

The key to life: Understanding the “new person” we all are in Jesus



A transcript of Sunday broadcasts from
Conversations in Christ
on KNCO during July 2018

C Clifton Jones
Grass Valley, CA
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About the front cover

Like most people, I have spent most of my life trying to understand what life is all about and how to live it successfully and enjoyably. Having been raised in a Christian home, greatly influenced by my parents and my childhood pastor (both of which, I am eternally grateful), and pursuing formal and informal study for the past fifty years ... it has been only recently (within the past five years) that I have discovered the Key to life!

I found that this "key" was not in my good upbringing, or in any church I have attended (good and helpful as they have all been), nor was it in seminary training, theology, books, ideas, or even trusted mentors. The key to life is in a person - Jesus, who was the God of creation who came and joined the human race in order to save it! Even Jesus said, "You look for salvation in sacred writings, but it is only found in me." And success (true success), peace, joy, and satisfaction are all experienced by living in "the new person we all are in Jesus." Jesus came with the sole purpose of saving humanity from the ruin of sin. And this He did - fully and completely. This is why He is called "Savior of the world" ... simply because He saved it!

Once I learned that my God, my Creator, my Lord and Savior could be fully trusted as the One who loves and saves his world by his grace alone, and that He died **for** me, **with** me, and even "as" me in order to make me a new person in him ... this is when I became free. Living in the new person I am in Jesus gives me freedom, joy, and peace, without fear whatsoever, knowing that all I am is completely because of Him!

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Introduction

These six radio broadcasts of *Conversations in Christ* are just three old guys discussing the very important topic of “the new person we all are in Jesus.” We did not plan what to say, used no notes, and had no agenda – except to answer an initial question and go wherever it led us. These broadcasts can be heard or downloaded from the CinC website at:

<http://conversationsinchrist.com//>

Needless to say, three old guys with all our different experiences and beliefs do not always agree. But we believe this to be healthy and our goal is not agreement, but love! Our love for each other (and for all people, no matter how much they disagree) is our focus. We choose to rise up above mere “doctrinal differences” and bask together in that “higher law of love” in the Spirit of God!

So please keep several things in mind as you read (or listen to the audio):

1. The views of one guy does not necessarily reflect the views of the other two guys. We hold a great deal in common (especially in the most important things about who God is and what grace is all about) but we each have opinions, too. However, these opinions are fully respected – mutually.
2. None of us possess any “ecclesiastical authority” whatsoever. We not only *can* be wrong, we in fact *are* wrong at times. We are painfully aware of this, but it is a good reminder that we are but *mere mortals* and that “truth” ultimately resides with God alone.
3. We do, however, each one of us, try to be as accurate, honest, and true to the Bible as we can possibly be. In this, we (no doubt) fail to some degree. But, such failure is not due to a lack of effort on our part, nor is it a lack of desire to serve God (and others) humbly and faithfully.
4. Therefore, it is *your* job to “test everything carefully” (as Paul exhorts us to do), pray, and seek God through His Spirit to determine what to believe. We are confident that God will not fail you, even when your honest seeking results in disagreement with us! Your relationship with God is a very sacred and personal thing. We encourage you to cultivate it fully in the way that only you can as a unique and special creation. In other words ... we trust you alone with God!
5. And so, let this booklet be simply a source of information, a starting point for your own study and thinking, and (perhaps) something that will stimulate good discussion

on a very important subject with many other people.

All three of us were very surprised after we had completed these six broadcasts. That they turned out as well as they did. Each one of us (independently) discovered that reading the transcript was a very different experience from listening to the audio broadcasts. We learned different things from each form of media (written and spoken). As a result, I strongly suggest that you take in both formats. Listening *and* reading yields better understanding and insight to “the new person you are in Jesus” and how to live in greater joy and peace. So please consider listening to the audio and then carefully reading the transcript. Or, perhaps, reversing the order might be best for you.

But I must warn you ... many questions will arise simply because our presentation is incomplete. Everything that needed to be said, was not! Also, a great deal of related and foundational information is missing. As a result, I have included a number of supplementary sections that will provide what is missing in the broadcast. My hope is that this will help answer many questions that you may have. (See *Supplementary Information* in the Contents for a complete list of topics.)

It is my sincere hope that your understanding of the *new person* that you are in Jesus, will encourage you beyond measure. And, it is hoped that your faith in God, who loves you so much, will greatly increase bringing joy and peace that truly passes understanding!

One last thing I ask. As I write this section of this booklet, I am also watching the Bret Kavanaugh / Dr. Christine Ford hearing before the US Senate (9-27-2018). In watching I am struck by two things: (1) The *truth* is often very hard to determine even when multiple credible views and testimonies are provided. There are always two sides to every issue, situation or belief. (2) The best method of attempting to determine the truth is to “look at everything carefully” (as the Apostle Paul exhorts us to do) and try to be as fair-minded and objective as possible. I have endeavored to do this in this booklet.

Transcribed Broadcasts

#1. The Significance of the Two Adams (July 8, 2018)

ANNOUNCER: Good morning and welcome to Conversations in Christ, with Bill Rose and Mike Rough. We invite you to sit back, open your Bible and engage in a dialogue as we learn more about the incredible gift of grace that God has given all of us. Now let's reason together in love.

MIKE: Morning Bill.

BILL: Good Morning Mike.

MIKE: Good morning Denny.

DENNY (sound engineer): Good morning pop.

MIKE: And good morning to our guest conversationalist, Carl Jones.

CARL: Hey, good morning!

BILL: Maybe we should all give him a standing ovation!

CARL: Ha! I noticed you're staying seated!

BILL: Yes. Ha!

MIKE: Well, we are very happy to have Carl with us, and a little later on we will give him an opportunity to give a little “commercial” because Carl has written a couple books that Bill and I are very proud to endorse. But we will get to that a little bit later.

So to get started this morning, Bill is going to introduce a question that somebody asked him – a question they wanted to hear us talk about on the radio program. So Bill, tell us what that's about.

BILL: Yeah. You know, the other day I was just sitting around over lunch with another realtor who had been listening to the show and heard us encourage questions to come from the audience. Every week last month we invited people to ask us some questions. Her question was, “What's the significance between the *first Adam* and the *second Adam*?” I thought this was a great question because so much of everything we believe falls into that. I mean, whether you're looking at God's grace or universal salvation, you can just see so

many different topics spinning out of that. So, what we wanted to do was address this person's question, take some time go through some Scripture, express some thoughts, and get down to the root of the importance of this idea of the *first* Adam versus the *second*. So, who wants to get us started ... Mike?

MIKE: Yeah, I have been very eager to discuss this question ever since you told me about it because I think it's a really great question and one that not too many people really ever talk about and one that not many people really understand.

So first of all, let me say that we start (of course) with Adam in Genesis, but the book of Genesis starts out with “In the beginning, God” And this is where far too many people fail to begin their study because they really don't begin their theology with God! Too often people's theology begins with *man* instead. But it is God who has done everything in relation to all humanity, in just two men: the “first Adam” is the Adam created in the garden, and the “second Adam” is Jesus. The first Adam fell into sin, and we call it the “fall of Adam” or sometimes “the fall of man”, and Adam ate of the “tree of the knowledge of good and evil” and became a fallen thinker. Okay?

After this fall, Adam began to think wrongly just as the Bible tells us “as a man thinks in his heart, so is he.” And so Adam began thinking the wrong way even after God taught him so much directly in the garden – and for who knows how long. But when Adam fell, all mankind as a race of people also fell with him. God included all of mankind into Adam because Adam was the “father” of all men (all men and women!). By the way, folks, ladies ... we're not taking you out of this. We consider men and women equal. But Adam was the first person (or first man) of all mankind. So when we're dealing with Adam, we're really dealing with the whole human race, male and female!

The thing about this that we need to understand is that God considered all humanity lost in Adam. All humanity fell when Adam, the first person, did. Now understand that God never lost us, we lost our way. God knew us, had a plan, and will never forsake us as those made in his own likeness. Okay? So God considered all mankind, in Adam, as fallen persons. He did this so that He could also consider all mankind in the second Adam (Jesus) to be saved from that fall. So, the first Adam got us lost and the second Adam got us found (and made us right with God). Okay?

We have some Scripture for this in Romans 5. It says, “Nevertheless, death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those who had not sinned in the same way as Adam (who is a symbol of Jesus who came later).” Also, 1 Corinthians 15 (and verse 45) says, “In Adam, all die. But in Christ all shall be made alive.” Now, there are many people who take the first “all” (in Adam) to mean something different from the second “all” (in Christ). They claim that “all that are in Christ” are not the same as “all that are in Adam”! How could they not be the same?

Let me read that again. “As in Adam, all die. Even so in Christ all shall be made alive.” And so this is one of the verses that tells us what happened. All people who were lost in the first Adam will be made alive because of second Adam, Jesus. It goes on and also says, “The first Adam was made a living soul, but the second Adam was made a life-giving spirit.” Okay? And so, the first Adam was not the same as the second one. And the second Adam is greater than the first one (Jesus who accomplished something much greater than Adam because He made everyone whole!).

So that is just a quick summary of the difference between the first and second Adam. But we also need to understand from this that God has dealt with the whole human race in these two Adams. What happened to the first Adam happened to all of us, and what happened to the second Adam (which was Jesus) happened to all of us as well. And this is exclusive of anything that we believe, think or say. This all happened by God's grace. God let the first Adam fall into wrong thinking, but then put us all back into right thinking through Jesus, the second Adam!

And then there is the verse in 1John 4 that says, “As Jesus is ... so are we!” Okay? So, you guys jump in here if you want.

BILL: I was going to ask Carl, since we brought him in as a guest, and put him on the spot. So when it says that “in Adam all died”, what do you think is the significance of that death? What is he really talking about here?

CARL: We're in Romans chapter five, Right?

BILL: Yeah. So how would you describe that? If that was our inheritance, once Adam fell ... how would you define death?

CARL: Well, the significance is that there is a contrast, or perhaps a comparison, between what Adam did for humanity and what Jesus did. It's interesting how it is worded in Romans chapter 5. In verse 18, for example, it says, “*As through* the one sin (of Adam) there resulted condemnation to all humanity, *even so* through one act of righteousness (of Jesus) there resulted justification of life to all humanity”. This “as ... even so...” comparison implies that it is the same group of people (all humanity) that are affected. The most basic understanding of the word “all” is *everyone*, and like Mike said, “all” means the same thing in both places that are compared (Adam vs. Jesus). Now, it is true that the word *all* can mean different things at different times, but you need a good reason, especially with that kind of wording here (where he says *as* something happened in Adam *even so* something else happened in Jesus) to make “all” not mean everyone!

Another thing that is very interesting is that what Jesus did for all humanity goes far beyond just this passage in Romans. Although Romans 5 is a great section of Scripture that tells how God worked in all humanity, everything that is revealed about “God becoming

human” in the person of Jesus (the *incarnation*) explains this even more. When you look at the Early Christian Writers, they were really big on the incarnation. This is where “Jesus becoming human” gets tied together with “salvation” convincingly. When Jesus came to this earth, that is when *God* came to this earth in the person of Jesus, and He represented all humanity. He had to represent everyone because He actually became a human being, just like us! He didn't just show up and walk around and say, “Here I am, look at me.” No, He came through the “birth canal” like everybody else. And so, He actually joined humanity. This is significant, and the Early Christians understood this. If you look at the writings of Athanasius, for example, the incarnation was a central part of salvation. Jesus wasn't just born so that He could go on and save people. His being born as a human being was an integral part of salvation, because He joined humanity.

