattered, [“distressed and dispirited”—NAS] like sheep having no shepherd. Then He said to His disciples.... “pray the Lord... to send out laborers into His harvest” (Mt. 9:36-38).

Why are we asked to pray for laborers for the harvest? Why are they needed? Does not the text say it is because people are weary, scattered, distressed, and dispirited? But what has our tradition led us to believe? Answer: To pray because all people are on their way to hell! Is there not an inconsistency here?

What are earthly pains compared to eternal woe? Yet, it was the temporal pains that weighed most on our Lord’s heart, not those of the life beyond. How can we explain this? Along with the *Gehenna* study in chapter one, these passages confirm that our Lord did not teach everlasting punishment. We need to look closely at our Lord’s words to see how clear this is.

Consider another key piece of evidence. Note where Christ ended His quote of Isaiah 61:1-2a: “proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD.” Now look at what immediately follows that He did not quote: “**And** the day of recompense [ABP LXX] of our God” (Is. 61:2b). Why did He leave that part out? Could it be that the “day” of recompense is just that, a day? For if it were days without end of recompense, how can we explain His silence here? Should He not have at least finished the sentence? Yes, and much more! He should have warned them in the strongest possible way to snatch them all out of everlasting fire! If there was ever an appropriate time to lay the foundation of eternal torment, this was it. He was sitting on a proof text. Did He not care some in His audience might die that night and go straight to hell? What kind of precedent would this set for His followers who would thereafter follow His example?

One final point regarding His first public address: did you notice the response of the people? “All marveled at the gracious words that proceeded out of His mouth” (Lu. 4:22). Gracious words—the people marveled!

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What is God really like? Is the destiny of the human race tragic? I hope that in this chapter you have come to see God's nature more clearly—that all is not lost for humanity.

Does God really love every single person impartially? YES.

Can He really do what His heart would like to do? YES.

The God of all the earth is truly GOD, not god. He has all the power of the universe at His disposal, and His very essence is love—pure, unadulterated, impartial love for all His creation. Knowing Him in truth will fill our hearts with peace and hope. We can face whatever lies before us. Our only hope is His very nature. Can we trust Him with our eternal destiny and that of our loved ones? Yes we can! Let us sing aloud of His power and of His mercy (Ps. 59:16)!

PURPOSE-DRIVEN JUDGMENT

*We went through fire...
but You brought us out to rich fulfillment.*
(Ps. 66:12)

Is there any positive purpose to God's *Gehenna* judgment? What purpose does it serve? According to the prevalent theology, its only purpose is to inflict pain. This view refuses to acknowledge that God's judgment has any remedial effect and instead presents it as a perpetual prison from which its victims can never escape. I intend to show in this chapter that: First, this view is simply unjust and Scripture does not support unjust punishment of any kind; Second, Scripture affirms death as no obstacle to God in accomplishing His purposes in anyone; Third, God is just, and His justice satisfies even our human understanding of justice; Fourth, the Bible provides clear examples that all of His judgments are driven by a positive purpose.

Justice vs. Infinite Penalty

Many say sinners must suffer infinitely because a Holy God cannot allow sin in His presence. To believe this is to deny the DEITY of Christ. He kept company with sinners and took the world's sin upon Himself (Lu. 7:34; Jn. 1:29; 2Co. 5:21)! Is Christ not Holy? God's holiness does not reject sinners outright, but eternally seeks to cleanse and save them! (Ps. 136). But they say, "finite sins merit infinite penalty because they are committed against a Holy and infinite God." If this were so, why does Scripture not state it? Is this not of greatest importance? Why no explanation? There is none because Scripture does not teach such a doctrine. It teaches the Mosaic code of justice (Ex. 21:23-5). Read the code! See how God works in judgment. But this horrific philosophy of injustice does not come from the heart of a loving God, but from the corrupted minds of human beings!

Justice does not come solely from punishment, but from punishment with a view toward restitution. If someone steals your wallet, justice is served when your wallet is returned and the thief is punished. Justice for sin against a Holy God requires repentance and reconciliation. We as parents know the hurt we feel when slighted by a child. God, in the ultimate sense, is Father of all. "All souls are Mine" (Ez. 18:4). Infinite punishment would inflict infinite pain on a God who "IS" Love (1 Jn. 4:8, 16; Mt. 23:37; Lu. 15:20). That would be the highest conceivable injustice!

Also, is it just that Satan keeps forever what He robs from God? It would be especially unjust to Christ who "appeared for the very purpose of undoing the devil's work" (1 Jn. 3:8 NEB).

How can justice require infinite penalty from creatures born in sin through no fault of their own, prone to sin by an inherited weakness (Adam's curse), created with imperfect

knowledge, surrounded by demons tempting on every side, and all in light of Christ's propitiation for the sins of the whole world (1Jn. 2:2; Jn. 1:29)?

What Scripture teaches such a travesty?

Whose conscience is not violated at the thought?

Would not a single sentence of infinite penalty outweigh the guilt of the whole race?

What constructive purpose could it possibly serve?

Infinite penalty cannot satisfy justice by definition. For at the point at which it satisfies justice, the penalty must end. Because what is infinite cannot end and Scripture affirms just penalty (Col. 3:25; He. 2:2), "just infinite penalty" is an oxymoron - like a square circle, an utter impossibility. If justice requires infinite penalty, then these verses are senseless:

Speak comfort to Jerusalem... for she has received from the LORD double for all her sins (Is. 40:2) (See also Jer. 16:18). How can what is infinite be doubled? Whatever led God to double this penalty, one thing is clear: the penalty is measurable and limited.

His anger is but for a moment, His favor is for life; weeping may endure for a night, but joy comes in the morning (Ps. 30:5). What possible comfort could "a moment" and "a night" offer anyone tormented by the threat of infinite penalty? It would be a mere mockery. This further suggests that just penalty is for a limited time.

Renders to each according to his work (Ex. 21:24; De. 25:3; Ps. 62:12; Mt. 7:1-2; Ro. 2:5, 6). Penalty "according to his work" is something measurable and unquestionably just. How does infinite penalty accommodate varying levels of guilt? "It shall be more tolerable for Sodom than for you" (Mt. 11:24; Lu. 10:14). Such wording implies the penalty referred to is measurable.

You laid affliction on our backs... We went through fire... but You brought us to rich fulfillment (Ps. 66:10-12). This penalty was given to bring the sufferer to rich fulfillment; that is, it had a positive purpose. What positive purpose is served by infinite punishment? In addition, would God, the epitome of all justice and impartiality, inflict purposeful penalty for some and only purposeless for others?

The Lord will not cast off forever. Though He causes grief, yet He will show compassion according to the multitude of His mercies. For He does not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men (La. 3:31-33). Though He causes grief, "yet" there is purpose. What happens to "yet," when you contemplate infinite penalty? It becomes a meaningless word. "Yet" assures us the penalty is not infinite.

Hope Beyond Death

Is one's state after death absolutely final as we have been led to think? Tradition maintains that God's judgment has no remedial purpose—it is an eternal death. Yet the phrase, "eternal death," is nowhere to be found in Scripture!

What mysteriously happens at death making it impossible for God to bring someone to repentance? Has He been stripped of His power? Where does Scripture declare His impotence in the face of death? Many quote Hebrews 9:27 thinking it bars all hope. "It is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment" (He. 9:27). How does this passage address the issue? The point in question is not the fact of judgment, but whether or not it is infinite. This reference does not offer us any information.

Does judgment have a remedial or restorative element to it, or is it solely retributive? What is the evidence? A number of passages have led me to conclude it cannot be solely retributive. We will see these later under “Examples of Purpose-Driven Judgment.” However, I would first like to demonstrate Scriptural support for my conviction that death in and of itself is not a hopeless condition for anyone.

Texts that Testify

I kill and make alive; I wound and heal (De. 32:39).

The Lord kills and makes alive; He brings down to the grave [Sheol] and brings up (1Sa. 2:6). Sheol is translated “hell” thirty - one times in the KJV! He brings down to *Sheol* and brings up. How can one be brought up from what is supposed to be an irremediable state?

We must die. But God does not take away life; instead, He devises ways so that a banished person may not remain estranged from Him (2 Sa 14:14 NIV). Nothing stops God!

God will redeem my soul from the power of Sheol (Ps. 49:15 NAS). (See also: Ps. 30:2-3; 86:13; 116:3-8; Hos. 13:14). One is not left in Sheol forever.

All who go down to the dust shall bow before Him... (Ps. 22:29b). “All” who die will bow. Can what is annihilated bow? Bowing stems from a genuine and not a “forced” worship as discussed in Chapter 6.

He will swallow up death forever and will wipe away tears from all faces (Is. 25:8). Death is swallowed up with tears wiped from all faces. Note the word “all.”

For men are not cast off by the Lord forever. Though he brings grief, he will show compassion, so great is his unfailing love (Lam 3:31-32 NIV). “For men” refers to all people. Death is no barrier to a God whose love cannot fail.

When I bring back their captives, the captives of Sodom and her daughters, and the captives of Samaria and her daughters, then I will also bring back the captives of your captivity among them (Ez. 16:53; read entire chapter). God restores the destroyed of Sodom and Samaria. (See also Jer. 49:6, 37-39; 2Pe. 2:6).

I will ransom them from the power of the grave [Sheol]; I will redeem them from death. O Death, I will be your plagues! O Grave [Sheol], I will be your destruction (Hos. 13:14)! God ransoms from the power of hell, redeems from death, and is death’s destruction! Only if we do not believe God is all-powerful, impartial, and all-loving can we remain hopeless.

God is able to raise up children to Abraham from these stones (Mt. 3:9). If God can do this, can He not raise the lost from death? Is this too hard for Him (Jer. 32:27)?

*You will by no means get out of there **till** you have paid the last penny (Mt. 5:26).*

*His master delivered him to the torturers **until** he should pay all. So My Father also will do to you (Mt. 18:34-5).* Does “till” and “until” support the concept of an unending hell?

Every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven, but blasphemy against the Spirit will not...either in this age or in the age to come (Mt. 12:31-32; Mk. 3:29-30). This is saying that every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven in the age to come except this sin.

If not, what is the point of singling out one sin in particular as an exception? This is powerful testimony from the lips of Christ Himself for hope after death! Because a particular sin will not be forgiven at a given time does not require that the penalty be infinite. Also, God's justice in judgment does not change! (Mal. 3:6). All judgment is measured and with a purpose. Either a just penalty will be exacted (He. 2:2), or its forgiveness must await a subsequent age. (Scripture alludes to the "ages to come"- Ep. 2:7). We can rest assured that the Father's chastising penalty for this sin will be just, and righteous, and in character with His loving heart for all. See #11 Appendix V.

He is not the God of the dead but of the living, for all live to Him (Lu. 20:38). If all the dead live to Him, then we can have hope beyond death unless there is no hope in God Himself!

God...brings the dead to life and calls into being what does not exist (Ro. 4:17 JB).

If their [Israel] being cast away is the reconciling of the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead? (Ro. 11:15). Life from the dead for the world? That is what it says! Would this "life" be merely a prelude to further death?

Christ died, rose, and lived again, that He might be Lord of both the dead and the living (Ro. 14:9). These "dead" are apparently those who once lived on earth. At some point they exist again under Christ's Lordship. It would be senseless to say He is Lord of the annihilated ones. For Christ to be "Lord" implies hope, not hopelessness, especially in light of Ph. 2:10-11. Once their subjection is made complete, God becomes all in them (1Co. 15:28).

The last enemy that will be destroyed is death (1Co. 15:26). If death is destroyed, what is left? Life.

Jesus tasted death for everyone (He. 2:9). If Christ tasted death for everyone, then hope beyond death must be for all! If it does not at least mean this, what is the point?

Death is swallowed in victory. O Death, where is your sting? O Hades, where is your victory? (1Co. 15:54-55). What words could be brighter or more hopeful than these? Who would dare place limits on such a promise? Do we forget what has made this possible? Nothing but the blood of Jesus shed for all!

What will they do who are baptized for the dead, if the dead do not rise at all? Why then are they baptized for the dead (1Co. 15:29)? Why were New Testament believers baptized for the dead if they believed the lost dead were in a hopeless state?

Christ abolished death (2Ti. 1:10). Who did Christ not abolish death for according to Is. 53:6; Jn. 1:29; 6:51; Ro. 5:6, 8; 1Ti. 2:6; He. 2:9; 1Pe. 3:18; 1Jn. 2:2? In light of this, how can death possibly be hopeless for anyone?

He destroys him who had the power of death (He. 2:14). If the one who had the power of death is destroyed, then there must be hope.

Jesus Christ the same yesterday, today, and forever (He. 13:8). He does not change or fail! Once a Savior, always a Savior. "Jesus" means "Savior." As long as a Savior is needed, He remains such.

Fear not, I... have the keys of Hell and of Death (Re. 1:17-18 KJV). Christ holding Hell's keys is our assurance that He will release its captives at the proper time. If not, the words "fear not," would be a mockery.

There shall be no more death (Re. 21:4). How can death be a hopeless condition if it will cease to exist?

Christ...went and preached to the spirits in prison, who formerly were disobedient, when once the Divine longsuffering waited in the days of Noah....the gospel was preached also to those who are dead, that they might be judged according to men in the flesh, but live according to God in the spirit....He ascended on high...led captivity captive....descended into the lower parts of the earth...that He might fill all things (1Pe. 3:18-20; 4:6-7; Ep. 4:8-10).

William Barclay wrote:

If Christ descended into Hades and preached there, there is no corner of the universe into which the message of grace has not come. There is in this passage the solution of one of the most haunting questions raised by the Christian faith—what is to happen to those who lived before Jesus Christ and to those to whom the gospel never came? There can be no salvation without repentance but how can repentance come to those who have never been confronted with the love and holiness of God? If there is no other name by which men may be saved, what is to happen to those who never heard it? This is the point that Justin Martyr fastened on long ago: “The Lord, the Holy God of Israel, remembered his dead, those sleeping in the earth, and came down to them to tell them the good news of salvation.” The doctrine of the descent into Hades conserves the precious truth that no man who ever lived is left without a sight of Christ and without the offer of the salvation of God. Many in repeating the creed have found the phrase, “He descended into hell” either meaningless or bewildering, and have tacitly agreed to set it on one side and forget it. It may well be that we ought to think of this as a picture painted in terms of poetry rather than a doctrine stated in terms of theology. (1)

Thoughts to Ponder

Most Christians do not believe infants or the mentally handicapped go to hopeless death. If hope is extended to these, then God (if He is truly impartial and just) will extend hope to all. If not, then these privileged few are given an unfair advantage. Who in their right mind would want to live beyond the age of accountability if an eternal hell is their destiny? Or who would want to be born with a sound mind, if a mental handicap would keep them out of hell?

Martin Luther, the father of the Protestant Reformation, regarding the possibility of salvation by faith after death, said, “Who would doubt God’s ability to do that?” He then said, however, that “no one can prove it.”(2) Thank God for the abundant evidence presented here.

It is amazing to me that a passage such as He. 9:27 has been used to deny the substance of these numerous passages! How could we have allowed ourselves to believe death is an insurmountable barrier to an Almighty God? We simply assumed our tradition handed down from the time of Augustine was correct. I urge you to prayerfully re-evaluate the Scriptural evidence in support of hope beyond death and hell. (Ge. 18:14; Job 23:13; 42:2; Ps. 115:3; 66:3-4; 135:6; Is. 14:24, 27; 50:2; 55:11; Jer. 32:17, 27; Ez. 36:23-36; Dan. 4:35; Mt. 19:26; Mk. 10:26-27; Lu. 1:37; 18:27; Ep. 1:11; Ph. 3:20-21; He. 6:17; 8:10).

A Just Judge

What kind of a judge is God? Can we count on Him to do what is right and fair for everyone? Absolutely! “Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?” (Ge. 18:25). Scripture abounds with references to His just and righteous judgments. Please reflect on these:

Beaten... according to guilt...forty blows...no more (De. 25:2-4).

All His ways are justice, a God...without injustice (De. 32:4).

As he has done, so shall it be to him—fracture for fracture, eye for eye, tooth for tooth (Le. 24:19).

The judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether (Ps. 19:9).

Your judgments are a great deep; O Lord, You preserve man and beast (Ps. 36:6).

To You belongs mercy; You render to each one according to his work (Ps. 62:12).

He shall judge the world with righteousness (Ps. 96:13; Ac. 17:31).

I know that Your judgments are right, and that in faithfulness You have afflicted me (Ps. 119:75).

Though He causes grief, yet He will show compassion according to the multitude of His mercies. For He does not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men (La. 3:31-33).

He does not retain His anger forever, because He delights in mercy (Mic. 7:18).

Every transgression and disobedience received a just reward... (He. 2:2).

Woe to you...you will receive greater condemnation (Mt. 23:14; Lu. 20:47). Greater than what?

It shall be more tolerable for Sodom in the day of judgment than for you (Mt. 11:20-24; Lu. 10:14). What kind of everlasting punishment would be “more tolerable” than another?

God renders to each according to his deeds (Ro. 2:5-6).

He who does wrong will be repaid for what he has done, and there is no partiality (Col. 3:25).

A generic infinite punishment for everyone contradicts all that Scripture declares about God’s just and righteous judgments. Statements like, “to each one according to his deeds” and “fracture for fracture—eye for eye,” fly in the face of infinite punishment. Each punishment fits its crime. God’s idea of justice is not different than ours. Yes, His ways are not our ways, but only because He has more mercy than we have, not less! (See Is. 55:7-8). These numerous passages demonstrate what is right for the Judge of all the earth to do in judgment.

God’s Wrath

What is God’s “wrath” [Greek—*orgee*]? The KJV translators translate this one Greek word by four English words: “wrath,” “anger,” “indignation,” and “vengeance.” Which is it? They don’t all mean the same thing. The more literal translations, most often translate it as

“anger.” Rotherham, Weymouth, and Young’s Literal translation all translate *orgee* as “anger” in the following passages.

Jesus...delivers us from the wrath [orgee—anger] to come (1Th. 1:10).

Because of these things the wrath [orgee—anger] of God is coming upon the sons of disobedience (Ep. 5:6; Col. 3:6).

Wrath [orgee—anger] has come upon them [Israel] to the uttermost (1Th. 2:16). Note: “God’s anger in its severest form has overtaken them” (Weymouth). Anger in its “severest form,” yet all Israel will be saved (Ro. 11:25-26).

Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath [orgee]; for it is written, “vengeance [requital—Vincent] is Mine, I will repay,” says the Lord (Ro. 12:19). Prof. Marvin Vincent, explains that vengeance (*ekdikeō*--Strong’s #1558) is an unfortunate rendering, as implying, in popular usage, personal vindictiveness. It is the full awarding of justice to all parties. See Vincent’s Word Studies of the N.T. Vol. IV, page 55. Notice Scripture interprets itself in this passage.

Orgee is interchanged with the idea of requital, “I will repay.” To “repay” signifies to recompense what is due, no more—no less. It is in total harmony with the many texts stating God will righteously judge each one according to his works. “He who does wrong will be repaid for what he has done, and there is no partiality” (Col. 3:25). “God renders to each according to his deeds” (Ro. 2:5-6). (See also: De. 32:2-3; Le. 24:19; Ps. 62:12; He. 2:2).

Being the most common word used by the literal translations, how does the dictionary define the simple word “anger”? “Extreme or passionate displeasure.” (3) In brief, God’s wrath is His passionate displeasure and just recompense of sinful conduct, which He deals with fairly according to deeds. This is all that can be said about God’s wrath. How tragic that images of innumerable multitudes being cast into an eternal furnace of fire have been falsely associated with this word.

Examples of Purpose-Driven Judgment

Scripture makes it clear that God exhibits no variation or shadow of turning. He does not change (Ja. 1:17; Mal. 3:6). If God’s past and present judgments are just, righteous, and purposeful, we can rest assured they will continue to be so in the future. Let’s look at some passages that demonstrate His positive purposes in judgment.

You refined us as silver...laid affliction on our backs...We went through fire...But You brought us out to rich fulfillment (Ps. 66:10-12).

When Your judgments are in the earth, the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness (Is. 26:9).

You have appointed them for judgment; O Rock, You have marked them for correction (Hab. 1:12).

Behold, happy is the man whom God corrects; Therefore do not despise the chastening of the Almighty. For He bruises, but He binds up; He wounds, but His hands make whole (Job 5:17-18). Happy! Does the thought that God’s judgments might have a wholesome purpose make you happy?

In trouble they visited You, they poured out a prayer when Your chastening was upon them (Is. 26:16). Is not “prayer” purposeful?

And if by these things you are not reformed by Me, but walk contrary to Me, then I also will walk contrary to you, and I will punish you yet seven times for your sins (Le. 26:23-24). “These things” refer to a list of judgments starting in verse 14. God, as a loving Father, persists in discipline until He achieves His goals, whatever it takes.

If they break My statutes and do not keep My commandments, then I will punish their transgression with the rod, and their iniquity with stripes. Nevertheless My loving-kindness I will not utterly take from him, nor allow My faithfulness to fail (Ps. 89:31-33).

Your judgments are right...in faithfulness You have afflicted me (Ps. 119:75). Even in the midst of His rod, stripes, and afflictions, His loving-kindness is present and His faithfulness does not fail. For it is in faithfulness He afflicts. We expect “loving-kindness and faithfulness” from good parents in their disciplines, do we not? Do not these terms reveal the Father heart of God is His loving discipline of His children?

Because they rebelled against the words of God, and despised the counsel of the Most High, therefore He brought down their heart with labor....Then they cried out to the Lord in their trouble, and He saved them out of their distresses (Ps. 107:11-13). “They cried to the Lord.” They recognized their need of God and sincerely sought Him. What could be more purposeful with those who have despised God counsel?

It is good for me that I have been afflicted, that I may learn Your statutes (Ps. 119:71). God afflicts to teach. This is good!

Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I keep Your word (Ps. 119:67). God’s afflictions clearly correct us.

When the Lord has washed away the filth of the daughters of Zion, and purged the blood of Jerusalem from her midst, by the spirit of judgment and by the spirit of burning... (Is. 4:4). He washes away filth by the spirit of judgment and burning.

The Lord will scatter you...you will serve gods, work of men’s hands...But from there you will seek the Lord. (De.4:27-29)

When you are in distress and all these things have come upon you...you will return to the Lord...and listen to His voice. For the Lord...is a compassionate God. (De. 4:30-31 NAS)

You have stricken them, but they have not grieved; You have consumed them, but they have refused to receive correction....They are foolish; for they do not know...the judgment of their God (Jer. 5:3, 4). They were stricken so they would repent and consumed to receive correction. But they were foolish and did not understand His judgments. Do we?

Through deceit they refuse to know Me....therefore...I will refine them and try them (Jer. 9:6-7). Those who refuse to know Him will go through a process of refining and testing. Is purpose not evident in the word refine?

*The fierce anger of the LORD will not turn back **until** He fully accomplishes the purposes of His heart. In **days to come** you will understand this* (Jer. 30:24 NIV). God’s judgment is proven to be measured and purposeful by the simple phrase, “until He fully accomplishes the purposes of His heart.” Can it be clearer? Are we now in those “days”?

*I have **driven** them in My anger; ...I will bring them back...for the good of them (Jer. 32:37-39). He drove them away, which ultimately was for their good. Was this not purpose “driven” judgment?*

All the earth shall be devoured with the fire of My jealousy. For then I will restore to the peoples a pure language, that they all may call on the name of the LORD, to serve Him with one accord (Zep. 3:8-9). When His judgments have achieved their purpose, the people will be united. They will then call on God and serve Him!

Who can endure the day of His coming...stand when He appears? For He is like a refiner's fire and like launderer's soap...He will purify... and purge them as gold and silver, that they may offer to the Lord an offering in righteousness (Mal. 3:2-3). His judgments are a refiner's fire, purging their impurities that they may offer an offering in righteousness.

Judgment to the nationstill He put forth judgment to victory, in his name shall nations hope (Mt. 12:18-21 YLT). “Judgment to victory” with nations hoping in His name speaks of great purpose!

Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be cast out. And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw [drag] all peoples to Myself (Jn. 12:31-32). When judgment comes, the enemy is cast out, and all peoples are dragged to Christ. Is this not judgment with a grand and glorious purpose?

Concerning the faith have suffered shipwreck, of whom are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I delivered to Satan that they may learn not to blaspheme (1Ti. 1:19b-20).

Deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus (1Co. 5:4-5). Here are two examples of judgment with purpose: learning not to blaspheme and saving the spirit. Even Satan is used of God. God is always in control.

Wrath has come upon them [Israel] to the uttermost (1Th. 2:16). “And so all Israel will be saved...He will turn away ungodliness from Jacob...” (Ro. 11:26). Wrath to the uttermost, yet salvation with ungodliness turned away. The purpose of this judgment is Israel's salvation in its appointed time.

*We shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ. For it is written... “every knee shall bow to Me, and every tongue shall [‘give praise’—NAS] to God.” **So then** each of us shall give account of himself to God (Ro. 14:10-12). (See also Ph. 2:9-11; Is. 45:22-25). Note that “for” and “so then” link judgment (both before and after) with worship. Is this not evidence there is a glorious purpose in judgment?*

My son, do not despise the chastening of the Lord, nor detest His correction; for whom the Lord loves He corrects, just as a father the son in whom he delights (Pr. 3:11-12). God chastens to correct, just as human parents do. Whom He loves He corrects. Whom does He not love? See “His Love” chapter 2..

*If you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom a father does not chasten? But if you are without chastening, of which **all have become partakers**, then you are illegitimate and not sons. Furthermore, we have had human fathers who corrected us, and we paid them respect. Shall we not much more readily be in subjection to the Father of spirits and live? For they indeed for a few days chastened us as seemed best to them, but He for our profit, that we may be partakers of His*

holiness. Now no chastening seems to be joyful... but painful; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it” (He. 12:5-11).

The Lord loves all people and we can rest assured all will be chastened in the same spirit seen here. “Afterward” it yields fruit. That is purpose! But there can be no “afterward” with infinite penalty. Kalen Fristad, a United Methodist minister and author of *Destined For Salvation*, wrote regarding Jer. 3:12-3, 22; 9:13-6; 32:37-8:

God allowed the Babylonians to conquer and enslave the Israelites for the purpose of getting them to return to Him....The purpose of biblical punishment is to make a wrongdoer a right-doer. If hell is endured without end, the experience would be of no value to an individual because there would be no chance of his embracing good, repenting and attempting a new beginning....Suffering from which nothing can be learned or gained is meaningless, and the one who brought it about would be a fiend not a father. We as parents discipline our children, not for the sake of punishment, but in order to encourage change. Surely God is at least as honorable as any parent in this regard. (4)

Christ warns us as believers; more is required of us:

Then Peter said to Him, “Lord, do **You speak** this parable only to us, or to all people?” And the Lord said, “Who then is that faithful and wise steward, whom his master will make ruler over his household, to give them their portion of food in due season? Blessed is that servant whom his master will find so doing when he comes. Truly, I say to you that he will make him ruler over all that he has. But if that servant says in his heart, ‘My master is delaying his coming,’ and begins to beat the male and female servants, and to eat and drink and be drunk, the master of that servant will come on a day when he is not looking for him, and at an hour when he is not aware, and will cut him in two and appoint him his **portion with the unbelievers**. And that servant who knew his master’s will, and did not prepare himself or do according to his will, shall be beaten with **many stripes**. But he who did not know, yet committed things deserving of stripes, shall be beaten with few. For everyone **to whom much is given**, from him **much will be required**; and to whom much has been committed, of him they will ask the more. I came to send **fire** on the earth...” (Lu. 12:41-49)

This passage is a warning to believers. What is the threat? To be cut in two and appointed our “portion” with unbelievers. Believers judged with unbelievers? Why should we be shocked? Does not the judge of all the earth do right? What is this “portion?” Many stripes! Not unending stripes. This is confirmed moreover by the use of the word “portion.” To have a “portion” of something fits with a measured judgment (Mt. 7:2), not with an eternal one. This is exactly how judgment in the lake of fire is expressed, “shall have their part in” (Re. 21:8).

Also, these “stripes” are associated with “fire,” the symbol of God’s purification process. Fire is something positive that everyone will be “purified by” (Mk. 9:49 GNT). See also page 209.

Is this parable the only text where we see believers being appointed their “portion” in judgment with unbelievers? Re. 21:8 list eight categories of sinners with unbelievers singled out. This indicates, if we are honest, that the others include believers. That agrees with this parable and the opening words, “He who overcomes.” How many of us have glossed over this list feeling self righteous about ourselves? Should we be so confident? Reflect on them a moment.

*He who overcomes shall inherit all things, and I will be his God and he shall be My son. But the cowardly [Are you courageous?], **unbelieving** [Do you believe all God's promises?* Ro. 4:21], **abominable** [Are you ever proud? Pr. 6:16-17], **murderers** [Are you ever angry? Mt. 5:21-22], **sexually immoral** [Do you ever look with lust? Mt. 5:28], **sorcerers, idolaters** [Do you ever covet? Col. 3:5], **and all liars** [Do you always tell people what you really think?] shall have their **part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death** (Re. 21:7-8). *Let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall* (1Co. 10:12).*Especially "Proclamations" chapters 6 & 7.*

Let us stop sweeping under the carpet the fearful parts of Scripture and denying the obvious. We who believe have been given much, and thus much is required of us (Lu. 12:48). The warnings are very real. Neglect them to our peril. But let's keep this in mind:

In ancient Eastern literature, exaggerated expressions and metaphors to accentuate concepts are intended to grab the reader's attention and not meant to be taken literally. This is typical oriental style as mentioned on page 225. The critical thing to remember in any strong language describing judgment, is the character of the Judge and the purpose of His judgments.

God "is" Love with no "buts." All His judgments are exacted in love with a just, righteous, and remedial purpose. This truth draws our hearts to sincerely love God with our whole being, brings true peace, and harmonizes the Scriptures.

William Law wrote:

All that passes for a time between God and his fallen creature, is but one and the same thing, working for one and the same end; and though this is called wrath, that called punishment, curse, and death, it is all from the beginning to the end, nothing but the work of the first creating love, and means nothing else, does nothing else, but those works of purifying fire, which must, and alone can burn away all that dark evil, which separates the creature from its first created union with God. God's providence, from the fall to the restitution of all things, is doing the same thing.*

William Law wrote "A Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life." He had a profound influence on Samuel Johnson, John and Charles Wesley, George Whitefield, W. Wilberforce, Andrew Murray, and others.

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In this chapter we have seen that: God is perfect in justice, infinite penalty is not just, death is no obstacle to God, and numerous passages demonstrated His good and remedial purpose in judgment. Though there are mysteries about God's judgments (Ro. 11:33), there are no mysteries about His nature, justice, and impartiality. Let us now consider the bigger picture of God's unailing plan for all.

* "Affectionate and Earnest Address to the Clergy. 1744. Addr-191.

CHAPTER FOUR

BLESSED HOPE
PART ONE

*The **grace** of God has appeared, bringing salvation to **all men**...looking for the **blessed hope** and the appearing of the **glory** of our **great** God.... (Tit. 2:11-13 NAS)*

In the next two chapters, I will attempt to present a comprehensive understanding of the big picture—God’s unfailing plan for man—as I perceive it through my dim mirror of understanding. I refer to it as the “Blessed Hope” as Paul links this phrase with the salvation of all and the appearing of God’s glory. The **salvation of all** is certainly a blessed, amazing, magnificent, grand, wondrous, awe inspiring, and glorious hope that brings **glory** to our **Great** God!

Hope for the World

Let us begin at the close of our Lord’s earthly ministry: the night of His arrest. His whole life had led up to this climactic moment. He knew exactly what was to befall Him (Jn. 18:4). In the midst of a time like this, please reflect on the cry of His heart:

*Lifting up His eyes to heaven, He said, “Father, the hour has come....Holy Father, keep them in your name...that they may be **one** even as we are one....that they may all be **one**...that the **world may believe**....that they may be **one**...that they may be **perfected in unity**, so that the **world may know** that You sent Me” (Jn. 17:1, 11, 21-23 NAS).*

Just think of it! Our Lord could have been completely paralyzed with fear with only His execution in mind. On the contrary, His thoughts did not dwell on Himself, but instead on all humanity. His heart went out to the whole world. And what does the world need? To witness Christians loving one another—walking in unity. The world has yet to see it. It is my conviction that the Blessed Hope has the potential to tear down the highest walls that have divided believers over the centuries, and restore the fullness of joy into the hearts of God’s people. “You greatly rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory” (1Pe. 1:8 NAS). Then the world will believe! Then the world will know who sent Christ and why!

Babes

It shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment than for you.” At that time Jesus answered and said, “I thank You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from the wise and prudent and have revealed them to babes.

(Mt. 11:24-25; See also 1 Co. 1:26-29)

I am grateful that the discovery of God's truth is not the exclusive domain of the religious "elite." In this passage, God has hidden "things" pertaining to His judgments from the wise and has revealed them to "babes." Oh, that we would all be babes! Many "babes" today, I believe, long for the day when the dark cloud veiling God's judgments is lifted from the Church. Oh what joy, peace, and unity of purpose will envelop His Body on that day! Then the world will know Jesus Christ is Lord! (Jn. 17:23). This is the glory of the Blessed Hope I cherish.

Reason

God expects us to think through what we believe and not to simply accept what men teach. Christ commands us to judge for ourselves what is right (Lu. 12:57). Paul exhorts us to test all things (1Th. 5:21) and to judge for ourselves what he says (1Co. 10:15). From the outset of biblical revelation, we are challenged to think for ourselves—"Shall not the judge of all the earth do right" (Ge. 18:25)? Does not such a question require thinking? Our Lord always expected His hearers to think. "What do you think, Simon" (Mt. 17:25)? "What do you think? If a man has a hundred sheep..." (Mt. 18:12). "What do you think? A man had two sons..." (Mt. 21:28). "What do you think about the Christ" (Mt. 22:42)? "If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father..." (Mt. 7:11)? Call to mind the Bereans who searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether the words preached to them were so (Ac. 17:11). They are said to have been "more noble-minded" (NAS). We have been endowed with great reasoning powers, and God expects us to use them. He even invites us to reason with Him! "Come...let us reason together, says the LORD" (Is. 1:18). It is our very capacity to reason that enables us to love and be like God.

Our hell tradition goes against all reason. In response to this, some will quote Is. 55:8: "His thoughts are not our thoughts, and His ways are not our ways." By this, they are inferring man's reasoning is flawed—what we think is cruel and unjust is really not. If this be true, then we are not made in His image and have nothing in common with God. It would be impossible to reason with Him on any level. But is this what Isaiah meant? If you check the context, you will see that His thoughts are different than ours in relation to mercy, not cruelty. What a travesty such a wondrous passage has been twisted out of context to say the very opposite about God. This is a prime example of invalidating the Word of God for the sake of tradition (Mt. 15:6)—a tradition fostering a fear toward God taught by the commandment of men (Is. 29:13).

Though man a thinking being is defined
Few use the great prerogative of mind.
How few think justly of the thinking few!
How many never think, who think they do!
—Jane Taylor (1)

Question of Questions

How can a good God create creatures He knows will be tormented forever? There are two views. There is the prevalent view, that this is the price God had to pay to get a few into Heaven. The second view is the Blessed Hope. He does not face this dilemma at all, but reconciles all to Himself in the fullness of time. Which most glorifies the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ? Which conforms with an all-knowing, all-powerful, and all-loving Creator?

How can we believe God is good, while at the same time believe infinite penalty is the lot of most of humanity? We cannot unless we have a perverted sense of what “good” is, or we do not believe God has the power to prevent it, or we have not thought long and hard enough about the horror of what infinite penalty entails. However, if we believe God is “good” in the normal sense, and His penalties are finite and just, there are no conflicting issues. This is the theology of the New Testament, the early Church, and a remnant of believers throughout the centuries since. It is a theology that honors God, satisfies both reason and God’s moral witness in each heart, and best harmonizes the Scriptures. This is the Blessed Hope.

Power *versus* Love or Power and Love?

I look at it simply. Jesus said we must receive the kingdom of God as a child (Mk. 10:15). If one and one equals two, it cannot be three. The following two points add up to a final glorious outcome and not a tragic one.

God is all-powerful and always accomplishes His will. (Calvinist/Reformed theology).

God loves all people and wills the reconciliation of everyone. (Arminian theology – that of most Christians).

Since He wills the reconciliation of all and has all power necessary to accomplish His will, is it too much to believe He will accomplish it? For if He does not, which part of the equation is flawed? “A” or “B”? Calvinists say “B” is flawed, while Arminians say “A” is flawed. But if we accept “A” as the Calvinists do, and “B” as the Arminians do, then we would, like a child, conclude that every person must ultimately be reconciled. This is the Blessed Hope.

POWER + love = Calvinism / Reformed View

Power + **LOVE** = Arminianism / Majority View

POWER + **LOVE** = Blessed Hope View

The key to unlock the mystery as I see it, is that Calvinists are right about God’s power, and Arminians are right about His love. The tragedy is that both adhere to Augustine’s theory of judgment which forces them to reject (or explain away) the glorious side of each other’s theology. But if instead, they both embraced the Blessed Hope, they would become one and the world would soon know Jesus Christ is Lord! (Jn. 13:35; 17:21, 23). There would be nothing to reject or explain away. The greatest theological controversy and division in the body of Christ would vanish. Might this not be the key to set the captives free, harmonize the Scriptures of judgment and mercy for all, and unite the body of Christ?

Which of these three views comprehends “the width and length and depth and height” of Christ’s love, and does justice to His unlimited power (Ep. 3:18-19; page 48)? Which most glorifies God?

Paradigm Shift

How can Christ be considered greater than Adam if Adam’s transgression has greater power to condemn than Christ’s merit and sacrifice has the power to save? Have you considered this enigma? Please stop a moment and think about this. This is important.

If you are facing perplexing and disturbing questions in your faith, perhaps your conception (paradigm) of God is flawed. How we understand God's nature and character, as reflected in his grand plan for humanity, affects how we understand the world and directly affects how we interpret the Scriptures. "If your eye [conception of God] is false your whole body [being] will be full of darkness" (Mt. 6:23).

For 25 years I held the Arminian view of God. Then, while a missionary in Senegal, West Africa, the realization that I did not have complete assurance of my salvation unsettled me. I wrestled with this for months and finally concluded that salvation had to be the work of God. I had made a paradigm shift. I began to understand God's power in the way our Calvinist and Reformed brethren do. I continued joyfully in this new perspective for about two years, until I no longer found comfort in my "personal" salvation. How could I in the midst of a world of lost people? Living in a Muslim nation deeply affected me. It prepared me to consider a third paradigm —the "Blessed Hope."

Most people are not aware of how powerfully their conception of God affects how they understand the Scriptures. It forces them to conclude that certain passages cannot mean what they seem to say. For example: "For as in Adam **all** die, even so in Christ **all** shall be made alive" (1Co. 15:22). My previous conception of God had forced me to limit the scope of the second "all" to a few only. My present view of God no longer limits it. However, it has not been easy seeing passages differently than how I have always seen them. I was conditioned for so long to see them in a certain way. Stepping out of my former paradigm has been a slow and hard process. But once the veil started to lift, I began seeing Scripture without the filter of an eternal hell. I was free to receive God's revelation in a fresh new way. What a discovery!

Let us embrace the paradigm that truly honors, magnifies, and glorifies God. We should not be surprised that the predominant view has been the hard and cruel dogma of Augustine. It conforms to the legalistic, hard, and cruel sides of our fallen nature. Man's tendency has always been to amplify what seems to be the hard side of God, and our tradition reflects that. It blinds us from seeing God's true nature in mercy and judgment. I pray God will open your heart and mind to the paradigm worthy of His Name.

Salvation

What is meant by "salvation"? What does believing in Jesus save us from? In "Repentance and Salvation," Robert Wilkin, executive director of the *Grace Evangelical Society* stated:

It would be difficult to find a concept which is richer and more *varied in meaning* than the biblical concept of salvation. The breadth of salvation is so *sweeping* and its intended aim so magnificent that in many contexts the words used *defy precise definition*. (2)

Joseph Dillow, Th.D. Dallas Theological Seminary and author of *The Reign of the Servant Kings*, explained:

Salvation is a *broad term*. It commonly means "to make whole," "to sanctify," "to endure victoriously," or "to be delivered from some general trouble or difficulty." Without question, the common "knee-jerk" reaction which assumes that "salvation" always has eternal deliverance in view, has seriously compromised the ability of many to objectively discern what the New Testament writers intended to teach. (3)

In *A Generous Orthodoxy*, Brian McLaren, founding pastor of Cedar Ridge Community Church in Baltimore and author of *Finding Faith* and other titles, wrote,

In the Bible, “save” means “rescue” or “heal.” It emphatically does not automatically mean “save from hell” or “give eternal life after death.”...Its meaning varies from passage to passage, but in general, in any context, “save” means “get out of trouble.” (4)

In order to better understand salvation, we need to get a broad overview of what Christ came to do for us. He came to:

Give rest (Mt. 11:28).

Heal the brokenhearted, free the captives and oppressed, and give sight to the blind (Lu. 4:18).

Comfort the mourning, give beauty for ashes, joy for mourning, and a garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness (Is. 61:2, 3).

Save from sin and turn from iniquity (Mic 7:19; Mt. 1:21; Ac. 3:26; Ro. 11:26).

Save from God’s passionate displeasure (wrath) and just recompense of sinful conduct (Ro. 5:9). (See “God’s Wrath,” page 71).

Set free from sin (Ro. 6:22).

Rescue from this present evil age (Ga. 1:4 NAS).

Bring hope and God to the hopeless and godless (Ep. 2:12).

Redeem from every lawless deed and purify us. (Tit. 2:11-15 NAS).

Set free those who all their lives were enslaved to the fear of death (He. 2:14-15).

Redeem from aimless conduct (1Pe. 1:18-19).

Model compassion for the distressed and dispirited and igniting our hearts to pray for laborers in the harvest (Mt. 9:36-38 NAS).

If salvation is deliverance from eternal woe, why the emphasis on temporal deliverances? These passages speak of deliverance from being heavy laden, blindness, broken-heartedness, sorrow, mourning, heaviness of spirit, hopelessness, impurity, fear of death, aimless conduct, weariness, being distressed and dispirited, lawless deeds (sin) and their consequences, the present evil age. How can Scripture emphasize these comparatively insignificant temporal pains in the face of infinite pain? For life on earth is but a vapor (Ja. 4:14), and then we are hurled into eternal woe. How could James say pure religion is to visit orphans and widows (Ja. 1:27)? What a waste of time when we could be snatching the masses from hell! Why does Scripture not place the emphasis where it ought to be? Why the smoke screens? The only answer making sense to me is that a flawed view of judgment has distorted the significance and scope of God’s salvation.

Salvation’s Purpose

Having an idea of what we are saved “from,” we must now consider what we are saved “unto.” C. S. Lewis, twentieth century British teacher and prolific author, understood the purpose of salvation. He wrote, “Every Christian is to become a little Christ. The whole purpose of becoming a Christian is simply nothing else.” (5) Scripture reveals salvation to be a process as much as it is an event. It goes beyond a new birth experience. Consider these:

Warn...that we may present everyone perfect in Christ (Col.1:28). Warn against what?

Boldness in the day of judgment; because we are like Him (1Jn. 4:17). Christians facing judgment?

Work out salvation (Ph. 2:12-13). Salvation by works?

Shall be saved by His life (Ro. 5:10). Shall be saved? I thought we were saved already!

Take heed...in “doing” you will save yourself (1Ti. 4:16). Saved by doing? Save yourself?

How are such expressions reconciled with Paul’s teaching on salvation by grace? They refer to salvation’s “made complete” dimension (Col. 1:28)—the end goal of our salvation. Salvation always depends completely on the work of Christ on the cross. But, we must understand that God is going somewhere with our salvation. We are predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son (Ro. 8:29); “We shall be like Him...” (1Jn. 3:2); “Till we all come in the unity of the faith...unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ” (Ep. 4:13 KJV; Ga. 4:19). Reconciliation (Ro. 5:10) is not salvation in that sense, but refers to what God has already done in Christ. It is a means to an end—our perfection (Col. 1:28). Once reconciled, God’s purpose is for us to become transformed into the image of Christ. This is why believers are said to be “especially” saved (1Ti. 4:10) since they are presently submitting to God who is working salvation in them (Ez. 36:27; Ep. 2:10, 3:20; Ph. 1:6, 2:13, 4:13; Jn. 15:5). Salvation goes beyond deliverance from temporal things and from God’s passionate displeasure in judgment, to actual deliverance from our sinful nature. Our perfection is the goal (See Ro. 6:3, 4, 11-12; 8:29; Ga. 4:19; Ph. 2:12-13; Col. 1:27-28; 2Ti. 2:11-13; Tit. 2:14; 3:8; Ja.1:27; 1Jn.3:3; 1 Jn. 4:17).

Attaining the fullness of salvation, our perfection in Christ, comes only through the cross working in our lives. “God forbid that I should boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world” (Ga. 6:14). It is only through dying to ourselves, sufferings, and trials that we develop spiritually. (Mt. 16:24; Jn. 12:24; Ro. 5:3-5; 6:6; 2Co. 12:9, 10; Ga. 2:20; Ja. 1:2-4; 1Pe. 1:6-7; 2:21).

Though sufferings and trials, our cross, are not redemptive (only the blood of Christ is), they are nevertheless essential to our training. Either we take up our cross willingly, or God will lay it on us in His own time. For the way of the cross is the only path to our “full” salvation—“to a perfect man” (Ep. 4:13). There are no shortcuts. Even Christ “learned obedience by the things which He suffered” (He. 5:8). “The disciple is not above his teacher; but everyone who is *perfectly trained* will be like his teacher” (Lu. 6:40).

We must all be perfectly trained. Believers have been given the opportunity to live a godly and selfless lifestyle in this age, i.e. crucifying themselves daily in the steps of Christ. Unbelievers will have their opportunity in the coming age or ages as God brings the cross upon them through purposeful judgment.

Why faith then? What is its purpose? What does it mean to believe in the “name” of Jesus for salvation (Ac. 4:12; Ph. 2:9-11)? Faith is “trusting” in God’s “Person”—His nature, character, and ways, being fully assured, that what He promises, He can and will do (Ro. 4:21). It is not a religious formula, but childlike trust in the true God (Mk. 10:15). Faith opens the channels of God’s blessings into our lives. As we trust Him we begin to know His peace and subsequently yield to His Spirit working in us.

Many think that because they have faith, they are a cut above the rest. Not so. Faith is God’s gift and work in us. Hebrew and Greek scholar, Dr. Michael Jones says that the “gift,” referred to in Ep. 2:8, clearly and unmistakably refers back to both salvation and faith in the Greek. (6) This is confirmed by He. 12:2: “Jesus, author and finisher of our faith” (He. 12:2). The following, I believe, will confirm this: Mt. 11:27, 16:16-17; Jn. 1:13, 6:44, 15:16; Ac.

13:48; Ro. 10:17, 12:3; 1Co. 4:7; Ph. 1:6, 1:29, 2:13; Col. 1:12; 1Ti. 1:14; Ez. 36: 26-27; Jer. 24:7, 31:33-34, 32:39-40.

Some even scorn the thought that unbelievers may be able to trust Christ beyond this life. How sad. “Of course they’ll believe then,” they say, “it will all be too obvious. There will be no merit to that!” Merit? Since when is faith meritorious? “Where is boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? Of works? No, but by the law of faith” (Ro. 3:27). Why must faith only be valid in this life? Can trusting God ever become obsolete? And what “if” faith were limited to this life? Would that paralyze an almighty, all-loving God from restoring life to whom He wants, when He wants, and where He wants? When did He stop being GOD?

Mystery to Ponder

God, in His infinite wisdom, integrates both mercy (pardon) and judgment (chastisement). It is not simply “either/or” as our tradition implies. To give you an example of what I mean, consider the following texts. How do we explain them?

*To You...belongs mercy; **for** You render to each according to his work* (Ps. 62:12; 101:1). Mercy, yet He renders according to work?

You were to them God-Who-Forgives, Though You took vengeance [punished—ABP] on their deeds (Ps. 99:8). God forgives, yet punishes?

Say to those with fearful hearts, “Be strong, do not fear; your God will come, He will come with vengeance [will recompense—ABP]; with divine retribution He will come to save you” (Is. 35:4 NIV). Do not fear because God comes with recompense? Divine retribution to save you?

Her iniquity is pardoned; she has received from the Lord...double for all her sins (Is. 40:2). Sin pardoned, yet receives double for sin?

We [believers] must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may be recompensed for his deeds...according to what he has done, whether good or bad...He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him (2Co. 5:10, 21 NAS). Recompensed for bad deeds, yet righteous in Christ?

*As the elect of God...Christ forgave you....**but** he who does wrong will be repaid for what he has done, and there is no partiality* (Col 3:12, 13, 25). Forgiven, yet repaid?

Judges according to work...redeemed...precious blood of Christ (1Pe. 1:17-19). Judged according to work, yet redeemed?

*We ourselves have **known**...God’s love toward ourselves...Love will come to its perfection in us **when** we can face the day of Judgment without fear;...to fear is to expect punishment* (1Jn. 4:16-18 JB). Although we know (experience) God’s love (v. 16, 19), i.e. mercy; we rightly fear chastisement in the day of judgment if we lack love. We who know His love should fear His judgment? Who is sure they are perfect in love? Are you?

How do we reconcile these seemingly conflicting statements? In addition to these, have you noticed the extensive number of warnings in Scripture directed to believers—to those redeemed and washed in the blood? These warnings are real. The answer lies in simply accepting that God integrates both mercy and judgment as He sees necessary. But is there a verse that states this plainly? Yes! “Judgment is without mercy to the one who has shown no

mercy” (Ja. 2:13). Jesus states it His own way: “Blessed are the merciful for they shall obtain mercy. (Mt. 5:7).” One depends on the other.

In one sense, we are “justified” by faith (Ro. 5:1, etc), yet, in another sense, we are not. A lowly tax collector is “justified” as a result of his humility, while a high ranking Pharisee is not justified in spite of his prayer and faith (Lu. 18:9-14). Now what if this humble tax man had acted like the wicked servant in Mt. 18:32? He too would have been delivered to the jailers until his original debt was paid (34-35). So then, lasting justification depends on our continuance in merciful deeds. Jesus repeats the same idea when emphasizing the role of faith in prayer. He admonishes us that while praying, unless we forgive, we will not be forgiven (Mk. 11:22-26). So then, God works through **both** mercy **and** judgment to accomplish His will in each of our lives. Is this not fair and just?

Along with this, might there be further light offered if forgiveness, like salvation, has more than one dimension? Could there be both a legal **and** relational side to it? All humanity receives pardon from our inherited sin in Adam through Christ’s redemption as the last Adam (Ro. 5:11-21; 1Co. 15:22, 45; 1Jn. 2:2). We gain “legal” pardon based solely on the merits of Christ just as we have legally inherited Adam’s sin. Note that the legal, financial term involved is “redeem” (1Pe. 1:18; Ep. 1:7). Yet relational forgiveness depends on each individual’s response to God’s truth revealed in his or her heart. “To whom much is given (revealed), much is required” (Lu. 12:48). God is absolutely fair and just with each person (Le. 24:19). In all the universe no one is more fair and just than He (De. 32:4; Ps. 19:9).

“If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1Jn. 1:9). This is “relational” forgiveness as it is linked to confession, a relational act. Notice the reason He forgives: He is “just.” Why is justice a factor? Because Christ legally paid the ransom for the sins of the whole world! (1Ti. 2:6; 1Jn. 2:2). Since the debt has been paid, God must forgive. But that does not exclude Him from doing it on His terms and for our correction (Pr. 3:11-12). Remember, He is a loving Father to all (pages 51-59).

We need to recognize that God integrates **both** mercy **and** judgment. This factor is a crucial piece of the puzzle helping us to better understand God’s plan for all. By applying mercy together with judgment, He accomplishes what is good and just in all our lives. Charles Pridgeon, president and founder of the Pittsburgh Bible Institute, argues:

There is an erroneous idea that when one accepts forgiveness of his sins, he thereby escapes all the consequences of his sins. This is by no means the case, as everyone may know by experience. The consequences last until there is no longer need of their warning and judging lesson. Some of them continue to the end of this life, and even extend much further. (7)

Does this throw a wrench in our theology? Did we think we had God or even salvation all figured out? Did we forget how deep are the riches of God’s wisdom and knowledge; that His judgments are unsearchable and His ways unfathomable (Ro. 11:33)? Did we forget even Paul only knew in part (1Co. 13:9-12)? How could we have expected Paul to make everything clear when even he admitted to seeing without complete clarity? Is it any wonder myriads of Christian denominations fiercely adhere to conflicting tenets?

Let us humble ourselves before God’s power and wisdom and accept that He is infinitely greater than we can imagine (Ep. 3:20). Let us accept that we do not have all the answers. Let us cease being dogmatic in our doctrines and humble ourselves before the mighty hand of God. Consider what was said to Daniel: “Do not fear, Daniel, for from the first day that you set your heart to understand, and to humble yourself before your God, your words were heard...” (Da. 10:12). The key to understanding is a humble and seeking heart.

“Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out” (Ro. 11:33)! “For we know in part...For now we see in a mirror, dimly...Now I know in part...” (1Co. 13:9-12). “Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us...be glory” (Ep. 3:20).

In order to appreciate the vital role of God’s just and righteous judgments in His unfailing plan for all, we must understand salvation’s depth and purpose—the grand scope of what it encompasses; salvation’s relationship to faith and the Cross; and recognize that God integrates pardon with chastisement. Failure to recognize any of these vital elements will compromise our ability to find harmony within the Scriptures and grasp the awesome majesty of God!

Thoughts and Prayers

Ephesians 3:20 states God is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all we ask or think. Do we believe it? Can we dare believe, hope, and pray for something this grand and wonderful—that God can and will accomplish all His will for humanity? Is His hand so short it cannot redeem all people (Is. 50:2)? Is the redemption of all not good and acceptable to Him (1Ti. 2:3)? John Wesley believed that God can convert a world as easily as one individual. (8) Was he mistaken? The apostle Paul wrote:

*I exhort...that...supplications, **prayers**, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men...for this is **good and acceptable** in the sight of God our Savior; who **will have all men to be saved**....Christ Jesus...gave himself **a ransom for all**, to be **testified in due time**...I will therefore that men pray everywhere, lifting up holy hands **without...doubting** (1Ti. 2:1-6, 8 KJV). (See also: Mk. 11:22-4; Ro. 4:20; Ja. 1:6-8).*

Does God not call us to pray and thank Him for the salvation of all, and to do so without doubting? Is He not willing and able? If we err by praying in such a lofty way, would this dishonor or displease Him? Our only sin would be taking His Word to heart. If I am to err, let it be for expecting too much of God, not too little. Let us dare to think and believe the very highest thoughts of God! What can be higher than thanking Him for the salvation of all people?

Scope of the Gospel

Scripture, foreseeing God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel to Abraham beforehand, saying, ‘In you all the nations shall be blessed’.
(Ga. 3:8)

The Gospel is defined in eight simple words! “In you all the nations shall be blessed.” These words are the very Gospel Paul preached—justification by faith. This Gospel was first revealed to Abraham and is repeated five times in Genesis! (Ge. 12:3; 18:18; 22:18; 26:4; 28:14). God did not want us to miss it. Notice it does not say “some” nations, but “all.” The important question in all this is: Does the term “nations” include every person? Peter makes it clear:

*In your seed **all** the families of the earth shall be blessed. To you first, God, having raised up His Servant Jesus, sent Him to bless you, in turning away **every one** of you from your iniquities.* (Ac.3:25-26)

According to Peter, the blessing of all nations includes all the “families” of the earth. But he does not stop there. He goes on specifying that the blessing includes every member of the family. Notice his words, “every one of you.” For years as a missionary, I have heard and read that God was merely interested in a token representative from every nation, tribe, and tongue. That has always troubled and perplexed me. As I look at Scripture more closely, I see a totally different picture of God. Let’s look at this passage again:

*In your seed **all** the families of the earth shall be blessed. To you **first**, God, having raised up His Servant Jesus, sent Him to bless you, in turning away **every one** of you from your iniquities. (Ac. 3:25-26).*

Acts 3:25-26 establishes four critical points.

The Gospel comes to the elect first (not exclusively), and in “due time” it will bless every one of your family members, regardless of what you think their present spiritual state is.

What is the blessing? It is turning away from sin.

It is the same gospel Paul preached—justification by faith. This is established in Galatians 3:8 via God’s promise to Abraham (Ge. 12:3) and repeated here (Ac. 3:25).

It confirms that justification by faith, as marvelous as it is, is not an end in itself; it is the prerequisite to turning from sin, the “working out” of our salvation.

Think about the term “family.” What does it mean to be a member of a family? It means one is part of a cohesive whole. If one is hurting, all are hurting. It can be accurately compared to the Body of Christ. We are “*members individually*,” and the members should have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all the members suffer with him or her (see 1Co. 12:25-27). Now ponder this: How can these “blessed ones” spoken of by Peter in the above passage—all individual members of families—experience the “great joy” of the Gospel (Lu. 2:10; Ro. 10:15) if they are vexed and tormented over the destiny of any of their lost family members? Could you “greatly rejoice with joy inexpressible” (1Pe. 1:8 NAS), knowing that your son, daughter, dad, mom, wife, or husband are suffering in an eternal hell?

If we do not provide, love, and care for our own household, we have denied the faith and are worse than unbelievers (1Ti. 5:8). We must love our family members and neighbors “as” ourselves (Ro. 13:8-9). If we so loved in truth, we could not have peace and joy unless we knew all our loved ones were eternally safe. This simple truth alone confirms the unlimited scope of the Good News.

Paid in Full

One of the last things Christ said while hanging on the cross was, “Father, forgive them” (Lu. 23:34). Did God not answer His prayer? In John’s gospel, His last recorded words were, “It is finished” (Jn. 19:30), which *The Bible Knowledge Commentary* says means, “**paid in full.**” (9) What is the significance of this? Consider the commentary John provides on Christ’s redemption. What better commentary could we have than the author? He says, “Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world” (Jn. 1:29)! He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and *not for ours only* but also for the whole world” (1Jn. 2:2). The sins of the **whole world** have been **paid in full!** I would not dare place any limitations on the power of the blood of Christ to save all for whom it was shed—the world.

Perhaps no passages are more precious and essential than these. I entreat you to prayerfully meditate on each one.

Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world” (Jn. 1:29)! The world!

It is finished (Jn. 19:30). Paid in full!

He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world (1Jn. 2:2). The world!

The LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all (Is. 53:6). Everyone!

My flesh...I...give for the life of the world (Jn. 6:51). The world!

Christ died for the ungodly (Ro. 5:6). That includes everyone!

When we were enemies we were reconciled...through [His] death (Ro. 5:10). If you and I, why not all?

Justification...to all men (Ro. 5:18 NAS). All men!

If One died for all, then all died (2Co. 5:14). His death affects all!

For it pleased the Father...by Him to reconcile all things to Himself...through the blood of His cross (Col. 1:19-20). All!

He...tasted death for everyone (He. 2:9). Everyone!

Christ...suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust (1Pe. 3:18). Everyone!

He gave Himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time (1Ti. 2:6). Everyone!

Christ gave Himself a ransom for all (1Ti. 2:6) and not merely some. He propitiated not only our sins, but also those of the whole world! (1Jn. 2:2). That includes the ungodly (Ro. 5:6), the unjust (1Pe. 3:18), and even His enemies (Ro. 5:8). In fact everyone (He. 2:9). The ransom for their sins has been paid in “full” (Jn. 19:30). Thus all are reconciled through His blood (Col.1:20). I accept these passages as they read. Moreover, because I do, I am confident that God will reveal Himself to all men in His ordered (due) time (1Ti. 2:6).

What “Paid in Full” Implies

Christ did not suffer in vain for anyone. Sooner or later, all will come to faith and obedience. All are washed in the blood. “And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw [drag] all men to myself” (Jn. 12:32 RSV). See “Drags All” chapter 6.

Why is “all coming to faith” so hard to believe in light of what Scripture teaches about Christ’s death and God’s power? Just think of your own faith and obedience. You were blessed enough to experience it in this age, perhaps in your youth or later in life. In either case, it happened. To whom do you give credit for your faith and obedience? Do you credit yourself for being lucky enough to have been at the right place at the right time? Or wise enough to have seen the opportunity and seized it (Lu. 10:21; 1Co. 1:26-31)? Or righteous enough to carry your cross and remain faithful to the end? If you do not credit yourself, then you must credit another—Christ and His “paid in full” redemption. So then, I will assume you do not credit yourself but Christ for your salvation.

Do you believe you are saved while most of the human race is going to hell forever? If so, think carefully what this means. It means God has arbitrarily selected you over others; or that He finds you more worthy than others; or both. But this denies that Christ has “paid in

full” sin’s debt. It denies that God is impartial and fair with every person on earth (page 56). It denies that Christ accomplished His mission (Jn. 17:4, 12:47). It means the Father’s will and purpose to save all is forever denied. It means His love is not without end (1Co. 13:8). Do you see the contradiction in all this? This is very serious. But I have good news for you. There is a Biblical solution to your dilemma. That solution is understanding God’s purposes in election. That will be discussed in the next chapter.

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In this chapter we saw that the burden of our Lord’s heart was for the whole world and that our oneness is essential to our witness.

Education, wisdom, and status are not the prerequisites for spiritual revelation; we must be as babes before Him. We are called to judge for ourselves what is right and to face the question of questions. “How can a good God create people He knows will be tormented forever?” The two major Christian theologies were contrasted with each other. Each magnifies a key attribute of God – His love or His power. The Blessed Hope was shown to glorify God in both of these attributes. Could this be the key to Christian unity and world witness? Veiled from the traditional paradigms is the salvation of all and the integration of both pardon and chastisement. The wondrous scope of salvation was traced to God’s promise to Abraham, confirmed by Peter and Paul, and ultimately by Christ on the cross, as the sins of the whole world were “paid in full.”

We start with Christ facing the cross with the world on His heart, and close with His very last words while suspended between heaven and earth: “Father, forgive them....It is finished.” Such forgiveness confirms the Blessed Hope. In the next chapter, we will address several themes essential to a fuller appreciation of this hope.

BLESSED HOPE PART TWO

*...the bringing in of a better hope, through which
we draw near to God.
(He. 7:19)*

What role has God given the Church in His unfailing plan for humanity? How do the “ages” or “time” fit into His economy?

Election

Election, to many, is a theological term meaning God has decided in advance who He will save from hell. Its roots go back to Augustine (most influential Church Father). (1) The Augustinian view of election holds that God has chosen to save a select few—His “elect.” Many pastors have been taught this in seminary, particularly those of the Baptist and Reformed persuasions. Fewer and fewer are openly professing it today. One prominent theologian who has exerted a profound influence in Calvinist circles (and on my life 30 years ago), was Arthur Pink. He wrote:

Faith is God’s gift, and “all men have not faith” (2Th. 3:2); therefore, we see God does not bestow this gift upon all. Upon whom then does he bestow this saving favor? We answer, upon his own elect—“As many as were ordained to eternal life believed” (Ac. 13:48) hence it is that we read of “the faith of God’s elect” (Tit. 1:1). But is God partial in the distribution of his favors? Has he not the right to be? Are there still some who “murmur against the good man of the house?” Then his own words are sufficient reply—“Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with mine own” (Mt. 20:15)? God is sovereign in the bestowment of his gifts.... (2)

Pink frankly stated that God is partial when the testimony of Scripture says He is not (See Ps. 145:9; Ac. 10:34; Ro. 2:11; 10:12-13; Ga. 2:6; Ep. 6:9; Col. 3:25; 1Ti. 2:3-4; 1Pe. 1:17). The truth in Pink’s understanding of election lies in his acceptance of all that the Bible teaches regarding God’s power and sovereignty. In this, I agree. God does have the power to draw any one to Himself whom He chooses. The point on which Pink has erred is not in election itself, but in its purpose. Had he understood that, he would not have been forced to draw the conclusion that God does not love all men impartially. The following passages lend support for election: (Mt. 11:27; Mk. 4:12-23; Ac. 13:48; Ro. 8:28-30; 9:3-5, 11-26; 10:20; 11:5-12; 1Co. 1:23; 2Th. 2:13; 1Ti. 6:12; 2Ti. 2:25; Tit. 1:1; He. 3:6; 9:15; 12:2; Ja. 2:5; 1Pe. 1:2, 3; 2:12).

Purpose of Election

Like Pink, most who believe in election view it solely as deliverance from infinite punishment. However, infinite punishment is not a biblical teaching. God has called a people in election, choosing them for a particular purpose. It has nothing to do with God playing favorites. This has been His way from the time of Abraham and the Israelite nation, down through the centuries to the Church of the firstborn (He. 12:23).

*The Lord said to Abram: "Get out of your country...to a land that I will show you. I will make you a great nation; I will bless you and make your name great; you shall **be a blessing**...in you all families of earth shall be blessed." God...preached the gospel to Abraham beforehand, saying, "In you all the nations shall be blessed" (Ge. 12:1-3; Ga. 3:8). (See Ge. 18:18; 22:18; 26:4; 28:14; Ac. 3:25).*

God promised Abraham and his seed that they would be the heirs of the world! (Ro. 4:13). With this comes purpose and great responsibility. We, the members of Christ's body, are His "elect." We are called to "be" a blessing, and not merely to be "blessed." "He saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was given to us in Christ Jesus before time began" (2Ti. 1:9). "In the exercise of His will He brought us forth by the word of truth, so that we would be a kind of first-fruits among His creatures" (Ja. 1:18 NAS).

We as a "kind of first-fruits" among His creatures share this distinction with Christ who is the "firstborn over all creation" (Col. 1:15). We labor with Him to implore all people to be reconciled with God (2Co 5:20). We are preparing now to rule and reign with Him in the coming ages (2Ti. 2:12; Re. 20:6), to govern five or ten cities (Lu. 19:17, 19), to sit on thrones governing the tribes of Israel (Mt. 19:28; Lu. 22:30), even to rule over all He has (Lu. 12:43-4). Our Lord is preparing leaders for that time, and it all depends on our faithfulness now (2Ti. 2:12-13).

The phrase "first-fruits," naturally implies there are "second" fruits. Who are they? They are those whom God will reach in "due time," who are not part of the first-fruits. Christ will draw [drag] **all** to Himself (Jn. 12:32). "For if the first-fruit is holy, **the lump is also holy**" (Ro. 11:16). In God's eyes, all are holy and set apart for Himself, including the lump from which the elect are derived and worthy of His wondrous salvation. But, you might ask, "Does not the lump refer to the elect Gentiles only?" No. Consider the immediate context of the preceding verses. "Now if their transgression is **riches for the world** and their failure is riches for the Gentiles, how much more will their fulfillment be!...For if their being cast away is the **reconciling of the world**, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead" (Ro. 11:12, 15)? I repeat, "In the exercise of His will He brought us forth by the word of truth, so that we would be a kind of first-fruits among His creatures" (Ja. 1:18 NAS). "Riches for the world," "reconciling the world," and "first-fruits among His creatures," refer to all men. And would God command us to "do good to all men" (Ga. 6:10) if He has no intention to do so Himself? Please note the words emphasized in this next verse:

*He chose us...before the foundation of the world...predestined us to adoption...according to the good pleasure of His will....having made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure which He purposed in Himself, that in the dispensation of the **fullness of the times** He might **gather together in one all [things]** in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth—in Him....predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will, that we who **first trusted** [first-fruits] in Christ should be to the praise of His glory (Ep. 1:4-12).*

“He made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, that in the *ages to come* He might *show* [“display” WEY/DBY] the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus” (Ep. 2:6-7). To whom does God plan to display the exceeding riches of His grace if not to those in greatest need of it? Why display it to those who have already known and experienced it?

“The household of Stephanas...the *first-fruits* of Achaia...have devoted themselves to the ministry of the *saints*” (1Co. 16:15). As first-fruits, our ministry is both to those within the elect family of God, and to those yet outside. For unless the first-fruits themselves receive the nurture they need, they will lack the brightness of God’s reflection before the world (Mt. 5:13-16; Ga. 6:10).

[Please read Ro. 8:19-23.]

The creation also will be delivered from corruption. Of course, this includes people. Who groans more than suffering humanity for whom Christ died? The focus here is not the animal kingdom. For all people (as second fruits) in due time, are dragged into Christ (Jn. 12:32). and thus delivered from corruption and brought into the liberty of the first-fruit company. Notice how the phrase “first-fruits” is introduced in the immediate context of the “whole creation” (vs. 22 - 23). Truly, this has great significance.

[Please read 1Pe. 2:9, 12.]

To what purpose are the elect chosen? To demonstrate an honorable conduct before the lost that they may glorify God on the day of visitation. Is it not the salvation of the lost that most glorifies God? Those who glorify Him on that day will have come to know Him through the elect! What a responsibility we have!

Do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And...angels (1Co. 6:2-3)?

*Jesus Christ...has made us **kings and priests*** (Re. 1:5-6).

*These...were redeemed from among men, being **first-fruits** to God...* (Re. 14:4-5).

We are the first-fruits—the priests and kings who will judge the world and intercede for the ungodly (lost) in this age and the ages to come. Note, we are not “exclusive” fruits. We are only “first” fruits among many to come. Andrew Jukes explained:

To say that God saves only the first-born would be, if it may be said, to make Him worse than even Moloch, whose slaves devoted only their first-born to the flames. But Scripture never says that these only shall be saved, but rather that “in this seed,” whose portion as the first-born is double, (De.21:17) “all kindreds of the earth shall be blessed.” I fear that the elect, instead of bearing this witness, have too often ignored and even contradicted it.
(3)

God does not merely settle for the first-fruits. They are but the pledge for the whole. As a royal priesthood (1Pe. 2:9), we are to labor with Christ in gathering in the whole crop—the remaining fruits. We are to shine as lights in a dark world, and not merely form Christian country clubs. We must guard against exclusiveness toward those “yet” outside the fold.

Is the organized church today much different than the Israelites who stoned Paul and Steven for merely mentioning that the Gentiles were included with them? True, as believers, we have a legal adoption status. However, we are nevertheless wild olive shoots grafted in (Ro. 11:17) and as such are not special above the rest of men. We are of the same stock.

For if the first-fruit (elect) is holy, the lump (humanity) is also holy (Ro. 11:15-16). We easily forget that “while” we were enemies we “were” reconciled to God (Ro. 5:10). While “still” sinners Christ died for us (Ro. 5:8; 5:6). We need to keep in mind one principal difference between an “us” and “them” mentality: to whom much is given, much is required (Lu. 12:48).

Plan B

I would like to now address those steeped in Arminian theology (those who do not recognize the role of election in God's plan). Contrary to Arminian beliefs, God never had a "plan B." Christ was "indeed" foreordained before the foundation of the world (1Pe. 1:18-20) "God saved us...before time began..." (2Ti. 1:8-9). "The Lamb was slain from the foundation of the world" (Re. 13:8). "He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world" (Ep. 1:4). God did not do the best He could; He did the best He would! Augustine's idea of infinite penalty was never part of God's plan. For the God of the Universe is GOD, not god. The Trinity is not God, the Devil, and the Will of Man! This is polytheism. But God Is One! To say God had to change His plans due to man's unpredictability does grave injustice to God's absolute sovereignty over His creation, His power, His wisdom, His knowledge, and His victory over all evil. In truth, it does nothing less than strip Him of His DEITY.

As I look closely at the Scriptures, I see a God who knows where He is going; a God who knows the future. God has but one plan and the following passages bear this out.

And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, And you shall bruise His heel (Ge. 3:15).

Then He said to Abram: "Know certainly that your descendants will be strangers in a land that is not theirs, and will serve them, and they will afflict them four hundred years. And also the nation whom they serve I will judge; afterward they shall come out with great possessions" (Ge. 15:13-14).

But I am sure that the king of Egypt will not let you go, no, not even by a mighty hand (Ex. 3:19).

I am God, and there is none like Me, declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times things that are not yet done, saying, "My counsel shall stand, and I will do all My pleasure....Indeed I have spoken it; I will also bring it to pass. I have purposed it; I will also do it" (Is. 46:9-11).

Before I formed you in the womb I knew you (Jer. 1:5).

We are "predestined according to the purpose of Him who 'works all things' according to the counsel of His will" (Ep. 1:11).

For more examples, you may consider these: Ex. 9:30; 11:9; 1K. 13:1-5, 32; 21:20-22; 2K. 8:12; Ps. 147:5; Is. 41:21-26; 44:11, 28; 65:24-25; Mt. 10:17, 18, 21, 22; 11:14, 21; 12:45; 13:35; 24:2, 33-41; Mk. 14:30; Lu. 14:28-32; Jn. 6:64; 8:20; 21:18-19; Ac. 2:23; 15:8, 18; 17:26; Ro. 4:17; 8:29-30; 11:2, 33; Ga. 3:8; 2Ti. 1:9; Tit. 1:2; He. 4:13; 1Pe. 1:2, 19-20; 1Jn. 3:20; 5:14; Re. 13:8; 17:18. This list is not exhaustive. (In addition, consider all the Messianic Prophecies).

Due Time

According to Andrew Jukes, three principle truths solve the great riddle of mercy for all (Ro. 11:32) and few finding the way (Mt. 7:14): These truths involve: 1. Election. 2. The ages (along with the correct interpretation of *aion*). 3. Death, destruction, and judgment. "These truths throw a flood of light on Scripture, and enable us at once to see order and agreement, where without this light there seems perplexing inconsistency." (4)

We need to take seriously the many references to God's appointed times or "ages." How do they relate to God's loving purposes in bringing salvation to all men (Tit. 2:11 NAS)? When will such take place? Let's see.

*God...will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth. For...Christ...gave Himself a ransom for all, to be testified in **due time** (1Ti. 2:3-6 KJV). Christ gave Himself a ransom for all, which will be testified [or proved TEV, NEB] in its proper time or era.*

*He has made everything beautiful **in its time** (Ec. 3:11).*

***At that time** Jerusalem shall be called the Throne of the LORD, and all the nations shall be gathered to it, to the name of the LORD....No more shall they follow the dictates of their evil hearts (Jer. 3:17).*

*The fierce anger of the LORD will not turn back **until** He fully accomplishes the purposes of His heart. In **days to come** you will understand this (Jer. 30:24 NIV).*

***Seventy weeks** are determined for your people and for your holy city, to finish the transgression, to make an end of sins, to make reconciliation for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness...(Da. 9:24).*

*Whom heaven must receive **until the times** of restoration of all things, which God has spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began (Ac. 3:21).*

***To you first**, God, having raised up His Servant Jesus, sent Him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from your iniquities (Ac. 3:26).*

*At **this present time** there is a remnant according to the election of grace (Ro. 11:5).*

*Do not... be ignorant of this mystery...blindness in part **has happened** to Israel **until** the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. So **all Israel will be saved**....The Deliverer will come...He will turn away ungodliness from Jacob; for this is My covenant with them, **when** I take away their sins (Ro. 11:25-27) (See also Ro. 11:8). Note Paul does not distinguish between Jew and Greek (Ro. 10:12-13).*

*In the dispensation of the **fullness of the times** He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth—in Him (Ep. 1:9-10).*

*In the **ages to come** He might show [display WEY—DBY] the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus (Ep. 2:7).*

[Please read 1Co. 15:22-28.]

***For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive** (1Co. 15:22 NAS).*

*But each in his own order: Christ the **first-fruits**, **after** that those who are Christ's at His coming. **Then** comes the end, **when**... (1Co. 15:23-24 NAS).*

When what? "When all things [persons—page 132] are subjected to Him...that God may be all in all" (1Co. 15:28 NAS). Notice the four critical time references used here: "first-fruits," "after," "then...when." These time words seem to relate to three separate time periods (orders) and three categories of persons.

What is the goal of all being subjected to Christ? That God may be all in all. "When all things [people] are subjected to Him, *then* the Son Himself also will be subjected to the One who subjected all things to Him, *so that God may be all in all*" (1Co. 15:28 NAS).

God All in all! Could this be the full realization of Christ's nature and power in us? Yes! Here is worship at its pinnacle as every knee bows and all tongues confess that Jesus Christ is Lord! Everyone is saying "blessing and honor and glory and power be to the Lamb!" (Ph. 2:10-11; Re. 5:11). Worship flows without reservation from only sincere hearts in love with God! All ignorance and rebellion are abolished (Jn. 1:7, 9; Ro. 14:11; He. 2:8). Nothing but child like trust in God remains. The last enemy (death) is destroyed! (1Co. 15:26). Only life remains! Now, with no more death and rebellion, God is always and forever All in all. This points to a glorious transformation and culmination of human experience into the very nature of God Himself—the complete realization of what we were meant to be.

*You **have put** [past tense] **all things in subjection** under his feet. For in that He put [past tense] all in subjection under him, He left **nothing** that is not put under him. **But now** we do not **yet** see all [things] put under him (He. 2:8).*

This is a very revealing passage. It assures us that though all have not "yet" made Christ their Master, they will! "You *have put* all in subjection." Christ works in every life toward this goal and cannot fail. All in "due" time will come to a place of genuine repentance. "He left *nothing* that is not put under Him." Nothing! God can refer to future events as past—"God...calls those things which do not exist as though they did" (Ro. 4:17b); for He is the eternal "I AM" (Ex. 3:14) who transcends time (Ps.90:4; Ep. 1:4, 10; 2:7; He. 13:8; 2Pe. 3:8).

The Greek word for "subjected," here is *hupotasso* (Strong's #5293) (5), which applies to both Christ and man. "Now, whenever all may be subjected [5293] to Him, then the Son [as the Son of Man—Man's representative Head] Himself also shall be subjected [5293]..." (1Co. 15:28 CLT). Paul uses this same word in the context of the righteousness of faith: "They being *ignorant* of God's righteousness...*have not submitted* [5293] to the righteousness of God...righteousness to everyone who believes" (Ro. 10:3, 4).

Once God lifts the veil covering all eyes, and His righteousness in Christ is revealed, what will stop all from submitting to Christ? A submitted and believing heart brings glory and honor to God, and conforms to such an awesome thought as "God all in all." That is precisely why submission will take ages to achieve. Sure, God could cause all creation to bow to Him instantly by brute force. He could have done that ages ago. But this is not the submission worthy of a God who "is" love. "He is able even to subdue [win the hearts of] all things [people] to Himself" (Ph.3:21). "How awesome are your works! Through the greatest of your power your enemies shall submit themselves to you. All the earth shall worship you and sing praises to your Name" (Ps. 66:3-4). "Christ...seated...above all...not only in this age but also in that which is to come. And He put all things [people] under His feet...Him who fills all in all" (Ep. 1:20-3). What a God! He has a plan for humanity that transcends everything Augustinian theology has ever taught. I now know He makes everything beautiful in its time. Sadly, many of Scripture's critical time statements have been veiled to us by the mistranslation of the Greek word *aion*. (See Appendix V #2).

Last Things

Biblical truth is not always presented in chronological order. The final events regarding the end of the ages and the restoration of all things take place beyond the scope of the book of Revelation. At its close, we do not see an end to all rule, authority, and power (Re. 22:15). For Christ must reign until He has put all enemies under His feet, including death. Only when all are subjected to Him, will God be all in all (1Co. 15:28). John does not tell us this in Revelation. Paul does. But John does reveal some important details about the age to come. They can be interpreted symbolically or literally. Though I present a literal approach, I do not discount a symbolic interpretation.

The Holy City of God—New Jerusalem comes down out of heaven and God with the Lamb abide in it and are its light (21:2, 3, 23). Nations walk in its light and bring their glory into it and its gates remain open (21:24-25). Yet nothing unclean can enter the city (21:27), only those who have washed their robes or who do His commandments (22:14 - depends on which ancient manuscript your Bible is based on). The city, if interpreted literally, will cover an area about the size of half the continental USA (Re. 21:16), and there is no sea (Re. 21:1). So can you imagine how large the inhabited world is. Outside the city is a world of lost people (22:15)! Verses 20:4, 6 introduce us to priests who are reigning with Christ. There is a tree of life with leaves to “heal the nations” (22:2). God’s bond-servants (NAS) serve Him and reign -- to the ages of the ages (22:3,5 YLT).

Let’s recap: The gates never close, yet there is a world of sinners outside. There are servants serving God and priests reigning. There are nations needing healing. What does it all mean?

Well, nations are people. Who needs healing more than the sinners outside? What will Christ’s servants, priests, and co-rulers of Christ be doing? I believe they will rule justly, proclaim the Good News, and intercede as priests! Why not? Verse 22:17 says, “Come! Let him who thirsts come. Whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely!” Is it not right to think that this invitation applies to the very sinners mentioned in the same context (verses 15 -17)? When does Christ stop being a Savior? He is the same yesterday, today, and forever! (He. 13:8). So long as a Savior is needed, He saves! Sinners “outside” will at some point bow their knees and worship Christ as Lord (Ph. 2:9-11). They will repent, do His commandments, and have the right to the tree of life, just as you and I. Does God change?

For I am the LORD, I do not change; therefore you are not consumed, O sons of Jacob (Mal. 3:6).

God is love. Love never ends (1Jn. 4:8; 1Co. 13:8 RSV).

The Father...with whom there is no variation (Ja. 1:17).

He pursues the lost sheep **until** He finds them! (Lu. 15:4, 7). We will labor with Him as joint heirs (if we suffer with Him now - Ro. 8:17) and fellow workers in His world harvest!

Although the book of Revelation is the last book in the Bible, it was Paul, not John, who received the most far reaching and profound revelations of Christ and God’s purposes for the Church. “I became a minister according to the divine office, which was given to me for you, *to make the word of God fully known, the mystery hidden for ages* and generations but now made manifest to his saints” (Col. 1:25-26 RSV). Darby & CLT read, “to complete the word of God.” Paul was named the “Apostle to the Gentiles” (Ro. 11:13). We can call him “our Apostle.” To Him was given the truth regarding justification by faith and the law’s purpose; Israel and the Church, (with no distinction between Jew and Gentile); the fruits of the Spirit and the priority of Christian unity; the Bride of Christ and our freedom in Him; spiritual gifts with love as the more excellent way; Church government and the five-fold ministry; instructions pertaining to worship, the Lord’s supper, family relationships, giving, diet, godly living, church discipline, spiritual warfare, civil government; and finally, the **consummation of the ages** (1 Co. 15) climaxing in the ultimate reconciliation of humanity with God becoming **All in all** (1 Co. 15:26-28). All this came through Paul.

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The Blessed Hope is a glorious hope encompassing a global view of God’s plan for humanity that truly rejoices the heart. This is Good News! (Lu.2:10). In this chapter, I have shown that God has called us, His “elect,” to be lights in the world. We have been given a

privileged status, not for ourselves, but for Him, in serving all people. God is truly sovereign over all creation and has but one perfect plan. His destiny for all cannot be thwarted and will come to pass in His due time. To see God's unfailing plan unfold in Scripture, we must understand the true meaning of key biblical words such as *aion* and realize that Paul, not John, was given the revelation of the consummation of the ages.

I pray that you will look at all Scripture from the viewpoint of God's absolute sovereignty and infinite love. We must understand judgment in light of who God is, and not God from a flawed view of judgment. Judgment serves God's unfailing purposes for all. I offer these thoughts, not as one with great knowledge, but merely as one who believes in a great GOD. I pray He imparts to you only what pleases Him. I invite you to take a journey with me through the passages that have sealed the Blessed Hope in my heart.

PROCLAMATIONS PART ONE

The word...upon which You have caused me to hope.
(Ps. 119:49)

The above verse clearly expresses what the next couple of chapters are all about. Here, I present 36 texts that either directly confirm or indirectly support my conviction in the Blessed Hope. Truly, they are the word upon which He has caused me to hope. They speak powerfully to me, and I hope they will to you too. I have arranged them in alphabetical order with a few exceptions. Please pray for God's revelation as you read these precious passages.

All Is Possible

With God all things are possible.
(Jer. 32:17; Mt. 19:24-26; Mk. 10:27; Lu. 1:37; 18:26)

With God all things are possible? Do we believe this statement? Is it possible that an all-powerful God who can do anything, and who loves everyone, cannot save whom He will, or will not save whom He can? I can accept that one might admit they do not know if God can or would save those in hell. But, to say dogmatically "there can never be any hope" is a frank denial of this passage, God's power, and the many promises made in Scripture.

Beatitudes

Blessed are you poor, for yours is the kingdom of God.
Blessed are you who hunger now, for you shall be filled.
Blessed are you who weep now, for you shall laugh.
(Lu. 6:20-21)

Christ was not speaking only to believers here as seen in Lu. 6:19, 7:1; Mt. 5:1-2, 7:28-29; and Mt. 8:1. He addressed the crowd. According to our tradition, the majority of humanity is hopelessly lost. Therefore, when will these lost ones receive the kingdom, be filled, and laugh? I no longer struggle with this passage, as I can simply accept it as it is. This is one more example of how the Scriptures are harmonized as a result of the Blessed Hope.

Creation Freed

*For the earnest expectation of the creation eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it in hope because the **creation** itself also **will be delivered** from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. For we know the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs until now.*

(Ro. 8:19-22)

“Creation” in the above passage certainly includes people. Christ died for people. What part of creation groans and labors with birth pangs more than people? All people in God’s appointed time will be delivered from the bondage of corruption and share in the blessings of the sons of God, the first-fruits (elect) of His creation. That is what this glorious passage says. Any other view demeans this precious promise into something insignificant. If people are not referred to here, how do we understand the following passages?

Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature (Mk. 16:15).

If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation (2Co. 5:17).

In Christ, neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails but a new creation (Ga. 6:15).

“Creation” clearly includes people! Oh, if we would only see how central people are in this passage. We could then fully experience the great comfort and joy it was intended to impart to our hearts!

Death Destroyed

The last enemy that will be destroyed is death....
(1Co. 15:26)

Death is an enemy and will be destroyed. Which is the last enemy, the first death or the second? German scholar and Bible translator A.E. Knoch wrote:

Death at any time is an enemy. We are agreed on that. The second death is an enemy. One of these is the last enemy. Is it the first or second? Can the first death be the last enemy? No enemy can be last if it has another coming after it. Hence the single word last is all the proof needed to establish the fact that it must be the second death which will be abolished. (1)

If death, the last enemy, is destroyed, then life is the result. If this is not so, the statement is void of meaning. For what is the opposite of death? For the process of dying is not the greatest or last enemy, it is the state of death itself. Whether death be the first, second, or tenth, nothing changes because “death” in 1Co. 15:26 is not qualified. Scripture includes any types there may be. “O Death, where is your sting? O Hades [hell], where is your victory? The sting of death is sin....But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through Christ” (1Co. 15:55-57).

Drags All

*Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of
this world will be cast out. And I, when I am lifted up from
the earth, will draw all men to myself.*
(Jn. 12:31-32)

The word “draw” (Greek - *helkouro*) is literally “to drag.” (2) It is not restricted by the resistance of the object being pulled. Once the judgment of this world has run its course and the ruler of this world is cast out, Christ will drag all men to Himself. He confirmed this just a few verses further (vs. 47) by saying He came “to save the world.” Christ successfully accomplished His mission! (Jn. 17:4; Jn. 3:17).

Consider the unrestricted force of “draw” in these examples:

*Peter, having a sword, **drew** (helkouo) it and struck...* (Jn. 18:10).

*Peter went up and **dragged** (helkouo) the net to land, full of large fish* (Jn. 21:11).

*They seized Paul and Silas and **dragged** (helkouo) them into the market place* (Ac. 16:19 NAS).

*Taking hold of Paul, they **dragged** (helkouo) him out of the temple* (Ac. 21:30 NAS).

*Is it not the rich who...**drag** (helkouo) you into the courts.* (Ja. 2:6)?

As the “sword,” “net,” “Paul,” “Silas,” and the poor were not able to resist the “dragging” powers that overcame them, neither can any power resist Christ’s dragging power. No power is greater than God; nothing can resist Christ. “I will drag all men to Myself.”

Especially Believers

*This is a **faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance.***

*For to this end we both labor and suffer reproach, because we trust in the living **God, who is the Savior of all men, especially of those who believe. These things command and teach.***

(1Ti. 4:9-11)

This must be a very important passage to warrant such a powerful introduction and closing. Paul exhorts us to view these faithful words as worthy of all acceptance, and tells us to command and teach these truths. Understand the importance of this critical passage. If God is the Savior exclusively of those who believe during their earthly existence, as our tradition teaches, then this passage is clearly in error. The difference between “exclusively” and “especially” is paramount. To interchange these concepts is to contradict Scripture.

What does “especially of those who believe” mean? The immediate context sheds much light: “Set the believers an example....practice these duties....so that all may see your progress. Take heed to yourself and teaching; hold to that, for *by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers*” (1Ti. 4:12-16 RSV).