And by joining humanity He was saying, “What happens to you, I'm going to let happen to me also. You're on your way to death, and I'm going to die *with* you and *for* you -- and even *as* you – in your place.” But here's the really good news. What happened to Jesus will also happen to us, because He joined us and became indelibly linked with us as humans -- just like Adam was with us. So, what happened to Christ happened to us. When He rose from the dead, so did we! Now, actually, his birth, death, and resurrection work together. These three things were one saving act – working together. They're all very important. So, when He rose from the dead, we all rose from the dead with him -- all of humanity -- and He “became sin” for us, for the whole human race. Romans 6 makes this clear (hot on the heels of Romans 5!).

Now, how we respond to such good news ... well, that's another discussion. But the big question is, “What's the meaning of faith?” Is faith something we do to merit favor with God, or is faith something we do in *response* to what God has already done for us, in our place, by grace alone? These are two very different views! One view is grace, the other is “works” (of some kind). I like tying the incarnation (God becoming human) in with this whole concept of being “in Adam” and “in Christ”. It helps to show what salvation is really all about.

BILL: Yeah. And I think that's probably the missing link. And as we grow in our faith, we sometimes don't ponder enough how we were initially thrown into Adam and how we inherited his fallen nature and his death! I interpret that death as, at least, physical death since God gives us “time limits” for how long we can sin (so to speak). But also, by God's grace, He places us into the second Adam (Jesus) and with that placement we are given, not just a “new birth”, but also a new realization of what it is to “live in faith.” And I believe it's not *our* faith that creates more belief, but God's gift of faith that creates life in us so that we *can* believe at all! So, faith becomes a gift and it's not something that we would logically figure out and achieve, or even accept. God comes along and hands it off to us as a gift, and yes, we're going to receive it no matter what.

But the nice thing about it is that when this becomes a reality, it becomes (in one sense) a “born again” experience – wouldn’t you say?

MIKE: Yeah!

BILL: The born again experience is not, “I’ve now become a Christian”, but more of a, “I’ve come to realize how important this life of faith is, and how regenerated I am because I am now totally connected with the birth, life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, in all aspects.”

MIKE: And, you know, that’s why it is important, and why this person asked this question: “What’s the significance of these two Adams?” Well, what we need to understand is that most Christians believe that everybody was lost in Adam, but how few believe that they were also all found in Jesus! They believe all to be in Adam, but then salvation becomes a *personal* thing, where God saves people one at a time, as they believe. This is so incorrect and wrong because you can’t find in the Bible that Jesus is called a “personal savior.” Instead, He is called “Savior of the world.”

Now also many people say, “Oh, you’ve got to make Jesus Lord and Savior of your life.” No, God made you a *new creation* in Christ Jesus. And so, this is what we need to understand. What happened to Adam happened to us, and what happened to Jesus (the second Adam) also happened to us! And so when Jesus died, we died. And when He was raised, we were raised. When He was seated with the Heavenly Father, we were also seated. The Bible tells us this in Ephesians 2. So, we don’t get saved one-at-a-time. Instead, all mankind was saved in Jesus on the cross 2000 years ago? Okay.

But it was also pre-determined that we would all be saved before the foundation of the world. Right? We know this. We were predestined to be “adopted as sons”, and so everybody was adopted in Jesus on the cross. It is so important that we understand this. But it’s a big problem in Christianity today – something that is not understood. It’s not understood and not accepted because people have been taught for so long that salvation is a “personal salvation”, based on our act of believing rather than on the faith (and faithfulness) of Jesus, along with the Heavenly Father in redeeming all of mankind from the death that the first Adam took us into.

CARL: Yes. And it’s not that there is *no* personal aspect of it, whatsoever!

MIKE: That’s correct!

CARL: It *becomes* very personal.

MIKE: Right!

CARL: And we experience it when we exercise our faith and respond to what God has *already* done for us by grace. It absolutely becomes personal! But only then, not in the actual salvation act which was performed by Jesus alone *for* us. And people mistakenly think that when they believed, when it *became* personal, that's when they moved into "favor with God." But that's just not true. We were already in favor with God because of grace. Grace means "un-merited favor"! So when we believe, there is no merit involved on our part. But ... there is gaining! We do gain a new level of fellowship with God that we didn't have before – even though we already had a relationship with God. He was related to us by becoming human. He made sure of this, and that's the beautiful thing about it!

So it *becomes* personal, and people mistake that sense of "personal-ness" as an act of salvation. But such a conclusion makes salvation very tenuous. Because, who knows, if you quit believing do you lose your salvation? Why not? It was *your* act of faith that secured your salvation, so why wouldn't *your* unbelief also relinquish it? And there are many Christians who believe this to be the case! But, when salvation depends *completely* on God, by His grace alone and not of ourselves in any way, then it's a done deal! When Christ said, "It is finished" ... it was indeed finished! There was nothing left to do, and nothing left to add to it ... except for us to believe, experience it, enjoy it, and grow in him. All these things are good things, but none of them *earn* anything with God! This is the key point.

BILL: Yeah, and I think the fallacy in that kind of thinking about "personal salvation" is in what is often presented in some churches when they say, "You need to make a choice, and if you don't you are going to burn in hell and live in punishment forever." And so *free choice* for many Christians is extremely important, and the real conclusion for them is that God will never violate free choice. But when we see what is written in Romans 5, it is clear that all people were placed into Adam. God did not come along and say, "Hey, what do you guys think? How would you like to inherit Adam? I'm going to give you a choice." Instead, there was no free choice made there by us. And so, as a result, God made the decision for us because He had a better plan. He took the decision making process out of our hands because his plan of salvation was far more perfect and complete. And since it was perfect and complete He also decides to place every person, without them having a choice in the matter, into His Son Jesus Christ.

That act of going to the cross by Jesus (just as Carl pointed out), was perfect and allowed Jesus to say with authority and confidence, "It is finished!" Therefore, what Jesus did was to make all humanity saved. I know that's a struggle for so many people. And it was a barrier for me in my understanding of universal salvation, because it violated my sense of free choice, thinking I was pretty good at choosing, and that God was going to take free choice away from me. But in reality, this is exactly what He did! And He did so because I could never match his brilliance or his intellect, nor could I ever understand why He wanted to do things the way He did. I had this conversation over lunch one day with a friend, and we concluded that the older we get, the more we realized what "little kids" we

really are (compared to God) with such a lack of understanding. And so since God sees that weakness in humanity He says, “That's fine. You know, I'm just going to make that decision for you, one that remains secure and permanent for everyone.”

MIKE: Yeah. And of course, like you said, we are little kids, which is what Jesus said, that we must become like a little child to participate in the kingdom of God! So, we all need to understand that we *are* little children, and to go ahead and *be* little children where God is concerned. But we need to be adults (mature) in our relationship with each other. In terms of our relationship with the Father and the Son and Holy Spirit, we are little children. We don't really know much (compared to them), and so we can just frolic around in our life with the Trinity, enjoying the kingdom that we're in, and participating in it right along with each other. This is what “church” really is. It's not a building or a place where we go, but it's people together sharing and fellowshiping with each other. And that's what participating in the kingdom is all about! Carl, were you going to say something here?

BILL: I'd like to jump in here and comment on this fellowship aspect. I think it's very important. When we talk about fellowship and having a common mind within denominational ranks, there is also a conflict because we tend to bundle up into different groups and resist getting together and just talk about ideas like these. And even when we do, we don't ever seem to just sit down and freely throw out ideas and say, “What do you think?”, and let the other person come back and say, “Well, this is what I think ... what about you?” Instead, we are so quick to try to defend our position!

MIKE: I'm going to have to cut you off there, because I want to give to Carl just about a minute and a half to make his commercial. Carl, tell us about your book.

CARL: OK, this is *your* idea, but I'm happy to do it. I have a couple of booklets I've put together. I call them “booklets” because it seems more appropriate than calling them books. You can get them off my website at: godislovefellowship.com. Maybe Denny will put links to them on the CinC website.

One booklet covers the four views of eternal destiny. I tried to be very fair-minded, gracious, and objective in how I present these views. But also in this booklet, I take off my “teacher hat” and put on my “opinion hat” and present the view that makes the most sense to me. The booklet has been well received, and I have received a lot of good feedback on it.

The other booklet is a collection of quotes from Early Christians who lived and wrote before Augustine and the rise of the Roman Catholic Church. These early believers had a marvelous and wonderful view of how God would eventually restore everything. This is something that a lot of people don't know about, and something I wasn't taught at church or even in Seminary! And so, I published this booklet of quotes (about 150, by 18 writers, between 100 and 400 AD). And, like the other booklet, I tried to be very fair-minded,

accurate, and objective. In fact, I included a whole chapter of quotes from writers who held other views (like eternal punishment).

So I think I have produced a couple of pretty good booklets that should be encouraging and informative. This is my only goal.

MIKE: Both books are very objective, folks, and are not tilted in one way or the other.

CARL: Well ... they're tilted a little one way more than the other! Ha! But I've tried to be fair-minded.

MIKE: But you expressed it as your opinion.

CARL: I try to be respectful of other people's ideas and opinions, just as I want them to do with me ... and have a conversation. And this is what this radio show is all about -- a conversation that's ruled by our love for each other.

MIKE: So, anyway, you can download these booklets from: *godislovefellowship.com*.

CARL: Yes, and go to the *Resources* page, and they're right there.

MIKE: And if you can't download them, just write to us, or call us, or go to our webpage at: *conversationsinchrist.org*.

DENNY (Sound engineer): Time to say goodbye, guys.

MIKE: Okay. We'll talk more about this next time.

ANNOUNCER: Thank you for listening to *Conversations in Christ*. Our prayer is that today's program has opened your heart and mind to a greater understanding and curiosity about the gift of grace that God has given to each of us, through his Son, Jesus Christ. If you have any questions or comments about today's program, feel free to send an email to: *info@conversationsinchrist.org*, or you can send a note to: Conversations in Christ, PO Box 2677, Grass Valley, California, 95945.

Remember, you have been blessed with every spiritual blessing so that you may believe and begin to experience the very life of God in you. Tune in again next week for Conversations in Christ.

#2. The Good News: Announcing Salvation by Grace (July 15, 2018)

ANNOUNCER: Good morning and welcome to Conversations in Christ, with Bill Rose and Mike Rough. We invite you to sit back, open your Bible and engage in a dialogue as we learn more about the incredible gift of grace that God has given all of us. Now let's reason together in love.

MIKE: Good morning, Billy ... and Denny!

BILL: Good morning,

DENNY: "Daddy" ... Good morning!

MIKE: And good morning to our guest conversationalist from last week ... Carl Jones.

CARL: Hey guys. Thanks for letting me come back. I guess I didn't mess up too much.

BILL: I guess we didn't drive you out either. We tried to! Ha!

MIKE: Yeah. Well, you know, Carl and I have had lots of discussions over several years, and some of them have been pretty lively! I actually can't wait until he and I have a disagreement right here on his radio program and see how it goes. Ha!