Is this salvation by works? No, it is “working out” salvation (Ph. 2:12). God’s purpose in salvation is not to save us in our sins (Mt. 1:21), but from them. Christ saves us from our sinful nature and transforms us into His image (Ga. 4:19) so we may shine as lights in the world (Mt. 5:13-16). Thus, believers are “especially” saved because they have been justified by faith, and are presently working out their salvation as God empowers them (Ph. 2:13). Their salvation is being perfected (made complete) for all to see (1Ti. 4:15-16).

None of this changes the fact that God is still the Savior of those who do not yet believe. Once His righteous, just, and purpose-driven judgments have run their course, death will be destroyed, all will be made alive, and all will be subjected to Christ. Then God will be all in all (1Co. 15:22-28). He is, in an ultimate sense, the Savior of all men, (unbelievers and believers) but especially, at present, of believers.

The Greek word “especially,” is *malista*. Could it also mean “exclusively”? The only way to know is to observe how it is used in Scripture. This is a good example of how useful *The Word Study Concordance* can be. *Malista* occurs twelve times. As you read these references, try substituting the word “exclusively” and see how it fits.

*They...fell on Paul’s neck sorrowing **most of all** [*malista*] for the words which he spoke* (Ac. 20:38).

*I have brought him out before you all and **especially** [malista] before you King Agrippa (Ac. 25:26).*

*Agrippa...**especially** [malista] because you are an expert (Ac. 26:2-3).*

*Let us do good to all, **especially** [malista] to those who are of the household of faith (Ga. 6:9-10).*

*All the saints greet you, but **especially** [malista] those who are of Caesar's household (Ph. 4:20-23).*

*If anyone does not provide for his own, and **especially** [malista] for those of his household, he has denied the faith... (1Ti. 5:3-8).*

*Elders be counted worthy of double honor, **especially** [malista] those who labor in the word and doctrine (1Ti. 5:16-18).*

*Bring the cloak...and the books, **especially** [malista] the parchments (2Ti. 4:13).*

*There are many...deceivers, **especially** [malista] those of the circumcision... (Tit. 1:10-11).*

*But more than a slave—a beloved brother, **especially** [malista] to me but how much more to you (Phil. 16).*

*Reserve...for the day of judgment, and **especially** [malista] those who walk according to the flesh (2Pe. 2:9-11).*

Can we substitute the idea of “exclusively” for “especially” in any of these *malista* passages? No! Nor do we have grammatical or contextual grounds to do so in 1Ti. 4:10. Compare this passage with Ga. 6:10: “...let us do good to all, *especially* to those who are of the household of faith.” Can we neglect doing good to unbelievers? Of course not! Neither can we deny that God is the savior of **all** men. But to the contrary, we are commanded to teach this very thing!

Every Knee

At the name of Jesus every knee will bow.

(Ph. 2:10-11 NAS) See also Ps. 66:3-4; Is. 45:22-25; Ro. 14:11; Re. 5:13

It is tragic that our hell theology has forced us to deny the glorious majesty of this great declaration. It has forced us to read into it a compelled submission, as we would give to one like Hitler. Without such a prejudice, we would never have restricted the passage this way. A close look at the context will prove that only a genuine adoration is possible. I list 20 points to demonstrate this in Appendix II.

Fullness of Times

*According to His good pleasure which He purposed in Himself, that in the dispensation of the **fullness of the times** He might **gather together in one all** things in Christ...in Him...who works all things according to the counsel of His will.*

(Ep. 1:9-11)

The good pleasure of God is to gather together in one all people, from every place. A time is coming when this promise will be realized in all its greatness. For God is truly GOD, a God who works all things out according to the counsel (purpose) of His will. This is not “wishful” thinking; it is His decree. What He decrees will take place and nothing—not even man’s sin or will can stop it (Job 42:2; Ez. 36:27; Da. 4:35). In God’s good time, He will bring everyone into Christ. This is not hard to believe for us who know His love, power, and will.

Forgive Them

“Father, forgive them...”
(Lu. 23:34)

Do you think the cruel soldiers who crucified Christ were forgiven? I do. Christ prayed for them, sealing His request in His blood. Would God forgive the ones who tortured His Son and bar forever from forgiveness those for whom He died? Please think about this.

Christ on the cross is the embodiment of forgiveness—the key element of our faith (Mt. 6:9-15). What hinders forgiveness more than worshipping a God who never forgives the lost? Belief in eternal punishment has short circuited the Gospel’s power for over 1600 years hindering our ability to forgive. But the Good News is, there are no limits to God’s forgiveness! Christ, the very image of God, forgiving His torturers, is all the proof we need. Why even read this book?

If God writes people off forever, so will we. For 34 years my brother Bob ridiculed me for my faith. I tried countless times to share Christ with Him, but to no avail. Eventually, I wrote him off. This was until I discovered God’s unending love. Once I began to see Bob through God’s eyes of limitless love, my love for him was rekindled. No longer did I see him as a lost cause, but as a worshipper of God in the ages to come (Re. 5:13). It may be I who will wash his feet in God’s Kingdom. What a revelation! This radically changed my attitude towards him. I began to honor him as I saw him through the eyes of Christ, beholding his torturers, asking for their forgiveness. Bob died suddenly one day. And though I grieve, I’m at peace.

Friend, God does not command us to do what He will not do. The Gospel of Peace (Ro. 10:15) magnifies God in His unlimited love and forgiveness. With hearts enraptured by such a God, and filled with His Spirit, we too will forgive as Christ did. And when the world sees and experiences **that** forgiveness, it will encounter Christ in us and be drawn to Him as He proclaimed (Jn. 12:32)!

For As...Even So

For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive.
(1Co. 15:22)

Would the following statement sound strange to you? “For as in the pre-Civil War era **all** Southern African Americans were slaves, **even so**, in the post-Civil War era, **some** of them were given liberty.” It sounds strange to me. It doesn’t make sense.

In “For as **all**...even so **all**,” the agreement makes grammatical sense.

In “For as **all**...even so **some**,” the statement makes no grammatical sense because “all” and “some” do not agree in context: “for as...even so” requires agreement. Grammatically, you cannot say, “all” to mean “some.” “All” means “inclusive;” “some” does not.

Some say that “made alive” simply means all are resurrected to judgment. The whole context argues against such a thought, for “made alive” is presented solely as something glorious and positive. (I discuss this next). Others claim “all” refers to two completely different groups of persons. Only those “in” Christ are made alive, inferring that the majority of humanity is excluded. This would be tautology, for it is like saying, only the saved will be saved. Of even greater weight is the context: in such a glorious chapter as this, to say “only the saved will be saved” would seem a forced or strained interpretation. For in what way then would death be destroyed, swallowed up in victory, and its sting lost (See 1Co. 15:26-28, 54-55)? Do the magnificent words of these verses fit with a victory affecting just a small fraction of those dead in Adam? The Jerusalem Bible makes it unmistakably clear: “Just as all men die in Adam, so all men will be brought to life in Christ” (1Co. 15:22).

Made Alive

For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive.
(1Co. 15:22)

To some, “made alive” means merely to resurrect in order to annihilate. The word is *zōopoieō* (Strong's #2227). It is the verb form of *zōē* (#2222). Vine defines it as, “to make alive, cause to live, quicken” from *zōē*, “life,” and *poieō*, “to make.” (3) *Zōē* is the same word used in Jn. 3:16, and in more than 130 New Testament passages. “I am the way, the truth, and the life [*zōē*]” (Jn. 14:6). The phrase “made alive,” (*zōopoieō*) is used only 12 times (Jn. 5:21a, 21b; 6:63; Ro. 4:17; 8:11; 1Co. 15:22, 36, 45; 2Co. 3:6; Ga. 3:21; 1Ti. 6:13; 1Pe. 3:18). Try to read the idea of annihilation or everlasting torment in any of these references and see if they fit. You will quickly see they refer only to a positive and glorious spiritual life.

Last Adam

As through one transgression there resulted condemnation to all men, even so through one act of righteousness there resulted justification of life to all men. For as through the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, even so through the obedience of the One the many will be made righteous.
(Ro. 5:18-19 NAS)

Let's take a moment to break down and discuss this text.

Clause 1. *“As through **one** transgression there resulted condemnation **to all men**,*

Clause 2. *even so through **one** act of righteousness there resulted justification of life **to all men**.*

Clause 3. *For as through the **one** man's disobedience **the many** were made sinners,*

Clause 4. *even so through the obedience of the **One** **the many** will be made righteous”*
(Ro. 5:18-19 NAS).

Why should “the many” in clause 4 refer to a different group than “the many” in clause 3, since nothing is said to indicate a difference? Only someone trying to support an agenda would try to read into it such an idea. In addition, it would contradict clauses 1 and 2. The point made in clauses 3 and 4 is singular versus plural.

Singular—versus—plural
the one—affecting—the many

Since everyone agrees all men were made sinners, clause 1 clearly refers to all men. Clause 2 argues from clause 1 and even states all men are in view. In clause 3, Paul expounds his thought further, he points out Adam, though only one person, has affected the lives of the multitudes of humanity (the many). No one will argue “the many” in clause 3 is not all men. So also, in clause 4, the exact comparison is being made except that “the One” affecting the lives of the multitudes of humanity (the many) is Christ. The “many” of clause 4 must be the same “many” as clause 3 because nothing is stated to the contrary. The “for as” followed by the “even so” requires the agreement. An honest seeker of truth must acknowledge these relationships. Basic grammar and ethics require it.

The Weymouth translation words it clearly.

*It follows then that just as the result of a single transgression is a condemnation which extends to the whole race, so also the result of a single decree of righteousness is a life-giving acquittal which extends to the whole race. **For as through the disobedience of the one individual the mass of humanity were constituted sinners, so also through the obedience of the One the mass of humanity will be constituted righteous** (Ro. 5:18-9).*

Joseph Kirk, pastor, radio preacher, and former director of *Scripture Studies Concern*, said it this way:

But someone will ask, Why does it say “the many” instead of “all” in verse 19? This is because the one disobedient man and the One righteous Man are put in a class by themselves. They are in contrast with “the many.” We may put it as follows: The one disobedient man plus “the many” equals all humanity made sinners. The One obedient Man plus “the many” equals all humanity made righteous. That “the one” plus “the many” made sinners, includes all humanity, few, if any, attempt to deny. Even so, “the One” plus “the many” made righteous is all-inclusive and guarantees justification of life for all humanity. (4)

See also Richard H. Bell’s “Romans 5:18-19,” *New Testament Studies*, Vol. 48 (2002), pp. 417-432. This Tübingen scholar argues “that Paul does in fact support a universal salvation in Rom. 5.18-19. Such an understanding is supported by both the context and by a detailed study of these verses” (p. 417). (5)

Finally, to get the full sense of Paul’s force of argument, we need to meditate on the whole context, especially verses 12 through 21. In the event Paul might be misunderstood, he spells it out clearly in his closing statement. “Where sin abounded, grace abounded *much more*” (Ro. 5:20)! How can a believer claim Christ gained back less than what Adam lost?

One phrase has been used to reduce the “many” in Christ to mean the “few”: “For if by the one man’s offense death reigned through the one, much more those *who receive* abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ” (Ro. 5:17). Paul is comparing Adam to Christ. He refers to “those who receive [*lambanō*]” in a passive sense. Adam sinned, and as a result, all men have received (passively) the consequences of his action. The consequences of Christ’s action must also be received in the same manner, or Paul’s whole argument falls apart. Dr. Bell’s exegesis confirms this. (5) Consider the following examples of Paul’s use of the word, *lambanō*, in the very same letter:

*Through Him, we have received [*lambanō*] grace and apostleship for obedience to the faith among all nations for His name* (Ro. 1:5).

We also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received [lambanō] the reconciliation (Ro. 5:11).

For you did not receive [lambanō] the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received [lambanō] the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, “Abba, Father” (Ro. 8:15).

In which of these cases is *lambanō* used in an active, qualifying sense? They are all examples of passively receiving something as a result of factors outside of ourselves. In the same way we have received (*lambanō*) the Spirit of adoption, or sin in Adam, we have received (*lambanō*) abundance of grace in Christ. See how this passage reads in the literal versions.

For if by the offense of the one the death did reign through the one, much more those, who the abundance of the grace and of the free gift of the righteousness are receiving, in life shall reign through the one—Jesus Christ (Ro. 5:17 YLT).

For if, by the offense of the one, death reigns through the one, much rather, those obtaining the superabundance of grace and the gratuity of righteousness shall be reigning in life through the One, Jesus Christ (Ro. 5:17 CLT).

For, if, by the fault of the one, death reigned through the one, much more, they who the superabundance of the favour and of the free-gift of the righteousness do receive, in life, shall reign through the one, Jesus Christ (Ro. 5:17 ROTH).

For your scrutiny, I submit this passage in the *Greek Interlinear New Testament*. It illustrates the exact relationship between the words of Scripture, incorporating the *Strong's Concordance* numbering system:

ei <1487> {IF} gar <1063> {FOR} tw <3588> {BY THE} tou <3588> {OF THE} enov <1520> {ONE} paraptwmati <3900> o <3588> {OFFENCE} yanatov <2288> {DEATH} ebasileusen <936> (5656) {REIGNED} dia <1223> {BY} tou <3588> {THE} enov <1520> {ONE,} pollw <4183> {MUCH} mallon <3123> {MORE} oi <3588> {THOSE} thn <3588> {THE} perisseian <4050> thv <3588> {ABUNDANCE} caritov <5485> {OF GRACE} kai <2532> {AND} thv <3588> {OF THE} dwreav <1431> thv <3588> {GIFT} dikaiosunhv <1343> {OF RIGHTEOUSNESS} lambanontev <2983> (5723) {RECEIVING,} en <1722> {IN} zwh <2222> {LIFE} basileusousin <936> (5692) {SHALL REIGN} dia <1223> {BY} tou <3588> {THE} enov <1520> {ONE} ihsou <2424> {JESUS} cristou <5547> {CHRIST} (Ro. 5:17)

If *lambanō* here is in an active and qualifying sense, then it would restrict the “all” to those lucky enough to have heard the Gospel in this life; intelligent enough to have understood it clearly; wise enough to accept it; and dedicated enough to deny themselves, carry their cross, and endure to the very end. If stringent conditions are necessary to receive God’s grace, what stringent conditions were necessary to receive Adam’s curse? What choice were we given? Paul’s whole point is that what Christ has gained for lost humanity exceeds what Adam lost! Only one forced to defend an eternal hell would try to insist that *lambanō* here is in an active, qualifying sense.

Paul’s argument is irrefutable: God, who is Love, sent Christ, “a life-giving spirit” as the last Adam (1Co. 15:45). In His eternal purpose from before the foundation of the world (Ep. 1:4; Re. 13:8), God sent the second Adam to undo all the harm committed by the first. Paul’s closing statement undeniably confirms this. (Next)

Much More

*Where sin abounded, grace abounded **much more**.*
(Ro. 5:20)

Is Adam's sin in destroying lives greater than Christ's sacrifice in restoring them? If so, then what the second Adam (Christ) has accomplished in rescuing a few is infinitely "much less," not "much more" than what sin has done. The Weymouth translation, in verse 15, powerfully expresses the glorious achievement of Christ here:

*But God's free gift immeasurably outweighs the transgression. For if through the transgression of the one individual the mass of humanity have died, infinitely greater [much more] is the generosity with which God's grace, and the gift given in His grace which found expression in the one man Jesus Christ, **have been bestowed on the mass of humanity** (Ro. 5:15 WEY).*

"*Has been bestowed on the mass of humanity!*" This is an accomplished fact! As Adam impacted **all** humanity, so did Christ!

God Changes People

*I will...**cause** you to walk in My statutes, and...do them.*
(Ez. 36:26-27)

Is God a respecter of persons? What He has done for these, will He not do for others? "He is good to **all**." "In truth...God shows no **partiality**" (Ps. 145:9; Ac. 10:34). See also Ro. 2:11, 10:12; Ga. 2:6; Ep. 6:9; Col. 3:25; 1Ti. 2:3-4; Ja. 3:17; 1Pe. 1:17. Sadly, a flawed view of judgment has kept us from knowing God in His unlimited power and unstoppable will to change people. Scripture clearly teaches it. For God to sentence even one person to infinite penalty only proves He cannot or will not change that person, contradicting who He is.

God Does Right

Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?
(Ge. 18:25)

Is there a double standard? If something is wrong in our minds, is it not also in God's? How many truly believe God would create a world of people knowing they will suffer infinitely? Many accept this because they think God's moral standard is somehow different than ours. They erroneously base this in Is. 55:8: "For My thoughts are not your thoughts..." By simply quoting this one passage they attempt to justify an eternal hell. But they ignore the context. The phrase refers to God's abundant mercy, not cruelty! Please read the passage (Is. 55:7-9). Those who have a right concept of morality, love, and justice, know that a loving God would never inflict unjust (infinite) punishment.

God Wills All Saved

*I exhort first of all that supplications, **prayers**, intercessions,...be made **for all men**....this is **good and acceptable** in the sight of God our Savior; **Who will have** [desires NKJV] **all men to be saved**, and to come unto the knowledge of the*

truth....Christ Jesus; Who gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time (1Ti. 2:1-6 KJV) (*Who wills that all mankind be saved.* CLT).

Our Lord rebuked the Pharisees for invalidating the Scriptures for the sake of tradition (Mt. 15:3,6,9). Have our translators done the same? Since most do not believe God is all-powerful to do His will, they make His “will” into a mere “desire” to conform to their limited view of God. They negate the force of His words. Translators are human and as such always translate from their personal world view. It cannot be otherwise. That is why we must be especially careful to compare Scripture with Scripture, and carefully use concordances.

Do we demean the power of prayer *for all men* by denying God’s power to change wills and hearts? Who prays for what they think cannot happen? We deny that Christ *ransomed all*. Otherwise we would know that God must release the ransomed whose penalty has been paid. We make the clause, *testified in due time* meaningless, since we do not believe all will be ransomed. What is *good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior*? Most of humanity forever cursed? Can you see how our hell tradition clashes head on with passages such as this? But the Blessed Hope glories in every part of it! Nothing needs to be explained away. (See “God’s Will” chap.1).

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It is my hope that you will prayerfully reflect on these proclamations based on God’s power. Please do not rush through them, but allow the Holy Spirit time to impart these glorious truths to your heart. We have been conditioned so long to limit these passages, that to now accept them in their full scope is not easy. Tradition is hard to overcome. Jesus said, “You invalidated the word of God for the sake of your tradition.” “You err not knowing the Scriptures nor the power of God” (Mt.15:6 NAS, 22:29). Like Abraham, let us not waver at the promise of God through unbelief, but give Him glory, being fully convinced that He is able to fulfill all His promises (Ro. 4:20-21).

PROCLAMATIONS

PART TWO

Good News

*Behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy
which will be to **all people**.*
(Lu. 2:10)

The Christian message is a message of peace and glad tidings of good things! (Ro. 10:15; Ac. 10:36) It is supposed to be good tidings of great joy which will be to **all** people. That includes the billions who have never heard of Christ. However, our tradition has limited the Good News to only the following three small classes of individuals.

Those who have received Christ (in this life) and who are not yet truly burdened about any of their lost loved ones.

Those who have received Christ (in this life) and who care more about their own “personal” salvation than the rest of humanity—billions of their fellow human beings who Christ loves and died for, and whom they should be loving “as” themselves (Mt. 22:39).

Those who have received Christ (in this life) and who ignore or fail to take to heart the numerous warning passages addressed to believers.

Do you find yourself in one of these groups? I believe I can speak with some authority having personally experienced all three. According to the prevalent theology, “great joy” is reserved solely for these. Where does that leave the “all people” of Luke 2:10? Hopelessly lost. Not so! The angel was not lying. Great joy will become a precious reality for all people in God’s due time.

But to be fair, how does the prevalent view interpret Luke 2:10? It must define the “all” to mean “all classes” of people. This allows it to harmonize with the idea that the whole world is riding on a train destined for an “eternal” hell with only a “privileged” few (from every class of humanity) being spared this horrific fate. (1)

A note about our attitude in this privileged status: We rejoice in our “personal” rescue operation, don’t we? We sing, laugh, and are merry in worship. We thank God for our “personal” rescue while the rest of our human family race down the tracks to everlasting pain. Something just doesn’t feel right to me. Is this how Jesus really is?

The only view that I believe leads to lasting, unselfish, and unwavering joy, is to believe what it clearly says – “**all people**.” This is not a sentimental Christmas passage void of any real meaning.

Israel

All Israel will be saved, as it is written: “The Deliverer will come out of Zion, and He will turn away ungodliness from Jacob.”

Ro. 11:26 (Is. 45:25; Jer. 31:33-34; 32:40; Ez. 36:26-27; Ro. 11:1-2; He. 8:10-11)

Why Israel? Did God create this world with only one nation in mind? Or did He choose one particular people to affect all peoples? The following passages will show that God chose this nation as His channel of blessing to the whole world. And though they have failed in the past, as we all have to one degree or another, His purposes for her will yet be realized. For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable (Ro. 11:29).

I will give You as a light to the Gentiles, that You should be My salvation to the ends of the earth (Is. 49:6).

The nations shall know that I am the Lord...when I am hallowed in you before their eyes (Ez. 36:23).

Then the nations which are left all around you shall know that I, the Lord...I will do it (Ex. 36:36).

In the last days His house shall be established; and all nations shall flow into it (Is. 2:2).

At that time Jerusalem shall be called The Throne of the Lord, and all the nations shall be gathered to it....No more shall they follow the dictates of their evil hearts (Jer. 3:17).

All nations [families] of the earth shall be blessed (Ge. 12:3; 18:18; 22:18; 26:4; 28:14; Ac. 3:25-26).

Scripture...preached the gospel to Abraham beforehand, saying, “In you all the nations shall be blessed” (Ga. 3:8).

Does this people have a special distinction above all others? No, but they do have a great privilege. Paul writes, “The privilege is great from every point of view. First of all, because the Jews were entrusted with God’s truth” (Ro. 3:2 WEY). But this is not the whole story. God has always had all nations in His heart and purposes. See the following passages:

God made no distinction between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith (Ac. 15:9).

There is no distinction between Jew and Greek, for the same Lord over all is rich to all who call upon Him (Ro. 10:12).

The Gentiles are fellow heirs, partakers of His promise (Ep. 3:6).

He has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation (Ep. 2:14).

There is no partiality with God (Ro. 2:11). (See also: Nu. 16:22; Ps. 145:9; Ac. 10:34; Ga. 2:6; Ep. 6:9; Col. 3:25; 1Ti. 2:3, 4; 1Pe. 1:17).

Will only Israel be saved?

All the ends of the world shall turn to Him, and all the families of the nations shall worship (Ps. 22:27).

All flesh comes to Him....He provides atonement for transgressions (Ps. 65:2-3).

Through the greatness of His power His enemies submit to Him. All the earth shall worship and sing praises to Him (Ps. 66:3-4).

All kings shall fall down before Him: All nations shall serve Him (Ps. 72:11).

All nations shall come and worship before Him and glorify His name (Ps. 86:9).

He shall make for all people a feast...and will destroy the covering cast over all people, and the veil that is spread over all nations. He will swallow up death forever; and will wipe away tears from off all faces; and the rebuke of His people shall He take away from off all the earth: for He has spoken it (Is. 25:6-8).

*God has committed us all [Israel and Gentiles] to disobedience, that He might have mercy on all. Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out!...Of Him, through Him, and to Him are **all** things (Ro. 11:32-33, 36).*

These passages indicate Israel's salvation is not exclusive, but it precedes or heralds in the salvation of all.

Judge What Is Right

*Why do you not even on your own initiative judge what is right?
(Lu. 12:57 NAS)*

Our Lord calls us to judge for ourselves what is right. What is especially pertinent to our discussion is that these words are given in the very context of judgment! (See Lu. 12:42-49, 58-59 and Mt. 5:26; 18:34-35). Lu. 12:59 and Mt. 5:26 state that those judged are released when the last cent is paid. Is not this right to you? If so, you have a Biblical responsibility to question the teaching of infinite torment.

Have you critically examined the Scriptures about this? The Lord expects us to if we are to effectively proclaim the Gospel. Have you yet attempted to defend God's character to someone troubled with the thought of an eternal hell? Are you ready? What passages has God given you? We cannot hope to be effective messengers of the Good News if we cannot answer the most basic of questions. We will be held accountable (Ro. 14:10; 2Co. 5:10) if we merely parrot the pat answers of tradition without knowing the Scriptures for ourselves. (Mt. 15:3, 6, 9; Mk. 12:24; Lu. 17:2; Ac. 17:11; 2Ti. 2:15; Ja. 3:1)

Keys

*Fear not, I...have the keys of Hell and of Death.
(Re. 1:17-18 KJV)*

Have you ever heard the cliché: "The gates of hell are locked on the inside?" This is to say, that sinners choose hell over heaven because they prefer to. Even if they were given the chance to leave, they would choose to stay! This is not at all logical and neither is it found in Scripture. We need only to think about it solemnly and it falls apart. No, it is not we who hold the keys of our judgment, but Christ. The fact that Christ holds these keys is intended to relieve our fear. To know His character, is to know He would never hopelessly lock anyone away.

Kolasis

*And all these will go away into everlasting [aionion] punishment [kolasis].
(Mt. 25:46)*

According to William Barclay, *kolasis* originally meant the pruning of trees to make them grow better. He wrote, “I think it’s true to say that in all Greek secular literature *kolasis* is never used for anything but remedial punishment.” (2) How ironic that the text most often used to support an eternal hell is, in fact, one that strongly opposes it when accurately understood. (See *Aion* in Chapter 1).

Love Never Fails

*Love suffers long and is kind...does not behave rudely,
does not seek its own, is not provoked...bears all...endures all.
Love never fails [“ends”—RSV].
(1Co. 13:4-8)*

Re-read this text substituting the word “love” with “God” because God “is” love (1Jn. 4:8, 16). When does Love that can never end or fail finally give up on us? If the prevalent theology is true, God has given up on or stopped loving billions of people He once loved. What is our brief life on earth compared to eternity? “It is just a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away” (Ja. 4:14 NAS). Do you really think God’s love is as fleeting as vapor? Let us believe with the heart of a child that God’s love never fails or ends. Let us stop ignoring, denying, and explaining away the most glorious declarations of all!

Mercy

*Because He delights in mercy...will subdue our iniquities.
(Mic. 7:18-19)*

Is it conceivable that God delights in mercy towards people only until they die and then forever withholds mercy from them? Does not Scripture state His mercy reaches unto the heavens (Ps. 57:10)? How can we put limits on it? Is He not merciful (full of mercy) and abounding in mercy (Ps. 103:8)? What does it mean to be full of something and to abound in it? Psalm 145: 8-9 says the Lord is great in mercy and that His tender mercies are over all His works! Who is excluded from His tender mercies?

“To You...belongs mercy; for You render to each one according to his work” (Ps. 62:12). Who does “each one” represent if not all people? Only a penalty that ends can be according to each one’s work, especially in the presence of mercy. No judgment could be forever in a universe ruled by an infinitely merciful God (Ps. 136:1-26); a God full of compassion, gracious, longsuffering and **abundant in** mercy (Ps. 86:15). For God has committed us all to disobedience, that He might have mercy on **all** (Ro 11:32)! As long as there are people in need of mercy, we can rest assured God’s mercy will reach them—He’s the same yesterday, today, and forever (He. 13:8). More: hopebeyondhell.net/the-infinite-reach-of-mercy.

Overcoming Evil

*Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.
(Ro. 12:21)*

Does God operate in a way opposite to what He expects of us? The question is its own refutation. “Love your enemies...that you may be sons of your Father; for He makes His sun

rise on the evil and good; sends rain on the just and unjust...Therefore be perfect, just as your Father is perfect" (Mt. 5:44-48). "Do good to those who hate you" (Lu. 6:27).

Overcome evil with good? Be perfect, "just as" your Father is perfect? Notice the words "just as." The prevalent theology makes God out as one who hates His enemies, overcomes evil with evil, does evil to those that hate Him, and blesses His enemies for a season only to torment them forever. Is this what we are to model? Does loving our enemies merely mean we extend a token love to them while we envisage and plan their ruin? Such a theology falls apart at the seams, casting a dark shadow on God's character. Not so with the Blessed Hope. It portrays God as the truly loving Father He is.

Power of the Blood

*It pleased the Father...and by Him to reconcile **all** things to Himself, by Him, whether things on earth or things in heaven, having made peace through the **blood** of His cross.*

(Col. 1:19-20)

Note that "things" does not exclude persons, for Christ' blood was shed for persons, not things (see p.132-134). The CLT reads simply "all."

The reconciliation of all people is the Father's pleasure. It is based solely on the power of Christ's blood, shed for all. Dare we place limits on what the blood of His cross has achieved, and on what pleases the Father? Was it not the Father's purpose to reconcile all to Himself from the beginning? He is the "Lamb slain from the foundation of the world" (Re. 13:8; See also 1Pe. 1:18-20; 2Tim. 1:9). Notice Col. 1:20 reads "all" things and not "some" only. (Ac. 3:21; 1Co. 15:28; 2Co. 5:19; Ep. 1:9-11; Ph. 3:21). To deny the extent of the power of our Lord's blood to cleanse and reconcile all creation is a great disgrace and dishonor to His precious blood shed for all.

Rejoicing

You greatly rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory.

(1Pe. 1:8 NAS)

If the inexpressible joy Peter talked about is a true fruit of Christian experience, how can it co-exist in the presence of lost loved ones, or in the midst of an eternally lost world? How many Christians do you know are marked by that level of joy? To illustrate the depressing effect of traditional theology, I would like you to read the words of Albert Barnes, a respected Bible commentator and author of the popular, *Barnes Notes*. In my earlier years as a believer, I used to refer to his commentary from time to time. So, when I came across this quote, it deeply saddened my heart for him.

That any should suffer forever...that since God can save men, and will save a part, he has not purposed to save all; that, on the supposition that the atonement is ample, and that the blood of Christ can cleanse from all and every sin, it is not in fact applied to all...These are real, not imaginary difficulties. They are probably felt by every mind that ever reflected on the subject; and they are unexplained, unmitigated, unremoved. I confess, for one, that I feel them, and feel them more sensibly and powerfully the more I look at them, and the longer I live. I do not understand these facts; and I make no advances towards understanding them...for my whole soul pants for light and relief on these questions. But I get neither; and, in the distress and anguish of my own spirit, I confess that I see no light whatever. I see not one ray to disclose to me the reason why

sin came into the world; why the earth is strewn with the dying and the dead, and why man must suffer to all eternity.

I have never seen a particle of light thrown on these subjects that has given a moment's ease to my tortured mind; nor have I an explanation to offer, or a thought to suggest, which would be of relief to you....I confess, when I look on a world of sinners and of sufferers; upon death-beds and graveyards; upon the world of woe, filled with hosts to suffer forever; when I see my friends, my parents, my family, my people, my fellow-citizens; when I look upon a whole race, all involved in this sin and danger, and when I see the great mass of them wholly unconcerned, and when I feel that God only can save them, and yet he does not do it, I am struck dumb. It is all dark, dark, dark to my soul, and I cannot disguise it.³

How sad! Here is a man who has dedicated His life to God and to the study of the Scriptures, and as a result of an Augustinian mindset, was brought to utter despair. He knew no joy. He saw no particle of light thrown on these subjects, nor a moment's ease to his tortured mind. He was struck dumb, saying, "it is all dark, dark, dark to my soul." Why? Because of a tragically flawed paradigm of God.

How many sincere believers have experienced this same anguish—perhaps millions? I certainly have. This distress, anguish, and torture of mind are not the fruits of the true Gospel of Jesus Christ. Its source is in the lie that God is a defeated God and torments humanity forever. This is not the Good News that fills the heart with joy inexpressible and full of glory (1Pe. 1:8), the good tidings of great joy for all people (Lu. 2:10), or the glad tidings of good things (Ro. 10:15)! Albert Barnes' anguish is the opposite of the peace and joy the Lord would have us experience (Jn. 14:27; 15:11; Ac. 10:36; Ga. 5:22; etc.).

If you believe in an eternal hell and think you have the joy Peter described above, how do you deal with the numerous warnings addressed to believers in Scripture? Do you simply ignore them or write them off as not applying to you? Are you 100% sure your loved ones will finally be saved? If not, how can you experience a joy so wondrous, it can only be described as "inexpressible"? If however, you know that God's judgments, though painful, serve a positive and righteous purpose for all who experience them, you can then rejoice in God. For you know He will work only what is good in all those you love and with whom you are burdened. Inexpressible joy is possible for those who know God's true character and judgments! Only distress, anguish, and a tortured mind are in store for sincere thinkers in the prevailing view. Albert Barnes is proof.

Religion that is Pure

Pure and undefiled religion... visit orphans and widows in their trouble, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world.

(Ja. 1:27)

A powerful subliminal message speaks loud and clear: If most of the world's people are on their way to an eternal hell, what could be more important than putting all our energies into preventing that? How can God ask us to divert our attention from eternal suffering to the temporal needs of orphans or widows, and call it pure and faultless religion? Would you rather be poor on earth or imprisoned forever in everlasting torment? Something is not lining up here.

Rescued from This Age

*Christ gave Himself...in order to rescue us
from the **present** wicked age.
(Ga. 1:3-4 WEY)*

If Christ came to rescue us from everlasting punishment, how could Paul have said Christ gave Himself to rescue us from the “present” wicked age? Paul also wrote:

*For the grace of God has appeared, bringing **salvation** to all men, instructing us to...live sensibly...in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of...Christ Jesus, who gave Himself for us to redeem us from every lawless deed (Tit. 2:11-15 NAS).*

Note that in the context of salvation, Paul focused on the present age and redemption from every lawless deed with no mention of salvation from eternal flames.

Peter also says the same thing: “You were not redeemed with corruptible things...from your *aimless conduct*...but with the precious blood of Christ” (1Pe. 1:18-19). It is clear from passages such as these that our redemption is not from an infinite hell. If infinite penalty was hanging in the balance just a heartbeat away, how could Paul and Peter have been so negligent to not warn us?

Restoration of “All” Things

*Heaven must receive [Christ] until the times of **restoration**
of **all things**, which God has spoken by the mouth of
all His holy prophets since the world began.
(Ac. 3:21)*

The belief in infinite judgment compels its adherents to deny that “things” in this passage refers to persons. This is totally unjustified. The phrase, “of all things,” is translated from the one Greek word—*pas* (Strong’s #3956). [5] The KJV translates *pas* in numerous ways, among which are these:

“all” — 748 times (x)

“all things” — 170 x

“every” — 117 x

“all men” — 41 x

“whosoever” — 31 x

“everyone” — 28 x

“whole” — 12 x

“all manner of” — 11 x

“every man” — 11 x

“every thing” — 7 x

“any” — 7 x

“whatsoever” — 6 x [5]

Bible translator, Jonathan Mitchell, explained that “the word “things,” in this passage is not needed. It is up to the translator's discretion and reading of the context. The Concordant Literal reads, “restoration of **all** which God...” The *pas* form is *pantōn*, which can be rendered “all things,” “all people” or “all humans.” “All things,” of course, includes all humanity. See: hopebeyondhell.net/all-things.

The surest method for determining the meaning of a word or phrase is to compare Scripture with Scripture. Observe the following examples which show that “all things” undoubtedly includes persons:

*Let no one boast in men. For all **things** are yours: whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas, or the world or life or death, or things present or things to come—all are yours (1Co. 3:20-22). Are Paul and Apollos “things”?*

*He has put all **things** under His feet. However, when He says “all things are put under Him,” it is evident He who put all things under Him is excepted (1Co. 15:27). It would be pointless for Scripture to clarify God is exempted from the all “things” if He were not implied by it in the first place.*

*...to reconcile all **things** to Himself...made peace through the blood....And you...He has reconciled (Col. 1:19-21). “And you,” shows “things” refer to people.*

*Now we do not yet see all **things** put under Him. “But” we see Jesus... (He. 2:8-9). Is Jesus a thing?*

*When all **things** are made subject to Him...that God may be all in all (1Co. 15:28). Is God interested in being all in things?*

Since “things” in these passages clearly refer to persons, on what possible grounds can you exclude people from Acts 3:21? Especially since this is the most climatic event in human history! Of this all God’s holy prophets spoke from the very beginning! To think such a glorious prophetic fulfillment could exclude the very part of creation created in the likeness of God Himself, and for which Christ died, is preposterous and inconceivable. A time or “times” will come when all people will be restored to God. Acts 3:21 is not an isolated text.

God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself. (2Co. 5:19).

...The fullness of the times He might gather together in one all things in Christ (Ep. 1:10).

He is able even to subdue all things to Himself (Ph. 3:21).

It pleased the Father...to reconcile all things to Himself...through the blood... (Col. 1:19-21).

Yes! All are reconciled through the blood. The restoration of all in the fullness of times is His promise! It is clear “things” include people. However, if you think “all” here only means “some”, see Appendix V, #4.

Satisfied

*He shall see the travail of His soul, and shall be satisfied.
(Is. 53:11 KJV)*

Christ suffered excruciatingly for the salvation of each person that ever lived. He paid in full the price for all sin. How could He ever be satisfied unless His travail has achieved its purpose? If you bought a hundred acres, and found your title only read 99, would you be satisfied? Neither is the Great Shepherd of the sheep. He will not be satisfied until the last sheep is found! (Lu. 15:4, 7, 20).

Unchanging

I do not change; therefore, you are not consumed...
(Mal. 3:6)

The fact that God is unchanging offers great hope for all who experience His chastisements. He will not utterly consume us! We can count on His unchanging character. If He loves us today, we can know He will always love us.

I would like to share a true story recounted by Thomas Allin, author of *Christ Triumphant*:

In a certain quarter of London, one of the many evangelists had gone forth to preach to the people. When he had concluded an eloquent address, he was thus accosted by one of his hearers:

“Sir,” said the man, “may I ask you one or two questions?”

“Surely,” said the preacher.

“You have told us that God’s love for us is very great and very strong.”

“Yes.”

“And that He sent His Son to save us, and I may be saved this moment, if I will.”

“Yes.”

“But, if I go away without an immediate acceptance of this offer, and if, a few minutes after I were to be killed on my way home, I should find myself in hell for ever and ever.”

“Yes.”

“Then,” said the man, “if so, I don’t want to have anything to do with a being whose love for me can change so completely in five minutes.”(6)

Is this the way God really is? Does His love change in the twinkling of an eye or a heartbeat? Is He that fickle? Not so. God is called “the Rock” in De. 32:3-4 and many other passages (Ge. 49:24; De. 32:15, 18, 30, 31; 1Sa. 2:2; 2Sa. 22:2, 3, 32, 47; 23:3; Ps. 18:2, 31, 46; 28:1; 31:2, 3; 42:9; 61:2; 62:2, 6, 7; 71:3; 78:35; 89:26; 92:15; 94:22; 1Co. 10:4). The respected Old Testament scholars, Keil and Delitzsch, write, “God is called ‘the Rock,’ as the unchangeable refuge...by virtue of His unchangeableness or impregnable firmness.” (7)

Author of over 40 books, Dr. Robert Morey in *Exploring the Attributes of God* wrote, “In the Christian view, God is immutable, changeless, consistent, faithful, dependable, the same yesterday, today, and forever in His existence, being, and attributes. God...the eternal I AM....” (8)

God, who makes His sun rise on the evil and the good, commands us to be perfect, just as He is. How? By loving our enemies (Mt. 5:44-48). God loves His enemies while they walk on earth. Will He cease to love them after their last breath? Is He not immutable—unchangeable?

His *longsuffering* “is” salvation! (2Pe. 3:15).

God is not a man who changes His mind. He promises and fulfills. (Nu. 23:19 NIV; 1Sa. 15:29)

Who can make Him change (Job 23:13)?

They will be changed. But You are the same... (Ps. 102:26-27).

The Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning (Ja. 1:17).

The gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable (Ro. 11:29).

Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever (He. 13:8).

God, determining to show the immutability of His counsel [will] confirmed it by an oath... (He. 6:17).

Scripture abounds with the testimony of an unchanging God. As Malachi said above, “therefore” we are not consumed. It is not in God’s unchanging nature to infinitely punish or annihilate His creatures, but rather to restore and transform them.

Until He Finds

*What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he loses one, does not leave the ninety-nine...and go after the one **until he finds it?**Likewise... in heaven...”*
(Lu. 15:4, 7, 20)

If a shepherd would do such for a mere animal, how much more will God do for His own offspring (Acts 17: 28-29) created in His image? (Ge. 1:26-27; Mt. 7:11). “I am the good shepherd...(who) gives His life for the sheep” (Jn. 10:11). Since we humans would leave the 99 for the lost one, how much more will the Good Shepherd who gave His very life for the sheep? “*Likewise...joy in heaven...*” (Lu. 15:7, 20)

This shepherd illustration assures us that the Good Shepherd will not give up the search until He finds all His missing ones! This is especially so since He gave us these heartwarming words as a prelude to what to me is the most touching and comforting parable in the whole Bible—The Wayward or Prodigal son. (Next).

Wayward Son

But when he was still a great way off, his father saw him and had compassion, and ran and fell on his neck and kissed him.
(Lu. 15:20 - see 15:11-32)

What a God! Here is a grieving father, waiting, longing, and praying for his son’s return. Day after day, he waits and he watches the distant fields. Finally the day came. “Is that my son in the distant horizon? Could it possibly be? Yes! Yes! It is him!” His heart swells with compassion and joy. “My son is coming home!” He jumps to his feet. He does not merely walk, but he runs, yes, runs. He cannot wait to reach him. The party has already begun in heaven! (Lu. 15:7). When he finally comes to him, he falls on his neck, embraces him, and kisses him. Then he orders his servants, “let’s party!” What a picture of our heavenly Father!

The Christ I know and love is not a hired hand who does not care about the sheep, leaves the sheep, and flees when He sees the wolf coming (Jn. 10:12-13). No, a thousand times no.

He does not turn and run, but He gives His life to destroy the wolf (He. 2:14). He destroys the works of the wolf (1Jn. 3:8), “not” the sheep for whom He came to rescue! (Lu. 9:56).

It is not by chance the Lord gave us this story in the context of the lost sheep and coin. He is revealing to us the heart of our heavenly Father. The lost son represents every lost person. It shows us how our Father waits for His lost ones to realize their lost condition and need of reconciliation. When they do, He flees to their side with comfort and blessing with eyes full of compassion. Meanwhile, He waits and works life’s circumstances, be it in this age or in future ages, so His lost ones will come to themselves. A thousand years are as one day to Him (2Pe. 3:8). He does not give up. He is the Good Shepherd who goes after His sheep until He finds them.

Very Good

*God saw everything that He had made, and **indeed** it was very good.*
(Ge. 1:31)

Does God know the future? Absolutely! Scripture abounds with testimony telling us He knows the future from the beginning. So what? This is of paramount importance! For if God knew before He created the world what destiny awaited His creation, then He is responsible. There is no getting around it.

If you knew the ice was only 1/8” thick and would not even support a cat, but yet you sent your son, little Johnny, across the lake to fetch firewood, and he drowned, you would be at fault. It does not matter what the boy knew or did not know. You are his parent, and you knowingly allowed it to happen!

At the outset of creation, God saw everything He had made, including how it related to the past, present, and future, since He transcends the time realm. What was His conclusion? It was all “indeed” very good. Notice the word “indeed.” How is it possible that God could say all was “indeed very good” knowing eternal woe was the destiny awaiting the vast majority of humanity? Is that possible in a universe created by an all-powerful and loving God? That is impossible—unless of course God cannot know the future. Is that an option for us? If we doubt God knows the future, what do we do with the following passages: Ge. 3:15; 15:13-14; Ex. 3:19; 7:14; 9:30; 11:9; 1K. 13:1-6, 32; 21:20-22; 2K. 8:12; Ps. 94:8-9; 139:1-6; 147:5; Is. 41:21-26; 44:11, 21, 28; 46:9-11; 65:24; Jer. 1:5; 32:19; Ez. 11:5; Mt. 6:8, 10; 10:17, 18, 21, 22; 11:14, 21; 12:45; 24:2, 33-41; Mk. 14:30; Lu. 14:28-32; Jn. 6:64; 8:20; 21:18-19; Ac. 2:23; 15:8, 18; 17:26; Ro. 4:17; 8:29-30; 11:2, 33; Ga. 3:8; Ep. 1:4-5, 11; 3:11; 2Ti. 1:9; Tit. 1:2; He. 4:13; 1Pe. 1:2, 20; 1Jn. 3:20; 5:14; Re. 13:8; 17:18; plus all the Messianic prophecies?

It is abundantly clear that God knows the end from the beginning. The fact that He sees everything as “indeed very good” brings me much comfort and peace. It confirms He has everything under control! It confirms the Blessed Hope.

What Moved Christ

Moved with compassion...because they were weary.
(Mt. 9:36-38)

One day, as I was meditating on the Scriptures, I thought about what moved Christ with compassion for the multitudes. It had nothing to do with the afterlife. The passage simply said, “because they were weary and scattered, [distressed and dispirited - NAS] like sheep

having no shepherd” (Mt. 9:36-38). The more I thought about this, the louder it spoke to me. Sometimes, an indirect statement speaks louder than one that states something directly:

But when He saw the multitudes, He was moved with compassion for them, because they were weary and scattered [“distressed and dispirited”—NAS], like sheep having no shepherd. Then He said to His disciples, “The harvest truly is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest” (Mt. 9:36-38).

The exhortation to pray laborers be sent to the harvest is especially pertinent. Of all places in Scripture, this would be “the place” to state, in the strongest possible terms, the danger of infinite punishment—as our ultimate motivation for evangelism. Yet, the Lord does not utter a word about it. How do you explain this? Compare this with Christ’s first recorded public address (Lu. 4:16-19; Is. 61:1-3).

World Purpose

He...gives life to the world.
(Jn. 6:33)

“For the Son of Man did not come to destroy men’s lives but to save them” (Lu. 9:56). Christ has a world purpose. He came to give life to the world, not only to a select few (Jn. 6:33). He gave His flesh for the life of the world in its entirety (Jn. 6:51). Neither did He come to condemn the world, or even to judge it, but to save it (Jn. 3:17; 12:47). Should not these “world” passages tell us something? They are totally consistent with who He is—the Savior of the “world” (Jn. 4:42; 1Jn. 4:14). How glorious these promises have become to me as I now see them in their unlimited scope and power. Although destruction and judgment are very real, they do not frustrate God’s ultimate purpose for the world, but instead play a vital role in its fulfillment (in the fullness of times).

*God did not send His Son to condemn the **world**... (Jn. 3:17).*

*My flesh, which I shall give for the life of the **world**. (Jn. 6:51).*

*Neither did He come to judge the **world** but to save it. (Jn. 12:47).*

Yes, Christ came to save the world; that is His purpose, and nothing less than a world saved will satisfy Him. See page 184.

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Many additional passages could be marshaled in support of the Blessed Hope. I list many of them in Appendix I. Taken as a whole, these proclamations offer powerful support for this Hope. As with all Scripture, unless God opens our hearts and minds, we will not see His truth even if it is staring us in the face.

Mercy Aiken, in *If Hell is Real* says, “Come Up Higher!” She writes:

Traditional doctrines teach us to interpret the “victorious” scriptures in the light of the “judgment” scriptures. But what if God wants us to see it the other way around? Is not Christ’s victory the greatest revelation in the Bible? Standing on this highest peak—that is, the finished work of the cross, causes us to see a much larger and far more beautiful panoramic view of God’s plan throughout the ages. We do not throw out one set of Scriptures in favor of another. Rather, we seek to harmonize them... It is time to stop ignoring the parts of the Bible that do not fit in with our theology. (9)

It is my sincere prayer that you will rejoice in the full splendor of these precious proclamation passages, and no longer allow their glory to be stripped from your heart. I pray you will stand on the pinnacle of their glorious truth, emanating from Christ's victory, and understand God's purpose-driven judgment through them.

THE WITNESSES

By the mouth of two or three witnesses the matter shall be established.

(De. 19:15)

The case for the Blessed Hope stands on a firm foundation, one that provides a solid basis upon which we can base our hope. Scripture declares that by the mouth of two or three witnesses the matter shall be established (De. 19:15). In this chapter, I present six witnesses, more than doubling this requirement. Please weigh carefully the testimony you are about to hear from the Old Testament, the Apostles, the Early Church, the Moral Witness, and the Fruits of our theology.

The Old Testament

Consider Adam and Eve, Cain, the Antediluvians (those prior to Noah's time), Sodom and Gomorrah, Pharaoh, and the Canaanites for example. Would you not have expected God to have warned them repeatedly of such a horrific judgment as everlasting torment? What was the very first warning given? "Of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die" (Ge. 2:17). If death meant infinite punishment, why did not God say so? How about the Law of Moses with all its penalties and threatening? They all relate to earthly penalties. For example, read De. 28:15-68. For what are these in comparison with infinite punishment? What would you think of a government whose written legal code for petty theft stated three months incarceration, but in reality gave a life sentence? Is God guilty of infinitely worse?

Where does judgment refer to infinite penalty? After 3,455 years of biblical history, such a judgment is not pronounced. If *Sheol*, translated "hell," (KJV) meant punishment unending, how can the Psalmist be so confident he will be released from it? "You will redeem my soul from the power of *Sheol*" (Ps. 49:15; 1Sa. 2:6; Hos. 13:14).

[Turn to Is. 19:21-25; Ez. 16:44-63.]

The Egyptians will know the Lord? Israel one with Egypt? "Blessed is Egypt My people and Assyria the work of My hands?" Sodom and Samaria are more righteous than Israel? The Lord brings back the captives of Sodom and Samaria, and He returns them to their former state? These whom tradition has led us to believe are lost forever are restored?

In *Hell Under Fire*, Daniel Block, answers, "very little." (1) to the question, "What does the Old Testament teach about hell?" "Very little" is indeed an overstatement because it does not teach it at all. He submits two alleged "proof" texts to support the idea: Is. 66:24 and Da. 12:2.

And they have gone forth, and looked on the carcasses of the men who are transgressing against me, for their worm dieth not, and their fire is not quenched, and they have been an abhorrence to all flesh (Is. 66:24 YLT)!

This Isaiah passage does not refer to spiritual states of being, but to earthly carcasses. The only reason it is offered in support of endless punishment is because it contains metaphorical references to the worm and unquenched fire traditionally associated with hell. These terms are examined in Appendix V #1 and do not prove unending chastisement; only that punishment attains its goal.

The multitude of those sleeping in the dust of the ground do awake, some to life age-during, and some to reproaches—to abhorrence age-during (Da. 12:2 YLT).

Regarding this Daniel passage, what has been said regarding Mt. 25:46 in chapter one also applies here; but for argument's sake, let's assume Da. 12 supports an eternal hell. Consider that in my 842 page Bible, Da. 12:2 does not occur until page 791! Thus, we are not introduced to the idea of unending punishment until 94 percent of the Bible has been read! In a three year Bible reading plan, that would not occur until the 937th day, after two years and seven months have passed! How many people have tried to read the Old Testament and have never got past Leviticus? If the doctrine were true, would God not have made it known from the very beginning?

Look at it this way. Daniel was written about 535 B.C. compared to 1450-1406 B.C. for the Pentateuch (the first five books of the Old Testament). Some say Adam was created about 2,000 years before Abraham who was born in 2166 BC. This means God's people did not have a 'proof' text (if it is such) for everlasting punishment until about 3,500 years from Adam or 900 years from Moses! Can you imagine? How can one explain such silence when the Old Testament is filled with warnings of temporal judgments?

The Apostles

Our example should be the lives and preaching of those who understood our Lord's teachings best, the Apostles. They were called to proclaim His Gospel to the whole world. If you would like to know what they taught regarding judgment, you need to read the book of Acts. Nowhere do they proclaim infinite punishment. Neither is *Gehenna* mentioned by any of them anywhere except once by James who referred to it merely as a metaphor underlining the power of our words (Ja. 3:6). The following are the key references in Acts where the Apostles preach the Gospel: Ac. 2:14-40; 3:12-26; 7:2-50; 8:32-35; 10:34-48; 13:16-47; 16:30-31; 17:22-32; 20:18-35.

The strongest statement made is, "destroyed from the people" (Ac. 3:23 RSV). The Jerusalem Bible says, "cut off from the people." The Greek word translated "destruction" here is *exolothreúō*, Strong's #1842. It is used only once in the New Testament. Of it Spiros Zodhiates, in *The Complete Word Study Dictionary*, says, "The word and its synonym never mean extinction, but a change of one's state involving retribution or punishment." (2) He bases this comment on the Greek usage of the word in the Greek O.T. – the Septuagint—Ex. 30:33; 31:14; De. 7:10.

In addition, this "cutting off," whatever it entails, is not unchangeable. Though God is seen as severe in breaking off the natural branches in Ro. 11:21, He remains a God of goodness (v. 22). For He promises to graft them in again if they will change (v. 23).

When proclaiming the Gospel to the Gentiles, Paul says, "He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness" (Ac. 17:31). That is all he says! If infinite punishment was really in his mind, how could he not have warned them of it? Is this all that can be said about such an unimaginable and horrible judgment—"righteous judgment"?

If Paul believed God's judgments were infinite how could he claim in Ac. 20:27 that he had not shunned to declare the whole counsel of God, especially in light of Ez. 33:6-8?

I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all men. For I have not shunned to declare to you the whole counsel of God (Ac. 20:27). If the watchman sees the sword coming and does not blow the trumpet...his blood I will require... (Ez. 33:6-8).

Hades (hell KJV) is where the rich man went in Luke 16. How many times in all his 13 epistles (and Acts) does Paul warn us about Hades; 10 times, 30 times? Would you believe not once? That's right. And the one time he mentions the word, it is to comfort us in proclaiming its defeat! Not to threaten. "Oh Hades, where is your victory?" (1Co.15:55). This is stunning, especially since Christ chose him as His apostle to the nations! (Ac.9:15) Who had a greater mandate and influence than Paul? "I labored more than all of them" (1Co.15:10). Yet, where does he threaten us with Hades or *Gehenna*? But observe instead what Paul says is worthy of all acceptance.

*This is a faithful saying and worthy of **all** acceptance. For to this end we both labor and suffer reproach, because we trust in the living God, who is the Savior of all men, especially [not exclusively] of those who believe*. These things command and teach (1Ti. 4:9-11). *Because the process of salvation has already begun in believers. See vs 12-16. Also p.112.*

The Apostle Peter as well, so far from supporting unending torments, offers us great hope! He proclaims times of restoration of all (Ac. 3:21), confirms that all families (including each person) shall be blessed (Ac. 3:25-26), declares God shows no partiality (Ac. 10:34), describes the Christian life as indescribable joy (1Pe.1:8), states Christ went and preached to the spirits in prison and that the Gospel was preached to the dead (1Pe. 3:19; 4:6), affirms God's will to save all, and assures us that His longsuffering "is" salvation (2Pe. 3:9, 15).

Yes, the Apostles not only fail to proclaim everlasting punishment, but advocate instead, the Blessed Hope!

The Early Church

The early Church read the Scriptures directly from the Greek, and knew *aion* referred to a period of limited duration. For example, when they read Mt. 25:46, they did not understand it to mean infinite penalty like most do.

The theologian most responsible for establishing this teaching was Augustine in the 5th century. He was not a native Greek speaker. He said, "I have learned very little of the Greek language." (3) Is it surprising that a "non-Greek" speaker would misunderstand the Greek words of Scripture?

Charles Pridgeon, president and founder of the Pittsburgh Bible Institute, wrote:

In these early centuries those holding the doctrine of endless punishment were in the minority and no one was counted unorthodox who believed in restitution and the ultimate and complete victory of Christ. In fact, the leaders in the early Church Councils and those who were chosen to establish orthodoxy were well-known believers in the beneficent side of future punishment. This is especially true of the second great Church Council which was held to perfect the Nicene Creed....There is no word in these early statements of creed in favor of endless punishment. (4)

Historian and scholar, Ethelbert Stauffer, author of *Christ and the Caesars*, and *New Testament Theology*, wrote: "The primitive church never gave up the hope that in His will to save, the 'all-merciful' and 'all-powerful' God would overcome even the final 'no' of the self-sufficient world." (5)

I would like to bring to your attention the testimony of the following early Church leaders regarding their beliefs: Irenaeus, Theophilus, Clement of Alexandria, Origen, Eusebius of Caesarea, Athanasius, Gregory Nazianzen, Ambrose, Didymus, Gregory of Nyssa, Jerome, Hillary, Titus, Diodorus, Theodore of Mopsuestia, Cyril of Alexandria, Maximus of Turin, Theodoret, Peter Chrysologus. Turn to Appendix IV for a brief quotation from each.

Regarding Augustine (354-430 A.D.), Charles Pridgeon wrote “His influence probably more than that of any other of the Church Fathers brought forward and emphasized the doctrine of never-ending punishment. He spoke with greater consideration for those who differed with him than many of the moderns.” (6) Pridgeon quotes Augustine:

And now I see I must have a gentle disputation with certain tender hearts of our own religion, who are unwilling to believe that everlasting punishment will be inflicted, either on all those whom the just Judge shall condemn to the pains of hell, or even on some of them, but who think that after certain periods of time, longer or shorter according to the proportion of their crimes, they shall be delivered out of that state.—Augustine. (*De Civ. Del.*, lib. 21, c.17). (7)

And in *Encheirid. ad Laurent*, c. 29 Pridgeon again quotes Augustine: “There are very many in our day, who though not denying the Holy Scriptures, do not believe in endless torments.”—Augustine. (8)

Augustine admits that those who do not believe in endless torments are “very many,” and that they do not deny the Holy Scriptures. It is also significant that he does not consider them “unorthodox.” In fact, he refers to them as “tender hearts of our own religion,” with whom he must have a “gentle” disputation.

The above testimonies are only representative of what the early Church believed. In closing his chapter on the early Church, Pridgeon concluded:

On account of the doctrine of Reserve which was held by so many of the Church Fathers, some who are quoted as holding to the doctrine of never-ending torment have other passages which teach quite the contrary. Many held the doctrine of the ultimate salvation of all for themselves...but felt that it was not safe for the multitude, and therefore taught them an endless perdition. When we remember the cruelty and militarism of the Roman Empire, and also the pagan teaching that was permitted to enter on this great subject (because it was found in the pagan and barbarian religions of many who professed allegiance to Christianity), many of these we fear, judging from their actions, had not received a truly Christian spirit, and we are not surprised that “endless torment” was so largely incorporated in the western Church. Besides this, it took the dark ages and medieval ignorance to render this doctrine almost universal. It is time to return to the Bible and to the teaching of the early Church, which is not only Biblical but is sane and is also consistent with a God of love and the sacrifice of His Son who was a “propitiation for our sins and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world” (1John 2:2). (9)

If you will look over these ancient writings carefully, you will notice that the early Church leaders, at times, made reference to *aionian* punishment when it is clear “eternity” is not what they had in mind. In reality, they taught the restoration of all in those very same contexts. Sadly, modern researchers of early Church documents, not taking this into consideration, simply assume that when they referred to *aionian* punishment they meant “everlasting.”

I highly recommend Dr. Edward Beecher’s *History of Opinions*: <http://hopebeyondbell.net/testimony-of-the-early-church>.

Having no agenda or denomination to defend, Beecher honestly presents unbiased evidence and scholarly research. Dr. J.W. Hanson, a historical writer and contemporary, referred to Beecher's work as "a most truthful and candid volume." Beecher wrote, "The more profoundly learned [in Scripture] any one was in Christian antiquity, so much the more did he cherish and defend the hope that the sufferings of the wicked would at some time come to an end." (10) Another excellent source on church history is *Christ Triumphant* by Thomas Allin. A great part of his book is devoted to it.

In conclusion, the historical record shows that infinite penalty was not the predominant view held by the early Church. See Ap. IV.

The Moral Witness

Scripture everywhere appeals to our conscience. From the very beginning, the question is asked, "Shall not the judge of all the earth do right" (Ge. 18:25)? To what is such a question appealing? How can we know the difference between what is right or wrong if not for the moral witness God has placed in each of us? "Behold, the man has become like one of us, to know good and evil" (Ge. 3:22, 3:5). It begins with our God-given conscience. All subsequent and more complete moral understanding (such as the Bible provides) must build upon, and not contradict, the foundation established by the witness of conscience. This completes the structure of God's revelation. It is critical we understand this.

"Why do you not even on your own initiative judge what is right?" (Lu. 12:57 NAS). Have you judged what is right? The primary means by which God speaks to us is through our conscience—His moral witness. Without it, we would not have the capacity to receive any light from the Bible, or say "yes" to any of its truths. All we read is filtered through our conscience. This is how the Holy Spirit operates in our hearts to quicken His truth within us. "Our sufficiency is from God...not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life" (2Co. 3:5, 6).

At the outset of his writings, Paul established that conscience is God's initial revelation. All men have the truth (Ro. 1:18). God has revealed Himself to all (Ro. 1:19). By not responding appropriately to the God they knew, their thoughts became futile, and their hearts became dark and foolish. Thus, God gave them over to a debased mind, to do the unfitting (Ro. 1:21, 28). But in spite of having futile thoughts, dark and foolish hearts, and debased minds to do the unfitting, all people nevertheless know the righteous judgment of God—that "such things" deserve death (Ro. 1:28-32). All have a basic sense of morality and are without excuse before God (Ge. 3:5; Ro. 2:1). "If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts..." (Mt. 7:11). "The true Light...gives light to every man coming into the world" (Jn. 1:9).

We have been made in the image of God (Ge. 1:26). Though marred or clouded by sin, that image has not veiled God's moral witness implanted in each heart. Our Lord commands us to let our light shine before men that they may see our good works and glorify God (Mt. 5:16). How can people appreciate our "good" works unless they have the moral capacity to know they are good? "[Have] your conduct honorable among the Gentiles, that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may, by your good works which they observe, glorify God in the day of visitation" (1Pe. 2:11-12). "Having a good conscience, that when they defame you as evildoers, those who revile your good conduct in Christ may be ashamed" (1Pe. 3:16). (See Ro. 13:3-5; Ph. 2:15, 4:5; 1Th. 4:11-12; 1Ti. 4:12-15; Tit. 2:6-8; 1Pe. 2:15; 1Pe. 3:13). Page after page, the Bible is full of appeals to our moral sense. The Scriptures, being God's more comprehensive revelation, would be completely unintelligible if God had not first placed His moral witness in us. This witness plays a central role in understanding His Word. But you ask, What about Jer. 17:9 and Isaiah 55: 8-9?

“The heart is more deceitful than all else and is desperately sick; who can understand it?” (Jer.17:9 NAS). The Hebrew “sick” here is *ânash*, Strong’s #605, defined as: “a prim. root; to be frail, feeble, or (fig.) melancholy.” (11) The KJV says “desperately wicked.” “Wicked,” mentioned 490 times in the O.T., is never derived from *ânash* except this one time in the KJV. It never should have been translated “wicked.” Sick and wicked are not the same. Note the context. “Cursed is the man who trusts in man and makes flesh his strength, whose heart departs from the Lord... Blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord...The heart is more deceitful than all else and is desperately sick...” (Jer.17:5-9). Our hearts are deceitful (and thus sick) in the sense that we have allowed ourselves to think it right to trust in ourselves (or in man) instead of in God. To not trust God is to depart from Him. This passage in no way discounts God’s moral witness in each heart. Scripture stands! All are inexcusable (Ro. 1:32; 2:1). All know the difference between good and evil (Ge. 3:5, 22). Even those whom Christ calls evil know what is good (Mt. 7:11). If Jer. 17:9 discounts God’s moral witness, then how can God judge the world? But He does, and does so fairly according to our knowledge (Lu. 12:47-48). It is true there are grey areas in which our “sick” hearts can deceive us. But in the essential principles of good and evil, all sane people have an instinctual God given sense of right and wrong. Nothing can completely mute God’s voice of conscience. What power is greater than God’s?

“For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways...” (Is.55:8). How could we have ever quoted this passage to infer that righteousness and justice in God’s mind, are somehow different than ours, and this to justify His cruelty? Read the context: “Let the wicked forsake his way...return to the Lord, and He will have **mercy** on him...for He will **abundantly pardon**. For My thoughts are not your thoughts...” (Is. 55:7-8). God is different from us by being more merciful, not less—and He is certainly not cruel! Oh how we have corrupted this glorious passage and defamed His holy character!

Regarding unending punishment, who accepts it without question? Who has not struggled over such an unbearable thought? How many millions has it kept from coming to Christ because people know a loving God would not do such a thing? How many of us have allowed our consciences to be seared, or hardened, by this horror? Only a selfish heart can be content in a “personal” salvation in the midst of a world of lost people going to hell. Such consciences are numbed by sin. How much biblical truth has been veiled from us as a result of this lie about God (Mt. 6:23)? I have always struggled with the idea of eternal punishment. It totally contradicted my belief in a loving God. It was by far the biggest stumbling block to my faith. I now realize that this inner conflict was God’s voice crying out in my heart. Clark Pinnock, theologian, and author of *A Defense of Biblical Infallibility* and *The Scripture Principle* put it this way:

Everlasting torture is intolerable from a moral point of view because it pictures God acting like a bloodthirsty monster who maintains an everlasting Auschwitz for his enemies whom he does not allow to die. How can one love a God like that? I suppose one might be afraid of him, but could we love and respect him? Would we want to strive to be like him in such mercilessness? (12)

Hans Kung, renowned theologian who won the chair of Fundamental Theology at Tubingen University asked, “What would we think of a human being who satisfied his thirst for revenge so implacably and insatiably?” (13) Philip Yancey, author of *What’s So Amazing About Grace*, wrote, “What can be said about God if from eternity he decided to send most people to eternal damnation in order that his grace toward others might appear more laudable?” (14) Randy Klassen, pastor, seminary teacher, and author of *Jesus Word, Jesus Way* wrote:

An eternal hell poses the problem of a glaring inconsistency in the character of God. There is an affront to an enlightened sense of justice. There is also the matter of what purpose is served by it all. Whose victory is finally won if most people are in hell? Made in the image of God, all humans have a moral sense, a judicial sentiment. Even the unredeemed cringe when the Holocaust is reviewed. Our moral intuition rejects the idea that anyone, human or divine, who endlessly inflicted pain on another, could be called "good." Throughout history we read of religious factions and political parties justifying their cruelty to others. The Nazis justified their anti-Semitic atrocities, the Communists their anti-Christian murders, and the early Americans their slavery. But history has judged such violations of human rights as breaching a universal moral code. (15)

I believe these testimonies find their echo in the hearts of every Christian. I urge you to accept the whole counsel of God, especially His moral witness in your heart. Don't let your conscience be seared or deceived by any tradition, or suppressed when confronted by what seem to be conflicting Scriptures. His witness in our hearts is our God-given defense system protecting us from error, yes, even when interpreting the Scriptures. Truth will not contradict His Spirit in our conscience. Any Bible passage or teaching that conflicts with this witness must be put aside until God resolves the conflict in our heart.

Commending to every man's conscience (2Co. 4:2)

Oh, if only the Christians who participated in and condoned the torture and murder of fellow believers had followed the voice of their conscience instead of tradition. They would not have committed horrible atrocities. John Calvin, the great reformer, as legal prosecutor, argued the case against a brother in Christ over a point of doctrine. He petitioned for his execution. Michael Servetus was burned at the stake on October 27, 1553. (16) Such an act reflects the character of the God Calvin believed in. And what of the horrible inquisitions that tortured thousands throughout centuries over church dogma?

Christians who blindly accept what they read and what they are taught are no different than any other religious terrorists. How many religious terrorists critically examine their holy writings and traditions to determine if such are truly just and right? Their traditions have seared and deceived their consciences to a great degree. Why would you and I be any different if we too believed in a cruel God? Are we immune to error? What is the most heinous of terrors? Is it being captured by terrorists, tortured, and beheaded? Or is it being cast into a lake of fire to burn forever without any hope of ever being released? Who is truly the world's greatest terrorist if not the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ? What blasphemy! Well, this is what it boils down to when God's inner moral witness is suppressed, ignored, or denied.

Are we terrorists? Have we ever sowed the fear of everlasting torment in one of Christ's little ones? It would be better if a millstone be hung around our necks and we are thrown into the sea, than we should offend one of His little ones in this way (Lu. 17:2). We are not immune from the same trap as the world's cruelest despots and terrorists. Even Paul was at one time a terrorist (Ac. 22:4; 26:11)! God calls us to judge for ourselves what is right (Lu. 12:57), to test all things and hold fast that which is good (1Th. 5:21; 1Co. 10:15). It is not enough to claim Scripture as our authority, for so did Paul, the K.K.K., Queen Mary, Calvin, the Spanish inquisitors, etc. Believers can be just as brutal and cruel in Jesus' name as other religious extremists are in the name of their gods. "Keep your heart [conscience] with all diligence, for out of it spring the issues of life" (Pr. 4:23). Do not invalidate God's voice in your heart for the sake of your tradition (Mt.15:6). Read Charles Pridgeon's article on conscience on our website.

Good Fruit

We are known by our fruit (Mt. 7:16). Belief in the Blessed Hope...

Transforms us into His likeness as we naturally reflect whom we admire. Mother Theresa knew an impartial God who loves His enemies, and her life reflected it. John Calvin knew a partial God who hates His enemies and fought to have a fellow believer executed over a point of doctrine.

Fosters genuine affection for God enabling us to fulfill the first great command (Mk. 12:30). What can bar us from loving God more than the thought He might send us to eternal suffering? It would be natural to fear such a God, but love Him?

Motivates us to be like God in never giving up on difficult - to -love people—fulfilling the second great command (Mk. 12:31).

Strengthens our faith and trust in God knowing He will never forsake anyone, including ourselves and those we love.

Comforts all who mourn, especially those grieving for loved ones who have died outside the faith.

Makes it a joy to share truly Good News! No need to cower in shame about the bad news of the gospel any longer. We can present God as infinitely loving, just, and all-powerful. GOD Almighty! People are attracted to such a God.

Harmonizes the comforting passages with those that warn.

Imparts lasting joy and peace (1Pe. 1:8). In all my years under the threat of eternal hell, I never had deep and lasting peace.

Enriches worship. Fosters a true heart-felt affection for God.

Satisfies the heart of Him who died for all.

Satisfies our conscience, God's moral witness in our hearts.

Instills a healthy fear of judgment. In contrast, a penalty, which to reason and moral sense is shocking and unbearable, loses all force as a threat in the minds of many people.

Bad Fruit

We are known by our fruit (Mt. 7:16). Belief in eternal torment...

Makes Adam's sin greater than what the cross of Christ has accomplished. (See Ro. 5:12-21).

Fosters a vengeful attitude in many people. "They deserve it!"

Coerces love. "Love me or else!"

Compromises the Good News of the Gospel.

Breeds skepticism and unbelief by maligning God's character before the world.

Fosters a spirit of cruelty. Remember Tertullian, the Crusades, De Montfort, the massacre of St. Bartholomew (where 30-40,000 Christians perished), the horrendous Inquisitions, Queen (Bloody) Mary (who set her victims aflame to expedite God's

judgment), the K.K.K., etc. Believers with a hell mindset have committed the most unimaginable atrocities. Please read this short article, “Religious Cruelty,” at our website.

Makes the devil more powerful than Christ since he ultimately wins most of humanity.

Negates the most glorious passages in the Bible (Mt. 15:6).

Makes it impossible to obey the Word of God. Commands such as “Do not worry,” “Rejoice always,” and “Love God with all your heart” are impossible to keep when one is in danger, along with loved ones, of an eternal hell.

Is unworthy of God. It strips Him of His glory, unlimited power, and unfailing love. It mars His holy and just character before the world, depriving Him of the awesome worship He so deserves.

Robs Christ of His victory over evil and dishonors His shed blood by limiting its power to save.

Destroys belief in One all-powerful GOD, and replaces Him with a pseudo god who co-rules the earth with SATAN.

Is unworthy of man. It denies his infinite value to God, making man worthless and fit only for the dung pile. But the blood of Christ affirms man’s infinite value. He does not annihilate or torment forever what has infinite value in His sight.

Has brought untold anguish the world over. Millions have despaired over it, even to the point of emotional breakdown and suicide. What unimaginable anguish it has caused.

Breeds terrorism. If only religious terrorists knew the good tidings of great joy (Lu. 2:10); there would be no need to commit suicide to escape an eternal hell! What makes our hell Gospel desirable to Muslims or to those of other religions?

Offends Christ’s little ones. It would be better to be thrown into the sea than to terrorize His little children (Lu. 17:2).

Makes abortion a heroic act of mercy if you really think it out.

If we critically and objectively examine the evidence presented here, it should become apparent which theology brings God sincere and heartfelt worship. Would it not be safe to say that the theology that produces the above good fruits, harmonizes the Scriptures, does not violate our conscience, brings deep and lasting peace, and glorifies God in every way, is likely to be true?

•••••

This chapter has presented powerful testimony from six key witnesses whose authority is undeniable. What carries more authority than the Old Testament, the apostles, the early church, God’s moral witness, and the fruits of our faith? Their witness, sufficient in itself, only supplements the evidence presented in other chapters. Let us now consider twenty-four additional points of evidence supporting the Blessed Hope.

CIRCUMSTANTIAL EVIDENCE

Convince...with all longsuffering and teaching.
(2Ti. 4:2)

Thus far, we have evaluated the supporting pillars of infinite torment and have found them invalid (Chapter 1). We then focused on God's glorious nature, His unlimited power, and His essence which "is" love with no "buts" attached (Chapter 2). Such love then found expression in His just and purposeful judgments (Chapter 3). From there we stepped back to see the big picture of His blessed plan for all humanity, a plan that cannot fail (Chapters 4 and 5). From that vantage point, we narrowed in on many precious proclamations supporting powerfully both directly and indirectly the Blessed Hope (Chapters 6 and 7). With such glorious proclamations still resonating in our hearts, we heard six key witnesses give incontestable testimony reaffirming this hope (Chapter 8). Now, with hearts filled with anticipation for what still lies ahead, let us examine the circumstantial evidence of our case. It is my prayer that as you evaluate this evidence, God will open your eyes and heart to receive a deeper unveiling of His indescribable grace and mercy for all people.

Abortion Is Merciful

If pro-life Christians truly believe what their churches teach about hell, what motivates them to fight abortion? What is the better strategy to get the most people into heaven—evangelism or abortion? Well, most Christians would say abortion has a 100 percent success rate; pretty hard to beat, don't you think? Remember Andrea Yates, who drowned her five children? She was captivated with Michael Woroniecki's preaching that "bad children [go] to hell." (1) Was she really insane? Maybe she was simply a loving mother who wanted to spare her children an unimaginable and horrendous fate.

Beyond Horror

To reflect upon the horror of unending punishment is its own refutation. Whatever the actual torments may be, the horror is its never ending character. It is impossible to conceive suffering forever. It is a horror beyond description and incompatible with a God of mercy and grace.

Calvinism Affirms

J. I. Packer, a Calvinist, is one of the most influential theologians of our time. He says to believe that Christ died for everyone logically leads to the belief that all will be saved. (2) Is he right? Think about it. If you believe, as Packer does, in God's limitless power and that

man is helpless to override His will, you must agree that God brings to faith all for whom Christ died, which for Packer is only the elect.

Calvinism, because of its wide acceptance and influence, lends great credibility to the Blessed Hope because it shares with us the same view of God's power. Their theologians unwittingly offer strong arguments in defense of the Blessed Hope.

In essence, I share Packer's view that God does all His will. But unlike Packer, I maintain that Christ died for all. So, as Packer attests, since I believe in God's absolute power, and that Christ died for all, it is natural and inevitable that I would believe that God will save all.

Christ, Our Model?

If saving people from an eternal hell is our mission, why did Christ not model this objective? The same question can be asked of the Apostles. If you read through the Gospels, you will not find Jesus hurrying about trying to get people saved. He was content with healing infirmities and teaching people how to live. When He did teach, it was all too frequently in parables, a code language designed specifically to conceal truth from His hearers. Mt. 13:9-17; Mk4: 9-12; Lu. 8:8-10; Jn. 12:37-40; Pr. 25:2, etc.

Why would the world's Savior allow people to march right on by into eternal damnation? His life does not line up with our theology. Something is amiss, and I do not think it is He. Christ was not in a rush because He has the ages in which to operate. "With the Lord a thousand years are as one day" (2Pe. 3:8).

Comforts the Grieving

We all from time to time encounter friends or family members who are deeply hurting in the loss of a loved one. Often, it involves someone who made no outward profession of faith in Christ. How do you comfort them in their grief? Do you tell them they will be reunited in heaven, or tell them they are suffering in hell for all eternity? Do you take advantage of the opportunity, like some, to tell them they can escape such a fate? Not if you are a sensitive human being. All you can do is hold their hand and say nothing except, "I'm praying for you." Not so with the Blessed Hope! The Bible abounds with hope for all who grieve.

Cross of Christ

The cross does not simply give people an "opportunity" for salvation, but assures its ultimate attainment. The difference here is paramount. Allin declared:

The popular creed [Augustinian tradition] dishonors the Cross by limiting its power to save to the brief moments of earthly life. Further, it virtually teaches the Cross is a stupendous failure. This is easily shown. For plainly that which misses its end is a failure. The scriptural evidence is overwhelming, that the object of Christ's death was to save the world. If the world be not in fact saved, the Atonement is so far a failure. Disguise the fact as men may, the dilemma is inevitable. Answer, or evasion, there is none. (3)

In his movie, *The Passion*, Mel Gibson has truly given us a vivid picture of the awful price Christ paid to achieve His objective. It is impossible to imagine all He suffered for every person. It is even harder to think after all that, He failed to achieve His goal. I believe in the power of the cross. There is no greater power in the universe. For in it, we see the

extent of God's love. I cannot imagine the cross failing to any degree. However, I can conceive it accomplishing all its purpose. Nothing less would satisfy Christ or His Father.

Cruel World

We live in a cruel world. Every single human being must face innumerable sorrows in this life. We all have to face the death of a loved one eventually, not to mention our own approaching death. We have only old age to look forward to with all its uncertainty, loneliness, grief, pain, and for many, anguish. And after that, what? Millions of people are filled with fear, are lonely, and are destitute with no means to provide for their family. Life is hard—even cruel. No wonder so many take their own lives, turn to drugs, sex, and all kinds of worldly distractions. They have no purpose in life.

I realize I am painting a gloomy picture here, but it is the truth. Few take the time to reflect today. They are afraid to. They would rather watch TV, go to movies, play sports, work, read books, and do anything except think about life or the future. Worst of all, they worry about their fate in the next world. Then some will drive by a billboard like this one:

What does this say about God? Christians who promote such turn-or-burn evangelism know not what they do. They think through such fear tactics they will draw souls to Christ. But in reality, they only turn people away from God. And what does it do to Christ's "little ones"? It is better to be cast into the sea and drowned than to "offend" (KJV) one of them (Mk. 9:42). How many are tormented by the thought of an eternal hell for themselves and for their loved ones? What kind of God would place people in such a cruel world only to send them to something infinitely worse in the hereafter?

There have been times when I felt God to be distant and cruel. One of those times was in the aftermath of the Tsunami catastrophe of January 2005. Soon after the tragedy, I had a dream. In it, I was struggling with the horror of this disaster. One specific thought stuck with me upon awakening: "Faith is to believe God is good even in the midst of all the bad." As I thought of this that morning, I remembered the beatitudes Christ addressed to the multitudes in Lu. 6:19-21. He said the poor will receive the kingdom, the hungry will be filled, and the weeping will laugh! These words brought great light and comfort to my heart. No matter what difficult experiences and sufferings people go through in this life, the bottom line is, God will make it right (Ge. 18:25). His peace returned to my spirit.

What is the heart of God regarding this cruel world? When Christ saw the multitudes, He was moved with compassion for them (Mt. 9:36-38). Oh, how all people need to know they are loved by a compassionate God! The "goodness" and "kindness" (NAS) of God leads to repentance (Ro. 2:4). We do not need clever religious clichés of terror like the aforementioned sign. A cruel world testifies there must be something better, or this life is worse than meaningless. And there is! His name is Jesus Christ, Prince of Peace, Everlasting Father, Savior of the world.

False Hopes Raised

How can hope for the restoration of all be as abundantly set forth in Scripture (see Appendix I), if it were not a legitimate hope? Is God out to taunt us? Does He give us passages which raise our hopes only to shatter them in others? The very existence of such wondrous and hopeful passages affirms their validity and pleads their acceptance.

Gospel of Peace?

(Ro. 10:15)

Peace is a precious fruit of the Gospel (Ga. 5:22). However, in the traditional view, it doesn't seem as if peace is really possible **unless...**

1. I believe that I have met all the requirements* to escape an eternity of suffering and am sure I will continue to do so until my last breath. *Believe, repent, carry the cross, endure to the end, etc.
2. I am certain that all my loved ones will do the same.
3. I **do not** love my neighbors as myself. For if I did, I could not be at peace until everyone I love shares in salvation with me.

Something is grievously amiss in this theology. It offers me peace only if I am selfish at heart or am self-righteous. Is this the Gospel of God's true peace? I do not think so. I believe that His peace is ours only when we believe that He will save all!

Hell's Purpose

Doug Henderson, author of *Why Inclusion*, asked what he called a "nagging" question, "Sending people to Hell for eternity would serve what purpose for God? Revenge? Entertainment? How would that benefit the people sent there?" (4)

Have you ever asked yourself what purpose hell serves? This is one of the most pertinent and weighty questions anyone could raise. Why? Because an unsatisfactory answer maligns God's character.

Would you not think that if an eternal hell were true, the Bible would have thrown light on this solemn question? The fact that God offers no explanation argues against an eternal hell. Such a horrific thought, one that is so incomprehensible to every sincere thinker, demands at least some kind of explanation. Where is it?

Incredible

Regarding everlasting torment, Allin proposed:

If true, can this strange fact be explained—that nobody acts as if he believed it? I say this, for any man who so believed, and who possessed but a spark of common humanity—to say nothing of charity—could not rest, day or night, so long as one sinner remained who might be saved. To this all would give place—pleasure, learning, business, art, literature; nay, life itself would be too short for the terrible warnings, the burning entreaties, the earnest pleadings, that would be needed. No society, no individual, can possibly act, or has in fact acted, on such a creed, in the real business of life. It is simply impossible: who would dare so much as to smile, if he really believed endless torments were certain to be the portion of some member of his household—it may be of himself? Marriage would be a crime, and each birth the occasion of an awful dread. The shadow of a possible hell would darken every home, sadden every family hearth.... "The world would be one vast madhouse," says the American scholar HALLSTED. (5)

Last Sunday, Rev. Smith preached a powerful message on the second coming of Christ, and the last judgment. He boldly laid the grim destiny of humanity before his congregation.

After his sermon and the closing prayer, he announced: “We’re all meeting at Kingdom Park this afternoon at 1pm for our Annual Fellowship Banquet. Men, don’t forget your golf clubs, and the pastries, Ladies!”

The reality that our lives can go on so casually after such a heart wrenching sermon proves one of three possibilities:

We are totally oblivious to the horror of everlasting punishment.

If we are not oblivious, then in our heart of hearts, we really do not believe it.

Or, and pardon my strong language, we must be the most despicable, pathetic, detestable, wretched, and loathsome creatures in the universe.

Which of these is the case for you?

In Love with God

Do you believe the majority of the earth’s people will suffer forever in hell because they did not meet God’s criteria for heaven? Have you come to grips with the fact that you and those you love might actually fall short of this criteria, and to your ultimate horror and despair find yourself in the company of the majority on the last day? If you answered “yes” to these two questions, can you with a true and genuine affection love this God with “all” your heart?

What would you think of a bride on her wedding day kissing the bridegroom’s feet (an evil medieval prince) out of fear that he would cast her in the lion’s den if she didn’t? Would those kisses be real? Any love you think you have for a God that would torment you forever if you did not love him, is simply a survival instinct. Do homage or die! This is no different than Islam where one billion Muslims bow in adoration to Allah five times a day. Are they “in love” with Allah, or “in dread” of him?

Only the God of the Blessed Hope can instill in our hearts true and lasting affection for Him, fulfilling the first and greatest commandment (Mt. 22:38). Why? Because we can depend on Him and know that we and those we love are forever safe in His loving arms. We know that His love for us will never end (1Co. 13:8 RSV) because His unfailing plan encompasses the whole creation, not just a select few. (Ps. 66:3-4; Is. 46:10-11; Ro. 8:20-22; Jn. 1:29; 4:42; 12:32; 1Jn. 2:2; etc. See Appendix 1) What an awesome God!

Love...As Yourself

The whole law is summed up in one word...love. “You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (Ga. 5:14 NAS). The key word is “as.” Can we really love another person as much as we love ourselves? I believe we can because God is at work in us to do all His good pleasure (Ph. 2:13). Now picture the person you love most in the whole world being tormented in an eternal hell. With this horrific thought before you, can you rejoice in your “personal” salvation? Of course not, for as long as a loved one is hurting, you will hurt and find no comfort in any exclusive blessing you might have. See 1Co. 12:26; Ro. 12:5, 15.

I contend that if we truly fulfilled the commandment to love our lost neighbors “as” we love ourselves, it would be impossible to rejoice in our “personal” salvation, or know inner peace, so long as any of these beloved neighbors remained lost or in hell. Yet Scripture is clear—love, joy, and peace are integral to true Christian experience. (Ga. 5:22). This in itself confirms that the “eternal hell” gospel is a grave error, since it impedes or bars these precious fruits of the Spirit from our lives. However, knowing that God is a loving Father to all those I

love, and that His judgments are a necessary expression of His love, gives me peace. It enables me to maintain my joy in Him. For I know that His judgments are right, and in faithfulness He afflicts us (Ps. 119:75). “Though he brings grief, he will show compassion. So great is his unfailing love” (La. 3:32 NIV).

Life’s Potential

Lorraine Day pointed out:

Methuselah had 969 years to find God and get his life right. Yet a child may be born to a prostitute, drug addict mother and an alcoholic father (Mafia hit man) who beats his wife and kids everyday. The child grows up on the streets in the ghetto, joins a gang, and is murdered in a shootout at the age of 14. According to what we are taught, God says, “Well, kid, you had 14 years to find Me and get your life straight. Sadly, you didn’t get it right.” In this “parable,” the boy responds by saying “But why did you give Methuselah 969 years and me only 14 years?” (6)

Popular tradition says if we do not get it right here, there will never be another opportunity. Is this really so? Are we not God’s masterpiece of creation? He spent thousands, perhaps millions of years preparing this planet for our arrival. Is He so impatient as to only allow us but a few short years to develop our full potential? What of those who die as babies, or as young children? Or even the mentally handicapped? Are they a privileged group allowed to circumvent the system, leaving the rest of us to prove ourselves? Is this fair? Oh, that we would all have died as babies if that were true!

All creation, through the world of nature with its seasons and cycles, and the dreams living in our hearts point to a God with everything under control. This life cannot be all there is! It is one age in many (Ep. 2:7). His will for unborn babies and all those whose lives were cut short will be realized! For our God is not defeated by circumstances, war, evil, fate, or anything else; for He is GOD! (Ro. 8:31-39). This planet and age are only part of His creation. They are not the alpha and omega. Jesus is!

Natural Instincts

Earlier, I discussed abortion and showed that Christians, in spite of their belief in an eternal hell for most of humanity, are still compelled to combat against it. I did not explain why that is, only that it contradicted their theology. I think Allin explained it well. He wrote:

Wherever human beings exist, in what form of community it matters not, in what climate or under what conditions of life whatsoever, there is found everywhere a deep spontaneous belief, call it feeling, instinct, what you please, that connects the marriage tie and the birthday with joyful associations, with mirth and gladness. Now why is this—has it no meaning?...Is it possible that our Heavenly Father should bid His creatures everywhere to rejoice with a special joy at the marriage feast, at the natal hour, if these births were in fact destined to add largely to the ranks of hell?...As you think it over, take with you these words of Jesus Christ... “joy that a man is born into the world.” Dwell on these words, that you may grasp all they convey. Indeed, it may almost be said that in this lies the whole matter. It is a joy that a man—any man—should be born into the world (John xvi : 21) See how wide the words are. If you tell me that this joy is but a blind instinct of the mother: Yes, I reply, it is this very blindness, as you call it, of the instinct that constitutes its force, for it thus betrays its origin; it is implanted, and by whom? By the Great Parent, for it is spontaneous and betrays His hand. Do you ask me

to believe that He has done this without a meaning, without a certain purpose of good? Can I believe that our Father bids any mother's heart to stir with joy at the sight of her infant, while He knows that this infant is destined to be, will be, in fact, shut up into endless torment and sin? (7)

What does it all boil down to? It is a matter of the heart – God's Spirit in us. We can hear of the theologies of men such as Augustine teaching the precepts of men as commandments of God. "Their fear toward Me is taught by the commandment of men" (Is. 29:13). But what is really believed in our heart of hearts is that life is good and the Judge of all the earth will do what is right. We instinctively know we will not be disappointed about God in that day. God has to be good, or existence itself is void of meaning. The Blessed Hope provides the biblical basis for what our hearts already know to be true.

Parents!