CARL: It'll go well!

MIKE: Oh, I know. Yep. We've always disagreed in love, when we have disagreed. We don't disagree much, but we do occasionally.

CARL: Yes! And that's what I love about this show. I've listened from the beginning, way back in the days with George, and have always enjoyed it. Now I didn't listen every week because I see you guys in the coffee shop every week! Ha! But I did listen all last month and so I'm all caught up, and we're ready to go.

MIKE: Great. All right. Well, we have a good time here folks, and we hope you do too when you listen! So, Billy, what do you want to start us off with today -- a little bit from last week, right?

BILL: Yes, we picked up on a question that a friend of mine had, in terms of what was the significance of the "first Adam" and the "second Adam." Last week we talked about how important it was for God to place us into that "first Adam" (the Adam in the Garden of Eden), so that our physical life would be cut short, since we fell into sin and needed a radical change. And such a change was when we were placed into the "second Adam" (Jesus), and therefore we were also placed into his life where everything changes! That

change for us really took place on the cross, didn't it? And all of humanity then gets placed into every aspect of who Jesus Christ is as a savior.

So what I want to do is to talk about what did, in fact, come out of our being placed in Jesus Christ. Last week we looked at some pretty good verses that looked directly at how we are a “new creation.” When we were in Adam (the first Adam), we were in a state of being “in the old man” (or the “old person”), right? But when Jesus died on the cross, every single person was given this tremendous gift of being transformed into a “new creation” in Him!

MIKE: Can I interrupt for a second? I wanted to share with your friend, and not just your friend but everybody out there listening, that her question about the two Adams is one of the most significant topics in the Bible. This is because it pertains to everyone. And when we understand this ... we understand a great deal and are on our way to understanding what salvation by God's grace alone really means! We are also on our way to maturity in the Christian faith.

BILL: Yeah, I agree. And one of the verses that elaborates on this concept is in Ephesians 4, where Paul tells us to put on the “new person”, which was created according to God to make us perfect and right in his eyes. This “new person” is something meant to be “put on” (metaphorically). And what does “put on” imply in your mind?

MIKE: Clothing.

BILL: Yes, and it's not something that just becomes your “born again experience”, but it's an act by which you now recognize what's been accomplished in your life, and that “putting on” that we do in response to what Jesus already did is us saying, “Okay, I'm now going to experience what you've created through Jesus in my life.” And then Paul continues and says that this new life we put on is something created by God in true “righteousness and holiness” (right-standing and perfection in His eyes). And so this “new creation” in us by the work of Jesus has been given to every single human being. In God's mind He does not see us in our fallen human state, but instead sees the finished, completed work that He's done in us through Jesus. So, He has a complete picture in His mind when He looks at every single one of his creatures. Wouldn't you say?

MIKE: Yes, He sees us, and He sees us full and complete – in Jesus. And so, in relation to this “putting on the new person”, we do not need to be *conformed* to this foolish world but instead to be *transformed* by the renewing of our minds (as Paul wrote in Romans 12). And this renewing really brings our thinking into conformity with who we already are in that new creation we have in Jesus. We are not going to be “newly created” somewhere in the future or in heaven. We are already a new creation, in Jesus! We became a new creation when Jesus Christ became a new creation after his death on the cross. And so,

when He died, we died. And when He rose, we rose from death. And when He rose, He rose to a new life that never before existed. So did we! Okay?

Jesus did not come back from the dead into the same life that He had before He died. He came back into a new life, a new creation. And we were newly created in him as well. So what happened to Jesus happened to us. Okay? That's what we kept saying last week – that what happened to the first Adam happened to us, and what happened to the second Adam (Jesus) also happened to us ... as a human race. And this is the simplicity of what God has done for us. It was complicated for God because He had much to do for us. In fact the trinity (Father, Son, and Spirit together) had great things to do for us! But we were all just along for the ride! It was God's work for us as a free gift by his grace alone. And now we have the privilege of discovering who we already are in this "new creation" -- what we are in Jesus. So, Paul tells us to put on this "new creation" that we already are. In other words, we've got to start thinking in terms of who we are, and who we have been made to be in Jesus Christ.

Paul also wrote that if we walk in the power of the spirit, we won't walk in the "flesh" – that is, in the old person that was crucified in Christ. And so walking in the power of the spirit is putting on this new creation and thinking with the mind of Christ, which we now have. And that's what we do. Right? Well, that's what we *should* be doing, if we want to really enjoy the life that we now have. We certainly have been given all of the power and right to do so! But everyone does not enjoy the life that they now have in Jesus as the second and final Adam. Everyone gained new life in Jesus when He gained new life in his resurrection. This was his life-giving action as the second Adam for all humanity. And so, we all gained God's righteousness and new life. Those verses in Romans 5 that we went over last week are clear proof of this. So everybody has it, but not everyone knows it, and everyone does not experience it because they don't know about it ... yet! And this is what the good news is all about – announcing this good news of Jesus, the second and final Adam, saving his world that He so dearly loves. He is not called "Savior of the World" without good reason!

And this is why Bill and I do this radio program, and why Carl teaches on Sunday at *God is love Fellowship*. We want to tell people, "Hey, you are a new creation. God loves you. God recreated you into a new person. It is a beautiful thing He has done for us completely by his grace and not by any work whatsoever on our part. You're fabulous. You're beautiful. You're completed in him." Colossians tells us this – that we are complete in Jesus and we're just like Him. "As Jesus is in this world ... so are we." Okay? This, to me, is exciting news. Again, that's why we're here doing what we do.

CARL: And Bill gets a captive audience in his car, with the clients he takes out for his real estate business. So he's really got more going on than we do.

BILL: Let me jump in. It's the best "church service" you'll ever have.

CARL: I bet it is!

BILL: And I let them do all the talking!

CARL: That's terrific.

So this, this “new person” vs. “old person”, as I call it because the word “man” in old vs. new man, just means mankind. It's not gender oriented. And so we all have the “new person” (new man), and the old person (old man). We were an old person in Adam ... we were born with that! But we *became* a new person in Christ. Everybody did! But a lot of people, as you said Mike, don't experience it. They don't know about it. They're ignorant of it. The new person that they are is there, but it lays dormant within them. They are already a new person in Christ because of what Jesus did by his *grace*! And that salvation is by God alone. It's something He does on our behalf, for us. It has nothing to do with anything we do. In fact, it was done before all of us were even born -- so that now this new person that we are can come alive when we exercise faith, when we hear the good news announced to us. The good news is not an “offer” -- that if you do something, then God will do something. It is an *announcement* of what God has already done for us completely by his grace in Jesus. If you go through the New Testament book of Acts, and in fact the whole New Testament, you'll find that the good news is an announcement that Jesus is the Messiah, that He is the Son of God, and that He rose from the dead. Go look! Even Paul on Mars Hill gave that announcement and walked away. He never gave an altar call because he was *announcing* the “good news” of who Jesus is and what God had done by rising him from the dead. As a result of Paul's sermon, it said that “some believed.” But that belief did not earn any favor with God, because all favor with God toward us is by grace. This is what “grace” means ... unmerited favor! Now those who believed became enlightened in their knowledge, and they begin to live as the “new person” that they already were in Jesus at the cross, but then they started following Jesus. But we, so often today, want to turn our “act of faith” into an “act of salvation” for us. And, by the way, there is one aspect of “salvation” in our act of faith -- we become less entangled in our sin as our faith grows. This is because the word salvation just means “deliverance.” There are many aspects of “salvation” in the New Testament. But the real “big dog” of salvation is what Jesus did on the cross for us, by grace, which made us all new creations in Him. This saving act by Jesus delivered us from sin, because Jesus took away all sin from humanity and put it on himself on the cross. This is a salvation (deliverance) we could never ever do for ourselves!

Once we hear this good news announcement of what Jesus already did for us (and for all humanity) on the cross, we then think about it, know about it, consider it, believe it, and begin acting on it. Now we can choose. If we consider what Paul wrote in Romans 6, that we can now choose -- are we going to walk in the spirit? Are we going to consider ourselves dead to sin because we died with Jesus (as the second and final Adam)? We have all that privilege now in Jesus -- everyone and anyone does. But many do not realize

that they have this privilege in Jesus, obviously. We have a world full of evidence of such ignorance in people. But this is what the good news is all about – telling people (announcing to them) who they *already* are in Jesus, so they can hear about it, believe it, turn from sin that is destroying them, and turn to God who loves them and will never forsake them!

Just one other thing from last week. We ended with the idea that we don't make a choice, because God saved us apart from any decision we made (which is true). But this can imply that our choosing does not matter at all. And this is not true. Our choosing matters ... but not in any way of earning favor with God as far as salvation goes. So sometimes people will say, "You guys claim it doesn't matter if people believe or not!" Oh yes, it very much matters if we believe or not. You bet it does. It affects everything in our life. But such belief doesn't earn any favor with God. When we believe, it does not change God's disposition toward us! That was taken care of completely on the cross, when "God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself." But when we believe, it sure as heck changes *our* disposition toward God! And this is why believing matters... it changes us, not God.

This is so good to know, because that's the "good news" -- that God saved us by His grace, completely and totally, and not by any kind of work on our part whatsoever. And what does Paul say at the end of Romans 3? We *cannot* boast --not that we *should not* boast, or it is not proper for us to do so. We have no basis for bragging about anything, because salvation is completely done by God for us! And that is so good to know! Talk about confidence! There is no aspect of, "Oh, did I believe enough?" or, "What happens if I quit believing, what happens to mentally challenged kids, or what happens to people who never hear the good news?" That's all taken care of in the finished work of Jesus.

BILL: And that's why Paul said that he no longer looked at any person according to the flesh (the old person), right?

CARL: Yeah. And Paul was well aware that we all still have the "old person" within us (even though we *are* a "new person" in Jesus) when he wrote in Romans 7 that he struggled with these two "persons" within him. He said, "I want to do what's right, but I don't. And I don't want to do what is wrong, but I do." He had this "old person vs. new person" thing going on in him ... as we all do. He lived in it, but he also knew where the victory was. The victory had already been won in Jesus, on the cross, and the old person will be annihilated. Only his new person will live forever.

This is why judgment and condemnation in the Bible are not bad things. We've cast them as horrible, terrible things that God is doing. And to us as fallen creatures, they look like they are! But actually, they are ultimately good things that God is doing. That is because everything God does is good and has a good purpose, no matter how severe it may be. God is getting rid of that old person in us. He has judged it as worthless and condemned it to be done away, along with all sin. The old person that we are will eventually be gone for

eternity. And what's left is the new person in Jesus that we are now and will be forever. All humanity was represented by Jesus as the “second Adam” and saved everyone by taking away the sin (singular, not sins) of the whole world. Now that is a real savior! That is success. We know God wants everyone to be saved. That's his goal. And he doesn't fail because love *cannot* fail. We know that from 1 Corinthians 13, don't we?

BILL: And that's the good news. The good news is, “I'm not going to leave you, or anybody else, as an unfinished product.

CARL: Right!

BILL: And he is so intimately involved in every single person's life that he knows exactly what kind of judgment and what aspect of condemnation needs to take place to correct, restore, and save that person. God tailor-makes his salvation for each person. It is extremely personal, restorative, and renewing.

CARL: And that's real key. God's purpose in punishment, condemnation, judgment, and all that “severe stuff”, is ... correction! It's about improvement, restoration, redeeming, rescuing and healing. How can we ever expect anything less from the God who is what love is? The Early Christians (before 500 AD) wrote about this a great deal. They wrote how therapeutic God is and how he wants to heal. When he sees us sinning, it doesn't piss him off and make him want to destroy us or inflict pain and agony on us forever. No, it makes him love us and say, “I want to do something about this sin that is destroying you. I want to save you from sin because sin is the enemy.” God is not our enemy, sin is. He is *for* us. He is not against us!

MIKE: Yeah. And we have been taught so long that God is unhappy with us because we have sinned. But God is not unhappy with us, as much as he is unhappy about our sin. God condemns no man. Instead, Jesus condemned sin in the flesh (in our old person). God condemns sin, not mankind, and so mankind has never been condemned. In fact, God could have lived with us forever in our fallen mind and thinking -- but he knew that we could not! We can't deal with sin because it destroys us. We can only deal with it for maybe 80 to 100 years -- our life expectancy. But God did not want us to live this way for eternity, and so God re-created us in Christ Jesus as a new creation, not to please himself, but to please us!

This is where modern-day Christianity has gone so wrong. They think that God was unhappy with us because we were sinners, etc., and He couldn't deal with it. But that's not so. He has never been unhappy with us as his creation. He has always loved us, and He chose us from the foundation of the world to be with him, to be united with him. And, of course, that's what Jesus did on the cross for us. He united us back with the Father. God was never separated from us. It was we who were separated and alienated from him -- in our minds and our hearts. But God was never alienated from us. Our sin did not create a

problem for God, but He knew that it was a problem for us. And so He dealt with it all for us on the cross in Jesus. And thank God He did! Where would we be without this? So we can now look forward to a day and time when we will never again have to look at, or even think about, sin. It will all be completely gone and God will reconcile everything in heaven and on earth. But, of course, now in this life He wants us to think in terms of love and the fruit of the spirit, and not in terms of sin because sin ruins us.

CARL: Yeah. And in that sense, he's unhappy with us. He's not unhappy with us as a being, but unhappy with our *condition*. God's attitude is, "I'm not satisfied with that. I want better for you. There's going to be better for you. And so I'm unhappy with the situation." But love does something about it. Love takes action. It doesn't just sit back and pat us on the head and say, "Nice little child!"

MIKE: Right, yep! Like with our own children, if they hurt themselves we want to put salve on them. We want to take care of it and we want to heal them. And that's what God does. It is what He has done.

BILL: And this ties directly into what we were talking about in Colossians 3. It goes back to us having a choice in how we live our lives. Here Paul says, "Do not lie to each other since you have put off the old person with its sinful deeds and have put on the new person who has been renewed in knowing your Creator and becoming more like him." So once we come into the awareness that the old person has been set aside, we realize that the new person is now who we are in Christ. We realize that we are righteous and holy -- like what we see in Ephesians where Paul says, effectively, "Walk according to who you are in Christ, because you have been renewed in the very image and likeness of God, right now!"

What does that mean to us? It should be life-changing and very empowering to know that we are no longer stumbling around with a sense of being condemned, waiting to be punished, and having the titles of "sinner" and "unrighteous." Instead, we have now been made into the very image of Jesus Christ and we are fully in right-standing with God, fully holy and perfect in Jesus, because we are a new creation brought about by him alone. Obviously, we're not talking about physically walking around in perfection -- we would all like to be free of that encumbrance and flaw. But it is nice to know that we have now been made perfect in Jesus. Okay?

MIKE: Absolutely, and no one needs to worry about their ultimate eternal destination -- not one person. Therefore, we should be living our lives here at rest in our soul, knowing that Jesus Christ has dealt with everything that needs to be dealt with, and that we have all been created as a new creation. What God wants us to do while we're still here in this life, is to discover more of who Jesus is. Okay? Because we're now just like Jesus. The Bible tells us, "As Jesus is in this world, so are we."

For me, it was just a few years ago that I saw that verse. Now I had read it, I am sure, many times before, but every time I read it just went over my head like it wasn't even there. But once I began to see these truths, I saw that, wow, just as Jesus is, so are we ... right now! Then I realized that we have nothing to worry about. So we just need to discover who we are in Christ Jesus. And if we are folks who really like discovery – and I think most everyone does -- we can discover new things every day about who we are as we discover who Jesus is.

CARL: And we tend to be way too focused on our sin, guilt, and shame. But all this really does is drag us down because we stay focused on it over and over and over, even though our sin (all of it) has been taken away. Now, of course, we need to talk about sin long enough to talk about what it is that's been taken away, and yes, we still struggle with the effects of sin in our lives. As a result, for sure, we make decisions. But our focus should be on the Savior, his salvation of us, and the freedom that we have gained. We are free now! We're not in bondage. I often remind people that there are two big kinds of "bondage" that we have. One is our bondage to sin itself, which takes us down and destroys our lives. We are all fully aware of this because we all experience it. It is a very personal thing for everyone. But then there's another kind of bondage, and that is religious bondage. I do not mean the kind of religion that James (in the New Testament) was writing about -- helping orphans and widows, and making sure you're walking with God. Instead I mean the "finger pointing and the judging" kind of religion. When religious people are focused on sin, that's also all they see in everybody else. Pretty soon they're running "litmus tests" on everybody and sizing everybody up to see if they are good enough. What is sometimes worse, is that we are hardest on ourselves and it becomes a self-defeating life.

MIKE: Yeah. I lived that way for many years and I really wasn't as hard on everybody else, as I was on myself. And this was because I kept looking at myself, and looking at my sin, and saying, "I can't live this life!" But, you know, until I began to see the truth that I had already been taken care of, and all my sin had been dealt with in Jesus on the cross, only then I could start living according to the perfect person that I already was. I didn't have to think about sin anymore ... not in me or in anyone else! I still sinned, yes, but not in the same way that I did before, and not in the same number of sins. Okay? But sinning less did not make me perfect because I was already perfect in Jesus! And living life in the new person is a whole lot more productive and a whole lot more joyful. Plus, living a life of not focusing on sin does not give us a "license to sin" (as so many will accuse us of claiming when we encourage people to live in the new person that they already are.) No, it's not in any way a license to sin, but you're certainly free to sin if that is what you really want.

CARL: Yes, but which sin do you want a "license" to commit, anyway? Which crappy, lousy, horrible sin that is going to destroy your life (and everybody around you) did you want to get away with ... as if there is some kind of "license" to protect you. That's

ridiculous. Now, is there an enjoyable aspect of sin in the moment that we are tempted (or give into it)? Sure! But ultimately sin destroys us and we don't need that. We don't need to *focus* on sin, but we do need to acknowledge it.

BILL: And that's why sometimes religion is focused on trying to improve the “old person”, which is dead, but then it comes along and tries to suggest we can now improve the “new person” as well. We sometimes have an unrealistic approach to Christianity. We think that to be right with God, we’ve got to improve the “old person” – which we can’t. But we also think that we've got to improve the “new person” – which we also can’t, because it is already perfect!

MIKE: Yes, thinking that we have to work and do all kinds of good stuff.

All right, we're running out of time again and I'm sorry. But go to the website, folks, and look for Carl's books, we didn't get to tell people about them this time. But we'll start out next time and give you the chance to offer your books to people out there, Carl. Anyway, folks, we love you all and see us next week 8:30 on KNCO.

ANNOUNCER: Thank you for listening to *Conversations in Christ*. Our prayer is that today's program has opened your heart and mind to a greater understanding and curiosity about the gift of grace that God has given to each of us, through his Son, Jesus Christ. If you have any questions or comments about today's program, feel free to send an email to: info@conversationsinchrist.org, or you can send a note to: Conversations in Christ, PO Box 2677, Grass Valley, California, 95945.

Remember, you have been blessed with every spiritual blessing so that you may believe and begin to experience the very life of God in you. Tune in again next week for Conversations in Christ.

#3. We Believe in Him Because He Believes in Us (July 22, 2018)

ANNOUNCER: Good morning and welcome to Conversations in Christ, with Bill Rose and Mike Rough. We invite you to sit back, open your Bible and engage in a dialogue as we learn more about the incredible gift of grace that God has given all of us. Now let's reason together in love.

BILL: _Good Morning Mike!

MIKE: Good morning Billy!

BILL: And I think we've got Denny in the background. Good morning, Denny! You're the one who puts on this show, as our soundman. And then we've got Carl back with us. And Carl's been here, what, two weeks in a row now?

CARL: Yeah, And these weeks are just flying by. It's just amazing! This is my third week!

BILL: Third Week! Yeah!

MIKE: Yeah. Glad to have you, Carl.

CARL: I'm happy to be here. Thanks for having me back.

BILL: All right, Mike, I'd like to have you pick up on the conversation that we've been having on the "new creation" vs. "old creation", and I guess a question that might be coming up from people out there in the radio audience is, "So how does one become this "new creation"?"

MIKE: Yes, and that's a good question because too often folks have been taught in many religious circles that we *become* a "new creation" by our belief in Jesus Christ. And so, when we believe, we decide to become a "new creation." Now, of course, they understand that it is God who makes them a new creation, but that He doesn't do this until they believe. Well, this is just not the case. We all became "new creations" when we were "born again" -- and that happened when Jesus was born again on the cross! Let me read what Jesus said when He was talking to Nicodemus. You may remember that he came to Jesus by night, because he didn't want to be seen talking to Jesus in the daytime in front of the Pharisees. Jesus told Nicodemus, "I tell you the truth -- except a person be "born again", he cannot see the Kingdom of God. Do not be surprised when I say that you must be born again!"

Then in Peter's first letter, he wrote, "We are born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible -- by the Word of God which lives and abides forever." So this "Word of God" that Peter refers to -- who or what is it? Well, this Word of God can only be Jesus.

This is consistent through-out all the New Testament writings! And so, we were all made an “incorruptible seed”, or a “new creation” by the Word of God who is Jesus. Jesus was born again on the cross. Remember, from Romans three, “The wages (payment) of sin is death”, and Jesus took that payment of sin, for the whole world onto himself! Peter also wrote that, “He who knew no sin (Jesus), *became* sin that we might be made as perfect as God, in him (Jesus).” So Jesus became sin for us, in our place. He received the wages (payoff) of sin, which is death, also for us and in our place. When Jesus died, He died to the life He had as a human. And that human life in Jesus was lost! But because He did not have his own personal sin, He was made alive again -- a new life -- and He was “born again” on the cross. So we were born again on the cross with him.

Remember, we've been saying over the last two or three weeks that whatever happened to Adam (the first Adam) happened to us, and whatever happened to the second Adam (Jesus), also happened to us. Now when I say “us”, I mean all mankind, all of humanity, the whole human race. Okay? And so therefore, when Jesus said to Nicodemus, “You must be born again”, He was really speaking of himself -- and not only of himself but of all of us as well, because we were all in him on the cross. So when He was born again, we were born again, and this was an act of God, not of man, not of the will of man, but of the will of God. This is such a wonderful truth -- that we were all born again in Jesus, and we don't have to worry about how do we get to be born again somewhere down the road based on something we do! It's not up to us to be born again, just like it was not up to you to be born of your parents as a physical child. And so, it was not up to us to be reborn in Jesus by God 2000 years ago. This was not our will -- it was God's will! And because of that, we are all redeemed. We're all new creations. And that's how we became a “new creation.” We were born again.