*They built the high places of Baal, which are in the Valley of the Son of Hinnom [Gehenna], to cause their sons and their daughters to pass through the fire to Molech, which I did not command them, **nor did it come into My mind** that they should do this abomination (Jer. 32:35)....*

Do you remember the time when you first held your little ones in your arms and the affection that filled your heart? Is God less loving toward His children than you are? "If you give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father?" (Mt. 7:11).

Picture your daughter or son when she or he was about three. You told your child many times not to play with the stove. Finally, you had had enough. In order to teach little Rosy or Roy a lesson, you pressed the child's delicate finger on the red hot burner for one full second. Is this how you disciplined your child? No! Such never would have crossed your mind! Yet Christians, who call God "Father," say He torments His children for eternity; some say in literal fire!

What would society do to such a parent? Yet if the Supreme Being does something infinitely worse, it is somehow acceptable? How? How has it come to this? How could we have allowed ourselves to believe this way about God? Do we call God "Father" while believing that He burns His children forever? Loving parents should think about this. Hear your conscience; listen to your Father!

Personal Reflection I

One day as I was reflecting on God's gift of salvation, I realized how unworthy I was of it. I thought, "If God would save me, why would He not save all people since that is His will? Am I morally superior? No. Is not my very faith His gift?" Yes. Then it hit me—He will! He must!

As I reflected further, I realized something else. Only if we believe God will ultimately save all people is it possible to experience true and lasting joy, the supposed fruit of Christian experience (1Pe. 1:8). For to believe that God accepts some and rejects others forever is deeply unsettling. I know this well. For how can we know for sure that we, or those we love, will not be included with those rejected in the end? "For if God did not spare the natural branches, He will not spare you either" (Ro. 11:21 NIV). "Let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall" (1Co. 10:12).

Thus, the realization that God will ultimately bring all people to Himself, filled my heart, for the first time in my life, with true peace and joy—a joy Peter expressed as "joy so

glorious that it cannot be described” (1Pe. 1:8 JB). Let me present this idea slightly differently:

Personal Reflection II

No one deserves salvation. The only way I can be truly assured I will be saved is if I believe that God saves all. For if Christ did not die for all sin, or lacks the power to save the worst among us, failing to change even our sinful wills, then only uncertainty remains. For if all are not saved, I am only deluding myself in thinking I will certainly be saved. How can I be 100% sure that my faith, or my obedience to all God’s commands (until my last breath), will fully satisfy God?

Prayer and Thanks

Our Lord taught us to pray that the Father’s will be done on earth (Lu. 11:2). Is not His will the salvation of all men? Paul writes, “I exhort that...prayers...and giving of thanks be made for all men....For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior; who will have all men to be saved” (1Ti. 2:1-4 KJV).

Who has not prayed for the salvation of someone dear? Do we not do so because we know He wills it, and has the wherewithal to bring it to pass? If we can pray in faith for certain individuals we love, why can we not pray for all men like Paul commands? In fact, we are to give thanks for all men. What greater thing can we be thankful for than the salvation of all? For is this not His will? Would God have us pray and give thanks for what He cannot or would not grant? Our Lord’s exhortation to pray, “Thy will be done,” and Paul’s, to thank Him for all men, in the very context of the salvation of all, assures me He will do it.

Scripture Harmonized

All who know the Bible must admit that there are comforting parts, and frightening ones. I tried hard to back-file in my mind the difficult ones and remember only those which comforted me. However, I failed miserably. The thoughts of an eternal hell were never far from my consciousness. But now, in the Blessed Hope, I can face these passages without losing my peace. Here is what I mean:

GROUP A

The LORD is my light and my salvation; Whom shall I fear (Ps. 27:1).

Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light (Mt. 11:28-30).

Do not fear, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom (Lu. 12:32).

GROUP B

Unless your righteousness exceeds...Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven.

He who endures to the end will be saved.

You are saved, if you hold fast...unless you believed in vain (Mt. 5:20; Mt. 10:22; 1Co. 15:1-2).

How are we to reconcile these groups? Do we have the option to pick and choose? For most of my life I was at a loss. But in the Blessed Hope, I am settled. I can identify with Job: "Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him" (Job 13:15). How could he say this? He knew his God! "Those who know Your name will put their trust in You..." (Ps. 9:10). I now understand that even in His most severe judgments, He has a purpose, and His love is ever present. Comfort or warnings, mercy and judgment, all work together in each life to achieve His sure purpose.

TRADITION AT BAT

We have been called to trust God with all our heart (Pr. 3:5). It is His command, and to not trust Him is sin (Ro. 14:23). How, may I ask, can we trust a Being who will torment us forever if we mess up? Other believers have fallen, how can we be sure we won't? Are we better than the rest? Paul did not warn "take heed lest you fall" for nothing (1Co. 10:12). Why did Hymenaeus and Alexander (1Ti. 1:19-20) fall? Was it inadequate faith, or works? Or were their hearts too evil for God to change? How can we judge the adequacy of our faith, our works, or our heart? For our "heart is deceitful...who can know it?" (Jer.17:9). **STRIKE ONE!**

The Bible exhorts us not to worry about anything (Ph. 4:6; Mt. 6:25), nor to let our hearts be troubled and afraid (Jn. 14:1, 27). It commands us to rejoice at all times (Ph. 4:4; 1Th. 5:16). Please be honest with yourself. If you truly believe there is the slightest chance you or any of your loved ones might be tormented forever, how can you possibly not worry, or be troubled, or afraid, and rejoice at all times? You just cannot. I know. I've tried. **STRIKE TWO!**

The Bible tells us God is love (1Jn. 4:8, 16) and love never fails. (1Co. 13:8). Yet mainline theology says either God does not love everyone, or God, in most cases fails, due to "free" will. This finds itself in the midst of a religious system claiming there are no contradictions in our faith. Who, with unbiased reflection, does not see contradiction in all the above examples? **STRIKE THREE!**

GOD AT BAT

Consider this critical point. Of the three theologies referred to in chapter four, which best removes the contradictions in Scripture and enables us to obey the injunctions to trust God, to not fear or worry, to rejoice at all times, and to believe He is unfailing Love? Only the Blessed Hope does.

This hope has restored my faith and confidence in God's Word. It has taught me to view His unsearchable judgments (Ro. 11:33) through the clear light of His character and sure promises to restore all. This is nothing less than God's **GRAND SLAM!**

Larry Hodges, author of "The All-Encompassing Work of Christ" wrote, "This glorious truth is like so many others in the Bible. When one sees it, it is seen everywhere, on almost every page.

Spirit of the New Testament

The spirit of grace which illuminates the pages of the New Testament is devoid of the spirit of the Augustinian tradition of endless torment. Grace permeates this Testament. It

shines forth love, mercy, longsuffering, joy, and peace. Paul exhorts us to meditate on these things—particularly what is noble, just, pure, lovely, of good report, virtuous, and praiseworthy (Ph. 4:8). Upon these I now meditate and find great peace. However, while I lived under the threat of eternal torment, I could never deeply meditate on such virtues. How could I? I could never blot out of my mind very long the alleged reality of an endless hell. In fact, all deep and reflective thought inevitably led me to question the reality or goodness of God. The New Testament is true; Augustinian teachings are not. This is clear to me now. What a joy it is to experience true peace!

Statistics of World Missions

Mission Frontiers estimated that 11% of the world's population is Christian. (8) Billy Graham once said that 15% of church members are saved. (9) Putting these claims together and doing a few calculations, one can estimate that close to 99% of the world is going to a place of eternal suffering according to Evangelical leaders. How is this possible? Can this be what God purposed for His world? Where are the "good tidings of great joy for all people" (Lu. 2:10)?

Let's talk Bible statistics. Jesus died for 100% of humanity (1Jn. 2:2). If he had but 100 sheep and one got lost, He would leave the 99 in search of that lost one until He found it! (Lu. 15:4, 7). But we have reversed His parable to say the opposite about God. We say God lets the 99 go astray and is satisfied with saving one! What a defamation of our Father's holy and loving character! May He open our eyes. "God saw everything He had made and indeed it was very good" (Ge. 1:31). Rejoice dear friend, the destiny of humanity is not tragic!

Testimony of Song

Visitors on a typical Sunday morning attending our church have no idea what we really believe about God. Our positive, upbeat songs offer no hint. How filled they are with words expressive of the Blessed Hope! We are taught to believe one thing with our heads, but deep in our hearts where songs are birthed and worship extrudes, the doctrine of hell is strangely absent. Should not this testimony of the corporate body of Christ in its worship tell us something? Is this not the Spirit's witness to the truth? See Appendix III.

Worship Magnified

Worship reflects what we admire about God. We sing of His goodness, faithfulness, love, etc. It is not in us to sing of His judgments as they are commonly understood. Nevertheless, His just and righteous judgments are indeed praiseworthy! By not praising Him for them, we are failing to worship God for all He is. The revelation that even in judgment His love is victorious will draw our hearts into a depth of worship we have yet to experience. David knew this. He rejoiced in God's just judgments. Note the mood being portrayed here. They are set in the context of singing and rejoicing.

Let the heavens be glad...the earth rejoice...the fields rejoice....Then shall the trees...sing out at the presence of the Lord, because He cometh to judge the earth (1Ch. 16:31-33 KJV).

Sing unto Him a new song....He loveth righteousness and judgment: the earth is full of the goodness of the Lord. (Ps. 33:3-5 KJV).

Justice and judgment are the habitation of thy throne: mercy and truth shall go before Thy face. Blessed are the people who know the joyful sound... (Ps. 89:14-15 KJV).

He shall judge the people righteously. Let the heavens rejoice, and let the earth be gladLet the field be joyful...then shall all the trees of the wood rejoice before the Lord: for He cometh to judge the earth: He shall judge the world with righteousness, and the people with His truth. (Ps. 96:10-13 KJV).

Let the floods clap their hands, the hills be joyful together before the Lord; for He cometh to judge the earth: with righteousness shall He judge the world, and the people with equity (Ps. 98:8-9 KJV).

I will sing of mercy and judgment: unto Thee, O Lord, will I sing (Ps. 101:1 KJV).

Oh, let the nations be glad and sing for joy! For You shall judge the people righteously... (Ps. 67:4).

The Church is not singing the above passages. God is not yet receiving all the praise His glorious character deserves. Why? I encourage you to read Psalm 98. I am longing for the day when the Church will worship God for both His mercies and His judgments! For truly, “the judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether. More to be desired are they than gold, Yea, than much fine gold; Sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb” (Ps. 19:9-10).

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Please carefully weigh the twenty four points I have presented in this chapter. I hope you will prayerfully reflect on them. In chapter ten, we will consider a few key factors that have confirmed in my heart that Christ is truly triumphant in every sense.

CHRIST TRIUMPHANT

I...accomplished the work You have given me to do.
(Jn. 17:4 NAS)

If Christ is not the Triumphant One, there can be no basis for the Blessed Hope or any hope for that matter. But if He is, that fact alone establishes the validity of our Hope. In this chapter, we will consider God's oath on the matter, consider Christ's title as Savior of the world, establish that He fully accomplished His mission, contemplate the results of His ultimate sacrifice, reflect on God's mercy for all in light of His glorious Being, and make note of encouraging signs on the horizon.

Oath of God

Of what importance is an oath? It is of utmost importance, for it underlines the seriousness of a given promise of God. The Almighty Creator, possessor of all power, has made an oath that He will bless every family (Ac. 3:25-26) on earth and that every knee shall bow in worship before Him (Is. 45:23; etc). An oath reveals the unchangeableness of His purpose (He. 6:17). Nothing can stop Him, for He is well able even to subdue all things to Himself (Ph. 3:21). In fact, an oath means the end of all dispute (He. 6:16).

I will perform the oath I swore...in your seed all the nations [families Ac. 3:25] of the earth shall be blessed (Ge. 26:3-4; 22:16-18).

I have sworn...every knee shall bow (Is. 45:23).

To show...the unchangeable character of his purpose, he interposed with an oath (He. 6:17 RSV).

An oath...is for them an end of all dispute (He. 6:16).

We are reflecting on God's oath. When you think of the scant evidence proffered in favor of infinite punishment, and compare it to the massive evidence against it submitted in this book, to then ignore God's very oath on the matter would be very serious.

Indeed the World's Savior

Scripture refers to Christ as the Savior of the World. In fact, "Jesus" means savior (Mt. 1:21). The Father sent Him as such (1Jn. 4:14). Though we all give lip service to this title, we actually deny it. We attest instead that Christ is merely the Savior of "some out" of the world. Or again, He is the "wish to be" Savior of the world. But if the mass of humanity is lost forever, we can call Him what we will, He is not the Savior of the world. What we really believe is that it doesn't matter if He saves anyone at all. We would still call Him "Savior of

the world.” In our minds, to merely offer salvation makes one a savior. That is strange indeed—“The Savior of the world not saved.”

What would you think of a lifeguard who was hailed as the hero of the day at the funeral of a young girl for merely having offered her a life preserver and then threw it to the wrong end of the pool? Which of the following is the accurate version of John 12:47?

“I did not come to judge the world but to offer salvation to the world.”

“I did not come to judge the world but to save the world.”

Please bear with my redundancy - this is important.

Either the world is saved or it is not. Saving part of it is not saving it. If Christ saves some, He can be called the “Savior of some.” But He cannot be called “Savior of the world,” unless He saves the world. If God knew from the beginning that the world could not be saved, He would not have “sent the Son as “Savior of the world” (1Jn. 4:14), nor would the Apostle John have affirmed that Christ was “indeed” the Savior of the world (Jn. 4:42). Being Almighty and all-knowing, the Father sent Christ to do exactly what He knew He could and would do, and that is, to save the world! This fact alone does justice and brings full honor to His awesome title: “Savior of the World.”

Mission Accomplished

“I...accomplished the work You have given me to do” (Jn. 17:4 NAS). “The Son of God came to earth with the express purpose of undoing the devil’s work” (1Jn. 3:8 NEB). He came to “render powerless him who had the power of death... and free those who through fear of death were subject to slavery all their lives’ (He. 2:14-15 NAS). Christ is greater than he who is in the world (1Jn. 4:4), and He will cast him out! (Jn.12:31).

All these statements affirm unreservedly that Christ fulfilled His mission. If only some of the devil’s works are undone, i.e. only some people are saved, it would mean His mission failed; for Christ came to rescue the world, not merely part of it (Jn. 12:47). Allin claimed:

If evil be as strong as God, as enduring as God Himself, there is no escape from the conclusion that you proclaim the triumph of the evil one. You are proclaiming, not the true faith, but a dualism. You blot from the faith of Christendom its fundamental article, “I believe in one God the Father Almighty.” What are all heresies, all errors, that have stained the Church of God, compared with this supreme heresy, this dualism, which seats evil on the throne of the universe, a power enduring as God Himself? (1)

Christ is victorious!

Christ puts an end to all rule, authority, and power... (1Co. 15:24).

The Lord’s pleasure has prospered in His hand (Is. 53:10).

Christ has abolished death... (2Ti. 1:10; 1Co. 15:26).

It is finished [paid in full] (Jn. 19:30). (2)

He gave Himself a ransom for all to be testified in due time (1Ti. 2:6).

He shall see the travail of His soul, and be satisfied (Is. 53:11 KJV).

He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world (1Jn. 2:2).

O Death, where is your sting? O Hades, where is your victory (1Co. 15:55)?

The sting of death is sin...But God gives us the victory through Jesus Christ (1Co. 15:56-57).

Allin continued:

It is wholly inconceivable that the definite plan of an Almighty Being should end in failure—that this should be the result of the agony of the eternal Son. God has, in the face of angels and of men, before the universe and its gaze of wonder, entered Himself into the arena; become Himself a combatant, has wrestled with the foe, and has been defeated. I can bring myself to imagine those, who reject the Deity of Christ, as believing in His defeat; but it is passing strange that those who believe Him to be “very God Almighty,” are loudest in asserting His failure. (3)

I have good news for you. Christ will not be defeated! Satan is not on the throne of the universe, the great “I AM” is! Truly God’s plan for man is unfailing.

Ultimate Price

Christ paid the ultimate price for all our sins; not a few, not some, not even many, but all. The ransom was paid in full for every person on earth. There is no way anyone will ever have to pay again for what Christ has paid for. If someone does, then Christ suffered in vain for that person. That is not possible! He bought us all at a price, and we belong to Him.

The sufferings both believers and unbelievers experience, as a result of God’s righteous judgments, are remedial and retributive, not redemptive—only Christ redeems. They come to all in the same spirit of fatherly love as exemplified in He. 12:5-11. Does God not love all people impartially and wills the salvation of all? Though He chastises us, the chastisement can never take the place of the blood of Christ as our propitiation and ransom. There would be no hope for anyone without His perfect sacrifice for all.

It is inconceivable that God would have created the world without first anticipating the atonement. Even if all were to incur the second death described in Revelation, all men are still redeemed by the blood of the lamb slain before the foundation of the world! (1Pe. 1:20; 2Ti. 1:9; Re. 13:8). He purchased all men on the cross (Jn. 19:30). He died for the whole world! (1Jn. 2:2). Christ’s blood was not shed in vain for anyone! It will achieve all the glorious purpose which God has ordained. It cannot miss its mark!

“It pleased the Father to reconcile to Himself all things on earth and in heaven, having made peace *through the blood* of His cross” (Col. 1:19-20). The restoration of all cost our Lord a most horrendous price, as anyone who has viewed the film, “The Passion,” can testify. The phrase, “through the blood,” includes all the sufferings Christ endured from His birth. Think of...

How He emptied Himself to take on the form of a bond servant.

His battle in the wilderness for 40 days and nights.

His agony in the garden.

His abandonment by His friends.

His torture over the span of 24 hours.

The crown of thorns.

The crucifixion with all its excruciating pains (who can imagine it?).

Hanging for hours (like an eternity) on the cross with every nerve writhing in pain.

Finally...His last struggling breath.

What horror He suffered for every single human being! For each one of us has infinite value in His sight. That is why He yielded Himself to all this. Oh, how He loves us all! What love He expressed while hanging on the cross—"Father, forgive them." What a Savior! What a redeemer! How could we have ever thought, Christ having done so much for us, would fall short of being the Savior of all?

Mercy on All

*God has shut up all in disobedience so that He may show mercy to **all**... How **unsearchable** are His judgments and unfathomable His ways...*

(Ro. 11:32-33 NAS)

All Paul's exposition through chapters nine, ten, and eleven lead up to this final summary exclamation—"that He may show mercy to all." God's mercy is for every single human being on the planet. Such mercy is beyond our comprehension. Notice in the very context of such measureless mercy is His unsearchable judgments and unfathomable ways. How is this? Why are His judgments so vitally linked to His mercy for all? Could it be that His mercy finds expression through unsearchable judgments of which we can only know in part (1Co. 13:9-12)?

How is it that Augustine (the most influential Church Father) figured out for the Church what Christ said was hidden from the wise and prudent and only revealed to babes (Mt. 11:25-26)? What Paul said was past finding out (Ro. 11:33), has Augustine truly found out? His theology leads to depression and despair. It speaks of partial love, limited mercy, and injustice for the mass of humanity. It set the stage for the dark ages that followed. Could Isaiah have had theologians such as him in mind when he wrote: "And their fear toward Me is taught by the commandment of men" (Is. 29:13)? To consider the true fruit of his theology, read the Muslim Koran. It was deeply impacted by his theology. And the result? Watch the news. Thousands of devoted Muslims are waiting in line to give their lives as suicide bombers to escape their version of Augustine's hell.

Glorious God

What is God like? Is He kind? Is He cruel? Is He loving? Is He evil? Is He fair? These are the questions that matter, the questions all people want answered. This is no peripheral issue for it affects our very concept of God. And that, affects everything—absolutely everything!

Any human or demon can destroy lives. So could God, of course. But only God can create, transform, and restore. What do you think would give God greater pleasure and glory, destruction or restoration? Shall we restrict His possibilities by placing limits on His power and purpose? What would you expect from an all-powerful and all-loving God? I would expect the most marvelous things imaginable.

*To Him who is **able** to do **exceedingly abundantly above all** that we can ask or think"*
(Ep. 3:20). Wow!!!

*He will swallow up death forever and will wipe away tears from **all** faces* (Is. 25:8).

How will He wipe all tears in heaven? By a lobotomy of the memory of our lost loved ones in hell, or by His great power and wisdom in winning the hearts of the rebellious? Between the conflicting theologies of a fifth century theologian (Augustine) and the early Church, is it not clear which is most worthy of our glorious God? Here is a God who does not destroy His enemies by annihilating or eternally tormenting them. He destroys them by making them His friends!

The Blessed Hope and the Augustinian Tradition present two opposing views of God. Of these two ancient theologies, only the first does justice to the character of our glorious God as He is revealed in Christ. It is what the prophets, the apostles, and the early Church embraced. The second, on the other hand, is shackled by a theology of terror which I contend is the primary reason the Gospel has not yet taken the world by storm. Is it by coincidence that once it dominated the western church the medieval world plunged into the “dark ages”? (4) The following are the key reasons why I believe the Blessed Hope, above all theologies, most honors God: It...

satisfies the heart of Him who died for all and of His Father.

transforms us into His likeness as we naturally reflect what we admire.

fosters genuine and lasting affection for God.

empowers us to fulfill the two great love commands.

strengthens our faith and trust in Him.

instills in us a healthy fear of His judgments.

comforts all who mourn.

harmonizes the Scriptures.

imparts lasting joy and peace.

satisfies our issues of conscience.

empowers us in evangelism and missions.

gives rise to higher heights and deeper depths in worship.

Change on the Horizon

I have good news for you. Christianity is well on its way out of the dark ages of terror! Hundreds of books, articles, and websites presenting this Hope are being produced by Christians from all church backgrounds. One recent book, *The Shack*, paints a glorious picture of God. As of this writing (January 12, 2010), there are 10 million copies in print. It continues on the NY Times best seller list for the 84th consecutive week, including 52 weeks at #1. It was ranked by USA Today as the 6th best-selling book of 2008! (5) Christians everywhere are reading this book! The fact that it became so popular in the Christian world reflects the heart of the Body of Christ that welcomes such a high and magnificent view of God – a God who is truly “able to do **immeasurably more** than all we ask or **imagine**” (Ep. 3:20 NIV)! Other signs include:

The average believer has access to study tools (concordances) which facilitate the study of words based on the Greek and Hebrew languages (unprecedented in church history).

Very few, in their heart of hearts, truly believe in infinite punishment. More and more are vocalizing their rejection of it.

Such a punishment is not reflected in our worship songs.

Nor is it hardly preached from our pulpits anymore.

Whole denominations are reacting against it.

R. Albert Mohler Jr. in “Modern Theology: The Disappearance of Hell,” pointed out:

“In 1995, the Church of England Doctrine Commission re-issued *The Mystery of Salvation*, an official report commended by the House of Bishops. The report embraced a hope of universal salvation, arguing that it is “incompatible with the essential Christian affirmation that God is love to say that God brings millions into the world to damn them.” (6)

This report also said: “Over the last two centuries the decline in the churches of the western world of a belief in everlasting punishment has been one of the most notable transformations of Christian belief.” (7) And relative to the Protestant Evangelical world, he also wrote:

“The Nature of Hell,” (2000) a report of the *Evangelical Alliance Commissions on Unity and Truth Among Evangelicals (ACUTE)*, affirmed hell as an evangelical belief but concluded “specific details of hell’s duration, quality, finality, and purpose which are at issue in the current evangelical debate are comparatively less essential.” (8)

Did you know this? The details of hell’s duration, finality, and purpose were at issue in the current evangelical debate? Even the Catholic Church, the largest branch of the Christian world, after 1,500 years of teaching Augustine’s hell redefined it. Mohler continues:

Pope John Paul II redefined hell in a 1999 General Audience at the Vatican. “Hell is not a punishment imposed externally by God, but the condition resulting from attitudes and actions which people adopt in this life” declared the Pope. (9)

I believe this Pope embraced the Blessed Hope. In a 2001 message titled, “All creation will be ‘recapitulated’ in Christ,” he says:

God’s saving plan, “the mystery of his will” (cf. Eph 1:9) for every creature, is described...with a distinctive term: to “recapitulate” [gather together in one - KJV] all things in heaven and on earth in Christ (Eph 1:10)...The phrase “all things”, Irenaeus says, includes man...In himself he “recapitulates” Adam, in whom all humanity can see itself, transforms him into a child of God and restores him to full communion with the Father. Through his brotherhood with us in flesh and blood, in life and death, Christ becomes “the head” of saved humanity... Jesus himself said he was the fulcrum and point of convergence of this saving plan when he said: “I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself” (Jn 12: 32)... This work will reach its fullness at the end of time when - as Paul again recalls - “God will be all in all” (cf. 1 Cor 15:28)...The Church and the Spirit are waiting and praying for the moment when Christ will “deliver the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power....The last enemy to be destroyed is death. For God has put all things in subjection under his [Son’s] feet” (1 Cor 15: 24, 26-27)? (10)

Mohler further describes these changing times:

A fixture of Christian theology for over 16 centuries [notice the writer did not say 20], hell went away in a hurry. Historian Martin Marty reduced the situation down to this: “Hell disappeared. No one noticed.”...The sudden disappearance of hell amounts to a theological mystery of sorts. How did a doctrine so centrally enshrined in the system of theology suffer such a wholesale abandonment? What can explain this radical reordering of Christian theology? (11)

My answer: God. God is bringing light to the Church in the Spirit, which is making it harder and harder to maintain this cruel anti-Christ dogma. He is removing this odious stain on His character, and the whole Christian world is being affected. Who can say God is not at work in all these signs? His very name is at stake!

“The night is far spent, the day is at hand. Therefore let us cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light” (Ro. 13:12). The Church on a broad scale is being readied for the truth that God is really GOD, and His love for all will not fail! And when it enters into this in fullness and in unity (Jn. 17:21, 23), in His due time, God’s power will be released through it such that the Gospel, even with signs following (Ac. 4:30), will take the world by storm! I believe this is God’s unfailing plan for man. This is my hope.

Come To Jesus and Find Joy, Peace, and Purpose in Life

*I am the door. If **anyone** enters by Me, he will be saved...I have come that you may have life and that... more abundantly. I am the good shepherd...who gives His life for the sheep. (12)*

*Come to me, **all** you who... are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke...and learn from me, for I am gentle....For My yoke is easy and My burden is light. (13)*

If you are reading this book and do not know Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior, I invite you to come to Him. As the Son of God (14) and our very Creator, (15) He became a man (16) and died on the cross over 2,000 years ago for the sins of the whole world. (17) Our sins have separated us from God (18) and Christ is the only one (19) who cleanses (20) us from them. He, the sinless one, (21) paid the penalty for all our sins. (22) He died for our sakes. (23) He redeemed us, restoring us to God. (24)

The Apostle Paul, in response to someone asking what he must do to be saved, replied, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ.” (25) What more can we do? Christ paid our debt in full! (26) We, being dead in trespasses, He has made alive together with Him, having forgiven us all trespasses. (27) “For by grace you have been saved through faith (28) and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works...that we should walk in them.” (29)

Salvation in one sense is an accomplished fact, (30) due to Christ’s work on the cross—a gift. (31) Yet in another sense, it is a process involving good works, (32) not completed “until we all reach unity ...attaining the full measure of perfection found in Christ.” (33) In knowing Christ we become a new person; (34) we experience a genuine, personal and communal relationship with God. (35) Won’t you come to Him? Many come in the way of a simple prayer, something like this:

Thank you Lord for dying on the cross for the sins of the whole world and for revealing yourself to me. Reveal yourself to those I love and care for. Shine your light through me to those around me. I welcome your yoke. I want to know and love you; serve you with my whole heart and life.

If you would like to learn more about what it means to follow Jesus, we would love to talk with you. Call 1-800 254-1334.

And please... don't let the truth of God's unfailing love (36) become an issue between you and other believers in Christ. We are all one in Him, (37) though we may differ on some points. (38) What unites us all is the precious blood of Christ. (39)

Let your light shine (40) before a hurting world and church. We have a message of hope, of life, of joy that hurting people long to hear. (41)

To My Fellow Believers

If after considering the evidence in these pages you do not share my hope, please do not be too quick to judge or condemn those who do. I pray you would share the same attitude as Billy Graham as seen in this interview with Jon Meacham of Newsweek:

In Graham's view, the core message of the Gospel, and the love of God "for all people" should take priority....But more recent years have given him something he had little of in his decades of global evangelism: time to think both more deeply and more broadly....He...refuses to be judgmental...thinks God's ways and means are veiled from human eyes and wrapped in mystery. "There are many things that I don't understand," he says. He does not believe that Christians need to take every verse of the Bible literally; "sincere Christians," he says, "can disagree about the details of Scripture and theology—absolutely"....he is arguing that the Bible is open to interpretation, and fair-minded Christians may disagree or come to different conclusions about specific points. Like Saint Paul, he believes human beings on this side of paradise can grasp only so much. "Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror," Paul wrote, "then we shall see face to face."...."As time went on, I began to realize the love of God for everybody, all over the world," he says. "And in his death on the cross, some mysterious thing happened between God and the Son that we don't understand. But there he was, alone, taking on the sins of the world.... I spend more time on the love of God than I used to.".... When asked whether he believes heaven will be closed to good Jews, Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus or secular people, though, Graham says: "Those are decisions only the Lord will make...I believe the love of God is absolute. He said he gave his son for the whole world, and I think he loves everybody regardless of what label they have." (42)

Let us follow Rev. Graham's lead and refuse to be judgmental, believe the love of God is absolute, acknowledge His ways are veiled from human eyes and wrapped in mystery, and spend more time contemplating the love of God. Dare we condemn our fellow believers for believing God's power, love, and mercy are greater than we are willing to accept?

There is no hope of any kind without Christ's death on the cross! How many are those who throughout history have trodden under foot the Son of God and counted the blood of the covenant an unholy thing, in persecuting His redeemed walking in grace and love. Remember, we only know in part (Ro. 11:33; 1Co. 13:9-12). Now abide faith, hope, and love...but the greatest is love (1Co. 13:13).

If this Hope has found a place in your heart, please proceed humbly. Knowledge puffs up, but love edifies. Do not be quick to distance yourself from those who do not yet embrace this hope. I hope you will continue in your community of faith (unless you find it too difficult), being a beacon of peace, joy, and love to others who are hurting. This hope will be foreign to most as it probably was to you at first. Pray about and think through the Scriptures for yourself. Be ready to give your own defense for what you believe with gentleness and respect and in God's timing (1Pe. 3:15; Is. 50:4).

Your peace and joy in God will transform you, and you will love Him with all your heart and your neighbor as yourself. Be thankful He has opened your heart to see Him in such splendor. Be ready to lay your life down for the One who gave His all for you. Persecution

will come if you confront tradition head on just as it has with the prophets, apostles, and saints throughout the ages. May you bear abundant fruit to His glory counting it all joy to suffer for his name.

Most of all, pray God will impart this Blessed Hope into the hearts of His people so it will impact the world for His glory. How many are tormented by the thought of an eternal hell? I wish someone had shared with me these precious truths in my youth! I believe the Gospel of Jesus Christ, unshackled by the terror of man's tradition, is the only hope we have against the rising tide of radicalism in the world. It powerfully sets Christianity apart from all other religions—being the Gospel in its pristine glory and power.

“Now may the God of **hope** fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may **abound in hope** by the power of the Holy Spirit” (Ro. 15:13).

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I invite you to listen to a song that has touched me deeply. Worship the Lord with me! hopebeyondhell.net/every-eye-will-see-him.

I also invite you to our website for further study (see “Articles”) including “Book Updates” for edits I may make in the future. This is a living document edited or revised online as the Lord would permit.

If this book has blessed you, I hope you'll email me...I'd love to hear from you. I welcome your comments: gerry@hopeforallfellowship.com.

Please read the next page!

HEART-TO-HEART: NURTURING HOPE

Jesus said *wherever* two or three come together in His name, He's right there with us (Mt.18:20); that includes the phone. So come, visit with us in His name—voice to voice, heart to heart. Let's talk about the peace and joy we've found in Jesus, encourage each other in our common hope, and pray together... So grab a coffee, tea or whatever... Call or text us toll free: **1-800 254-1334**

HopeforAllFellowship.com

1-800 254-1334

NEW BOOK & VIDEO SERIES SHARE OUR HOPE FOR ALL

Jesus said, "What I whisper in your ears, proclaim from the housetops!" (Mt. 10:27 TLB) That means He really wants us to tell others about our hope. The world is full of hurting people... Who doesn't long for hope? Here's some free tools to help you share it:

"Hope for All: Ten Reasons God's Love Prevails"

Shorter & simpler than "Hope Beyond Hell."

Anchors our faith in hope. HopeforAll.info/new-book

"Hope for All..." Abridged Booklets (only 10 pages)

Brief introductory booklet. HopeforAll.info/booklet

"Hope for All..." Video / DVD Series (free online)

Author's heartfelt and concise presentation of our Hope.

Share it on Facebook, Twitter... HopeforAll.info/video-series

"Hope Beyond Hell" Abridged & Unabridged

HopeBeyondHell.net/order-books

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APPENDIX I: Proclamations of Hope (186 texts)

Even though it is the same Holy Spirit that opens our minds and hearts, a passage which supports the Blessed Hope for me, may not support it for you and vice versa. This list is not exhaustive. I present it only to show that my hope is solidly anchored in Scripture. Lord willing, and as time allows, I will add additional passages to this list in the future on our website.

Genesis

1:31 God [Who declares the end from the beginning - Is. 46:10.] saw everything He had made as indeed very good!

12:3 “All the families of the earth shall be blessed.” (18:18; 22:18; 26:4; 28:14)

18:25 “Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?”

26:3-4 He makes an oath to bless all nations.

1Samuel

2:6 “The Lord kills and makes alive; He brings down to the grave [*Sheol*, rendered “hell” 31 times in the KJV] and brings up.”

2Samuel

14:14 “God does not take away life; instead, He devises ways so that a banished person may not remain estranged from Him.”

1Chronicles

16:34 “He is good! For His mercy endures forever.”

16:41 “His mercy endures forever.” Repeated 41 times in the O.T.

Job

5:17-18 “Do not despise the chastening of the Almighty. For He bruises, but He binds up; He wounds, but His hands make whole.”

23:13 “Whatever His soul desires, that He does.”

42:2 “You can do all things; no plan of yours can be thwarted.” NIV

Psalms

2:8 He receives the nations for an inheritance.

13:5 “I trust in your unfailing love.” NIV

22:27 “All the ends of the world shall...turn to the Lord. And all the families of the nations shall worship before You.”

22:29 “All those who go down to the dust shall bow before Him...who cannot keep himself alive.”

30:5 “His anger is but for a moment, His favor is for life; weeping may endure for a night, but joy comes in the morning.”

33:5 “He loves righteousness and justice [“judgment”—KJV]; the earth is full of the goodness of the Lord.”

49:15 “God will redeem my soul from the power of [*Sheol*] the grave for He shall receive me.” Sheol is rendered “hell” 31 times in the KJV.

62:12 “To You, O Lord, belongs mercy; for You render to each one according to his work.”

65:2-3 “To You all flesh will come...You will provide atonement.”

66:3-4 “Through the greatness of Your power Your enemies shall submit themselves to You. All the earth shall worship You and sing praises to You.”

66:11-12 “You laid affliction on our backs...We went through fire...but You brought us out to rich fulfillment.”

67:1-4 “God...cause His face to shine upon us, that Your way may be known on earth, Your salvation among all nations...let all the peoples praise You. Oh, let the nations be glad and sing for joy! For You shall judge the people righteously.”

72:11 “All kings shall fall down before Him; all nations shall serve Him.”

72:17 “All nations shall call Him blessed.”

82:8 “O God, judge the earth; for You shall inherit all nations.”

86:9 All nations shall come, worship, and glorify Him.

86:10 “You are great, and do wondrous things.”

86:13 “Great is Your mercy...You have delivered my soul from the depths of Sheol.” Sheol is rendered “hell” 31 times in the KJV.

89:30-34 God will visit His son’s transgressions with the rod and stripes. “Nevertheless, My lovingkindness I will not utterly take from him, nor allow My faithfulness to fail. My covenant I will not break, nor alter the word that has gone out of My lips.”

90:3 “You turn man to destruction, and say, “return...”

98:6-9 “Shout joyfully...for He is coming to judge the earth. With righteousness He shall judge the world...the peoples with equity.”

102:19-20 “The Lord looked down...he viewed the earth, to hear the groans of the prisoners and release those condemned to death.” NIV

103:8-9 He is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in mercy. He will not always strive with us, nor keep his anger forever.

107:1 “He is good! For His mercy endures forever.”

135:6 “Whatever the Lord pleases He does, in heaven and in earth.”

136:1-26 “His mercy endures forever.” Repeated in each verse!

138:4 “All the kings of the earth shall praise You, O Lord, when they hear the words of Your mouth.”

139:8 “If I make my bed in hell, behold, You are there.”

145:7-10 “They shall utter the memory of Your great goodness, and shall sing of Your righteousness. The Lord is gracious and full of compassion, slow to anger and great in mercy. The Lord is good to all, and His tender mercies are over all His works. All Your works shall praise You, O Lord.”

145:14-16 “The Lord upholds all who fall, and raises up all who are bowed down. The eyes of all look expectantly to You... You open Your hand and satisfy the desire of every living thing.” Proverbs

16:9 “A man’s heart plans his way, but the Lord directs his steps.”

19:21 “There are many plans in a man’s heart, nevertheless the Lord’s counsel—[“purpose”—RSV] that will stand.”

20:24 “A man’s steps are ordained by the Lord, how then can man understand his way?” NAS

Isaiah

2:2 In the last days His house shall be established and all nations shall flow into it.

14:24 “The Lord...has sworn, saying, ‘surely, as I have thought, so it shall come to pass, and as I have purposed, so it shall stand.’”

14:27 “The Lord of hosts has purposed, and who will annul it? His hand is stretched out, and who will turn it back?”

25:6-8 He will make a feast for all people and destroy the covering cast over all people, and the veil that is spread over all nations. He will swallow up death [“in victory”—KJV] forever, and will wipe away tears from all faces.

26:9 “When Your judgments are in the earth, the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness.”

26:10 “Let grace be shown to the wicked, yet he will not learn righteousness.”

40:5 His glory shall be revealed and all flesh shall see it.

45:21-25 “There is no other God beside Me, a just God and a Savior...Look to Me, and be saved, all you ends of the earth!...I have sworn by Myself; the word has gone out of My mouth in righteousness, and shall not return, that to Me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall take an oath. ‘Surely in the Lord I have righteousness and strength. To Him men shall come, and all shall be ashamed who are incensed against Him. In the Lord all the descendants of Israel shall be justified, and shall glory.’”

46:10-11 “Declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times things that are not yet done, saying, ‘My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure’... Indeed I have spoken it; I will also bring it to pass. I have purposed it; I will also do it.”

48:10 “Behold, I have refined you...tested you in the furnace of affliction.”

49:6 “I will also give You as a light to the Gentiles, that You should be My salvation to the ends of the earth.”

50: 2 “Is My hand shortened at all that it cannot redeem? Or have I no power to deliver?”

52:10 “All the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God.”

53:10-11 “The pleasure of the LORD shall prosper in His hand. He shall see the labor [“travail”—KJV] of his soul, and be satisfied.”

54:8 “With a little wrath I hid My face from you for a moment; but with everlasting kindness I will have mercy on you, says the Lord, your Redeemer.”

55:7b-8 He will “abundantly pardon. For” His thoughts are not our thoughts, nor are His ways our ways.

55:11 “So shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth; it shall not return to Me void, but it shall accomplish what I please, and it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it.”

57:16 “I will not contend forever, nor will I always be angry; for the spirit would fail before Me, and the souls which I have made.”

Jeremiah

3:17 “At that time Jerusalem shall be called The Throne of the Lord, and all the nations shall be gathered to it... No more shall they follow the dictates of their evil hearts.”

10:23 “I know the way of man is not in himself; it is not in man who walks to direct his own steps.”

23:20 “The anger of the LORD will not turn back until he fully accomplishes the purposes of his heart. In days to come you will understand it clearly.” NIV

31:33-34 “I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts.... They all shall know Me....For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more.”

32:17 “There is nothing too hard for You.”

32:40 “I will put My fear in their hearts so that they will not depart from Me.”

Lamentations

3:31-33 “The Lord will not cast off forever. Though He causes grief, yet He will show compassion according to the multitude of His mercies. For He does not afflict willingly, nor grieve...men.”

Ezekiel

36:23 “The nations shall know that I am the Lord...when I am hallowed in you before their eyes.”

36:26 “I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone...and give you a heart of flesh.”

36:27 “I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do them.”

36:36 “Then the nations which are left all around you shall know that I...will do it.”

16:55 “When your sisters, Sodom and her daughters, return to their former state, and Samaria and her daughters return to their former state, then you and your daughters will return to your former state.”

18:4 “All souls are Mine.” Thus, will not God provide for all His creation? See 1Ti. 5:8. Absolutely!

Daniel

4:35 “He does according to His will...No one can restrain His hand.”

7:14 “To Him was given dominion...that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him.”

9:24 “Seventy weeks are determined...to make an end of sins, to make reconciliation for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness.” All in due time!

Hosea

13:14 “I will ransom them from the power of the grave [*Sheol*]...O death, I will be your plagues! O grave [*Sheol*], I will be your destruction!” *Sheol* is rendered “hell” in the KJV 31 times!

Joel

2:28 “I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh.”

Jonah

4:2 “You are a gracious and merciful God, slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness, One who relents from doing harm.”

Micah

7:18-19 “He does not retain His anger forever, because He delights in mercy... and will subdue our iniquities.”

Habakkuk

1:12 “You have appointed them for judgment...marked them for correction.”

2:14 “The earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea.”

Malachi

2:10 “Have we not all one Father? Has not one God created us?”

3:6 “I am the Lord, I do not change; therefore you are not consumed, O sons of Jacob.”

Matthew

5:26 “Assuredly...you will by no means get out of there [*Gehenna* prison] till you have paid the last penny.” Mt. 18: 34-35; Lu. 12: 59

5:44 “Love your enemies...that you may be sons of your Father.” Will God do less?

7:2 “With what judgment you judge, you will be judged; and with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you.”

9:36-38 “When He saw the multitudes, He was moved with compassion for them, because they were weary and scattered [“distressed and dispirited”—NAS], like sheep having no shepherd. Then He said... ‘The harvest truly is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore pray the Lord...to send out laborers into His harvest.’” Note: His concern for them was not their impending doom in hell.

12:20-21 “Till He send forth judgment unto victory. And in His name shall the Gentiles trust.” KJV

18:11 “The Son of Man has come to save that which was lost.” How many of the lost are included in the word “that”?

18:14 “It is not the will of your Father...that one of these little ones should perish.”

23:1, 9 “Jesus spoke to the multitudes and to His disciples....One is your Father.”

Mark

9:49 “Everyone will be purified with [*Gehenna*] fire” (GNT). Everyone!

10:26-27 “Who then can be saved?...With men it is impossible, but not with God; for with God all things are possible.”

Luke

2:10 “I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people.”

3:6 “All flesh shall see the salvation of God.”

3:38 “Adam, the son of God.” This makes God the Father of all humanity.

4:18 “He has anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor...sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed.” Also, “To comfort all who mourn... give them beauty for ashes...oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness.” Is. 61:2-3. See also Mt. 9:36-38.

4:22 All marveled at His gracious words.

9:56 “The Son of Man did not come to destroy men’s lives but to save them.”

12:57 “Why do you not even on your own initiative judge what is right?” NAS “Test all things; hold fast what is good.” 1 Th. 5:21.

15:4 “What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he loses one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine...and go after the one which is lost until he finds it?” Would the Good Shepherd do differently?

23:34 “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do.”

John

1:7-9 “This man came...to bear witness of the Light, that all through him might believe...the true Light which gives light to every man coming into the world.”

1:13 “Born, not...of the will of man, but of God.”

1:29 “Behold! The Lamb ...who takes away the sin of the world!”

3:17 “God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.” See #5 Appendix V concerning “might.”

4:42 “We know that this is indeed the ...Savior of the world.”

6:33 “He...comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.”

6:51 “I shall give My flesh...for the life of the world.”

8:12 “I am the light of the world.”

8:56 “Abraham rejoiced to see My day...and was glad.” Only a triumphant Savior would bring Abraham joy.

12:32 “I...will draw [drag] all peoples to Myself.”

12:47 “I did not come to judge the world but to save the world.”

17:4 I have “accomplished the work which thou gavest me to do.” RSV

Acts

3:21 “Heaven must receive [Jesus Christ] until the times of restoration of all things, which God has spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began.”