CARL: Can I add to that? And this isn't so much a disagreement, as much as I think it's a little bit incomplete. What you say is true! But there's always, in salvation, an *objective* part and a *subjective* part. Let me explain. In reconciliation, there is the part that God does to reconcile us to himself. This is His objective part in reconciliation. But then He turns right around and says that we need to *be reconciled* to him! And that is true, we do need to be. This is our subjective part in reconciliation. But the *real* reconciliation (the objective part) is what *He* did for us in Jesus on the cross. Our part in reconciliation is only how we respond to God and there's no merit or earning on our part in it. This is why our part is “subjective.”

The same thing is true with forgiveness. God has already forgiven us (and the whole world) in the atonement of Jesus on the cross. This is the objective part of forgiveness by God. But until we *receive* that forgiveness, and acknowledge it, and say, “Wow, you forgave me!”, we do not feel fully forgiven and experience it. This is our subjective part in it – but there is no merit or earning on our part whatsoever! And so, technically, we are born again in Christ on the cross because He represented us (this is God's objective and real action on our behalf), but we don't *experience* our being “born again” until we

exercise faith. This is why people will tell you, “I was born again when I believed in Jesus!”, because that is when they experienced what He already did for them on the cross.

And they do *feel* born again because they come alive, that is when they associate that experience of “born again” with the one that's in the Bible and then logically conclude that “believing” must be the moment I became “saved.” I remember as a kid at 10 years old receiving Christ, and that's when I became aware of it and I felt “born again.” And in a very real, experiential sense, I was. But I spent the next 53 years “re-upping” with God and saying, “God, if I didn't really mean it last year, I really mean it now!” I probably did that, maybe a half a dozen times in my lifetime. I meant it and I said, “Yeah, I think I'm saved now for sure, because I *really* believed, and I *really* meant it.” But then over time I would start thinking that it's been a while, and I have learned more, and maybe I wasn't sincere. So, I would “re-up” with God again! I think this plagues a lot of people, and it all comes from believing that salvation is something we do, by exercising faith, rather than something God does by grace alone through Jesus on the cross.

So being “born again” is a subjective experience as much as it is an objective reality. The reality is in the cross, the experience is in us. But this experience has no merit or earning with God, but it is very real. And so when we need to be careful not to say that there's no sense of “born again” when we believe, because there is indeed a sense of this in the awareness of it, the experience of it, and it becomes very real to us. And it really wasn't real to us until that happened, even though the reality of it was for sure on the cross.

MIKE: I agree with you. Absolutely. Because I have, more than once, felt “born again.” And two times especially. One was when I was 35 years old when I began to see grace. I was reared in church and I was very heavily involved in it. But it was when, all of a sudden, I saw how great grace was and I felt like I was just “born again.” Everything was new! And then in 2011, when I saw that it wasn't my faith that caused me to be saved, but it was the faith and faithfulness of Jesus Christ that caused it. It was then that I had yet another sense of being “born again.”

And because as each new “revelation” comes along, you have that sense that you're born again. But like you say, the objective truth is that we were all born again in Jesus on the cross, but we don't experience it until we believe. And that's why we agree with the folks about the importance of believing – that it's very important. Because if you don't believe that you have been saved, it doesn't mean you're not saved, but it does mean that you're not going to experience it, right? You're not going to enjoy the fruit of all it includes. And so, that's why we stress believing (as do the New Testament writers), but believing doesn't cause salvation. Instead, salvation causes us to have the ability to believe!

BILL: Exactly. Right. And adding onto that is the reality that I have *already* been saved, and now that experience is the “born again” experience. And it's not just a one-time act. Sometimes we tend to go back to when we were a child, or for me it was when I was 24

and in a car coming back from Santa Cruz and boom ... all of a sudden a light went on in the car in broad daylight. I got it! But that was my reality. And, as I have become more in tune with how God has saved us, I have even a greater sense of being “born again.” Now I have come to realize that my born again experience is daily. Sometimes there is a greater impact on us than other times. Sometimes we see things and say, “Oh boy, I hadn't seen that before!” But what I've noticed is that as I've come into this understanding of God's restoration for all through universal salvation, that his opinion of every single one of his creatures is that He loves them immensely. And now in my daily born again experience, I am sensing that I have become more loving toward people! Now as I look at every individual, I have developed a great love for them as well. I get captivated with the greater sense of what God is all about and how He is participating in people's lives.

CARL: Yeah, you've hit on something really important because people will instinctively carry out their lives according to what they believe about God. If they believe God is pissed off and that we have “robbed him of his honor” (which we got from Anselm in the Middle Ages), and that He has to somehow get that honor back by doing something really punitive to us ... then we will respond the same way to people. We will act much more punitive and vindictive toward them because we believe God has to beat somebody up, and inflict pain on someone, to get his honor back! When we take on that view of God, we are going to instinctively treat people different. I'll give you an example. Bloody Mary (as she was known -- it's not a drink!) was queen of England in the 16th century. She famously boasted that she burned heretics because God is going to burn them eventually anyway, and why not start now? Now, her whole view of God is that God brings pure retribution down on people who don't believe as she does, with no correcting or restoring purpose whatsoever. But that is not who God is! He is a loving, redeeming, reconciling, restoring, healing, saving God!

God always wants to redeem and restore and save because he's a savior. That's what saviors do! They redeem and save --- this one sure does! And, He doesn't fail at saving people. We know that the desire of God's heart is to save all humanity. “God desires all people to be saved”, wrote Paul. And Jesus said, “Come, everyone, to me and find rest!” We also know that God doesn't desire the destruction of the wicked -- on and on -- there are tons of verses. We know where God's heart is, and we know He has ability to save, and we know we can't save ourselves. But we do not possess the power to save ourselves. So, the only thing left is that God must succeed at saving. How could He not? Otherwise we have a universe that never finds complete and total justice -- if, indeed, “justice” is “making things right.” And, therefore, ultimate justice is making everything *ultimately* right. Nothing else will do.

So this whole thing about our view of God -- we *will* carry out that view in our actions and our lives. If we have a God who's very punitive and judgmental and vengeful -- then that's what we will tend to do. And, wow, Christians can sometimes be as vengeful as anybody on the planet! The history of the church demonstrates this clearly. Even the secular people

in the Middle Ages used to look at the Christians and say, “You guys are inventing ways to torment people, just to try to get them to believe different. We don't even do *that*. We're just trying to govern!”

So this is a very good point. And we see God as one who loves his world, finds great value in us because He created us in his own image, and will never throw anybody away like an old used garment, or a piece of used toilet paper to be flushed. He's never going to give up on us! He always wants the best and He will stick with us no matter how bad we are, until we are made right by his doing! That's what justice is -- to make things right. So ultimate justice, like George Macdonald said, is God making things ultimately right. And that's the only thing that will be true “justice” in eternity. Otherwise things are left wrong for eternity. Right?

MIKE: Very good!

BILL: And when you don't have that view of eternal restoration, then the view that you are left with is that God's love is limited, it's going to be restrained, and that it's not going to be unconditional. And so that gives you permission, then, to live and act likewise. And I saw that in my life and that's what brought me to this belief about a restorative God.

CARL: You know what else comes out of this? It makes it hard for people to really trust God because he's not trustworthy in their own mind. Now, they'll say that he's totally trustworthy, but when they see a God who's going to send the majority of people to never-ending agony, inflicting pain on them forever -- and this includes many of their loved ones and friends – how are they supposed to completely trust God? That's a really tough sell! And I see this in people's lives all the time in their own experiences, how they view the future, what's going to happen to their loved ones, etc. They are trying to trust God. They want to trust Him. But they have been taught what might be called a “dualistic view of God.” He's the most wonderful loving being they could ever know, and yet at the same time we have tagged Him with the worst possible thing anybody could ever imagine.

MIKE: Yeah, hate and vengeance!

CARL: How can we do this? This is not how God is presented in Scripture. He's presented with all of his attributes being absolutely holy and just. People often conclude that God must send people to hell because he's “holy and just.” But quite the opposite is true! “Holiness” means God is totally “set apart” from evil, wrong-doing, failing, and all such things. He *must* succeed. He *must* save. He's not free to sit back and let people perish. He's got to rescue them because that's who He is; that's in his heart. And for Him to torment people forever would be far from being “set apart.” That's what holiness means -- set apart from wrongdoing, evil, failure, torment, that kind of thing. It's unthinkable for the God of high moral excellence (as He is clearly presented throughout the Bible).

People who believe in eternal punishment by God, usually grab just a couple of verses to defend it. Perhaps we will talk about these in the weeks to come.

MIKE: Yes!

There are really only about three or four verses that people bring up (because there really aren't very many) to support this idea that God is going to eternally torment people and bring pure retribution on them with no reconciling purpose whatsoever – when, actually, quite the opposite is true. He always wants to (and will) reconcile us ... because that's what He does!

MIKE: And I'd like to reemphasize what you said about justice because the Western idea of justice is that “somebody has to be punished for wrong-doing.” But that’s not God's idea of justice. His idea of justice is “setting everything right.” He's going to fix the victim and the victimizer.

CARL: Yep,

MIKE: And he's going to fix everything. He's going to restore everything, and in the final analysis everything will be restored. That's God's idea of justice.

CARL: And just stop and think for a second, based on everything we know about God, intuitively. Wouldn't we expect Him to fix everything?

MIKE: Yeah!

CARL: Didn't He create all this? Isn't He responsible?

MIKE: That’s right. There you go.

CARL: We didn't choose to show up. We’re just here. We are totally dependent upon the God who made this world and He's accountable to himself to make things right, if He is able to do so. And if He is able to make things right, and He wants to, and we can't make things right ... what's left, except that He must! And that's why I love these Early Church writers who totally understood this, believed it, and did not hold any view of God executing pure retribution in the future. They had such a high view of God as one who restores, saves, reconciles and redeems. It's wonderful.

BILL: Well, that brings up a good point. That book that you've written is a wonderful book about the Early Church Fathers because it completely re-adjusts your mind in terms of what these guys were thinking back in those early days. And by “early days” we mean from 100 to about 500 AD. But, you've written a great book by pulling up quotes from these various individuals and discussing their view on how holy God is, how loving He is,

how committed He is to restoration, and how He even used fire for the benefit of everyone to exterminate and incinerate our “old person” and sin.

MIKE: Yep!

CARL: And they always saw God’s severe activity in all of these things as corrective and healing, because that's what we need. And that's what a loving God does.

By the way, thanks for the over-compliment. I didn't really write the book. I compiled it. Well, I wrote *some* things in it. But it’s more of a compilation of about 150 quotes from the Early Christian Writers. I got all of them out of one book by a scholarly lady named Ilaria Ramelli, who spent 15 years digging this stuff out. When I first started looking into these Early Church writers on my own, I came across this book. In fact, I think Mike introduced me to it. We each went half to buy at \$400 because it's a scholarly work of some 900 pages. I spent a year reading through it, and then I spent ten months compiling the best of the quotes she had put together. But she did, the “heavy lifting” -- I just compiled them and then wrote some paraphrases of what they were saying to make them easy to understand. So, I think if people can get their hands on this book of quotes, they might really benefit from them.

MIKE: What’s important about this book and about the Early Church Fathers is that, for the past 1500 years we have not been made privy to this information from the pulpits. Okay? Now it's been out there, but it was hard to find until now, until the Internet, which makes these things a lot easier to find for anyone who wants to know. So from the time of the apostles onward, for about the first 400 years, these guys were the ones who were taught by the Apostles and passed it down to others. They had this idea, as Carl said, that God was into restoration. He was not into punishment or annihilation, and very little concept of eternal torment was ever mentioned. So along comes Augustine and, of course, this is where the Western Church got its view of eternal punishment -- from Augustine and Roman Catholicism. And the Protestants continued with this same view and they ignored the first 400 years of teaching on this subject of eternal destiny. In fact, the Roman Catholic Church put guys like Origin down and branded him a heretic. And so, for me, until about 10 years ago, I never heard of any of these guys – these Early Church Fathers and what they believed.

CARL: Yeah. We're all “Roman Catholic” today – Protestants and Catholics alike – when it comes to eternal punishment! We all came out of that same heritage. I'm not saying it's necessarily bad, it's just a matter of fact. But, the Eastern Orthodox Church prior to Augustine ... did not officially hold to eternal punishment, because neither church did! It all became official after Augustine presented it so adamantly in his monumental work, *The City of God*.

But let me make two caveats about what you said. Predominantly, the Early Church Fathers (before Augustine) held this view of restoration. But not all of them. Tertullian, Augustine, and Justin did not. These were among the few who did hold to eternal punishment. But there are a couple of interesting things to be considered. First, the majority of these Early Church Fathers did not believe in eternal punishment and they were *Greek* Fathers. Tertullian and Augustine were Latin Fathers who came out of a different culture, a different background, different language, different location, and a whole different mindset – one that came from Rome and a Latin orientation.

The other thing -- and this is really interesting -- is that no Council or Creed ever officially held eternal punishment as an official belief. And keep in mind that these councils and creeds, for the first 1000 years, tried to update for each new generation of believers all the official beliefs of the Christian Church -- the Trinity, nature of Christ, etc. But they never included eternal punishment as an official belief, even though there were people who believed it. Most Christians in those early days of the church (before 500 AD) did not. Additionally, in these councils and creeds, they never declared “eventual restoration of all things by God” to be any kind of heresy or false teaching.

So it wasn't until the emergence of Roman Catholicism that eternal punishment really began to take hold, through Augustine and his mammoth work *The City of God*. And in it, in books 21 and 22, he lays out eternal punishment by God in great detail. If you want to read plenty of speculation about hell and how it all works – Augustine will give it to you. And on the basis of his writings, the Western Church began to dominate and conduct itself through fear over people. They dominated people through fear and started selling salvation in the form of “indulgences.” The Reformation, some 1000 years later, made some good changes because they saw everything that happened from Augustine to the time of the reformation and realize many things had become wrong. And so, they *reformed* the church back to Augustine, but they should have gone farther. And so a lot of folks today are just taught what they're taught and this “pre-Augustine information” from Church History just doesn't fit the modern-church narrative. As a result, it is ignored. I am always surprised that people aren't more curious and interested about their own history.

MIKE: Yeah. And folks, that's one of the reasons why we're recommending that you download Carl's books from his website, which is at: godislovefellowship.com. Then go to the Resources page and there you will find them.

CARL: There are two books. This one with the Early Christian writer's quotes, and the other book which presents the four views of eternal destiny. I think you'll find them interesting, helpful, and encouraging! Now, I tried to be very objective and gracious in my writing, and I tried to recognize all the views and then just express my opinion.

MIKE: Yeah. So if you want some objective things folks, go there and download those books. And if you don't even believe Carl, you can research these things out for yourself.

BILL: And if you're struggling with internet downloading and you want a hard copy of these books, just email or call us and we'll get you some copies.

MIKE: Yep. Alright. Thank you -- and we'll see you all next week!

ANNOUNCER: Thank you for listening to *Conversations in Christ*. Our prayer is that today's program has opened your heart and mind to a greater understanding and curiosity about the gift of grace that God has given to each of us, through his Son, Jesus Christ. If you have any questions or comments about today's program, feel free to send an email to: info@conversationsinchrist.org, or you can send a note to: Conversations in Christ, PO Box 2677, Grass Valley, California, 95945.

Remember, you have been blessed with every spiritual blessing so that you may believe and begin to experience the very life of God in you. Tune in again next week for Conversations in Christ.

#4. The “Old Person” vs. the “New Person” (July 29, 2018)

ANNOUNCER: Good morning and welcome to Conversations in Christ, with Bill Rose and Mike Rough. We invite you to sit back, open your Bible and engage in a dialogue as we learn more about the incredible gift of grace that God has given all of us. Now let's reason together in love.

MIKE: Good morning, Billy!

BILL: Good morning Mikey!

MIKE: Good morning, Denny!

DENNY: Good morning sir.

MIKE: And good morning to our guest again, Carl Jones!

CARL: Hey!

MIKE: Carl, good to have you back!

CARL: I'm happy to be here!

MIKE: It's been a real pleasure to have you here this past three weeks, and we're going to have you here a couple more, we hope! And maybe, who knows, he just might become a permanent member with us on the radio broadcast, one of these days. He has not agreed to it, yet.

BILL: I guess we need to speak to his agent. Ha!

MIKE: Yeah, but I vote him in, don't you?

BILL: Yeah, but we got to see what the dollar amount will be! Ha!

MIKE: Oh, okay. Ha! Alright, folks, we have a good time here and I hope that you enjoy our program right along with us. But I'm going to turn it over to Carl, right now, and let him plug his books and also plug his fellowship.

CARL: Well, yeah, but before I even do that, I want to plug this radio show! Because this is a wonderful “conversation in Christ” each week! I've enjoyed listening to you guys over the years and following it, and the thing I like about it is that in spite of all the disagreements that we have here behind the scenes (and at the coffee shop) -- it doesn't matter! Our differences are not of utmost importance. I remember telling somebody recently that I'm no longer “emotionally invested in theology”, even though I'm a great

theology fan, have studied it for years, really enjoy it, and realize it is important. But my “emotional investment” is in the well-being of people and my love for them. And that rises up over the top. Yes, that's what's important. And such love *must* govern theology and our differences of opinions. And so, there's no threat here. There's no needing to argue. We might push on each other just to see if we really know what we're talking about. And sometimes we don't! And that's why we all need to be challenged – but in love. So I just love the format on this show. I love the way we do it.

MIKE: And we're not invested in “having to be right.”

BILL: That's right.

MIKE: I think that's the simplicity of what we do here.

BILL: We're all invested in terms of sharing our opinion for what it's worth.

CARL: And that really is it. I really believe truth belongs to God. It resides with him and it belongs to him – for Him to show it and bring it. And that's why the Bible says, “We have no teacher, but the Holy Spirit.” I'm even reluctant to call myself a teacher. I like to call myself a “presenter” because I give information, and I try to give good, accurate information about the Bible, and be as true as I can be. But, you know what -- I can be wrong. And so, I just present an opinion and try to encourage people to go work it out with God. It's about them and Him. It's not about me and them and God! We don't need to jump in there and govern others working out what the truth is with God. We can trust others “alone with God”! So anyway, I just wanted to say that good word about what you guys do here each week, and that I have really enjoyed coming in these past few weeks.

But here is what I do on Sunday mornings. I have a small fellowship I started about five years ago, and it is called *God is Love Fellowship* -- and for good reason! That title represents what really is at the core of what's important there. I've sub-called it “the unchurch for the unchurched.” Nothing against churches in this. I attended a church. I know a lot of the pastors in town. I love them, and I love what they're doing. But there are a lot of people who struggle with going to church. So I tell them this is an “unchurch” and that we don't have all the programs they will typically find in a church. If they want such wonderful things, I encourage them to go find a church that seems right for them. And, there is every kind of church you could ever want in this town. So, GILF is for unchurched people who are struggling and want a place to go to have something meaningful. I just walk them through the New Testament writings and try to encourage them to trust their Creator, who can be fully and completely trusted! That's really all I do.

But anyway, I broadcast live on YouTube every Sunday morning at 9AM, right after this show. So all you have to do is turn your radio off, turn on your computer, get on YouTube and search for “God is love Fellowship.” We meet about 45 minutes each week. And then

there are these two books that you mentioned, that you wanted me to talk about. I call them “booklets” because they are informally self-published and posted on the internet. I am very happy with them, and they turned out really well. I worked very hard and spent hundreds of hours researching and putting them together. My purpose in these booklets is to present accurate information to people and *educate* them – not just *indoctrinate* them! I want people to know what's true out there, what the facts are, and whatever they decide as a result is between them and God. I'm much more motivated to get into people's hands all the available information. Now, I like people agreeing with me, but if they don't, it's okay.

So, I'm not invested in trying to convince people, or argue, or anything else like that. And the freedom that comes from this “hands-off” approach with people – a freedom that I know Mike has, and Bill has, and I have, with each other and with people – it's amazing! My relationships with people, in the bars and in town and anywhere I go, is that I can talk to anybody about anything. And it's not because I compromise anything, it's because I love them. Okay? And it's really wonderful.

BILL: And you want to hear their opinion.

CARL: I do!

BILL: And that's what God has placed in your heart.

CARL: Sure, and I want to listen to them. That's part of love. They often have some good information for me!

But anyway, I have these two books -- one is on the four views of eternal destiny (annihilation, eternal punishment, restoration, etc.).

BILL: Yeah. Can you share all four views, briefly?

CARL: Oh No, sorry. I'm not going to try to go through them all here. It'll take too long! Get the book. Its free!

MIKE: Yeah, get the book! Ha!

CARL: But what I tried to do, though, was to share all four views and then say, “Here's the one that seems to have the most Biblical basis -- this restoration view.” So, I provided some evidence for that but I also tried to be very gracious and respectful of the other views. I have many friends in town who have other views of eternal destiny, and they're very sincere about them. It's very important to them and so I respect that. I don't think lowly of them, or necessarily think they are wrong. It's just not my decision to make *for* them.

So that's one book. The other book has these quotes we were talking about the last few weeks by the Early Christians. There are about 150 quotes that I got from another scholarly book. I just compiled these quotes, and then paraphrased them to make them easy to understand. I think people will find both of these booklets to be very helpful. So, go to: godislovefellowship.com, then go to the Resources page, and then click on any of the icons of the booklets to download the PDF. These two books I have discussed are in the upper left corner. Now, if you don't have a computer and want a hard copy, you can contact Mike or Bill here at *Conversations in Christ*. Or you can call me at 530-263-8050, and I will be happy to give you a copy. I'll even bring one over to you!

MIKE and Bill: Ha, ha!

CARL: So anyway, thanks for letting me share.

MIKE: You bet ... great! And, I want to add to what you said about calling yourself a “presenter.” I use the word “communicator” for myself. And that’s really all we are -- we're communicators. We are sometimes called teachers, but again, I want to reiterate this: The Holy Spirit is always the real teacher. We cannot cause anyone to understand any truth.