3:25-26 “In your seed all the families of the earth shall be blessed. To you first, God...sent Him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from your iniquities.”

10:34 “God shows no partiality.” See “His Love Is Not Partial” chapter 2.

17: 28-29 “As even some of your own poets have said, ‘For we also are His children.’ Being then the children of God...” (NAS) Speaking to unbelievers.

Romans

2:4 “Do you despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance?” (Not terror).

3:3-4 “Will their unbelief make the faithfulness of God without effect? Certainly not!”

4:21 “What He had promised He was also able to perform.”

5:8 “While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”

5:17 “For if by the one man’s offense death reigned through the one, much more those who receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ.” “Receive” is passive, not active. See “Last Adam” chapter 6.

5:18 “Therefore, as through one man’s offense judgment came to all men, resulting in condemnation, even so through one Man’s righteous act the free gift came to all men, resulting in justification of life.” Read the whole context from verses 12-21.

5:20 “Where sin abounded, grace abounded much more.”

8:21 “The creation [includes all people] itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God.”

11:15-16 “If their [Israel] being cast away is the reconciling of the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead? For if the first-fruit is holy, the lump [of humanity] is also holy.”

11:26 “All Israel will be saved...He will turn away ungodliness from Jacob.”

11:29 “The gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable.”

11:32 “God has committed them all to disobedience, that He might have mercy on all.”

11:33 “Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out!”

11:36 “Of Him and through Him and to Him are all things.”

12:21 “Overcome evil with good.” God is our model.

14:11 “Every knee shall bow to Me, and every tongue shall confess to God.” See “Every Knee” Appendix II.

1 Corinthians

3:15 “If anyone’s work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire.”

13:8 “Love never fails [“ends” RSV].” “God is love.” 1Jn. 4:8, 16.

15:22 “For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive.”

15:23 “But each one [Christ, elect, all men] in his own order.” In God’s appointed time. See “Due Time” chapter 5.

15:26 “The last enemy that will be destroyed is death [second death].”

15:28 “When all “things” are made subject to Him, then...that God may be all in all.” In God’s due time!

15:54 “Death is swallowed up in victory.”

15:55 Where is death’s sting or Hades’ [hell’s] victory? Only time Paul used *Hades*!

2 Corinthians

5:14 “If One died for all, then all died.” All die to sin in Christ!

5:19 “God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself.”

Galatians

3:8 “The Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel to Abraham beforehand, saying, ‘In you all the nations shall be blessed.’”

Ephesians

1:9-11 “Having made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure which He purposed in Himself, that in the dispensation of the fullness of the times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth—in Him...who works all things according to the counsel of His will.”
Wow!

2:7 “In the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.” Show to whom, and for what purpose?

3:6 The Gentiles are fellow heirs with Israel. What a glorious truth knowing all Israel will be saved - Ro. 11:26! See also Ep. 2:14.

4:8-10 “When He ascended on high, He led captivity captive, and gave gifts to men. Now this, ‘He ascended’ – what does it mean but that He also first descended into the lower parts of the earth? He who descended is also the One who ascended far above all the heavens, that He might fill all things.” See 1 Pe. 3:19 below.

Philippians

2:10-11 “At the name of Jesus every knee will bow, of those who are in heaven, and on earth and under the earth, and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” NAS

3:21 “He is able even to subdue all “things” to Himself.”

Colossians

1:19-20 “It pleased the Father...by Him to reconcile all “things” to Himself, by Him, whether things on earth or things in heaven, having made peace through the blood of His cross.”

1 Timothy

1:19-20 “Concerning the faith have suffered shipwreck, of whom are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I delivered to Satan that they may learn not to blaspheme.”

2:3-4, 6 “This is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior; Who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth...Who gave Himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time.” KJV

4:9-11 “This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance. For to this end we both labor and suffer reproach, because we trust in the living God, who is the Savior of all men, especially [not exclusively] of those who believe. These things command and teach.”

5:8 “If anyone [God included?] does not provide for his own [All souls are His.—Eze 18:4], and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.” Does God abandon His own forever in torment?

2Timothy

1:9 “God...saved us and called us...not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was given to us in Christ Jesus before time began.”

1:10 “Our Savior Jesus Christ...has abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.”

Titus

2:11 “The grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men.” NAS

Hebrews

2:2 “Every transgression and disobedience received a just reward.”

2:9 “Jesus...tasting death for...everyone.” CLT

2:14-15 “Through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and release those [all people] who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.”

7:25 “He is...able to save to the uttermost.”

8:10-11 “I will put My laws in their mind and write them on their hearts...and they shall be My people...for all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest.”

13:8 “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, & forever.” Always a Savior!

James

1:18 “Of His own will He brought us forth...that we might be a kind of first-fruits of His creatures.” See Ro. 8:20-23.

2:13 “Mercy triumphs over judgment.” Does this not apply to God?

5:11 “You have heard of the perseverance of Job and seen the end intended by the Lord—that the Lord is very compassionate and merciful.” When is God not in full control?

1Peter

1:8 “You greatly rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory.” NAS

2:12 The Gentiles will glorify God in the day of visitation because they observed our good works.

3:19-20; 4:6 “He...went and preached to the spirits in prison, who formerly were disobedient...the gospel was preached also to those who are dead, that they might be judged according to men in the flesh, but live according to God in the spirit.”

2Peter

3:8 “With the Lord...a thousand years [is] as one day.”

3:9 “The Lord is not slack concerning His promise...but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.”

3:15 “The longsuffering of our Lord is salvation.” Since a 1000 years are as a day to God, when does His longsuffering for the lost end? Will He seek His lost sheep “until” He finds them? Lu. 15:4.

1John

2:2 “He...is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world.”

3:8 “The Son of God appeared for this purpose, to destroy the works of the devil.” NAS Did He really succeed?

4:8, 16 “God is love.”

4:14 “The Father has sent the Son as Savior of the world.” Also Jn. 4:42.

Revelation

1:17-18 “Fear not; I...have the keys of hell and of death.” KJV

5:13 “Every creature which is in heaven and on the earth and under the earth...I heard saying: “Blessing and honor and glory and power be to Him who sits on the throne.”

15:4 “Who shall not fear You, O Lord, and glorify Your name?...For all nations shall come and worship before You, for Your judgments have been manifested.” Wow!

20:13 “Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them. And they were judged, each one according to his works.”

21:5 “Behold, I make all things new....these words are true and faithful.”

22:3 “There shall be no more curse.”

Blessed Hope | Big God| Small Devil | God Wins | All Saved

Augustine Tradition | Small God| Big Devil | God Loses | Very few Saved

Appendix II: Every Knee Shall Bow

God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. (Ph. 2:9-11 NAS).

Is this forced worship, or one offered genuinely from the heart? Below are 20 points that together, I believe, unmistakably affirm true worship.

According to Vine, “bow,” (*kamptō* per Strong’s 2578, “to bend”) is used especially of bending the knees in religious veneration (Ro.11:4, 14:11; Ep. 3:14; Ph. 2:10). [In contrast] *sunkamptō* signifies...to bend down by compulsory force” (Ro. 11:10). (1)

The phrase “confess that Jesus Christ is Lord” was used in early baptismal services by which those being baptized expressed their commitment to Christ or declared they had been saved through Christ. (2) Now, since “under the earth” refers to the abode of the dead (or hell), then even in death an opportunity remains to confess Christ unto salvation.

“No one can say that Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit” (1Co. 12:3). This is strong evidence it refers to a sincere worship since fear alone could bring about a forced worship without the need of the Holy Spirit moving the heart.

Paul links mouth confession with salvation. “If you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus...you will be saved...with the mouth confession is made unto salvation” (Ro. 10:9).

This worship brings Him glory. A forced worship would not glorify or satisfy a loving God. “This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me” (Mt. 15:8).

That this is true worship is confirmed in Re. 5:13 and by the entire context (Re. 5: 11-14) if they are related. “Every creature in heaven and earth and under the earth...I heard saying: ‘Blessing, honor, glory, power be to Him who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb’...” (Re. 5:13). Why would these two contexts not be related?

The word “confess” in this passage is the same Greek word *exomologeomai* that Christ used in praising His Father in Mt. 11:25 and Lu. 10:21. It is used 11 times: Mt. 3:6; 11:25; Mk. 1:5; Lu. 10:21; 22:6; Ac. 19:18; Ro. 14:11; 15:9; Ph. 2:11; Ja. 5:16; and Re. 3:5. None of these can be seen as “forced” praise. They relate to what flows naturally from the heart. For example, Jesus exclaimed, “I heartily praise Thee, Father...that Thou hast hidden these things...” (Mt. 11:25 Wey). The NIV and the NAS read, “I praise you Father.” Ro. 15:9 RSV states, “I will praise thee among the Gentiles, and sing to thy name” (See the NIV, NAS, TEV, Phillips, Jerusalem Bible, RSV, NEB, WEY, and so forth). *The Englishman’s Hebrew and Chaldee Concordance of the Old Testament* says *exomologeomai* is the Greek word used in Psalms for “praise” (*yadah*) and “give thanks” (*hoday*) in the Septuagint used in Christ’s time. Simply reading Psalms confirms the genuine worship of Ph. 2:11. (3)

Ken Eckerty in an article titled, “The Work of the Cross,” said:

I think it's significant that the bowing of every knee and the confessing of every tongue is done "in" the name of Jesus, not "at" as translated by the KJV. Scholars such as Vincent, Robertson, Young, Rotherham, and Bullinger (just to name a few) all say that it is best translated "in." "For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I..." Mt.18:20 "In" Christ's name implies an "entering into" or an intimacy with His name. Confession "in" His name cannot mean anything but intimacy. (4)

To accurately understand Ph. 2:9-11, we must go to the Old Testament from where it is quoted. Let us look closely at Is. 45:21-25:

*21. There is no other God beside Me, a just God and a Savior; there is none beside me. 22. Look to Me and be saved, all you ends of the earth! For I am God, and there is no other. 23. I have **sworn** by Myself; the word has gone out of My mouth in righteousness, and shall not return, that to Me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall take an oath. 24. He shall say, '**Surely in the LORD I have righteousness and strength. To Him men shall come, and all shall be **ashamed** who are incensed against Him. 25. In the LORD all the descendents of Israel shall be **justified**, and shall **glory**.'***

"Surely in the LORD I have righteousness" (vs. 24). Only a genuine believer could say this. Note that this is stated as an oath (vs. 23), making it especially pertinent.

Those who are incensed against Him shall be ashamed (vs. 24). Being ashamed is usually a positive thing and often a sign of genuine repentance. 2Ch. 30:15; Ezra 9:5-7; Job 19:3; Jer. 6:13-15, 8:12, 12:13, 31:18-20, Ez. 16:60-63, 36:31-33; 2Th. 3:14-15.

"All the descendants of Israel shall be justified and shall glory" (vs. 25). Justification and glory are undeniable evidences of genuine repentance.

"Because He delights in mercy. He will again have compassion on us, and **will subdue** our iniquities. You will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea (Mic. 7:18-19)." Is subduing iniquity forcing insincere worship?

"He is **able** even **to subdue** all "things" to Himself (**Ph.** 3:21)." Note: "things" is not in the Greek and that this is said in the very same letter!

"How **awesome** are Your works! Through the greatness of Your power Your **enemies shall submit themselves** to You. All the earth shall worship You and sing praises to You; they shall sing praises to Your name. Selah. Come and see the works of God; He is **awesome** in His doing toward the sons of men (Ps. 66:3-5)." Certainly these passages together with Ph. 2:11 all point to the same glorious worship (Re. 5:13)!

In Ps. 66:3-5, God is described twice as "awesome" in the very context of "enemies submitting themselves" through His "great" power. And this, mind you, is all in the context of "all the earth" worshiping and singing praises to God! David then invites us to come and see how awesome is His doing toward humanity! Where is "forced" worship here? As well, they are "submitting themselves," not "being" submitted. Relative to Mic. 7:18-19, how can a "compassionate subduing" from a God "delighting in mercy" (in the very context of sins cast away) possibly coincide with a forced worship of those eternally being tormented in hell? Now Ph. 3: 21 is found in the very same letter as our key text, making it particularly pertinent. It affirms that God's power is "even able" to do something. "Even able" implies something extraordinarily impressive. A compelled submission by brute force is not particularly impressive. But a God winning the hearts of His enemies through His sacrificial love on the cross—that is impressive! That's what makes Him truly a most "awesome" and all powerful God!

“He humbled Himself...even the death of the cross. Therefore God also has highly exalted Him...that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow” (Ph. 2:8-9). Every knee bows because of the cross. The word “therefore” links the cross with worship. To deny genuine worship at the foot of the cross is to strip this passage of all its meaning. Worse, it strips the cross of its power to save and insults the Spirit of grace (He. 10:29). Talbott asks:

Now just what is the power of the Cross, according to Paul? Is it the power of a conquering hero to compel His enemies to obey Him against their will? If that had been Paul’s doctrine, it would have been strange indeed, for God had no need of a crucifixion to compel obedience. He was quite capable of doing that all along. God sent His Son into the world, not as a conquering hero, but as a suffering servant; and the power that Jesus unleashed as He bled on the Cross was precisely the power of self-giving love, the power to overcome evil by transforming the wills and renewing the minds of the evil ones themselves. (5)

The cross of Christ is the greatest power in the universe because it alone can melt the hearts of God’s enemies, and make them His friends. As John Milton, the famous 17th century English author wrote, “Who overcomes by force hath overcome but half his foe.” (6)

Salvation is directly mentioned here. “Every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. **Therefore**...work out your own salvation...for God works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure” (Ph. 2:11-13). The word “therefore” is very significant, for it links the confession that Jesus is Lord directly with salvation.

God Himself works in them “to will.” Does God working in the hearts of His children to will to do His good pleasure mean only a forced submission? The question is its own refutation.

“When all things are made subject to Him, then the Son Himself will also be subject to Him who put all things under Him that God may be all in all” (1Co. 15:28). The Greek word for “subject” is the same word applied to Christ. Can it be questioned that Christ’s submission is not freely given? Moreover, would God be all in subjects forcefully subjugated?

*God also **has highly exalted** Him and given Him the name which is above every name....* What kind of a worship, sincere or genuine, would **highly** exalt Christ? I know which one would lowly exalt Him.

Finally, some will say, “Of course they’ll confess then, it will all be too obvious. There will be no merit to confessing then.” But are we saved by merit? Where is boasting? It is excluded (Ro. 3:27). We, as the Church, have stripped this passage of its full glory. The bottom line is the love of God will do what His power alone could never do: conquer the hearts of His enemies and make them His friends.

Why did I go into such detail over this one verse? Because this passage is very well known, quoted, and even sung about. Sadly, it is not truly appreciated for its glorious meaning. I think any honest reflection of these twenty points must agree with the evidence presented, that Ph. 2:9-11 affirms sincere and heartfelt worship.

Appendix III: ♪ ♪ Testimony of Song ♪ ♪

If we, as the corporate body of Christ, would carefully observe the words we sing in our worship of God, we would quickly see the message the Holy Spirit is speaking through us. Are we not the living body of Christ? The words we express in worship repeatedly attest to the Blessed Hope! The following are just a few examples:

*The love of God is greater far, Than tongue or pen can ever tell.
It goes beyond the highest star, And reaches to the lowest hell...
Could we with ink the ocean fill, And were the skies of parchment made, Were every
stalk on earth a quill, And every man a scribe by trade,
To write the love of God above, Would drain the ocean dry,
Nor could the scroll contain the whole, Tho stretched from sky to sky. O love of God,
how rich and pure! How measureless and strong!
It shall forever more endure—The saints and angels' song. (1)*

*Ah Lord God...Nothing is too difficult for Thee...
Nothing, nothing, absolutely nothing. Nothing is too difficult for Thee. (2)*

*All of my days I will sing of Your greatness. All of my days I will speak of Your grace All
of my days I will tell of Your wondrous love. (3)*

*Hark! the herald angels sing...Peace on earth, and mercy mild, God and sinners
reconciled!" Joyful, all ye nations rise, Join the triumph of the skies...Light and life to
all He brings, Ris'n with healing in His wings. (4)*

*Joy to the world, the Lord is come Let earth receive her King He comes to make His
blessings flow Far as the curse is found. (5)*

*One day every tongue will confess You are God. One day every knee will bow. Still the
greatest treasure remains for those who gladly choose you now. (6) ©*

Where is the threat of an eternal hell in these words? Are they not filled with hope, comfort, and peace? Do they not impart life? The love of God goes beyond the highest star and reaches to the lowest hell. Absolutely nothing is too difficult for Him! All of my days I will sing of Your greatness—speak of Your grace—tell of Your wondrous love. Joyful, all ye nations rise, join the triumph of the skies! Light and life to all He brings! He comes to make His blessings flow as far as the curse is found!

Appendix IV: Early Church Leaders Testify

Irenaeus: (130 to about 200 A.D.) “Bishop of Lyons.” His nearness to the apostles makes his testimony most interesting. Irenaeus did not believe evil would last forever. In his treatise *Against Heretics*, he wrote in Book III, chap. 23, §6:”(1)

Wherefore also He drove him (Adam) out of Paradise, and removed him far from the tree of life, not because He envied him the tree of life, as some dare to assert, but because He pitied him and desired that he should not continue always a sinner, and that the sin which surrounded him should not be immortal, and the evil interminable and irremediable.—Irenaeus. (2)

Theophilus, (160-181 A.D.) “Bishop of Antioch.” (3)

And God showed great kindness to man in this, that He did not suffer him to continue being in sin forever; but, as it were by a kind of banishment, cast him out of Paradise, in order that, having by punishment expiated within an appointed time the sin, and having been disciplined, he should afterward be recalled.—Theophilus. *To Autolytus*, Book 2, chap. 26. (4)

Clement of Alexandria, (190 A.D.) “Head of the catechetical school there. He speaks of having learned from a disciple of the Apostles.—Strom. lib. ii. His wide and various learning, and his sympathetic spirit combine to give special weight to his teaching.” (5)

All men are Christ’s, some by knowing Him, the rest not yet. He is the Savior, not of some (only) and of the rest not (i.e., He is actually Savior of all) for how is He Lord and Savior if He is not Lord and Savior of all? But He is indeed Savior of those who believe...while of those who do not believe He is Lord, until having become able to confess Him, they obtain through Him the benefit appropriate and suitable (to their case). He by the Father’s will directs the salvation of all for all things have been ordered, both universally and in part, by the Lord of the universe; with a view to the salvation of the universe....But needful correction, by the goodness of the great overseeing Judge, through (by means of) the attendant angels, through various prior judgments, through the final (pantelous) judgment, compels even those who have become still more callous to repent.—Clement. Strom. lib. vii. pp. 702-6, Cologne, 1688. (6)

Origen, (185-254 A.D.) “Pupil and successor of Clement of Alexandria, founded a school at Caesarea...the greatest theologian and exegete of the Eastern Church.” (7)

But he that despises the purification of the word of God and the doctrine of the Gospel only keeps himself for dreadful and penal purifications afterward; that so the fire of hell may purge him in torments whom neither apostolical doctrine nor gospel preaching has cleansed, according to that which is written of being “purified by fire.” But how long this purification which is wrought out by penal fire shall endure, or for how many periods or ages it shall torment sinners, He only knows to whom all judgment is committed by the Father.—Origen. *Commentary on Rom.*, Book 8, Chap. 11. (8)

Eusebius of Caesarea, (265-340 A.D.) “Bishop of Caesarea in Palestine; friend of Constantine; the greatest of the early Church historians, wrote on Ps. 2:” (9) “The Son’s ‘breaking in pieces’ His enemies is for the sake of remolding them, as a potter his own work;

as Jer. xviii. 6, says: i.e., to restore them once more to their former state.”—Eusebius. De eccles. theol. iii. 16. (10)

Athanasius, (296-373 A.D.) “Called ‘the Great,’ ‘Father of Orthodoxy,’ ‘Pillar of Orthodoxy;’ Bishop of Alexandria and writer of many works; especially noted for defending the deity of our Lord.” (11) “While the devil thought to kill one he is deprived of all cast out of Hades, and sitting by the gates, sees all the fettered beings led forth by the courage of the Savior.”—Athanasius. De pass. et cruce Darn. (12)

Gregory Nazianzen, (330-390 A.D.) “President of the second great Ecumenical Council, was considered the most learned bishop in one of the most learned ages of the Church.” (13)

“Until He loosed by His blood all who groan under Tartarean chains.”—Carm. xxxv. (ed. Lyons, 1840.) “Today salvation has been brought to the universe to whatsoever is visible and whatsoever is invisible...(today) the gates of Hades are thrown open.”—Or. xlii. “Adam receives death as a gain, and (thereby) the cutting off of sin; that evil should not be immortal: and so the vengeance turns out a kindness, for thus I am of opinion it is that God punishes.”—Nazianzen. Orat. xlii. (14)

Ambrose, (340-397 A.D.) “Bishop of Milan; converted Augustine by his preaching; the Father of Latin hymnology; reproduced many of the writings of the Greek Fathers.” (15)

The mystery of the Incarnation is the salvation of the entire creation...as it is elsewhere said, “the whole creation shall be set free from the bondage of corruption”...So the Son of Man came to save that which was lost, i.e., all, for as in Adam all die, so, too, in Christ shall all be made alive. The subjection of Christ consists not in few, but in all (becoming obedient)...Christ will be subject to God in us by means of the obedience of all...(then) when vices having been cast away, and sin reduced to submission, one spirit of all people, in one sentiment, shall with one accord begin to cleave to God, then God will be All in All.—Ambrose. De fide lib. v. 7. (16)

Didymus, (380 A.D.) “The last distinguished head of the school of Alexandria, Didymus, surpassed all of his day in knowledge of the Scriptures.” says S. Jerome. He argues, “divine correction (even vengeance), and promise, have the same object in view.”—Adv. Man. ch. xviii. (17) Also “God ‘destroys liars, so far as they are liars.’—In Ps. v. 6. [Christ] ‘descends to Hades and brings back the souls, there detained on account of their sins.’”—Didymus. In Ps. lxxi. 20. See, too, De Trin. lib. iii 21, &c. (18)

Gregory of Nyssa, (332-398 A.D.) “A leading theologian of the Eastern Church and one of the most prominent figures in the second great Church Council which practically established the orthodoxy of the Nicene Creed.” (19)

The Divine judgment does not as its chief object cause pain to those who have sinned, but works good alone by separating from evil, and drawing to a share in blessedness. But this severance of good from evil causes the pain (of the judgment). In other words, the penalty is the cure; it is merely the unavoidable pain attending the removal of the intruding element of sin.—Gregory. *Dialogue of the Soul and Resurrection*. (20)

Jerome, (340-420 A.D.) “Devoted to Scripture study; revised the old Latin translations and translated the Old Testament from Hebrew into Latin of the New Testament. Allin stated he found nearly 100 passages in his works indicating Jerome sympathized with the ‘larger hope.’” (21) “When the Psalmist says, ‘Your enemies, O God, shall perish,’...every man who has been Your enemy shall hereafter be made Your friend; the man shall not perish, the enemy shall perish.”—Jerome. In Ps. xcii. 9. (22)

Hilary, (354 A.D.) “Hillary, Bishop of Poitiers, is considered one of the champions of orthodoxy.” (23) “The whole human race, who are one, are the one lost sheep, which is destined to be found by the Good Shepherd.”—Hillary. (24)

Titus, (364 A.D.) “Bishop of Bostra. Caillou, describes as ‘the most learned among the learned bishops of his age, and a most famous champion of the truth.’ S. Jerome reckons him as one of those, in whom you are at a loss whether to admire most, their learning or their knowledge of Holy Scripture.” (25)

The very pit itself is a place of torments and of chastisement, but is not eternal. It was made that it might be a medicine and help to those who sin. Sacred are the stripes which are medicine to those who have sinned. “Therefore we do not complain of the pits (of hell)—abyssis—but rather know that they are places of torment, and chastisement, being for the correction (amendment of those who have sinned.”—Titus Adv. Man. lib. i. 32. (26)

Diodorus, (378 A.D.) “Bishop of Tarsus...noted for untiring zeal in defense of the Nicene Faith.” (27) “For the wicked there are punishments not perpetual...according to the amount of malice in their works....The Resurrection, therefore, is regarded as a blessing not only to the good but also to the evil.”—Diodorus. ASSEM. Bibl. Or. iii. p. 324. (28)

Theodore of Mopsuestia, (407 A.D.) “The crown and climax of the school of Antioch...called the ‘Master of the East’ from his theological eminence.” Dorner. (Pers. of Christ, i. 50). (29)

“Who is so great a fool as to think, that so great a blessing can be to those that arise, the occasion of endless torment?”—Frag. Ex. lib. cont. pecc. orig. “All have the hope of rising with Christ, so that the body having obtained immortality, thenceforward the proclivity to evil should be removed.” [God] “recapitulated all things in Christ...as though making a compendious renewal, and restoration of the whole creation, through Him....Now this will take place in a future age, when all mankind and all powers (virtues) possessed of reason, look up to Him, as is right, and obtain mutual concord and firm peace.”—Theodore. In Eph. i. 10. (30)

Cyril of Alexandria, (412 A.D.) “He (Cyril) describes Christ as having spoiled Hades, and ‘left the devil there solitary and deserted.’—Hom. Pasch. vii. And again, ‘Christ, wandering down even to Hades, has emptied the dark, hidden, unseen treasures.’”—Glaphy in Gen. lib ii. (31) “For when death devoured Him who was the Lamb on behalf of all, it vomited forth all men in Him and with Him....Now when sin has been destroyed, how should it be but that death, too, should wholly perish?”—Cyril. In S. Jno. i. 29. (32)

Maximus of Turin, (422 A.D.) “Christ carried off to heaven man whose cause He undertook, snatched from the jaws of Hades mankind.”—Maximus. In Pent. Horn. ii. (33)

Theodoret, (423 A.D.) “Bishop of Cyrus...perhaps the most famous, and certainly the most learned teacher of his age; uniting to a noble intellect a character and accomplishments equally noble.” (34) “After His anger, God will bring to an end His judgment; for He will not be angry unto the end, nor keep His wrath to eternity.”—Theodoret. In Is. xiii. (35) “He shews here the reason for punishment, for the Lord, the lover of men, torments us only to cure us, that He may put a stop to the course of our iniquity.”—Theodoret. Hom in Ezech. cap. Vi. vers 6. (36)

Peter Chrysologus, (433 A.D.) “Bishop of Ravenna.” (37) On the parable of the hundred sheep he said, “That the one lost sheep represents ‘the whole human race lost in Adam,’ and so the Good Shepherd ‘follows the one, seeks the one, in order that in the one He may find all, in the one He may restore all.’”—Chrysologus. Ser. clxviii. (38)

Appendage by D. Scott Reichard (39)

The Apostles and Nicene Creeds and first four General Councils had not one word of condemnation against the Blessed Hope even though it was widely prevalent.

Chrysostom 400 A.D. — Trained in the school of Antioch and pupil of Diodorus of Tarsus. He sanctioned prayers for the dead and non-repentant. “It was needful that God reconcile them perfectly so that they should never again become His enemies.” “If punishment were an evil to those who sin, God never would have added evils to evils.” “God kindly inflicts vengeance.” Gen. iii. Hom. xviii.

Domitian of Galatia — Bishop of Ancyra. In the book he wrote to Vigilus says, “they have hastily run out to anathematize most holy and glorious teachers on account of those doctrines which have been advanced concerning restitution.”

Epistle to Diognetus Approx. 150 A.D. — Describes the “eternal fire” as chastening not “without end” but up to an end.”-- Mechri telous. ch.x.

F. M. Victorinus 360 A.D. — Rhetorician at Rome. “He is Jesus Christ because He will save all things unto life.”--ib. iii. 8.

Gregory of Nazianzen 325-390 A.D. — Bishop of Constantinople says, “they shall be baptized with fire, that last baptism which consumes all vanity and vice.” Orat. xxxix, 19- n.

Gregory Thaumaturgus 254 A.D. — Bishop of Caesarea. Was distinguished for orthodoxy and numerous alleged miracles. Converted nearly the whole pop. to Christianity. Taught Restoration boldly. Rufinus, Invec.in Hier. Lib.i. prope fin.

Irenaeus 180 A.D. — “Christ will come at the end of the times in order to annul everything evil, and to reconcile again all things, that there may be an end of all impurities.” Frag. iv.

Jerome 340-420 A.D. says: — “Fire is God’s last medicine for the ten tribes, and for heretics, and for all sin sinners...when the divine fire shall have burned up all that is vilest in them, they themselves shall be delivered as a brand snatched from the burning.” - In Amos iv. ii. (22)

Macrina 375 A.D. — On her death bed, she cheers her brother Basil by boldly assuring him of the extent of Christ’s redemption---as destined to embrace savingly all humanity, destined to blot from the universe every stain of sin. The purificatory nature of the fire of Hell is unmistakably set forth. Dict. of Christ. Biog. iii. P. 780.

Marcellus of Ancyra 315 A.D. — “For what else do the words mean, “until the times of restitution but that the Apostle designed to point out that time, in which all things partake of that perfect restoration.” Cont. Mar. ii. 4.

Pamphilus, the martyr 294 A.D. — Founded library and school at Caesarea. Wrote in his Apology for Origen with Eusebius there were very many testimonies of Fathers earlier than Origen, in favor of Restoration---Routh, Rel. sac. iii. P. 498.

Paulinus 393 A.D. — Bishop of Nola. “ A common disobedience shut up all, in order that faith might heal the whole; so that all the world may be made God’s servant.”---Carm. Ad Cyth. p. 494, ed. Antwerp, 1622.

Rufinus 390 A.D. — Taught that future punishment of the wicked was temporary. Huet, Orig. ii. p. 160

Sibylline books 2nd, 3rd centuries — They clearly state the beliefs current in those days. “All things, even Hades are to be melted down in the divine fire in order to be purified. All just and unjust pass through the fire. The lost are finally to be saved at the request of the righteous.” Lib. ii., vv. 195-340. “The Sibyl asserts that the pains of the damned are to be terminated.” Fabric., Bibl. Grec. I. p. 203.

Theodore the Blessed 423 A.D. — Bishop of Cyrus. Most famous and learned teacher of his age. “All the Kings of the earth shall adore Him. Some indeed in the present life willingly,

but all the rest after Resurrection.” In Ps. Lxxx. 18. “After His anger, God will bring to an end, nor keep His wrath to eternity.” In Is. xiii.

Appendix V

Frequently Asked Questions

I cannot answer to everyone's satisfaction every question raised about my faith. Like Paul, I only know in part (1Co. 13:9-11). Furthermore, God's judgments are unsearchable and past finding out (Ro. 11:33), and this book, after all, is a treatise on judgment. Only God can reveal His truth to you. "You have hidden these things from the wise and prudent and have revealed them to babes" (Mt. 11:25 – the context of this verse is judgment). "He who has ears to hear, let him hear. (Mt. 13:9). Please pray for God's light.

Here are a few questions I have had and wrestled with over the years. Thanks to others who have addressed these questions and the Lord shedding His light, I have been able to draw some conclusions. I pray they help you. Lord willing, I will address more questions in the future on our website. I also invite your answers to any of these questions and others so that I can learn from you as well. Email me. Please be patient for my reply.

1. What is fire in the Bible all about?
2. Why doesn't the Bible make this Hope clear?
3. What does "Appointed once to die then the judgment" mean?
4. Does "all" really mean "all"?
5. What does "the world 'might' be saved" mean?
6. Why preach the Gospel?
7. Shouldn't we party, since grace abounds?
8. Must we not be righteous to enter God's Kingdom?
9. What about *Losing the soul, Narrow gate, and Depart from me*?
10. What about Jn. 3:16; 3:36; 5:24; 5:29; 15:1-2, 6?
11. Is there a sin that shall "never" be forgiven?
12. Did God really hate Esau?
13. What are "coals of fire?"
14. Would it have been better had Judas not been born?
15. What if we do not seek Him "while" He may be found?
16. What did Paul mean by "the terror of the Lord?"
17. Can you explain what "everlasting destruction" means?
18. Why did Jesus say some people will gnash their teeth?
19. What about the rich man and Lazarus?
20. Can we trust those who claim to have had visions of hell?
21. How do you explain the cruel acts of God in the Old Testament?
22. If God is good, why is there so much suffering in the world?
23. If this Hope is true, why would God hide it from us?
24. Is this Universalism?

1. What is fire in the Bible all about?

Fire, as it relates to God's judgments, is a metaphor. It should never be taken literally. To do so falsifies Scripture. God is both "Love" and a "Consuming Fire" (1Jn. 4:8, 16; He. 12:29). It is comforting to know that our loving Father is committed to consume all evil in us. For more on fire, see "The Trilogy" after the Appendices.

Fire Not Quenched

Thomas Allin wrote:

Any good lexicon will show us how little the term translated “unquenchable” really conveys that idea. Homer often applies it to “glory,” “laughter,” “shouting,” to the brief fire that consumed the Grecian Fleet. Eusebius twice says that martyrs were consumed in “unquenchable” fire. Church Hist. Vi.41. Cyril calls the fire that consumed the burnt offering, unquenchable. –De ador.lib.x. It is terrible to think of the agony caused to loving hearts by misleading translations; perhaps, most of all by that disgraceful rendering, “never shall be quenched.” Mk. 9:43-45 (now removed after it has worked such evil.) (3)

To understand what Mark meant by “unquenchable,” we must go to the Old Testament. “The *fire* on the altar is *burning* on it, it is *not quenched*, and the priest hath burned on it wood morning by morning...*fire* is *continually burning* on the altar, it is *not quenched*” (Le. 6:12-3).

Here we have a fire kept continually burning by the constant efforts of the priests each day. It is a fire with a purpose. Once it accomplished its purpose in the Aaronic priesthood, it was allowed to go out. Who believes the fires burning on those Old Testament altars are still burning today?

[Turn to 2K. 22:17; Is. 34:8-10; Jer. 21:12.]

Generation to generation is not forever. God’s “unquenching” fury against Israel in these passages does come to an end. “Circumcise...your hearts...lest My fury comes forth like fire, and burn so that no one can quench it, because of the evil of your doings....Take Refuge!...For I will bring disaster from the north, and great destruction” (Jer. 4:4-7). The words, “no one can quench it,” mean that no one can extinguish it while it runs its course. It is another way of saying “unquenchable.” The terminology here points to some form of remedial judgment. It is important to note that He brings chastisement because of the evil “of” their doings and not because they “are” evil beings beyond recovery. The prevalent theology is built on the latter.

“Its cities were broken down... by His *fierce anger*.... ‘The whole land shall be desolate; yet I will *not make a full end* [“destroy completely”—NIV; see also Jer. 5:10, 18]. For this shall the earth mourn,...because I have spoken. I have *purposed* and will *not relent*, nor will I turn back from it” (Jer. 4:26-28).

“You have stricken them, but they have not grieved; You have consumed [burned] them, but they have refused to receive correction;...They have refused to return...for they do not know the way of the Lord, the judgment of their God” (Jer. 5:1-4).

Why does the fire of His fury burn so that no one can quench it? Is there a purpose? Absolutely! (Jer. 4:28). It is a refiner’s fire (Mal. 3:2, 3). He consumes to correct (Jer. 5:3; 30:11). If they continue to refuse, He continues to consume, for He is relentless (Jer. 4:28). “Unquenchable” means “unstoppable.” He will not cease until His purpose is achieved. “Behold, My anger and fury will be poured out on this place—on man and beast, the trees of the field, the fruit of the ground. And it will burn and not be quenched” (Jer. 7:20). If unquenchable is not forever for beasts, trees, and fruits, why must it be so for people?

“Behold, My anger and My fury will be poured out...and it will burn and not be quenched....This is a nation that does not obey the voice of the LORD their God nor *receive correction*....For the children of Judah have done evil in My sight” (Jer. 7:20, 28, 30). The purpose of God’s judgments are correction for “having done” evil, not annihilation or eternal torment for “being hopelessly evil.” An infinite difference lies between these two ideas.

“If you will not heed Me...then I will *kindle a fire* in its gates, and it shall devour *the palaces of Jerusalem*, and it *shall not be quenched*” (Jer. 17:27). Have the palaces stopped burning yet?

*I will kindle a **fire in you**, and it shall devour every green tree and every dry tree **in you**; the **blazing flame shall not be quenched**, and **all faces from the south to the north shall be scorched** by it. All flesh shall see that I, the LORD, have kindled it; **it shall not be quenched**. Then I said, “Ah, Lord GOD! They say of me, “Does He not speak parables?” (Ez. 20:47-49).*

Yes, He does speak in parables, and the meaning of “shall not be quenched” is not the same as “shall not ever be quenched.” Note that they are not to be tormented forever, but scorched! Those who received our Lord’s words understood that “unquenchable” did not last forever, but went on relentlessly until its objective was attained (see also Is. 1:31; Amo. 5:6).

Refining Fire

We all will be salted (NAS) with His refining, purifying fire. “...cast into hell fire where their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched. **For everyone** will be seasoned [purified GNT] with fire” (Mk. 9:47-49). Note that the fire that purifies us is directly linked to “hell” fire! And it affects “everyone,” which includes you and I. “Purified with fire” are the testing, trials, and judgments God must bring us through to perfect us. These are the means by which we are transformed into the image of Christ—the purpose of our salvation. Even Christ “learned obedience” through the trials of suffering (He. 5:8). “The disciple is not above His Master” (Mt. 10:24). If we resist His purifying fires in this age, we will need to go through them in the next, for our God is relentless (unstoppable—Jer. 4:28), as we saw above. He will not give up on us until His purposes for us are accomplished! Consider the following texts:

*You **tested us; refined us** as silver, brought us into the net; **laid affliction on our backs**, caused men to ride over our heads; We went through **fire**. ...But You brought us out to **rich fulfillment** (Ps. 66:10-12).*

*He is like a **refiner’s fire** and like launderer’s soap. He will sit as a **refiner and a purifier** of silver; He will **purify** the sons of Levi, and **purge** them as gold and silver, that they may offer to the LORD an offering in righteousness (Mal. 3:2, 3).*

*He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with **fire** (Mt. 3:11; Lu. 3:16).*

*I came to cast **fire** upon the earth; and would that it were already **kindled** (Lu. 12:47-49 RSV)!*

*Each man’s work will become manifest...it will be revealed with **fire**, and the **fire will test** what sort of work each one has done. If any man’s work is **burned up**, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as **through fire** (1Co. 3:13-15).*

*Your faith...is **tested by fire**... (1Pe. 1:7).*

See also Is. 48:10, Jer. 9:7, Da. 11:35, Zec. 13:9, Re 3:18, and page 245. God refines, purifies, and purges us to richly fulfill us, that we may offer a righteous offering! Our works can only be evaluated through the testing of what is called “fire.” Even our faith must be so tested. Fire is a good thing. It is for our fulfillment regardless of its pain. No fire. No pain. No gain.

Undying Worm

“And they shall go forth and look upon the corpses of the men who have transgressed against Me. For their *worm does not die*, and their fire is not quenched” (Is. 66:24). “The corpses of this people will be food for the birds of the heaven and for the beasts of the earth. And no one will frighten them away” (Jer. 7:33). The undying worm concept, in my view, has been greatly misunderstood. The term is not saying people cannot die and thus must live on in perpetual torment. William Barclay pointed out:

The Valley of Hinnom [*Gehenna*] became the place where the refuse of Jerusalem was cast out and destroyed. It was a kind of public incinerator. Always the fire smoldered in it, and a pall of thick smoke lay over it, and bred a loathsome kind of worm which was hard to kill (Mark 9:44-48). So *Gehenna*...became identified in people’s minds with all that was accursed and filthy, the place where useless and evil things were destroyed. (4) (Also bodies of criminals - p. 215)

Fire and worms reflected the repugnant conditions taking place in the Jerusalem dump. Both act as purifying agents by destroying disease carrying organisms. They represented the purifying aspect of the *Gehenna* judgment. They are relentless until all dross and decayed matter are consumed. Therefore, God’s purifying purpose of removing all impurity in those judged will be fully accomplished. This offers no support for the idea that judgment must be endless.

Lake of Fire—An Everlasting Torture Chamber?

“The Ancient One sat down to judge...He sat on a fiery throne...and a river of fire was pouring out flowing from his **presence**...” “He shall be tormented with fire and brimstone... in the **presence** of the Lamb.” “If I make my bed in hell, behold, **You are there**” (Dan. 7:9-10 NLT; Re. 14:10; Ps. 139:8). It brings me great comfort to know that our Father and Christ Himself are present with us in God’s fiery judgment. Whether the metaphor is a “river,” a “lake” or “hell,” He is with us. Our Father’s consuming and refining fire (He.12:29; Mal. 3:2-3) flows from He who IS Love – unfailing, unending Love. (1Jn. 4:8, 16; 1 Co. 13:8; Ps. 13:5 NIV).

Re. 20:14 defines the “lake of fire” as both the “second death” and “death and Hades cast into it.” Death cast into fire is the death of death; the last enemy destroyed! See “Death Destroyed” chap. 6. I see this as also dying to our sinful self (Ro. 6). Once God, as a Consuming Fire, consumes the dross in us, destroys the death in us if you will (Ro. 8:6; 1Ti. 5:6; 2Co. 5:14-15), we come forth in newness of life, a new creation! (Ro. 6:4; 2 Co. 5:17). This conforms with the *Gehenna* “until” judgment of Mt. 5:22-26.

Torture is *tumpanizō* (Strong’s #5178), used once in the NT: “...others were tortured, not accepting their release, so that they might obtain a better resurrection...” (He. 11:35). The Greek word associated with “torment” in the fiery lake is not *tumpanizō*, but *basanizo* (Strong’s # 928). “Torment” (*basanizo*) is used of a sick person, of a ship “tossed” with waves; “toiling” in rowing; “vexed” regarding Lot; birth—“pains” (Mt. 8:6; 14:24; Mk. 6:48; 2Pe. 2:8; Re. 12:2). This is not torture. Charles Pridgeon, president and founder of the Pittsburgh Bible Institute, wrote:

The original idea of *basanizo* is “to put to the test by rubbing on a touchstone,” to test some metal that looked like gold to find whether (Mal. 3:2-3) it was real or not. The meaning and usage harmonizes with the idea of divine purification and the torment which is the test to find whether there has been any change in the sufferer...Sulphur [brimstone] was sacred to the deity among the ancient Greeks; and was used to fumigate,

to purify, to cleanse and consecrate to the deity; for this purpose they burned it in their incense. In Homer's Iliad (16:228), one is spoken of as purifying a goblet with fire and brimstone. The verb derived from *Theion* is *Theioo*, which means to hallow, to make divine, or to dedicate to a god (see Liddell and Scott Greek-English Lexicon, 1897 Edition). To any Greek, or any trained in the Greek language, a "lake of fire and brimstone" would mean a "lake of divine purification." (5)

The *Greek-English Keyword Concordance* translates the Greek word *theion* as **both** "brimstone"(sulfur) and "divine." It reads: "Sulphur (divine), was so called because it was used in the lustrations [purification ceremonies] of false worship." (6) *The Word Study Concordance* has "brimstone" (Strong's #2303; *thōn*) derived from *thōs* (Strong's #2304 which the KJV and NIV both translate as "Divine"--Ac. 17:29; 2 Pe. 1:3-4). (7) Vine says *theion* (brimstone) originally denoted "fire from heaven," and goes on to say that "sulfur was used in pagan purifications." (8) So all the sources agree here. The lake of fire and brimstone means a lake of divine purification. Wow!

Consider the references to this "lake of fire," called the "second death." He who overcomes shall not be *hurt* ["injured" CLT] by it. (Re. 2:11). Being "injured" by something is a far cry from being infinitely tormented.

"Blessed and holy is he who has part in the *first* resurrection. Over such the *second death* has no power, but they shall be priests...and shall reign with Him a thousand years" (Re. 20:6). I believe that those having part in this resurrection already died the "second" death when they died to sin on earth (Ro. 6).

"The dead were judged *according to their works*...Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them. And they were judged, each one *according to his works*" (Re. 20:12-13). "According to works" is in direct conflict with a mass generic sentence!

"Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death" (Re. 20:14). The death of death! The last enemy is destroyed!

"The cowardly, unbelieving, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars shall have their *part* in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death" (Re. 21:8). These are having their "part" which harmonizes perfectly with "according to works," but is totally inconsistent with infinite penalty. For how can what is infinite be "part" of something greater? The closer we look at the language of judgment in Scripture, the more it contradicts the prevalent view.