CARL: Nope!

MIKE: All any of us can do, not just the three of us here, but all of you folks out there also ... all we can do is communicate. We cannot cause anyone to understand truth. We can communicate truth, but it's the Holy Spirit who causes a person to understand. And we know this, so we're not trying to get people to believe what we say. We're just giving out what we believe to be the truth here, and leaving it up to the Holy Spirit (along with each individual out there) to determine whether it's true or not.

BILL: And people sometimes say, “Well, you guys are sure spending a lot of time talking about what is in the next life!” But when you think about it, what's the most important subject that we have, as people, who live in this world? The question is what is going to happen when we die? What is your opinion about what's going to take place in your life, and for those people who came before you and after you? It's the most important question you can possibly ask.

CARL: And it affects everything in this life anyway.

BILL: Yes, it does.

CARL: I can't think of anything more important. That's what Christ is all about, and also what *Conversations in Christ* is all about too! Perhaps wisely, this program isn't so broad that it tries to go into all theological topics and all discussions about the future, etc. Instead, it stays focused on who Jesus is, his person, his work, his atonement, and what

that all means. There's plenty to work with these important topics alone. Besides, the central theme of the Bible is Jesus! Even He said that "the Scriptures speak of me." So, you guys stand on very solid ground here at CinC.

MIKE: Yeah, that's super! And you know it's true, however, that our eternal destiny is set! And so, one of the things I never present much about is our eternal reward, or an eternal destiny. Instead, I say, "Hey ... we're in" (as far as eternity goes). So, the only real question is, "How do we live our life here and now?" I want to know! And, this is where I've been for the last 40 or so years. I want to know how to live, today. I want to live victorious, today. And that's what Jesus promised, when He said He had won the victory. Now, what we should be doing, every day as believers, is to walk in a victorious manner in our souls. And that's what we try to do on this program and create that kind of an atmosphere, communicating about how to live and love, today. This is what life is all about. It's all about love. And, if we operate our lives in love, we're going to be very happy and satisfied people!

I just wanted to bring that up. But also wanted to make a little plug for the fellowship that we have every Wednesday night at 6:00 PM at the Beam Easy-living Center on Hwy 174 near town. I usually communicate some great things about our faith in Christ, and occasionally we have a special speaker like Bill. Everyone is welcome. You don't have to agree with us. We don't push anything or ask anything of anyone. We don't even take an offering, and we don't have any kind of membership. We just have great fellowship centered around who Jesus is and the new person we all are in him.

CARL: And if you want to hear Bill teach, you can go tell him you want to buy a house and he'll give you a ride in his car, and he'll talk to you and listen to you. It'll be great. It'll probably be better than you and I put together, Mike!

BILL and MIKE: Ha, ha!

MIKE: And folks, by the way, we have been forgetting each week to ask for questions and comments. We want you folks out there to, if you're enjoying the show (or even if you don't), send us your questions or comments. Tell us what you would like us to talk about and we would be happy to bring those subjects up and talk about them on the air.

BILL: Yeah. And certainly, if you disagree with this topic of "universal salvation", by all means bring up your reasons why, and we will discuss them.

MIKE: Sure. Feel free to do that. Now, last week we were talking about being "born again" and how that happened. And so, there is a verse I want to bring up today. It is 1 John 3:9. This tends to be something that most people have never heard anybody talk about. I don't think I've ever heard anyone preach on this particular verse. It says, "Whosoever is born of God does not commit sin, for his seed remains in him and he

cannot sin, because he is born of God.” Ah, did you all hear this, folks? Whoever is born of God *does not commit sin* for his seed remains in him, and he *cannot sin* because he is born of God! What do you think about that?

CARL: Well, earlier in John’s same letter, he said, “If you say you're without sin, you're a liar!” So how does this work? Did John forget he wrote this when he wrote later what Mike just quoted?

MIKE: Good point!

CARL: And the commentators do all kinds of gymnastics to try to figure this out. So, good question, Mike!

MIKE: So, what's the answer?

CARL: Well ... it’s your question. Go for it!

MIKE: Okay.

BILL: Well, you know, it brings up even a little bit more controversy when we look at verse ten, (immediately following Mike’s verse nine), where John says, “In this, the children of God and the children of the devil are made clear. Whoever does not practice doing what is right is not of God, nor is the one who does not love his brother -- he is not of God either.”

MIKE: Ahhhh!

BILL: So how can you have one verse that says you're absolutely in a position of not knowing God and more in line with the devil, and then in another verse (before that one), that if you know God, then you're not sinning?

CARL: Now, for those who have been listening for the last few weeks, they might have a clue!

MIKE: Very good, guys. Now, what most of us have been taught is that this represents two different persons -- one person is saved and the other is not. Now I agree, but only to this extent: that the “old person” is the one John is talking about as doing the sinning in us, and he is not saved. But the “new person” in us is the one John is talking about as *unable* to sin. And this new person in us *is* saved! This new person is redeemed and is the “new us” that have been created in Christ Jesus.

CARL: The new person that we are ... is perfect!

MIKE: Yes, He's perfect. Absolutely.

CARL: He cannot sin!

MIKE: True, he cannot sin!

CARL: It's wonderful!

MIKE: Yes. It's fabulous! And, therefore, this is further proven by Paul when he says, "When we shall see him, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as He is. And as He is, so are we." So, we're all going to finally see this when we see Jesus face to face.

CARL: And we won't have the "old person" hanging around and causing trouble.

MIKE: Yeah, the "old person" will be annihilated, and taken away from us. Okay? But that actually all happened 2000 years ago at the cross ... yet we're not going to see it or experience it until we leave this earth, leave this body, and get our new bodies. But the "old us" ... read verse 10 again, Bill ...

BILL: "In this, the children of God and the children of the devil are made clear."

MIKE: So the children of the devil is our "old person" which has been crucified with Jesus on the cross! We're all children of the devil, in this regard. Every human being has the "old person" in them. So *that* old person is not going to see God, and is not going to see heaven. Ever. And that is good!

This is also the meaning of the parable about the sheep and the goats. We are all, both the sheep and the goats. The goats represent the "old person" in us that is going to be annihilated. The goats are going one way, but the sheep (the new persons in us) are going to be with Jesus.

CARL: We've been taught, consistently, that out of humanity there are two groups -- and who knows exactly where the dividing line is. But there must be some line separating "righteous" people from "wicked" people. Right? And if you're just barely on this side of that line, you're in the in-crowd. But if you are just barely on the other side, well, you're in the out-crowd. And this in-crowd is the "righteous" people, whereas the out-crowd is the "wicked" people -- as if there's a clear contrast between the two groups. The problem is that righteous people do all kinds of bad things, and wicked people can do good things sometimes too. So, this kind of division doesn't really work very well. Plus, if it is all about dividing humanity into two groups, then it is also all about "salvation by works"! There's no grace or faith mentioned in this passage, is there? It only about "doing good works in Jesus' name." So, instead of seeing this as dividing all humanity into two groups of people as the *righteous* and *wicked*, it makes more sense, (and is more consistent with salvation by grace through faith) to see this as dividing each one of us into the "old person we were in Adam" and the "new person we are now in Jesus" (the last Adam). It really takes all humanity and says, "All of us are both sheep and goats"! This view really

explains everything, and it's found throughout Scripture. This idea of the “old and new person” is everywhere.

BILL: Yep. And later on in verse 14, John says, “We know that we have passed from death to life because we love our brother. And whoever does not love his brother abides in death.” So, it is the same thing. When we come to the reality of just how much God loves us, we get more exposed to unconditional love, and we start extending that love to our “brother.” But when, on the other hand, we do not love our fellow humans (our “brother”), we abide in death and do not have a complete understanding of God's love and we walk inconsistently. But, like you pointed out, Carl, we all do that. We're all living in this inconsistent lifestyle. And that's why these verses are not so much strict, binding “commands” as much as they are reminders.

CARL: Well, also when we set up this in-group and out-group, we start going out into society as those in the in-group with all our “in-group” friends. And we usually base this on our act of belief, or on God's choosing some over others, or works to earn favor with God. The point is that we think we are in the *in-group* and others are in the *out-group*, and so we tend to treat people differently. When I finally understood (at age 63) that this wasn't the case, and that I was just as lost in Adam as anybody, and also just as saved in Jesus as anyone, I started seeing everyone in a new way. I didn't condescend to them any more in my mind. I started to relate to them, talk to them, and love them, instead of focusing on “when they will start going to church” -- and concluding that they deserve to go to hell if they don't! It was easy to walk away feeling “righteous” about it. But there wasn't any real compassion.

But now, I love them and I do not mind hanging around them, even with all their goofiness, drug orientation, wrong attitudes, and careless living. Jesus seemed to not mind either. And many of these people I meet out in society have a good heart. Yes, they are struggling, but that's the way God sees us too – struggling! We have needs, just as they do. I often ask Christians, “When we sin, what does it invoke in God? What happens to God inside? What does it make him want to do *to* us?” There we are, sinning -- does it make Him mad? Is He building up wrath, until He just can't hardly stand it anymore? Does our sin make God want to pour out all kinds of awful stuff on us as punishment? Or ... does God look at us when we sin and say, “That's horrible. I love you. I don't want sin destroying you.” Did God send his innocent Son to get in the way of His wrath against us, so that He can beat him up instead of us? Is that God's solution? Or did God send his Son to take our sin away from us, because this is what we needed? Those are two very different views of salvation. One comes from Anselm and Augustine and the Roman Catholic Church. The other one comes from the New Testament and the Early Christians as the “Gospel of the grace of God” (as Paul called it). Big difference!

MIKE: You Bet!

BILL: Yeah. And then he puts it even more distinctly. In verse 15, John says, “So whoever hates his brother is a murderer.” And why? Why would you be a murderer if you hate your brother? Well, it’s because you’ve just murdered him in your heart. And in one sense, there is nothing more detrimental than that because you can carry that hatred for your entire life. And a lot of people do. I often come across people that are estranged from a husband, wife, kids, or friends and are no longer talking to one another. And, their intent is to never talk with that person again.

CARL: And it owns them!

MIKE: Yeah, and they’re living this death, in this life, because they’re living in the “old person.” And that’s the power that this “old person” (that we are still plagued with in this life) can have on us. And they’re living that way because they do not understand that they are a “new creation” in Christ and what He has done for them already on the cross! They actually are this “new creation” and they don’t have to live this way. But that’s what they choose to do. And, of course, one of these days they’re going to see that they have been totally reconciled by God through Jesus on the cross. But until then, such people are miserable. You know, if there’s any hell ... it is *this* hell, on earth, where people are living in hatred and living in their illusion of an unforgiven state. I’ve been there in the past, but one day I refused to live there anymore. I hate that kind of a life that I used to live -- a life of uncertainty and a life of judgement.

CARL: Yes, because it owns us! And all our attention, and our whole focus, is on all of that and we’re robbed of life. There’s no freedom.

MIKE: That’s right.

CARL: And aside from what happens to us when we die, God wants us to have an abundant life here and now.

MIKE: Exactly right.

CARL: Not just claiming joy and peace. Real peace!

MIKE: Oh yeah!