"They are having no rest day and night, those worshiping the wild beast and its image" (Re. 14:11b CLT). This refers to the time prior to their judgment as it is unthinkable they would continue to worship the beast while being chastised for doing so. Even if they did, it indicates nothing about the duration of their judgment. In addition, as we said concerning "in part," and "according to works," the concept of "day and night" pertains to the time realm, and is inconsistent with eternity.

Second Time "Gehenna" Used by Christ (First on page 32)

Gehenna,... Hebrew Ge-Hinnom, or Valley of Hinnom... to the south of Jerusalem, where, after the introduction of the worship of the fire-gods by Ahaz, the idolatrous Jews sacrificed their children to Molech...(2 K. 23:10). After this it became the common refuse-place of the city, into which the bodies of criminals, carcasses of animals, and all sorts of filth were cast. From its depth and narrowness, and its fires and ascending smoke, it became the symbol of the place of the future punishment of the wicked... As fire was the characteristic of the place, it was called the *Gehenna* of fire. (1)

[Turn to Mt. 10:17, 24-31.] (Parallel passages: Mt. 10:28, Lu. 12:5)

Here, our Lord says in one breath, **to fear** God and **not to fear** Him. Unless the Spirit opens our understanding, we will see much contradiction in the Bible. So, which is it? Do we fear, or do we not?

God uses adversity, persecution, sickness, and suffering in all of their forms to refine and mold us into the image of Christ (Ja. 1:2-4; 1Pe. 4:1-2, 12-14). Here God is urging us to accept the cross of suffering (in this case, persecution) for our spiritual development. To cower from our ordained trials only impedes God's refining work in us. Those whom He is not allowed to refine and mold now, must yet be refined in the *Gehenna* fire of purification in a more encompassing way—body and soul. The *Gehenna* destruction must break down the resisting strongholds of self-will in the soul. This apparently is a more painful process warranting a greater degree of fear than that which is experienced merely in the physical body.

We consist of more than just soul and body, but also of spirit. Even if our soul and body were to be annihilated (if God were to do that), our spirit is not mentioned. The apostle Paul identified three parts of our being. "May your spirit, soul, and body be kept sound and blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1Th. 5:23 RSV). And why are we commanded to love God with all our heart, soul, mind if there are no distinctions (Mt. 22:37)? What is meant by the Word of God piercing even to the division of soul and spirit (He. 4:12)? What is the difference between these two terms? In defining soul, W. E. Vine, in his *An Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words* provides 11 separate definitions! (2) This is a challenging word! Regardless of the specific meaning of "soul," it is the end purpose of God's judgments that is the issue. For light here, we must search the whole revelation of God. Our study of the word "destruction" in Chapter 1 demonstrated that "destruction" does not necessitate eternal ruin or annihilation, but on the contrary, can be shown to result in a glorious and constructive purpose.

Those of the Calvinist and Reformed traditions do not see this as a real threat to the elect or first-fruits. He is merely "able" to destroy. They support this with Mt. 3:9: "God is able to raise up children to Abraham from these stones." They reason that because He does not really raise children from stones, though He could, neither does He annihilate or eternally torment His children, though He could.

It was important to Christ that His disciples understood that the *Gehenna* judgment was from their "Father." As a father of three, this speaks volumes to me. A loving father always has the welfare of his children at heart in all his disciplines. That our Lord links it with such an endearing term is strong evidence against the prevalent view.

So, are we to fear our Father or not? He clearly did not intend that His hearers should continue in fear, as He immediately completes His thought by exhorting them not to fear. Now, consider the outcome had the disciples understood His threat as everlasting torment: Would they have cared if they were of more value than birds, if everlasting torment hung over their heads? Such apparent words of comfort would be a mockery. Why even express such a trifle? It is certainly not the "fear not" they would remember, but the "fear Him" who can torment forever. Since our Lord immediately followed His threat with such comforting words, it is very hard for me to believe everlasting torment could have possibly been in anyone's mind that day.

Third Time "Gehenna" Used by Christ

[Turn to Mt. 23:15.]

If *Gehenna* is everlasting (beyond measure), how can one deserve it twice as much as another? Only a measurable penalty can be merited twice as much.

[Turn to Mt. 23:33, 36-39.]

We must not make too much of the words “serpents” and “vipers,” for Jesus even calls Peter, whom He loves, “Satan”. In asking, “How will you escape the sentence of *Gehenna*?” (vs. 33), the Lord is asserting that they will not escape (verse 36 confirms this). Then He says, “Jerusalem, Jerusalem...how often I wanted to gather your children together, the way a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were unwilling.” Do you not sense God’s broken heart, His true heart for His wayward children? “**Truly** I say to you, **all** these things [the sentence of *Gehenna* (vs. 33) and the guilt of all the righteous blood (vs. 35)] **will come upon** this generation...Behold, your house is being left to you desolate! For I say to you, from now on you will not see Me **until** you say, ‘Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!’ Here is that word “until” again (vs. 39). The sentence of *Gehenna* endures only “until” they say, “Blessed is He...” These in *Gehenna* will once again see the Lord and call Him Blessed. (Ps. 66:4-8; Re. 5:12-13).

Last Time “Gehenna” Used by Christ

[Turn to Mt. 18:9 and Mk. 9:43-50.]

This passage is similar to what was said on the first occasion except it introduces two new concepts—a fire that is not quenched, and the undying worm. A few translations have translated “unquenchable fire” as “fire that never goes out” (vs. 43). This is unjustified, as “never” is not in the Greek. The literal translations do not use it (YLT, CLT, ROTH, ESV 2001), and most of the others do not use it either (RSV, NAS, JB, NEB, DBY, Douay, etc.).

“...the fire is not quenched. **For** everyone will be salted with fire” (Mk. 9:48-9). The word “for” links *Gehenna* fire to fire that salts everyone. What is the relationship between these two? Are they one and the same? If not, why are they linked together? This link is strong evidence that in some way, they both (the *Gehenna* and salt fires) must carry a constructive purpose.

Great, Marvelous, Just are Thy Acts – by Charles Rutsch

“For neither is the Father judging anyone, but has given all judging (“krisis” Strong’s #2920) to the Son, that all may be honoring the Son, according as they are honoring the Father. He who is not honoring the Son is not honoring the Father who sends Him...and those who do good shall go out into a resurrection of life, yet those who commit bad things, into a resurrection of judging [krisis]”(Jn. 5:22, 23, 29 CLT). Note: the same Greek word “krisis” is used in verses 22 and 29.

All judging has been given to the Son, that all would honor the Son. Every heart will honor Jesus Christ as their Savior for in the name of Jesus (His name means Savior) every knee will bow (Ph. 2:10) and all will say, “Only in the Lord is there righteousness and strength” (Is. 45:24). Not only will every knee bow to Him Who is their Savior, but all will forsake their false idols, and every tongue will acclaim Jesus Christ to be their sovereign Lord (Ph. 2:11). And every tongue will praise God (Ro. 14:11). No one can say that Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit (1Co. 12:3).

The primary purpose of judgment is to break down all idolatry and false worship, so that we will only honor and worship the true God. We tend to honor and worship ourselves, money, false gods, etc. Yet, all pride will be humbled and all trust in idols will be broken down. Nebuchadnezzar is an object lesson in God’s ways. He is first proud of all his accomplishments and is self-exalting, but then he loses his mind for seven seasons, is humbled, and then worships the true God who is really in control of everything (Da. 4:28-37). All God’s judgments operate on this same principle. “For I am the Lord, I do not change therefore you are not consumed, O sons of Jacob” (Mal. 3:6).

Great and marvelous are Thy acts, Lord God Almighty! Just and true are Thy ways, King of the eons! Who may by no means be afraid of Thee, Lord, and glorify Thy name? For Thou only art benign (holy KJV, kind YLT). For all the nations shall arrive and worship before Thee, for Thy just awards (righteous acts – NIV) were made manifest (Re. 15:3, 4 CLT).

In II Thessalonians, Paul talks about the man of lawlessness who will sit in the temple and demand worship at some point in the future. People may think they would not be foolish enough to worship such a man, but really, we all have a strong tendency to sit in the temple of our own hearts and worship, exalt, and honor ourselves. What will play out on the world stage is really what goes on in our hearts. People do not honor, worship, and serve the true God. So He “sends an operation of deception that all may be judged who do not believe the truth” (2Th.2:12). This judgment humbles and breaks down everything that people had confidence and faith in so that “all the nations shall come and worship before You, for Your judgments have been manifested” (Re. 15:4).

Judgment is that which corrects and straightens out. If we are proud and idolatrous then we need to be corrected. Nebuchadnezzar experienced this painful process, but the end result was for his good. Those who experience the “resurrection of judging” (krisis) will go through a judging process that is ultimately for their good as well. (9)

2. Why doesn't the Bible make this Hope clear?

The Bible is a collection of ancient documents written in a world far removed from our own. We cannot read it in the original languages and must trust translators. The problem is that translators cannot help but interpret the ancient writings according to their view of God. If they think He is a mean God who does cruel things, then that skews their interpretation that way. Tragically, the major translations are the works of believers in eternal punishment. So, when it comes to studying that theme, we are at a great disadvantage if they are wrong. That is why we need to diligently compare a wide range of translations and do our own study. We should draw our conclusions based on the bigger picture of Scripture, not isolated texts. I wish it were easier. Here's an example of our challenge:

The YLT always translates *aion* as “age.” The Rotherham translates it as “age, age-abiding.” The CLT translates it “eon.” But the KJV translates *aion* by nine different words: “age,” “course,” “end,” “eternal,” “everlasting,” “evermore,” (for) “ever,” “never,” and “world.” How can this be? These words have many different meanings. Unless we use a reference work, such as *The Word Study New Testament*, we have no way of knowing when and where our translators have taken such liberties with the inspired Word. In just the first three chapters of Ephesians, (a key book regarding God's plan for man relative to the fullness of the times) *aion* is used seven times. And out of those seven, the KJV has chosen five different English words (“ages,” “course,” “end,” “eternal,” and “world”) to translate this one Greek word! And to add to this confusion, it translates the Greek word *genea* (generation), a totally different word, twice as “ages.” Talk about confusion compounded! Is it any wonder that the Church has been blinded from God's truth about His judgments and the Blessed Hope? To clarify, I have submitted below the relevant KJV and YLT verses from the first three chapters of Ephesians so you can see how they compare where the word *aion* is used. All underlined words are translations of the Greek word *aion*.

King James Version

1:21—Not only in this world, but also in that which is to come

2:2—According to the course of this world

2:7—In the ages to come

3:9—From the beginning of the *world* hath been hid
3:11—According to the *eternal* purpose
3:5—Which in other ages [*genea*]
3:21—Throughout all ages [*genea*], *world* without *end*. Amen.

Young's Literal Translation

1:21—Not only in this *age*, but also in the coming one
2:2—According to the *age* of this world
2:7—In the *ages* that are coming
3:9—Hid from the *ages*
3:11—According to a purpose of the *ages*
3:5—Which in other generations [*genea*]
3:21—To all the generations [*genea*], of the *age* of the *ages*. Amen.

Ep. 3:21 is saying something to us about Christ's glory in the church, the *ekklesia*, that Vine defines as "the whole company of the redeemed throughout the present era." (10) This "whole company," are God's "first" fruits. Now, if you wanted to do a study on Ep. 1:9-12, which talks about a mystery, the gathering together of all in Christ, predestination, God's purpose, the counsel of His will, those who "first" trusted in Christ, and the dispensation or administration of the "fullness of times;" which of these versions would likely lead you to the truth? Compare again Ep. 3:21: Are they both saying the same thing? Which is most accurate to the original language? "Unto Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end" (KJV). Or "To Him is the glory in the assembly in Christ Jesus, to all the generations of the age of the ages?" (YLT).

The "age of the ages" and "world without end" do not mean the same thing! Why should "age of the ages" be a mystery and require interpretation? Is it not a biblical expression like many others like it? Consider the following: "King of kings and Lord of lords" (Ti. 6:15); "Holy and most Holy" (Ex. 26:33); "Song of songs" (So. 1:1); "Vanity of vanities" (Ec. 12:8); "Servant of servants" (Ge. 9:25); "God of gods and Lord of lords" (De.10:17); "Prince of princes" (Da. 8:25); "Hebrew of Hebrews" (Ph. 3:5). Do you have any problem understanding these expressions? Then why should Ephesians 3:21 be an enigma? It must refer to the final and greatest of all ages.

I realize words often carry different meanings according to context, and thus require different words to translate accurately. The problem comes when fallible humans attempt to translate the "inspired" words of God with a flawed mindset about His character (Mt. 6:23). The safest and most accurate way to determine the meaning of Bible words is to study how they are used in all contexts. Here we need a Greek/Hebrew-based concordance as referred to on page 20. Otherwise, we are at the total mercy of translators. There is no substitute to doing our own study (2Ti. 2:15).

Above all, unless the Spirit of God opens our eyes and ears to His truth (Mt. 13:9), all our efforts in Bible study will be of little help. Let us diligently pray that the Lord will open our hearts and minds to understand the Scriptures as He opened them to His disciples on the road to Emmaus (Lu. 24:45).

3. Appointed once to die, then the judgment? He. 9:27

Yes, judgment comes, but the issue is the nature and duration of judgment, not its incontestable fact. Is there a remedial or restorative element to it, or is it solely retributive? This passage does not address this.

4. Does “All” mean “All”?

Some claim the “all” in the context of the Blessed Hope promises does not mean every single person. It merely means “all without distinction” (all races), not “all without exception.” However, Dr. Keith DeRose, Yale Philosophy professor (Spec. Philosophy of Language, also a believer), wrote:

Quantifier phrases...are to be understood...relative to a contextually determined domain....When the domain is limited, there has to be some fairly clear clue about what the limited domain is. When “all” is used in the NT, as in “All have sinned [Ro. 3:23] and fallen short of the glory of God,” the “all” I take it, refers to all people. It could possibly refer to some restricted class of people, but that suggestion is to be rejected, because (a) there is no such restricted class that clearly presents itself, (b) it’s incumbent on a speaker to make clear what the class is if he means it to be restricted, and (c) the N.T. does not specify any such restricted class. So, “All have sinned” means that all people have sinned, as almost all would agree. (11)

DeRose goes on to say as “all” have sinned is not restricted, so are the passages supporting our theme (as found in Appendix I). He continues,

What restricted class of people could be meant? [Ro. 5:18 and 1 Co. 15:22 for example] Surely not all the saved; that would turn the statements into useless tautologies: all the saved are saved? The Biblical writers aren’t so incompetent as to mean some specially restricted class that doesn’t clearly present itself without making it clear. (12)

Were it not for the prevailing view’s agenda, the “all,” in such passages as 1Co. 15:22 would never have been questioned in the first place. Consider a text shedding light on this: “You have put all things in subjection under his feet” (He. 2:8). Is there a restricted sense to “all” in this passage?

- A. “You have put all things in subjection under his feet.
- B. For in that He put all things in subjection under him,
- C. He left nothing that is not put under him.
- D. **But now** we do **not yet** see all things put under him.”

This is a unique passage, as it provides its own built in commentary. What if this passage only contained clause A, like most Blessed Hope passages? Then some could argue “all” only means “all without distinction”. because “all things” are not presently in subjection. However, those additional clauses give us a biblical model for other Blessed Hope promises.

This passage reveals two very important truths: “All” in this promise means “all without exception,” not “all without distinction.” It will find its fulfillment in God’s appointed time. Note the words “but now” and “not yet.” Clause C shows that “all” is without exception. No one would contest this. Clause D specifies that God’s promises will find their fulfillment in due time, though at present, it is not so. If there is any question about the compatibility of this passage with other Blessed Hope texts, it is refuted by the following statement directly linked by a second “but”: “But we see Jesus...by the grace of God...taste death for everyone” (He. 2:9). We can wholeheartedly trust God when He says “all” in His Blessed Hope promises; “all” is not a mysterious code word for “some.”

5. What does “might” or “may” be saved mean? (Jn. 3:17)

God sent His son that the world through Him “**might**” be saved (Jn. 3:17). Does this mean “perhaps” shall be saved? Consider this statement: “The dam was dynamited so that the pent up waters ‘might’ rush out.” Is there a doubt that the waters will rush out? No! “Might” is used in Jn. 3:17 in the same way. The NIV says “to save the world.” Please read the following similar passages: Mt. 26:56; Mk.3:14-15; Ep. 2:6-7; Jn. 9:3; Jn. 17:1-2.

6. Why preach the Gospel?

Why Preach the Gospel? You would never ask that question if you really knew the Gospel. I preach because God’s love compels me! (2 Co. 5:14). The Gospel, stripped of hell baggage, is the greatest news in the world! We no longer need to hesitate in shame and embarrassment telling people their deceased loved ones are burning in hell forever with no possible hope of release. Nothing brings greater pain than that. There is no worse news imaginable. And this has been part and parcel of what is said to be Good News? What horror! But that is not the Gospel. The Gospel brings great joy to both the messenger who proclaims it and its recipients. “How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the Gospel of Peace, who bring glad tidings of good things!” (Ro. 10:15).

The world is full of hurting people longing for glad tidings of good things. Christ was moved with compassion for the crowds because they were *distressed* and *dispirited* (NAS). He urged His disciples to pray for workers into the harvest field of humanity; yet nothing is mentioned of hell as the motivating force - only the pain of life’s mental anguish. (Mt. 9:36-38).

What is feared most of all? Death. Jesus came to destroy death’s power and free us from the fear of death; a fear that has imprisoned us all our lives (He. 2:15). The world longs for hope and good news. We who understand God’s unfailing love for all have a message of such Good News that we just cannot hold it back. That’s why you have this book in your hand!

7. Let’s party and sin! Won’t grace abound?

This was the same reaction Paul’s hearers had to Romans 5. “What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? Certainly not!” (Ro. 6:1-2). This response only confirms the truth of our joyous news, for it engenders the same reaction Paul received! If your gospel does not result in this response, are you sharing the Good News Paul preached?

Though the Gospel is Good News, it does not condone sin. Read your Bible; it is full of warnings. We all reap what we sow (Ga. 6:7).

And why must God’s penalty be eternal to deter us from sin? Man’s sanctions are not, yet they deter most people. The real issue here is that of the heart. Only a corrupt heart needs to be motivated by threat of penalty in order to do right. “We love Him because He first loved us” (1Jn. 4:19).

8. Unrighteous shall not inherit Kingdom? 1Co. 6:9; Ep. 5:5

The unrighteous, while in that state, cannot inherit God’s Kingdom. But they will not always be such. God will make them righteous. We, too, who believe in Jesus, were in their company, remember? (Ro 5:6, 10). Throughout the ages, God will continue His transforming work in His creation until such a time as all are transformed into the likeness of Christ. The key lies in the mystery of the ages. God’s plan for humanity will not fail.

9. Losing the soul? Narrow gate? Depart from Me?

What then will a man gain if he wins the whole world and ruins his life (Mt. 16:26 JB)? Go in through the narrow gate; for wide is the... road which leads to ruin (Mt 7:14 DSB) I have never known you. Go away from me... (Mt. 7:23 PME)

According to Andrew Jukes, three principles solve the great riddle of mercy for all (Ro. 11:32) and few finding the way (Mt. 7:14): A right understanding of: election; the ages; and death, destruction, and judgment. “This throws a flood of light on Scripture and enable us at once to see order and agreement where without this light there seems perplexing inconsistency.” (13) All warnings can be understood similarly. “Many are called, but few are chosen (Mt. 22:14).” Christ chooses from among His “called” those worthy to rule with Him in the age or ages to come. We qualify for this by living a life of obedience (the narrow gate), and love. We are to be a kings and priests—a holy nation, a royal priesthood (1 Pet. 2:9-12). See chapter five.

Christ “laid down His **life** [Greek *psuchē*, Strong’s #5590] for us” (1Jn. 3:16). *Psuchē* is translated as “life” or “soul.” The Jerusalem Bible words Mt. 16:26: “ruins his life.” Christ illuminates this in His next statement: “And then He will reward each according to his works” (Mt. 16:27). “According to works” is the Blessed Hope! God renders to each person according to what is deserved; no more, no less! This flows with the whole tenor of Scripture (Ps. 62:12; Pr.24:12; Is. 59:18; Jer. 17:10, 25:14; Ez.24:14, 36:19; Hos.12:2; Zec.1:6; Mt.6:14-15, 7:1, 16:27, 18:34-35; Mk.4:24, 11:25-26; Lu.12:47-48,59, 14:14, 18:14; Ro.2:6; 2Co. 5:10, 11:15; Ga.6:7; Ep.6:8; Col.3:25; 2Ti.4:14; Ja.2:13; 1Pe.1:17; Re.2:23, 18:6, 20:12-13, 22:12, etc.).

The essence of Mt. 16:27 is the same as Mt. 19:21: “If you want to be perfect go sell what you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven.” Christ is speaking of perfection. With this in mind, I would say that to “ruin” or “lose” one’s life (Mt. 16:26) means one is losing the opportunity of living a “perfect” life—a fruitful life in Christ. Such a life forfeits those things of the world that are without lasting value. It is a great deception to seek after that which is only worthless in the end. Jesus taught us to lay up treasures in heaven, and not on earth (Mt. 6:19). These treasures consist of good works that bless others. (Mt. 25:44-45; Ja. 1:27; 1Jn. 3:17-18). This is true wealth. If we are self seeking, we are losing or wasting our lives. Does that mean God will trash us forever? Not a God of love! Never! He will chastise us according to our works as the loving Father He is (He. 12:5-11). In His own way and time, He will cause us to learn the lessons we are destined to learn; for He works all things according to the counsel of His will (Ep. 1:9-11). Whatever else it might mean to “ruin life,” “take the wide road,” be “sent away,” it does not mean He cannot or will not discipline and restore us to Himself in His “due time.” His promises “for all” guarantee it!

10. What about John 3:16; 3:36; 5:24; 5:29; 15:1-2, 6?

John 3:16 should never be separated from 3:17. “For thus God loves the world, so that He gives His only-begotten Son, that everyone who is believing in Him should not be perishing, but may be having life eonian. For God does not dispatch His Son into the world that He should be judging the world, but that the world may be saved through Him” (CLT). “May” here does not mean “perhaps” or “maybe.” See question #5.

No one, while in unbelief, is experiencing “eonian life,” a quality of life according to Christ in Jn. 17:3. This is in the present tense. Unbelief is not a hopeless condition, or no one could ever be saved. We were all in unbelief. We are all born “perishing.” We are dead until God makes us alive in Christ (Ep. 2:1). “Let the dead bury their dead” (Mt. 8:22). “She who

lives in pleasure is dead while she lives” (1Ti. 5:6). To “be perishing” is not a hopeless condition, but is the prerequisite to “being” saved. “The Son of Man has come to save that which was **lost** (perished)” (Mt. 18:11). “Jesus came into the world to save sinners” (1Ti. 1:15). The issue is this: Has God limited Himself to save sinners only in this life? (See “Hope Beyond Death” chap. 3). Christ is “Lord of both the dead and the living!” God “is not the God of the dead but of the living, for all live to Him” (Ro. 14:9; Lu. 20:38). “It is not His will for any to be “lost” (perish), but for all to come to repentance” (2Pe. 3:9 NEB). However, “life eonian” is not everyone’s experience in this world. “Life eonian” is a quality of life. It is “knowing” God, said Christ (Jn. 17:3). And what has God said about “knowing” Himself? “For all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them. For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more” (He. 8:11-12). This applies to all. God is not partial (Ro. 2:11; 10:12; 11:26, 32; Ac. 10: 34-36; Ep. 2:14; 3:6; 1Pe.1:17). John 3:16-17 does not say or mean that anyone will perish forever. “For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but **to save the world** through him!” (Jn. 3:17 NIV). God’s purpose is to save the whole world! See Jn. 12:47.

Jn. 3:36: “He who is believing in the Son has life eonian, yet he who is stubborn as to the Son shall not be seeing life, but the indignation of God is remaining on him” (CLT). No one, while in unbelief is seeing life, but the indignation of God is remaining on him. This indignation does not mean that God does not love that person, but the converse. It is an expression of His love working in that life to affect change. For if this passage presented a hopeless scenario, then none of us could ever be saved. We were all at one time in unbelief. And “God hath concluded them all in unbelief, that He might have mercy upon all” (Ro. 11:32 KJV). And remember, faith is God’s work in us. We have nothing to boast of. Hebrew and Greek scholar, Dr. Michael Jones, says that the “gift” referred to in Ep. 2:8 clearly and unmistakably refers back to **both** salvation **and** faith in the Greek. (14) Faith is God’s gift! It is not of works lest anyone should boast. We are His workmanship!

Jn. 5:24, 29: “He who is hearing My word and believing Him Who sends Me, has life eonian and is not coming into judging, but has proceeded out of death into life...those who do good shall go out into a resurrection of life, yet those who commit bad things, into a resurrection of judging” (CLT). This is understood in a similar way as Jn. 3:36. The words “judging” in both cases are the same Greek word – *krisis* (Strong’s #2920). *Krisis* is the common word for judgment. For example: *Judge righteous judgment* (Jn. 7:24). *Mercy triumphs over judgment* (Ja. 2:13). *True and righteous are His judgments* (Re. 19:2), etc.

Jn. 15:1, 2, 6: “My Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit. ...If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw them into the fire, and they are burned” (See “Refining Fire” p. 211). Christ “removes” from his company of co-workers those who are not worthy to rule and reign with Him. This is a great loss of privilege and honor. What happens after we are removed is a process of purification through God’s refining fire.

11. Is there a sin that shall “never” be forgiven? Mk. 3:29-30

Blasphemy against the Spirit is discussed on page 67. **The word “never” is not in the Greek!**

“Whoever may speak evil in regard to the Holy Spirit hath not forgiveness—to the age, but is in danger of age-during judgment;’ because they said, ‘He hath an unclean spirit’” (Mk. 3:28-30 YLT). Read more: hopebeyondhell.net/unpardonable-sin-3.

12. Was Esau hated by God? Mal.1:2-3

This is a play on words similar to Christ's command to "hate our family" (Lu. 14:26). Of course Jesus wants us to love our families, but in our heart of hearts, our deepest love should be for God. This is hyperbole, something very common in ancient biblical writings. God's hate regarding Esau relates to something about Esau that is disliked in a greater way than what God dislikes about Jacob the "deceiver." When God elects one over another, it does not mean He loves them more, but rather He is delegating to them a greater responsibility in His service. For more on election, see chapter 5.

13. What are "coals of fire?" Ro.12:20

"If your enemy is hungry, feed him...for in so doing you will heap coals of fire on his head... overcome evil with good." The coals of fire are not a symbol of punishment but of burning shame, says William Barclay. "To treat our enemy with kindness rather than vengeance is to move him. Vengeance may break his spirit, but kindness will break his heart." (15) This depicts the attitude of our heavenly Father. (Ps. 66:3,4, 10-12).

Jesus commands us to love our enemies that we may be perfect, just as our Father is perfect (Mt. 5:48). He could not command us in this way--to love our enemies--if God did not love His. Neither could Paul command us to overcome evil with good, if God overcomes it with evil. Take a moment to let these truths settle into your heart. For more on fire, see question#1.

14. Better had Judas not been born? Mt. 26:24

This passage does not say that it would have been better for Judas if his mother had never conceived him, only that he not had been born. There is a big difference. Ec. 6:3 says, "If a man begets a hundred children and lives many years...but his soul is not satisfied with goodness...I say that a stillborn child is better than he." It could be the same with Judas; "Woe to that man...it would have been good for that man if he had not been born [but stillborn]." More: hopebeyondhell.net/judas.

15. Seek God while He may be found? Is. 55:6-7

"Come...Incline your ear...Hear and your soul shall live" (Is 55:1, 3). While our hearts are sensitized to Him (inclined and hearing), He can be found; He is near. But if we allow our hearts to get cold, we distance ourselves! Note the context: God abundantly pardons the wicked (v.7)! Are not His mercies new every morning (Lam 3:23)? Read all of Psalm 136.

Though God is abundant in mercy, there is yet a sense of urgency about the present. He deals with us for a season through grace; but if we persist in resisting Him, He judges us. And while we are being judged, He may be beyond our reach until our judgment lesson is learned. This verse does not say a time will come when we will never be able to find God, or that He will not find us. We must not read into this verse what is not there.

16. What does the "terror of the Lord" refer to? 2Co. 5:11

The word terror here is the common Greek word for fear, *phobos* (Strongs #5401; NIV "fear"). The threat is directed at believers for neglecting to preach. It is not about motivating us to preach because of the terror of hell awaiting sinners. Read this passage in context,

noting especially 2Co. 1:1 and 5:10-11. The “we must all” consists of believers. In his first letter, Paul said, “Woe is me if I do not preach the gospel!” (1Co. 9:16).

17. What does “everlasting destruction” mean? 2Th. 1:9

Marvin Vincent, in *Word Studies in the New Testament* regarding *olethron aionion* in 2Th. 1:9 explained:

If *olethros* is extinction, then the passage teaches the annihilation of the wicked, in which case the adjective *aionios* is superfluous, because extinction is final, and excludes the idea of duration...In this passage, the word destruction is qualified. It is “destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his power,” at his second coming, in the new *aeon*. In other words, it is the severance, at a given point of time, of those who obey not the gospel from the presence and the glory of Christ. *Aionios* may therefore describe this severance as continuing during the millennial *aeon* between Christ’s coming and the final judgment; as being for the wicked prolonged throughout that *aeon* and characteristic of it, or it may describe the severance as characterizing or enduring through a period or *aeon* succeeding the final judgment, the extent of which period is not defined. In neither case is *aionios*, to be interpreted as everlasting... (16)

If we cross-reference *olethros* with 1Co. 5:5, with its derivative *olothrūo* in He. 11:28, we will see that utter annihilation does not fit. For example, take the extermination of the “first-born” of Egypt (He. 11:28): Were all these innocent babies utterly annihilated before God? Also, though Satan destroys the flesh of the saved, we know God restores it in the resurrection (1Co. 5:5). Even were God to utterly annihilate someone, has He not the power to restore (De. 32:39; 1Sa. 2:6; Mt. 3:9)? More: hopebeyondhell.net/destruction.

18. What about weeping and gnashing teeth? Lu. 13:28-30

Greek scholar William Barclay writes, “It was the eastern custom to use language in the most vivid possible way. Eastern language is always as vivid as the human mind can make it.” (17) As well, Thomas Allin, author of “Christ Triumphant” writes, “The whole Bible is Oriental. Every line breathes the spirit of the East, with its hyperboles and metaphors, and what to us seem utter exaggerations. If such language be taken literally, its whole meaning is lost. When the sacred writers want to describe the dusky redness of a lunar eclipse, they say the moon is “turned into blood.” He who perverts Scripture is not the man who reduces this sacred poetry to its true meaning. Nay, that man perverts the Bible who hardens into dogmas the glowing metaphors of Eastern poetry—such conduct Lange calls “a moral scandal.” So with our Lord’s words. Am I to hate my father and mother or pluck out my right eye literally? Or take a case by Farrar: “Egypt is said to have been an iron furnace to the Jews (De. 4:20; Jer. 11:4), and yet they said, ‘it was well with us there,’ and sighed for its enjoyments (Nu. 11:18). Therefore I maintain that no doctrine of endless pain can be based on Eastern imagery, on metaphors mistranslated very often, and always misinterpreted.” (18)

The following scene depicts a very serious disappointment for God’s unfaithful children, called “sons of the kingdom” in Mt. 8:12 and “unprofitable servants” in Mt. 25:30. In no case, is it proven to be an eternal state. In fact, the context indicates the contrary:

There will be weeping and grinding of teeth (bitter regret –PME) when you see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, and yourselves turned outside. And men from east and west, from north and south, will come to take their

places at the feast in the kingdom of God. Yes, there are those now last who will be first, and those now first who will be last (Lu. 13:28-30 JB).

It is likely the ones thrown out are the very ones who came first but were not ready. Perhaps they came without their wedding garment (Mt. 22:11-12)? Once their judgment outside runs its course, they will return as the “first which shall be last.” Note the compassionate heart of Christ in what He says just a few verses further:

*O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, but you were not willing! See! Your house is left to you desolate [with weeping and gnashing of teeth?]; and assuredly, I say to you, you shall not see Me **until the time** comes when you say, “Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD” (Lu. 13:34, 35)!*

The Lord said they would not see Him “until” the time comes when they say, “Blessed is He...” This is separation for a season, not eternity. Might those left desolate not be the “first” who are thrown out? Though thrown out for a time, they return as “last” (Lu. 13:30) after they have paid the last cent and washed their robes (Mt. 5:26; 18:34-35; Lu. 12:59). “Blessed are those who wash their robes, so that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter by the gates into the city” (Re. 22:14 NAS). “Weeping may endure for a night, but joy comes in the morning” (Ps. 30:5). “God will redeem my soul from the power of Sheol” (Ps. 49:15 NAS).

19. What about the rich man and Lazarus? Lu. 16:26

Between us and you there is a great gulf fixed, so that those who want to pass from here to you cannot, nor can those from there pass to us.

This passage is saying that while the chastisement is taking place, one cannot up and leave at will. It does not say that once the last penny is paid, there will be no release. For Christ says, “You will by no means get out of there till you have paid the last penny” (Mt. 5:26; 18:34-35; Lu. 12:57-59). The “fixed gulf” refers to a situation relative to a given period of time. If a road has been covered with deep snowdrifts, we well might tell someone who wants to drive through it, “You cannot cross over from there to us.” However, once the snow trucks plow the road, or the sun melts the snow, the road is clear once again. When you are in prison, iron bars are your fixed gulf; you cannot come and go as you please. But once you have served your time you are released. While God is the jailor, there will be no prison breaks!

Who holds the prison keys? “I have the keys of Hades and of Death.” “He who has the key of David, He who opens and no one shuts, and shuts and no one opens” (Re. 1:18, 3:7). Christ has already used His keys! He went and preached to the spirits in prison who formerly were disobedient in the days of Noah (1Pe. 3:19-20). The Gospel was preached also to those who are dead that they might be judged according to men in the flesh, but live according to God in the spirit (1Pe. 4:6). “He ascended on high and led captivity captive, giving gifts to men. Now this ascending means that He first descended into the lower parts of the earth [Hades?]. He who descended is also the One who ascended far above all the heavens, that He might fill all things” (Ep. 4:8-9). Christ, having all authority and power and holding the keys of Hades, has Himself crossed the great gulf, as Peter and Paul imply.

What if Christ had not demonstrated His power to cross the gulf? Is anything too hard for Him? (Ge. 18:14; Jer. 32:17; Mt. 19:26; Mk. 10:26-27; Lu. 1:37; 18:27). Even if Christ

lacked the power or will to cross the “gulf,” (which is inconceivable) it will be destroyed in the lake of fire, also called the second death (Re. 20:14). Once Hades and Death are destroyed (1Co. 15:26), what’s left? Life! The absence of death can be none other than life. The last enemy to be destroyed is death (1Co. 15:26)! “O Death, where is your sting? O Hades, where is your victory” (1Co. 15:55)? But, if most of humanity were locked in hell forever, Hades would be victorious.

Scripture sheds much light on this parable if our eyes are open. “We went through fire... but you brought us out to rich fulfillment” (Ps. 66:12). “When your judgments are in the earth the inhabitants of the world learn righteousness” (Is. 26:9). “You appointed them for judgment...you marked them for correction” (Hab. 1:12). “For I am the Lord, I do not change, therefore you are not consumed” (Mal. 3:6, He.13:8, Ja.1:27). “Everyone will be purified by fire” (Mk. 9:49 GNT). Everyone! This parable displays God’s corrective purpose in judgment. Notice the rich man’s deep concern for his brothers. God is changing him. “I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you” (Ez. 36:26). “All Israel will be saved, as it is written...He will turn away ungodliness from Jacob” (Ro. 11:26). And here we have a son of Abraham, being tormented, yet showing compassion. God, open our eyes!

This passage in no way negates limited judgment. If it did, it would contradict the whole Bible. Judgment is always according to deeds. (Ps. 62:12; Pr.24:12; Is. 59:18; Jer. 17: 10, 25:14; Ez.24:14, 36:19; Hos.12:2; Zec.1:6; Mt.6:14-15, 7:1, 16:27, 18:34-35; Mk.4:24, 11:25-26; Lu.12:47-48,59, 14:14, 18:14; Ro.2:6; 2Co. 5:10, 11:15; Ga.6:7; Ep.6:8; Col.3:25; 2Ti.4:14; Ja.2:13; 1Pe.1:17; Re.2:23, 18:6, 20:12-13, 22:12, etc.). Judgment is always measured; “With what judgment you judge you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you” (Mt. 7:2). The rich man is reaping the exact consequences of his acts. Judgment is always fair; “eye for eye, tooth for tooth” (Le.24:20). Judgment is always according to guilt and “no more” (De. 25:3). No more! Every sin receives a just retribution (He. 2:2). Some receive many stripes, others few, but no one receives unending stripes (Lu 12:47). Judgment is always until the last cent is paid (Mt. 5:26, 18:35, Lu. 12:59)! Now, if Hades is an eternal prison with no hope of release, how could Jesus say “Fear not, I... have the keys of Hades” (Re 1:17-18)? Of what use are keys if He cannot or will not use them?

Paul never once mentions Hades or *Gehenna* in all His letters (or in Acts) except to proclaim its defeat! “O Hades, where is your victory?” (1Co. 15:55). How can we explain this in light of Paul’s unique calling and authority? “Sheol” is translated as “hell” in the KJV 31 times! Peter translates “Sheol” as “Hades” (Ac. 2:27). This means “Sheol” of the O.T. is the same “Hades” in this parable! Now consider this: “God will redeem my soul from the power of Sheol (Hades)” Ps. 49:15 NAS. “I will ransom them from the power of the grave (Sheol/ Hades)...O grave (Sheol/ Hades) I will be your destruction” (Hos. 13:14)! Did you see that? Read it again and again until it sinks in!

One last point - “Torment” in this parable is from the Greek words, *basanos* (v.23, 28) and *odunaomai* (v.24, 25). Neither means torture. The Greek word for torture, *tumpanizomai*, used only in He. 11:35. *Odunaomai* is “anxiously” and “sorrowing” in Lu.2:48 and Acts 20:38. Tradition makes these words more dreadful than is warranted. “My servant lies at home dreadfully tormented” (Mt. 8:6). If *basanizo* is something especially dreadful, why add the adjective “dreadfully”? Why is there no adjective in our parable if Hades is as horrendous as claimed? See “Lake of Fire” in Appendix. V for more on *basanizo*.

This parable offers no support for eternal punishment. Jesus warned us about following the traditions of men, “You invalidate the Word of God for the sake of your tradition” (Mt. 15:6, NAS). “These people draw near with their mouth and honor me with their lips, but have removed their hearts far from me, and their fear toward me is taught by the commandment

(tradition) of men” (Is. 29:13). What fear, terror, and horror has the distorted teaching of this parable caused! My heart longs for the truth to be known. Let Scripture interpret itself!

20. What of those claiming visions of hell?

What’s our authority for truth, man’s unverifiable claims to a supernatural experience, or is it Scripture along with God’s confirming witness in our heart? The Gospel is GOOD NEWS, not terrifying news. (Lu. 2:10; Ro. 10:15; Ac. 10:36; Ph.4:4; 1Pe. 1:8 NAS; etc). God has not given us the spirit of fear (2Ti. 1:7). Joy and peace are fruits of the Spirit, not terror (Gal 5:22). “Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you...Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid” (Jn. 14:27). If believing that God is a terrorist is necessary for salvation, then why did God not terrify the Israelites with hell in the O.T.? Why did He not engrave it on tablets of stone? Why was it not found in the numerous judgments of Leviticus. and Deuteronomy? Why did Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles, never once mention the word hell except to proclaim its defeat (1Co 15:55)? If we must be terrified into heaven, why has God not terrified everyone? Is He partial? The Bible says God is “good to all” (Ps 145:9). It is the goodness of God that leads us to repentance (Ro. 2:4). We love Him because He first loved us, not because He threatens us with eternal torture (1Jn. 4:19)! If an eternal hell were everyone’s destiny, what kind of a God would not warn every man, woman, and child on planet earth and do everything He could to keep them from going there? When it comes to questions on the afterlife, I will place my confidence in God, not in man.

21. Why does God seem so cruel in the O.T.?

Though I don’t have an answer that fully satisfies me, I am comforted knowing that death is not hopeless for anyone. God will wipe away every tear; death, sorrow, crying and pain shall cease (Rev. 21:4). Author and theologian, Dr. Norman Geisler, in defense of Israel’s alleged “atrocities” against the Canaanite and Amalekite cultures wrote:

This was a thoroughly evil culture... They were into brutality, cruelty, incest, bestiality, cultic prostitution, even child sacrifice by fire. They were an aggressive culture that wanted to annihilate the Israelites. God took action not only for the sake of the Israelites but, ultimately, for the sake of everyone through history whose salvation would be provided by the Messiah who was to be born among them.

God’s purpose in these instances was to destroy the corrupt nation because the national structure was inherently evil....Many verses indicate that God’s primary desire was to drive these evil people out of the land they already knew had been promised for a long time to Israel. That way, Israel could come in and be relatively free from the outside corruption that could have destroyed it like a cancer. He wanted to create an environment where the Messiah could come for the benefit of millions of people through history. Besides, under the rules of conduct God had given the Israelites, whenever they went into an enemy city they were to first make the people an offer of peace. The people had a choice: they could accept that offer, in which case they wouldn’t be killed, or they could reject the offer at their own peril. That’s appropriate and fair. Most of the women and children would have fled in advance before the actual fighting began, leaving behind the warriors to face the Israelites. The fighters who remained would have been the most hardened, the ones who stubbornly refused to leave, the carriers of the corrupt culture....God is not capricious, he’s not arbitrary, he’s not cruel...he is undeniably just.

It seems, if Geisler is correct, that God had to protect Israel in order to fulfill His good purposes for the entire world. I welcome your thoughts...

22. If God is good, why is there so much pain and suffering in the world?

We who believe in the Blessed Hope can at least be comforted knowing suffering is not eternal. But why is there so much unfairness in the world; even extreme suffering? Is there any purpose to it? What is it intended to teach us? I think the answer lies in the significance of the "Body" of Christ. "There is one body." "The body is not one member but many." "I pray that they may be one." "Bear one another's burdens." "Bear with one another in love." "That the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity...and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. "I now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up in my flesh what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ, for the sake of His body" (Col.1:24). There are eighty "one another" phrases in the N.T.! They are everywhere! Could it be that through our oneness, the experiences of individuals become the experience, lessons, and wisdom of all? It is evident that in God's sovereign will, we all must go through degrees of pain and suffering; some less, some more. I believe that through our oneness in God's Spirit, we all bear with Christ (identify with and participate in) the burdens of humanity. We must learn the full measure of the sickness of sin, and even more wonderfully, the full redemption and contrasting grace and love of our Father! When we all become one in Christ and knit together, there will no longer be an issue of fairness in suffering. Each will identify and truly empathize with each other's pain. The lessons gained from the experience of the world's full history of sin will be everyone's to share. This gives deep meaning to all pain and the oneness we experience as members of His body. **We are all one.** Our brother's and sister's pain is our own! Only an almighty God of infinite knowledge and wisdom, could ever do such a thing. Our gracious Father will nurture this attitude in us more and more as we mature in Christ. [I thank Derek Calder for this inspiring thought.]

23. Why would God allow this to be hidden?

It has not always been so. It was known and accepted during the first 500 years of Church history when believers read the Scriptures in Greek. Yet, it is true that God veils truth from certain groups of people for specific times and purposes (Ro. 16:25; Ep. 3:8-12; Col 1:25-27). The Church was blinded to salvation by faith for over a thousand years until Luther. The Lord stated plainly that He hid truth from His hearers through parables (Mt. 13:11; 9-17). "It is the glory of God to conceal a matter; but the glory of kings is to search out a matter" (Pr. 25:2). Andrew Jukes writes:

When have God's people as a body ever seen or received any truth beyond their own dispensation? Take as an instance Israel of old, whose ways, "ensamples of us," prefigure the Church of this age. Did they ever receive the call of the Gentiles, or see God's purpose outside their own election? A few all through that age spoke of blessings to the world, and were without exception judged for such a testimony:—"Which of the prophets have not your father's slain?" Was God's purpose to the Gentiles therefore a false doctrine: or, because His people did not receive it, was it not to be found in their own Scriptures? The doctrine of the "restitution of all things" is to the Church what "the call of the Gentiles" was to Israel. Is Israel's path to teach us nothing? Are men's traditions about God's purpose to be preferred to His own unerring Word? But the path is not a new one for the sons of God. All the prophets perished in Jerusalem. And, above all, the Lord was judged as a Deceiver, by those whom God had called to be His

witnesses. The Church's judgment, therefore, cannot decide a point like this, if that judgment be in opposition to the Word of God. (20)

Mercy Aiken, author of *If Hell Is Real*, writes:

In the time of Christ most of Israel completely missed the Word of God when He was in their midst. They were too busy with their nose in the book, to perceive the Word Himself as He came and dwelt among them! Certainly the masses must have thought... "But none of the teachers, Pharisees, or priests believe that Jesus is the Messiah! And they know the scripture better than me!" That fact alone kept many Jews from daring to believe in Jesus. To do so was heresy and to admit faith in Him was basically asking for scorn and rejection. We have been quick to point the finger at the Pharisees, and not realize that we as the church follow the same pattern today. Are we going to play it safe and side with the majority, who are clinging to their traditions... or risk it all and step out and follow Him? (21)

As I have struggled with this question, I have found solace in the truths of election and first-fruits through God's plan for the ages (ch.5). Though so many do not yet see God's glory, His glorious plan for all humanity is being fulfilled. All nations will come, worship, and glorify His name. God is great and does wondrous things (Ps. 86:9-10)! There are encouraging signs in our time that show me that the Church is more receptive than ever to test its traditions as Christ and Paul exhort (Lu. 12:57; Mt. 15:3, 6, 9; 1Th. 5:21).

24. Is this Universalism?

No. Universalism, to most Christians, means that all beliefs are equally valid; all roads lead to heaven. This is **not** the Blessed Hope which proclaims Christ as the only way to the Father. Many refer to this Hope as "Christian Universalism," which is accurate. However, many believers in the Blessed Hope use the term "Universalism" when they really mean "Christian Universalism." Sadly, this causes misunderstanding. The root of the word, "universal," is a beautiful concept. God loves all universally; no one is excluded (Jn. 3:16). Christ's blood propitiates the sins of the **whole** world (1Jn. 2:2)! This is universal propitiation. **Every knee** will bow in sincere worship of Jesus Christ! This is universal worship - "Christian" Universalism.

All roads do not lead to God; but Christ searches for His lost sheep until He finds them, no matter what road they are on. **Ninety-nine sheep out of one hundred is not enough for Christ** (Lu. 15:4)!

It is tragic that the Blessed Hope has been maligned by a misuse of the term "Universalism." This has prejudiced many against this Hope before understanding it. It has historically been referred to as "Apocatastasis," "Reconciliation," "Restoration" and "Restitution." These terms represent the "gathering together in one" of all things in Christ (Ep. 1:10; Strong's #346). Other terms include: "Larger or Greater Hope," "Victorious Gospel," "Inclusion," "Ultimate Reconciliation," "Universal Redemption or Salvation or Restoration," "Greater Faith or Hope," "Paul's Gospel," "Biblical or Christian Universalism," and of course, "Universalism." There is no single term for this Hope. Perhaps this should tell us something. When asked His name, God simply said: I AM WHO I AM. God is too great to be identified by one term. So is this Hope. We do not emphasize a term, we emphasize GOD!

Some rightly ask, "Is this heretical?" My answer is no. If we are heretics, it is for believing that God is greater than most think He is. Do we uphold the authority of Scripture and the supremacy of Christ? Yes. We elevate **both** the **blood** of Christ and His **absolute triumph** over evil to their rightful place. We proclaim a GOD in full control of His

universe—One that loves all people with unending love. We are in every way Christian. Let me be very specific: Jesus came in the flesh, lived and died for our sins, was resurrected, and is coming again. He is the only begotten Son of God and the only way of salvation. He and the Father are one. We worship Christ and our Father in the Holy Spirit. In fact, we magnify Christ's deity more since we believe that He fully destroys the devil's works and accomplishes all His will (1Jn. 3:8; Jn. 17:4). His blood is the only power in the universe that cleanses from sin. Many of us have died as martyrs for our faith in Christ! If you do not at least hope God is this great, I can only pray for you. Jesus IS the way, the truth, and the life, no one comes to the Father but through Him. He is Lord of all!

We who believe the Blessed Hope are not confined to any one group or denomination. We are simply believers. You will find us in all Churches: Baptist, Pentecostal, Charismatic, Catholic, etc. You will also find us outside church walls. Most do not trumpet their convictions for fear of rejection or causing strife and division. This hope is vital in fulfilling Christ's prayer that His body would be one that the world may know God's love (Jn. 17:21, 23). At first it will create a stir, like birth pains. But this is necessary to force the Church to rethink its "hell" driven Gospel. There are countless believers throughout the world, who embrace this hope.

Who does not long that God be all powerful and unfailing in love? The Holy Spirit is shining His glorious light on the teachings of the Church. All wood, hay, and stubble will be burned. The fire is kindled! Who, in their heart of hearts, truly thinks most of humanity is destined to eternal suffering? Be honest. Only a small minority insists on this. An eternal hell contradicts God's character and most will admit it. Who is not repulsed by such a horrid doctrine? No defense of it can truly satisfy us. It is something we have learned to tolerate. We give it lip service, but inside, we block it out of our minds and hearts. How else can we cope? Can you relate? To confirm this, candidly ask your closest friends, those mature in faith, what they really think about humanity destined to eternal pain. You will be surprised at what you find. When the Church, as one body, embraces this truth, it will transform our worship and our witness. The joy that will radiate from God's people will draw multitudes to Christ.

CONCLUSION

I do not have all the answers. God does! Hopefully some of them were helpful to you. The essential thing is beyond facts themselves. It is the simple willingness to accept truth no matter what it might be. Craig Nolin writes in quoting Dr. Drew Westen:

When people draw conclusions about particular events, they are not just weighing the facts. "Without knowing it, they are also weighing what they would feel if they came to one conclusion or another, and they often come to the conclusion that would make them feel better, no matter what the facts are." Dr. Weston found that knowing an individual's predisposition proved to be a perfect predictor of their ultimate decision 84% of the time, which suggests that no amount of facts would change their original position... regardless of whether we are talking about diets, exercise, politics, religion, or business... This characteristic is the inspiration of the old line, "Don't confuse me with the facts. My mind is made up!" (22)

I pray you will be among those who will honestly accept the truth based on the facts. Augustinian teaching, as unsettling as it is when reflected on, has nonetheless brought us a certain degree of selfish security. When confronted with facts that challenge that security, we feel threatened. "Better that the lost suffer judgment forever than I suffer it at all!" Sadly, many subconsciously feel this way. The thought that we, as believers, may suffer some measure of judgment from God, is for most, not a welcomed idea. Keith Morrison, of NBC

News wrote: “Hell is for other people! Fully three-fourths of surveyed Americans felt pretty sure they will be going to heaven while just 2 percent expected they would go to hell.” (23)
For additional answers to questions, see our websites FAQs.

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THE TRILOGY

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The following list (1) identifies the key topics and themes that are important to a firm Biblical foundation in the Blessed Hope.

- God's ownership as Creator
- The success or failure of unconditional love
- The nature of God's kingdom during the reign of Jesus on earth
- The nature of "eternal" judgment
- The definition and nature of hell
- The origin and purpose of evil
- The liability for the fall of man
- Man's freedom of will
- God's sovereignty and will
- Definition of *aion*
- Predestination, election, foreknowledge
- Relevance of Old Testament laws

FREE WILL, SOVEREIGNTY, OWNERSHIP, EVIL

Although most Christians believe God is sovereign, their theology seems to deny it when questioned on details. They assume He has put aside His sovereignty to allow man to have free will. This is usually done with the intention of explaining evil in the world.

How free is our will? Since we are told to choose what is right and shun what is wrong, it is clear that we have a will. It is commonly believed that if we have a will at all, then it must be "totally" free. There are several scriptures, however, which would tend to say otherwise. For example, Jn. 6:44 says, "No man can come to me except the Father draw (lit. "drag") him. The same Greek word for drag is used in Jn. 21:6 where the disciples drag fish into their nets and in Ja.2:6 where the rich drag us to court. Jesus uses the same word in Jn. 12:32, "If I be lifted up, I will drag all men unto me." So these being "dragged" appear to be having their "free will" overruled by a higher will. Jn. 6:37, "All that the Father gives me shall come to me." In other words, those who decide to come to Christ by their own "free will" are the people whom the Father has given Him already. Jeremiah says in 31:18-19, 17:14 that essentially none of us will be saved unless God initiates it. If God does not turn us, we simply will not come to Him. John tells us that we are not born of our will but of God's (Jn.1:13). God does all according to His own will (Ep.1:11). There is someone behind the scenes who calls us and our response is, "I think I want to come to Christ." We think it is all by our own will, yet God has played a hidden role. He has chosen us so we in turn choose Him, "seemingly" of our own will. We may tend to hold this illusion in our immaturity. But the more we come to know Him, the more sovereign He seems to become.

Paul, who knew God more deeply than most, powerfully describes His Sovereignty in Romans 9 where he quotes Isaiah. After saying that it is God who creates both the good guys and the bad guys (and that the clay has no right to question the Potter), he says plainly (v. 19) that no one can resist the *boulema* will (ultimate plan) of God. This is a stronger use of the Greek term for "will" than *thelema* which is used in other passages where it is clear that man is definitely resisting God's will. Other examples of our inability to resist God's highest

intention include Joseph and his brothers, Pharaoh, God loving Jacob over Esau, Isaiah's description of Cyrus, and Nebuchadnezzar as God's tool. All these point to God's ability to control people in spite of "free will." If Paul says no one can resist the *boulema* will of God, then how much "total" free will do we really have? Does no one mean no one? Why do we question God's sovereignty? Could it be because we need to explain the existence of evil in the world in a way that does not make Him liable? Theologians have proposed two solutions: one says we do not understand any purpose for evil, but know God will work all things for good. The other says God is not responsible; it is caused by people and the Devil who inspires them. But to absolve God of any responsibility for evil, Christians take back most of His sovereignty. Free-will taken to its conclusion removes all sovereignty from God. It leaves Him impotent, on the sidelines unable to do anything.

Who is really sovereign on earth? Has God abdicated His throne? If we leave "total" free will intact, we are left with a very scary world. If God cannot override man's will, then He can no longer direct history—have a timetable. How much "free will" did Paul have when God threw him on his back and told him, "you will follow me?" God overruled his will. Can He not do it with everyone? Since He demonstrated His ability to turn the chief of sinners around, we know He can do it for all. Now if He can, but chooses not to, who is really liable for lost souls?

How is the question of evil resolved? It is not resolved by removing sovereignty from God, but by understanding why God does what He does. We must understand that in His sight sin is reckoned as debt. When we sin we become debtors to the law. When Adam sinned, all that he owned was sold to sin and sin held the debt note until Christ paid it off. We need to know that we have limited authority over ourselves and that the Jubilee ends all debt (Lev. 25).

Is it really a question of free-will versus sovereignty or is it a question of ownership? From a legal standpoint, the question of free-will is only a side bar. The issue is resolved when we understand that God, as Creator, owns all He has made (Ge.1:1; Ez.18:4). If man was formed from the dust of the earth (Ge.2:7) and all the earth is God's (Le.25:23) and the land, under law, must always be redeemed we understand the right of ownership. God always claims right of eminent domain. Man has delegated authority, but God retains sovereignty! In explaining evil, the ownership issue is crucial. We must look at evil in light of the liability laws.

Liability is based on ownership (Ex. 21:33-4). If a man digs a pit and does not take the necessary steps to cover it, and an ox comes along (of his own free will) and falls in the pit, the man is liable. He must buy the dead ox. Other liability laws which say the same thing are De.22:8 and Ex. 22:5-6. Consider the Garden of Eden. Back in the garden, God dug a pit. He did not cover it up and man fell in. The pit was complete with a couple of temptation trees and a tempter. God was fully aware what decision Adam would make. Yet God did not cover the pit. He could have prevented Adam from sinning by not planting the trees and placing the tempter in another universe. But God dug that pit and purposely left it uncovered. He had a plan. The plan called for man to fall. By God's own liability laws, He made Himself responsible. He purposely obligated Himself to take care of the situation. He sent His Son to pay the price. All creation became subject to death through Adam's fall. God bought the dead ox and owns it. He fulfilled the terms of redemption - bought all who fell. In doing so, He fulfilled the law. This is the Good News! Christ's blood redeemed the whole world (1Jn. 2:2; 1Ti. 2:6)!

In conclusion, according to these laws, the insistence that we have free-will may reduce God's liability, but not eliminate it altogether. In God's court, free-will is not a factor. God wrote the law of liability so we would understand His obligation to purchase the whole world. Though we do not have an explanation for each piece of the puzzle about evil, we know God

is sovereign. This may not be much comfort for those going through horrible situations, but at least we can rest assured He works all things for our good. Every injustice will be rectified. In the end, we will look back on all that has happened and say, “God was justified in all He has done.” (2)

CHURCH FATHERS AND FIRE

The majority of Church leaders of the early centuries believed in an end to God’s punishments, either through annihilation or ultimate reconciliation. They understood that *olam* and *aion* often pertained to the age to come (pages 29-30), and did not mean “eternal” like many claim. They understood the symbolic nature of fire in the Scriptures and viewed God’s judgment “fires” as something very positive. Fire was an element of life (Is.4:5), of purification (Mal.3:3), of transformation (2 Pe.3:10) and never of preservation alive for purposes of anguish. To them, fire was the sign of God’s being, not His wrath. God is a consuming fire (He.12:29). Christ’s eyes are a flame of fire (Re.1:14). The seven lamps of fire are the seven spirits of God (Re.4:5). His throne is a fiery flame and its wheels a burning fire (Da.7:9, 10). God’s ministers are a flame of fire (He.1:7). He is like a refiner’s fire (Mal.3:2). God answers Gideon (Jud. 6:21), David (1Chr. 21:26), Elijah and Elisha by fire. God gave His law in fire (De. 33:2) and the Holy Spirit descended at Pentecost in fire.(Ac. 2:3) Christ baptizes with the Holy Spirit and fire (Mt. 3:11). Fire tries everyone’s work (1Co. 3:13) and saves us “as by fire” (1Co. 3:15) not tortures in fire. The fires of *Gehenna* are kindled for purification. “Everyone will be purified by fire” (Mk. 9:49 GNT). Note that this fire is in the same context as *Gehenna* fire (v.47)! As Jerome says, “fire is God’s last medicine for the sinner.” (3) See Appendix IV for quotes from the Fathers.

SCRIPTURES IN PERSPECTIVE

A belief in eternal torment carries with it many other intermeshing doctrines and assumptions. It implies a yielding of God’s sovereignty to man’s free-will, a semi-sovereign devil, a denial of God’s infinite knowledge, a conditional love on the part of God, no legal and lawful liability for the fall of man on the part of God, and among many other things, an inability on God’s part to control the affairs of men. The following Scriptures tend to say otherwise. They show a God and Father who is in ultimate control of His universe especially the affairs of men, judges lawfully, and is steadfast in His unconditional love of man. Let’s take a look:

GENESIS: In Abraham shall all the families of the earth be blessed. 12:3; God saw all that He had made and it was very good. 1:31; You meant it for evil but God meant it for good. 50:20; **EXODUS:** Who made man’s mouth? Who makes him dumb or deaf? Is it not I? 4:11; God hardened Pharaoh’s heart. Was this fair unless God had a plan? 10:1-2; Liability laws - owner liable for actions of his possession. 21:28-31; Liability laws - owner is the one responsible. 21:33-34; 22:5; Liability laws - owner is liable even though not the cause. Dt. 22:8; **LEVITICUS:** Law of Jubilee - sunset provision on all debt (sin is reckoned as a debt). 25:8-13; Lawful right of Redemption - Kinsman redeemer has lawful right. 25:23-28; **NUMBERS:** All the earth will be filled with the glory of the Lord. 14:20-21; **DEUTERONOMY:** God has chosen you. 7:6; The Lord has not given certain ones a heart to know, nor eyes to see, nor ears to hear. 29:4-6; God puts to death and it is God who wounds. 32:39; **I SAMUEL:** The Lord kills and makes alive; He brings down to Sheol and raises up. 2:6-7; God sent Saul an evil spirit 16:14 KJV; **II SAMUEL:** God moved Satan to tempt David to number Israel. 24:1; 1Chr. 21:1; **I KINGS:** God sent a deceiving spirit to entice Ahab to fall in battle. 22:19-22; **I CHRONICLES:** Then Satan stood up against Israel and

moved David to number Israel. 21:1; Why? **II CHRONICLES**: No one can stand against Thee. 20:6; **JOB** God uses Satan. to tempt Job. 1:8-12; Shall we receive good at the hand of God and not evil also. 2:10 KJV; God performs what is appointed for. Job 23:13-14; His hand hath formed the crooked serpent. 26:13 KJV; No purpose of God's can be thwarted. 42:2 NIV; **PSALMS**: The control of God. 33:8-11; God fashions the hearts of all men. 33:15; To Thee all men come. 65:2; All the earth will worship Thee. 66:4; God blesses us that all the ends of the earth may fear Him. 67:2,7; His Sovereignty rules over all. 103:19; God does whatever He pleases. 115:3; Whatever the Lord pleases, He does, in heaven and in earth. 135:6; Days that were ordained for me, when as yet there was not one of them. 139:16; The Lord is good to all, and His mercies are over all His works. 145:9; **PROVERBS**: Lord made everything for His purpose, even the wicked for day of evil. 16:4 KJV; A man's heart plans his way but the Lord directs his steps. 16:9; The lot is cast but its every decision is from the Lord. 16:33; The Lord turns the king's heart wherever He wishes. 21:1; **ISAIAH**: Is it the axe or the One who wields it who is in control? 10:15; Earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover sea. 11:9; Just as I have intended it and just as I have planned it so it shall stand. 14:24; Who can frustrate what God has planned? 14:27; Him who planned it long ago. 22:11; The Lord of hosts has planned it. 23:9; When the earth experiences judgments, inhabitants learn righteousness. 26:9; God forms light and creates darkness, makes peace and creates evil. 45:7 KJV; God declares the end from the beginning and does His good pleasure. 46:10; I have planned it and surely I will do it. 46:11; I created the smith who blows the fire and the destroyer to ruin. 54:16 NAS; All flesh shall worship before God 66:23; **JEREMIAH**: Before you were born I knew you. 1:5; A man's way is not in himself. 10:23; Purpose and goal for use of evil by God. 18:11 KJV; I will give them a heart to know Me. 24:7; I shall correct you properly and by no means leave you unpunished. 46:28; **LAMENTATIONS**: Both good and evil go forth from the mouth of God. 3:38 KJV; **DANIEL**: God does according to His will and no one can ward off His hand. 4:35; That which is decreed will be done. (Is there any doubt?) 11:36; **AMOS**: If evil is in a city, has the Lord not done it. 3:6-8 KJV; **MICAH**: God does not retain His anger forever because He delights in mercy. 7:18-20; **HABAKKUK**: Earth will be filled with the knowledge of the Lord, as waters cover sea. 2:14; **ZEPHANIAH**: The earth will be burned by the fire of God's jealousy for then He gives them a pure language. 3:8-9; **HAGGAI**: Going to shake the heavens and earth and I will fill this house with glory. 2:6-7; **ZECHARIAH**: The Lord will be King over all the earth. 14:9.(4)

MATTHEW: The Spirit drove Jesus to the wilderness to be tempted by the Devil. 4:1; Law won't pass away until all is accomplished. 5:18; No one knows the Father except who the Son wills to reveal Him. 11:27; Not all men can accept this statement, but only those to whom it is given. 19:11; **LUKE**: To you it has been granted, to the rest it is in parables so they can't see. 8:10; **JOHN**: Born not of the will of the flesh or man, but of the will of God. 1:12-13; The Son gives life to whom He wills. 5:21; No one comes to the Son unless the Father draws him. 6:44; No one can come to Jesus unless it has been granted by the Father. 6:65; If I be lifted up, I will draw all men unto me. 12:32; You did not choose me, I chose you and appointed you. 15:16; **ACTS**: Christ crucified by the predestined plan of God. (Can God control?) 2:23; Heaven must receive Christ until the period of the restoration of all things. 3:21; To do whatever Thy hand and thy purpose has predestined to occur. 4:28; As many as had been ordained to eternal (*aionian*) life believed. 13:48; And the Lord opened her heart to respond to the things spoken by Paul. 16:14; Having determined their appointed times and boundaries, in Him we live. 17:26-28; The God of our fathers has appointed you to know His will. 22:14; **ROMANS**: God subjected creation to futility by His will and not by the will of man. 8:20-21; All those condemned in Adam were justified in Christ. 5:18; The wages of sin is death (not eternal torment). 6:23; For whom He foreknew, He also

predestined. 8:29; God's choice according to His purpose. 9:11; It does not depend on man's will but God's mercy 9:16; God has mercy on whom He desires and hardens whom He desires. 9:18; Who can resist the will of God? 9:19; Who are you, O man to answer God? The clay will not question God. 9:20; The Potter has the right over the clay since He owns it. 9:21; According to the election of grace. Who is really in control? 11:5; All Israel will be saved. 11:26; God has shut up all men in disobedience that He might have mercy on all. 11:32; From Him and through Him and to Him are all things. All things? 11:36; **I CORINTHIANS**: By His doing you are in Christ. Who is in charge? 1:30; All things originate from God. (i.e., all is of God) 11:12; Spirit distributes as He wills. (Who is in charge?) 12:11; As in Adam all die so also in Christ shall all be made alive (vivified). 15:22; He must reign until He has put all enemies under His feet. 15:25-26; **II CORINTHIANS**: All is of God and God is in Christ reconciling the world to Himself. 5:18-19; **EPHESIANS**: He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world. 1:4; He predestined us to adoption as sons according to His will. 1:5-6; Predestined according to His purpose who works all things after His will. 1:11; Saved by grace not of yourselves, it is a gift of God, not result of works. 2:8-9; Our good works prepared by God beforehand. (Is God omniscient?) 2:10; In accordance with the purpose of the ages. 3:11; Father of all who is over all, through all and in all. 4:6; **PHILIPPIANS**: Every knee will bow and every tongue confess Jesus as Lord. 2:9-11; God works in you both to will and to do His good pleasure. 2:12-13; **COLOSSIANS**: In Him were all things created and He holds all things together. 1:16-18; Through Christ the Father reconciles all unto Himself. 1:19-20; **II THESSALONIANS**: God has chosen you from the beginning. 2:13; **I TIMOTHY**: Paul is the example of salvation (God draws men when He wants) 1:16; Paul delivers them over to Satan so they can be taught not to blaspheme. 1:20; Who will have all men to be saved. (Can God accomplish His will?) 2:4; God is the savior of all men, especially of believers. 4:10; **II TIMOTHY**: Saved us not according to our works but according to His purpose. 1:9; God grants repentance. 2:25; **TITUS**: The grace of God has brought salvation to all men. 2:11; Saved us not by our deeds but according to His mercy. 3:5; **HEBREWS**: God has put all things in subjection, nothing is left. 2:8; All shall know me from the least to the greatest. 8:8-12; **I PETER**: To those who are chosen according to the foreknowledge of God. 1:1-2; Gospel has for this purpose been preached even to those who are dead. 4:5-6; **II PETER**: Make certain His calling and choosing you. 1:10; **I JOHN**: He is the propitiation for our sins: and also for the whole world. 2:2; God knows all things. 3:20; Jesus is the savior of the world (whole world?). 4:14; **REVELATION**: All nations will come and worship before thee when judgments come. 15:4; God has put it in their hearts to execute His purpose 17:17; God releases Satan for a short time at the end of the Millennium. 20:3; I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. 22:13.

Judgment Views Compared

Eternal Torment – (Augustinian Tradition)

1. Admits God is sovereign, all powerful, and all knowing; yet He really can't be due to the greater power of man's free will over God's will.
2. God assumes no legal liability for the fall of man though God placed Adam in the garden with a tempter, a temptation, and created him with the ability to be tempted. It is totally Adam's fault. He and his seed must bear the consequences throughout all eternity. (Just try to imagine "forever.")

3. Adam's sin was imputed to all, resulting in death and hell. Unlike Adam's sin, Christ's death was not imputed to all. The act of the first Adam was far more devastating than the benefits achieved by the last (1 Co.15:45) Adam.

4. Due to Adam's sin, all men die and are born going to hell.

5. Hell is eternal conscious punishment in body, mind and spirit. The Lake of Fire is believed by many to be a literal fire. Hell was an intrusion into God's plan. He did not want to create it but had to due to Satan's rebellion and man's fall.

6. Satan and God have been at war since the rebellion in heaven when a third of the angels rebelled with him. The former good angels became demons. Though Satan has free-will, he cannot do all he wants (see Job). Satan and God will always be enemies since hell is forever and Satan is in hell tormenting the lost.

7. This tradition assumes the eternal torture of the wicked has always been the majority opinion of the church.

8. It believes the Greek *aionios* always means eternal.

9. An eternal hell means sin and evil exist forever. All sinners will exist in torment throughout eternity with Satan and his demons.

10. Christ will not draw all men to Himself as He said in Jn. 12:32. He will fail in being the Savior of the world as proclaimed in Jn. 4:42; 1 Jn 4:14.

11. The "elect" are those chosen by God to be saved from hell. Although they have free-will, God works out the circumstances in their lives so that they are assured salvation. He could have done this for all people but chose not to. (This is a Calvinist / Reformed belief. Most Christians reject it.)

12. There is no possibility of salvation after death.

13. All sin is essentially judged the same: The teenager killed in a wreck, the billions who have not heard the Gospel, and Hitler, all go to hell forever. Although Jesus fulfilled all the Law and is the Kinsman Redeemer, He does not receive all He redeemed. The laws of redemption and the Jubilee (Le. 25) are not fulfilled. The laws of proper restitution for sin (Ex.21 -23) are not followed. If the only sin a person committed was stealing a loaf of bread, he will get the same punishment as Satan and all sinners—hell forever. The law of first fruits is not followed. We as first fruits do not sanctify the whole harvest (only a part gets saved). The Noahic, Abrahamic, and Mosaic Covenants which define the particulars of the Kingdom relative to scope and establishment are not fulfilled.

14. All the saved go to heaven at death and the unsaved to an eternal hell. There is no continuing work of Christ on earth to save all men (He. 13:8). His millennial reign is made up of only the saved, as all the unsaved are in hell. There are no subjects for the now kings and priests to reign over and serve in humility. All who are left on earth are Christians during the Kingdom reign. The result of history is two opposing empires destined for the same duration. Satan wins the largest kingdom with the billions who never heard of Christ (Muslims, Hindus, Chinese, etc). God is ultimately denied His ownership of all as Creator (Ez. 18:4). Every knee does not bow in saving adoration. Jesus fails to bring all enemies into subjection (1Co. 15:25). God does not love His enemies as He told us to. He loves them only until death. The clay defies the Potter. God does not become "all in all" (1Co.15:28). Sin and death are never abolished. Man's free will can and does override God's ultimate plan and desire to save all. All things are not restored (Ac. 3:21). Salvation was an offer, not a fact. The path of history is determined by man. It ends in final chaos with horrendous human suffering existing forever. What happened to Ge. 1:31; Lu. 2:10; Re. 5:13, etc.?

Blessed Hope

1. God is sovereign, all powerful, and all knowing, and has the power to control man and earthly events.

2. Per His liability laws (Ex. 21 and 22; Lev. 25 ; De. 22:8) God assumes legal liability for the fall (though man acted freely) as Creator and owner of all He creates. His obligation to save is imbedded in His law.

3. The righteousness of Christ is imputed to all humanity. All will become righteous as they come to know Him, but each in his own order. See Romans five and I Corinthians 15:23. See “Due Time” chapter 5.

4. Due to Adam’s sin, all do die and are judged (as defined next).

5. “Hell” is an old English word meaning to cover. The KJV translators unfortunately used it when translating *Hades*, *Sheol* and *Gehenna*. *Hades* and *Sheol* actually mean the grave, and *Gehenna* is linked to the garbage dump outside of Jerusalem. The Lake of Fire is a “consuming fire,” the application of God’s divine law and judgments (Dt.33:2,3, Is 33:14, Jer. 23:29, Mt. 3:11, 12, Dan. 7:9, 10 etc.). It is the Refiner’s great fire (Mal. 3:2) and His ministers are a flame of fire (Heb. 1:7). God gave His law in fire (Dt.33:2), the Holy Spirit comes in fire, and Jesus baptizes with fire. This “Fire” tries everyone’s work. Everyone is purified with fire (Mk.9:49 GNT). We “will be saved, yet so as through fire” (1Co. 3:15), not tortured by it for eternity. As Jerome (Appendix IV) says, the “fire” is God’s last medicine for the sinner. Although this fire has eternal results, it does not need to be eternal in its application. It is age-lasting (eonian) and lasts as long as it needs to exist for the purification of sinners. Each person’s sin will be judged fairly by the application of God’s law. The aborted baby, the high school student who died in an accident, the billions who have not heard the Gospel and Hitler will all be judged fairly. They will not all receive the same judgment for sin (eternal torture). The judgment will be pure and righteous. The penalty will fit the crime. Eternal torture for all levels of sin is unlawful judgment and violates not only the laws of God, but His nature and the conscience of man. It is illegal.

6. Satan is ultimately a tool of God. He cannot do all the damage he wants. God has limits on his activities and he needs permission to do his work (Job). Whether he rebelled or was created in his current state by God, he was no surprise. He is used by God to ultimately fulfill His purposes and plan. Satan and God will not always be enemies as the Lake of Fire is not eternal and Satan will one day cease to be.

7. The Blessed Hope was the majority view of the Church for the first 500 years of Church history. Eternal Torment dominated after Augustine.

8. *Aion* and *aionios* have been defined as “age-abiding,” “of God,” and “of the world or age to come.” None of these definitions state, imply, or require infinite duration. See “Aion” chapter 1.

9. Sin and evil do not exist forever, but evidently for the purposes of contrasts, are part of God’s plan during the ages. The fire of hell is the corrective application of God’s laws and judgments. The law is the tutor which leads us to Christ.

10. Jesus Christ will draw all men to Himself (Jn.12:32). He is the Kinsman Redeemer and according to the Laws of Redemption (Lev. 25), has full legal claim to all He has redeemed.

11. The “Elect” are chosen by God to be a blessing to all (Ge. 12:2). If they are found worthy, they will rule and reign with Christ in the age to come (Mt.19:28; Lu.12:43-44, 20:35, 22:28-30, 19:17-19; 1Co.6:2-3, 9:24-27, 16:15-16; Ph.3:12-14; 2Ti. 2:12; Re.1:6, 3:21, 14:4-5, 20:6). See “Purpose of Election” chap.5.

12. Is there a Scripture that says there is no hope for salvation after death? No! Death is no obstacle to God. “He is not the God of the dead, but of the living, for all live to Him” (Lu.

20:38). If all the dead live to Him, then there is hope in death unless there is no hope in God Himself! See p.65.

13. The restoration of all begins with the covenants: the Noahic (Ge. 9) defines its scope; the Abrahamic defines through whom (Gen. 12); the Mosaic establishes the judgments of God upon the disobedient and the New is ratified with the blood of Christ. Our decision to follow Christ determines the timing, not the fact of salvation. The question is when, in what order, and by what judgments we are resurrected. The Biblical law mandates the restoration of all (by laws of redemption and Jubilee in Lev. 25).

14. The continuing work of Christ includes the millennial reign on earth where He rules with His saints to bring all humanity into subjection to Himself. See "Last Things" chap 5. Man's free-will is subordinate to God's sovereignty and ultimate plan. The result of history is one eternal Kingdom with the Father and the Son as gloriously triumphant. Jesus, with His ruling saints, judges the world with righteous judgment. He drags all peoples to Himself. He brings all things into subjection. Every knee ultimately bows in adoration to Christ. In this the earth rejoices. Sin and death are abolished. History culminates in the glorious fulfillment of God becoming all in all. All God's glorious restoration promises from Genesis through Revelation are fulfilled! "All the ends of the world shall...turn to the Lord and all the families of the nations shall worship before You." "To You all flesh will come...You will provide atonement." "He is good! For His mercy endures forever" (Ps. 22:27; 65:2-3; 107:1; etc). Please meditate on Appendix I.

WHAT A GOD!

We are born outside of our will and imputed with the sin of Adam into an evil world ordained by God. Sin, death, evil and Satan are all part of the plan, not surprise intrusions. God gave man authority but never relinquished His Sovereignty. As Creator He is executing His preordained plan on schedule. The experience of evil we all face, is in His wisdom, required to fulfill His ultimate purpose in us. All creation will be brought into subjection to Himself. God authored the tension and takes full responsibility for the result in accordance with His law. Man will be held accountable to the extent of his authority and will be judged accordingly for the evil he caused. In every age, experience has shown that it is not the magnitude of the penalty that deters people from sin, but its reasonableness and certainty of infliction. Justice is served according to God's law (not man's) and the unconditional love of God in the form of mercy ultimately triumphs over judgment.

The Father is very patient with a long term plan that brings infinite glory to His name. Love and forgiveness, with righteous judgment, will bring all creation in subjection to Him. All will bow and confess, "**Jesus is Lord.**" He has paid the full price of redemption and has the legal right to all whom were lost in Adam. The death of Christ is the greatest and most powerful act in all of human history. Jesus will indeed draw all men to Himself in the fullness of time (Jn.12:32); He is indeed the Savior of the world and all will come to know Him from the least to the greatest (Jn.4:42, He. 8:11); but each in his own order (1Co.15:23). All are ultimately made alive in Him (1Co.15:22); Christ finishes and completes His work (Jn. 17:4, 19:30); He restores all things (Acts 3:21); there is no more curse (Re. 22:2); every knee bows to Him (Ph. 2:10-11); creation is delivered from the bondage of corruption (Ro.8:21); every creature joins the song of praise (Re. 5:13); and so comes the end when He delivers up the Kingdom to His Father and God becomes all in all (1 Co. 15:27-28).(5)

HELPFUL RESOURCES

We only know in part (1Co. 13:9-12). I urge you to carefully verify from Scripture all you hear and read (Acts 17:11). Peripheral beliefs among believers in the Blessed Hope are diverse since we come from many different backgrounds. Also, we are less fearful of questioning our traditions as Christ exhorts (Mt. 15:3, 6, 9). Paul commands us to test all things (1Th. 5: 21). See also Lu. 12:57; 2Ti.2:15. With diversity, comes a greater challenge to walk in unity. This is not optional (John 17)! Let's give each other liberty in Christ to believe differently in some areas. No one has cornered the market on truth. Jesus IS the truth. "I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified (1Co. 2:2)." Please... take a moment for this song! hopebeyondhell.net/every-eye-will-see-him-a-worship-song.

The Word Study Concordance and *The Word Study New Testament* by George Wigram and Ralph Winter. Available on Amazon.com.

The Second Death and the Restitution of All Things by Andrew Jukes, (1867). Pastor of St. John's Church and respected author: *The Law of the Offerings, Four Views of Christ, Types in Genesis, The Names of God*. Re-printed by Kregel Publications, Grand Rapids, MI. Jukes was a man of the Word with an exceptional depth of understanding in the Old Testament. This is not a light read, but a thorough exposition of the Blessed Hope. See hopebeyondhell.net/articles/recommended-reading-links.

Christ Triumphant by Thomas Allin D.D., (1890). Allin was a clergyman of the English Episcopal Church and ministered in North London in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. His works include *Race and Religion* and *The Augustinian Revolution in Theology* (1911). This is the most comprehensive book on this topic I have read. It has many times brought me to tears as I realized how loving and awesome God really is. See hopebeyondhell.net/articles/recommended-reading-links.

History of Opinions on the Scriptural Doctrine of Retribution by Dr. Edward Beecher, D.D., (1878). This is a book on Church History which also investigates the Greek word *aion*. Beecher is unbiased and scholarly, without an agenda or denomination to defend. He writes as a sincere seeker of truth. It is readable for an older work. See hopebeyondhell.net/articles/recommended-reading-links.

Absolute Assurance by Charles Slagle. This book greatly spoke to my heart at a pivotal time in my study on this topic. I could truly identify with Charles. See hopebeyondhell.net/articles/recommended-reading-links.

The Inescapable Love of God by Thomas Talbott (2014). Scholarly, yet readable for the layman. It presents a sound Biblical and philosophical exposition for the Blessed Hope. His arguments are compelling. This has strengthened my conviction in this Hope. Available on Amazon.com.

For more: hopebeyondhell.net/articles/recommended-reading-links.

TRILOGY AUTHOR

D. Scott Reichard is a CPA (QPA, QKA) and successful business owner. He and his wife Judy of 35 years live in Illinois. They have four grown children and two grandchildren. Scott attended church faithfully all his life and spent the first twenty-five years in the Church of Christ. In 1978, he became part of the Vineyard movement and helped start one of the largest Vineyard churches in America, serving in a number of leadership capacities. He came into the wonderful message of God's unfailing love in 1999. Seeing the need for a greater sense of community among believers coming into this wonderful Hope, Scott and a friend founded WiseFire.tv. This is an international social community and network for those who embrace God's unfailing love for all. It presently has members in 40 states and 25 countries. Scott also manages a charitable foundation involved in many national and international causes.

I thank Scott for permission to share with you a few choice excerpts from his *Trilogy series*. This series is a three part apologetic for the truth of the Blessed Hope, the result of five years of study and research. They consists of "E. T.," (Eternal Torment), "The Audit," and "The Glorious* Gospel of Jesus Savior of the World."

A note from Scott:

Gerry and I are working together to help promote this book. We invite you to partner with us in prayer, in financial support, in book distribution, in organizing speaking engagements, and in any way the Lord would lead you. It is our goal to bring this book to the attention of the Christian world so that the evidence can be honestly evaluated. Will you join us in this effort? It will take a team effort to bring this awesome GOOD NEWS to the world!

AUTHOR

Gerry Beauchemin has been involved in missions since 1986. He has served as a missionary in Mexico, the Philippines, and Senegal, West Africa, with *Youth With A Mission* (YWAM), *The Luke Society*, and *Philippine Health Care Ministries*. Since 2001, he has directed *Dental Training For Missions*. Gerry trains missionaries in primary dental care. He and his wife, Denise, (of 35 years), have three daughters and six grandchildren.

What qualifies Gerry to write on this theme?

For many years he has intensively reflected on the works of others and studied the Scriptures on this theme. He has found solid Biblical evidence for his conclusion of hope.

He has agonized for most of his life over hell and understands the contradictions it creates within the Christian faith and the Scriptures.

Gerry asked himself and God, “Who am I to write such a book?” Then he recalled 1Co. 1:26-29, “...*God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise...that no flesh should glory in his presence.*” KJV. This, with Mt. 10:27 and 11:25, spurred him on.

“Knowing Gerry as a close friend, I can say that he has wrestled with God and his conscience over the issues presented in this book. *Hope Beyond Hell* is the result of many years of introspection, Bible study, and prayer. Gerry’s enthusiasm for what he has discovered is evident on every page. To read this book is to know the author.”

Gary A. Fenwick, Missionary, Teacher, Mexico

A STORY OF ANGUISH, STRUGGLE, AND HOPE

I would like to introduce you to my dear friends, Gary and Michelle Amirault. They have known the Blessed Hope for many years. They call it the “Victorious Gospel of Jesus Christ!” I remember when living in Africa how their website greatly helped me. Their faith, love, and commitment to Christ inspire me. A couple of months ago I called Gary and stumbled into a very critical and heart wrenching moment in their lives. Michelle and Gary had just received news of their son’s death. I was shocked and lost for words. It was totally unexpected. Gary wept on the phone. All I could do was pray from the depth of my heart. I asked Gary to share his testimony:

“As Gerry shared with you, I have just recently lost my son. The grief of losing a son at only 35 cut much deeper than I ever would have imagined - even knowing he is in a better place. Gerry shared with me an email he received from a mother who had just lost her son to suicide. She was so thankful that she knew the God of the Blessed Hope. Otherwise, she would have tried to drown her agony in drugs and alcohol. I cannot begin to imagine what our grief would be like if we believed Scott was being tormented forever in some hell because he failed God. It would be unbearable. We are also so grateful to know that our deceased parents are secure in Christ’s love. They were not ‘born again’ when they died. Nothing, not even death, can stop Jesus from drawing people to Himself!

“Please take a moment to think about this: What would life be like if you thought your child was in agony and suffering for all eternity with no possible hope of escape? How would you cope? How many millions have known such anguish? According to many churches Scott would be in hell right now. How could we remain sane if we believed this? His death has given us much more compassion for the billions who have lost loved ones.

“I came to understand God’s unfailing love for all in a rather unusual manner. God showed me that Jesus was the Savior of all at the beginning of my conversion. He did so in three ways: 1. He let me walk in perfect love for three days. I couldn’t hate anyone on earth; this was His love, not mine. 2. He showed me a vision of all people dipped into darkness for a season but eventually restored to Him after learning valuable lessons. 3. I had a deep hunger for studying the Bible. “The Holy Spirit illuminated many texts revealing that all humanity would be saved through the Cross of Christ.

It was so easy to share Christ in those days! The fruit and gifts of the Holy Spirit poured out like rivers of living water. Sharing the gospel was as natural as breathing.

“When one pastor learned I was teaching God’s unfailing love for all, he rebuked me. He said God hated sin and those who committed it, for God was Holy; only those born again and living a holy life escaped hell. So I went to several other pastors to get their opinion. They were all in basic agreement. Those not ‘born again’ go to hell forever. Some said it was a place of conscious separation from God and the fire is not literal. Others said the fire was literal and that God does not send people there; they send themselves by rejecting Christ. I was told that to disagree with the majority view would be a sign of a rebellious spirit, so I yielded. Little did I know that in that decision I submitted to the ‘traditions of men which made God’s word of no effect.’ This snuffed out the love, light, and liberty I had in Christ.

“I lived like this for several years until I got fed up with the hypocrisy of it all. I saw atheists as better off than ‘hell fire’ believing Christians. I finally prayed, ‘God, take my life.’ On that same day, He put in my hands a series of booklets by J. Preston Eby. Eby explained how hell crept into the church and Bible translations. He quoted early church fathers who taught the salvation of all and showed how the mistranslation of a few Hebrew and Greek words distorted God’s character and plan to redeem the world. I soon found Bible translations

that did not have the word 'hell' in them. I also found reference works confirming that the original languages of the Bible did not contain the concept of everlasting punishment. During that time, the Holy Spirit reminded me how He had showed me this at the very beginning.

“How powerful and blinding are man’s traditions which Jesus warned about. They make the word of God of no effect (Matt. 15:6-9). I was living proof! It has taken me many years to break off tradition’s chains. I am not completely free yet, but the light of the Victorious Gospel of Jesus Christ is shining brighter in my heart.

“Paul wrote: ‘What if some [like my parents] did not believe and were without faith? Does their lack of faith and their faithlessness nullify and make ineffective and void the faithfulness of God and His fidelity to His Word? By no means!’ (Ro. 3:3, 4, Amplified). God is faithful towards everyone, including His faithless chosen and elect who do not believe His redemptive promises for all people (such as their enemies).

“Thank you, Father, for giving me the assurance that my parents will be drawn to Jesus – that Scott is now at rest with You, and I can once again give hope to every person I meet. Jesus is indeed the Savior of all humanity! That’s news good enough to tell everyone!” – Gary Amirault.

Note:

Gary’s website, Tentmaker.org, provides numerous reference works in support of the Blessed Hope.

HEART-TO-HEART: NURTURING HOPE

Jesus said *wherever* two or three come together in His name, He's right there with us (Mt.18:20); that includes the phone. So come, visit with us in His name—voice to voice, heart to heart. Let's talk about the peace and joy we've found in Jesus, encourage each other in our common hope, and pray together... So grab a coffee, tea or whatever... Call or text us toll free: **1-800 254-1334**

HopeforAllFellowship.com

1-800 254-1334

NEW BOOK & VIDEO SERIES SHARE OUR HOPE FOR ALL

Jesus said, "What I whisper in your ears, proclaim from the housetops!" (Mt. 10:27 TLB) That means He really wants us to tell others about our hope. The world is full of hurting people... Who doesn't long for hope? Here's some free tools to help you share it:

"Hope for All: Ten Reasons God's Love Prevails"

Shorter & simpler than "Hope Beyond Hell."

Anchors our faith in hope. HopeforAll.info/new-book

"Hope for All..." Abridged Booklets (only 10 pages)

Brief introductory booklet. HopeforAll.info/booklet

"Hope for All..." Video / DVD Series (free online)

Author's heartfelt and concise presentation of our Hope.

Share it on Facebook, Twitter... HopeforAll.info/video-series

"Hope Beyond Hell" Abridged & Unabridged

HopeBeyondHell.net/order-books

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