CARL: Peace inside that passes our understanding – to the point where you sometimes giggle at night, laying there and thinking, “I’m so full of joy and peace with God -- there’s no fear. Now I’m not saying I never have stress or fear, but it’s totally different than being absorbed by worry, fear, and resentment. It is so wonderful being free. It’s so amazing. Even, life changing!

BILL: And, to hate our brother goes totally “against the grain” in terms of how God created us in the first place. It’s instinctive in everybody’s life to want to love people and

have love exchanged back to them. To practice hatred, we've got to work against the grain of who we are as created in the image of God. When hate consumes us, it wears us out. When hate continues on, incremental, on a daily basis, we become more and more bitter.

CARL: Yes, and it feeds on itself. You get lost in it. Tangled in it.

MIKE: Yeah. And when we're that way, we're the most unhappy people. And I mean, *total* unhappiness when our life is filled with hatred and we are non-forgiving.

CARL: We can even be a “believer”, and still fall into this.

MIKE: That's correct. I've been a believer ever since I can remember. I've been a believer in Jesus Christ. Okay? But I lived many years in judgmentalism, and some hatred, and so on.

CARL: And legalism!

MIKE: Legalism? Oh yeah! But I refuse to live that way anymore because I have been freed from that. Right? And I came to realize I was freed 2000 years ago at the cross!

All right. Well, it looks like we've got about 10 more seconds ... right, Denny? Okay. Well folks, we'll see you next week. Thank you for being here again. Write to us, or call us if you want. Or go to our website at: *conversationsinchrist.org*.

ANNOUNCER: Thank you for listening to *Conversations in Christ*. Our prayer is that today's program has opened your heart and mind to a greater understanding and curiosity about the gift of grace that God has given to each of us, through his Son, Jesus Christ. If you have any questions or comments about today's program, feel free to send an email to: *info@conversationsinchrist.org*, or you can send a note to: Conversations in Christ, PO Box 2677, Grass Valley, California, 95945.

Remember, you have been blessed with every spiritual blessing so that you may believe and begin to experience the very life of God in you. Tune in again next week for Conversations in Christ.

#5. God's Unconditional Love as Irresistible (August 5, 2018)

ANNOUNCER: Good morning and welcome to Conversations in Christ, with Bill Rose and Mike Rough. We invite you to sit back, open your Bible and engage in a dialogue as we learn more about the incredible gift of grace that God has given all of us. Now let's reason together in love.

MIKE: Good morning, Bill Rose! Good morning, Carl Jones!

CARL: Hey guys!

MIKE: Good Morning Dennis Ruff! Ha!

DENNY: Good morning!

BILL: And Mike Ruff ... You guys related?

MIKE: I think so.

BILL: Father and son!

MIKE: Yes!

DENNY: But we don't know for sure. The DNA test is not back yet. Ha!

MIKE: Well, I claim him anyway, even if He doesn't claim me! Ha! Bill, where are we going to go today?

BILL: Well, let's go on to 1 John 4. John kinda goes crazy talking about how much God loves, how thrilled He is about sharing it with other people and exposing them to it, and how captivating that love is for us to live in. Maybe we could pick up there and start talking about that. Let's look at verse 17. It says, "Love has been perfected among us in this: that we may have boldness in the day of judgment because as He is, so are we in this world!"

So, the question I've got for people in the radio audience is: "Why would anybody ever think that in that day of judgment they're going to have boldness? Why would they ever have that kind of confidence?" And that's really what he's saying ... boldness, confidence, trust. Isn't he? Why did he write this?

MIKE: Well it is all right there in the very last part of that verse ... "because *as* He is in this world, so are we"! If I'm just like Jesus, I'm going to be bold, you know? And so, it should be no problem.

CARL: It's not really boldness in ourselves.

MIKE: No, it's boldness in Jesus, and in who He is!

CARL: Yes, absolutely.

MIKE: And so if I arrive at the pearly gates and Peter says, "What brings you here, and what makes you think that you have the right to come in here?", I'm going to say, "You see that person over there who has wounds in his hands and his feet and his side? That's my reason for being here! That's my validation ... right there! Jesus!"

CARL: And you're not going to walk up and say, "It's because I believe"!

MIKE: No way!

CARL: Because that would be a "work" that you did!

MIKE: There ya go!

CARL: It's because of what *He* did, alone, as a finished work. And we believe it because He did it. But our act of believing does not secure our place there. He secured it.

I often tell people – and they are surprised at this – that "believing in Jesus doesn't save you ... Jesus does!" Think about that for a minute. Our act of belief has no merit. It's a good thing. It's important. And we do gain from it in this life – greatly as we walk with God down life's road. But our faith has no merit with God because salvation is completely by grace, and that happened at the cross.

BILL: Yeah! And also, those words Mike just brought up at the end of verse 17, "As He is, so are we", John is saying that we are going to have boldness and confidence in the day of judgment. And John's not just saying that about just a few people -- just believers. Everybody's going to have that kind of confidence because as Peter wrote, "Every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord."

CARL: Yes, because salvation was not anything less for them than it was for us. It's completely by grace, unmerited, unearned, undeserved. Except we did need to be saved, and maybe in that sense we "deserved" it!

BILL: That's how we "earned" it – by sinning and needing to be saved – deserving of it by our own failing!

MIKE: Yep. But what do we really need to be saved from? And this, I think, is a big question that most of us don't really understand. We need to be saved from our own fallen mind and our own fallen mindset. In this mindset we think that God is alienated from us,

and so we end up living a life of alienating ourselves from Him. But in reality, God is not alienated from us It is only in our minds and hearts. And so God said, "Well, that's not going to stand. I'm going to fix that. You're not going to be allowed to live that way forever and I'm going to restore you to a position that is greater than even what Adam had in the very beginning! I'm going to restore you to full union with me." Okay?

CARL: Yeah. Our sin isn't something that makes God want to do something bad to us.

MIKE: No!

CARL: It makes him want to do something good to us!

MIKE: Absolutely, yeah! And we are talking about love here. Real love! Love that takes action! And one of the verses many Christians like to quote is the two great commandments from Jesus, that "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, mind, soul and strength, and you should love your neighbor as yourself." Those are the two great commandments according to Jesus. But I was thinking recently, "Wait a minute. Commandments? Can you command somebody to love? Huh? Is that possible? If I tell you, Carl, you've got to love me -- is that going to cause you to love me? It might make you want to do the opposite! It will tend to turn you off. You will probably say, "That's not going to make me love you!" Okay? And so what was Jesus really saying? We look at those things as "commandments", but they're not really commandments (in the *requirement* sense). These are *promises*, and the "commandment" aspect in this is really a commandment to Jesus, to keep these commandments *for us* .. since only He can! It is Jesus (God) who loves *us* with his whole heart, mind, soul, and strength.

CARL: God is the only one who can love that way. We never will -- not like He does -- because we really can't.

BILL: This is why John also wrote, in verse 19, that "We love him *because* He first loved us."

CARL: There you go.

MIKE: Absolutely. And so, when I ask people, "How much does God love you?", they often answer, "I don't know, maybe a lot?" Well, I'm going to tell you, God loves every one of us, every human being on the face of this earth, with His whole heart, mind, soul, and strength. And we know this from John 3:16, "For God *so* loved the world ..." How much did He love? With his whole being. Then He gave the very best that He had, which was his Son, Jesus Christ. God didn't have anything better to give to mankind. This is love! This is love that loves with a whole heart, mind, soul, and strength -- to give Jesus to the world, to mankind, to fallen creation and says, "Here, here's my Son!"

And what did we do? We took him and murdered him. We murdered the gift that God gave to us. And what did God do when we murdered his Son? He gave us life when He raised his Son from the dead three days later! Now the Law says, “A life for a life” -- if you take a life, then I'm going to take your life. Right? But God in His grace says, “No, I don't operate by the law; I operate by love. And so you take me and you kill me, but I'm going to give you life in return.” Now this is love that we cannot comprehend. I mean, it blows my mind just to think about it, and I know that I have not fully comprehended it.

CARL: God's “retaliation” ... was to love us! He retaliated with love ... not condemnation!

MIKE: Exactly!

CARL: Now He condemned the “old person” in us, but that is part of what love does, in addition to creating the “new person” in us in Jesus! This is what it is all about in 1 John - Love takes action! Love doesn't just sit there and pat us on the head and say, “Hey, I really like you. I really love you. I hope it goes well.” Love steps in and takes action and does something.

MIKE: That's what grace is – love in action!

CARL: Yes, it is. Absolutely!

BILL: And also, if the person doesn't see that kind of love, then what's going to happen in that person's life? He is going to live out of fear, And that's why John writes this in verse 18, “There is now no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment. And he who fears has not been made perfect in love.” And that's why we're so passionate about what we're talking about here on the radio broadcast each week. We are passionate because this kind of perfect love -- unconditional love, universal love -- it casts out fear. And when love casts out fear, we are no longer afraid of what people are thinking about us. We are no longer afraid of how we are going to live and act around them. We get exposed to God's *unconditional love* and then we instinctively start to live directly out of that love from Him. It becomes a love we have for other people, it is an instinctive love, and we are literally “wired into God” to live a life that becomes the result of how much He loves us!

CARL: Yeah. And it is a joy, and not a chore or a task, or something we *have to* do. It is something we *want* to do!

MIKE: Denny was telling me about what happened to him when he finally saw this truth. Would you like to share that with us Denny?

DENNY (Sound Engineer): Yeah. Before, when I believed that my “believing” saved me -- the way I was raised -- I judged everybody. I put everybody into a box. I was in my

box, and I would judge everybody else and put them into their box, thinking stuff like, “He belongs over here, and she belongs over there.” It was hard to love people that were in all these different “boxes” (that I put them in!). And then once I started believing in *universal salvation*, I said to myself, “We’re all in the same box!” And ya know, it became easy to love people. It became easy *not* to judge people! It was like a light bulb came on, and it wasn’t anything that I consciously tried to do, or tried not to do. It just happened!

MIKE: There you go. Yeah. When we try to love, that’s when it becomes an effort of our “old person” in Adam. If love does not flow out of us as part of our “instinctive life” (as Bill calls it), then it is forced. And then it becomes a work of the “old person” in us, trying to love. Love must come out of the love that we have received from God! It is really the only way. And when we begin to see that God loves us with his whole heart and mind and soul and strength, and when that love begins to fulfill us, and fulfill us, and fulfill us ... it just automatically flows back out of us. When we know God, and we know that He loves us (and loves everyone else too), we’re like sponges. And when a sponge gets full, it starts pouring back out what’s been put into it.

CARL: Especially when it is squeezed! When life “squeezes” us... what comes out? Well, whatever is inside. If we are full of anger, insecurity, and fear, then that is what will come out. But if we are full of God’s love – and we can only be full of it if we see Him as love itself, and not as hate and revenge – then love will come out. And it will be real love – the kind Mike just described that is beyond comprehension!

MIKE: Yes, for sure! And so that’s what happens to us. Love goes back to God from us, and it also goes back to our fellow man, without any effort. It’s effortless! If you’re trying to love people, folks, that’s just an effort of the “old person.” Give it up! Relax, and let God do it through you. Learn how much God loves who you are. Learn how He loves you so much, that you then begin to be a “sponge.” Eventually, that love will go back to Him and back to other people as well. It’s just natural. It’s natural in the same way that Bill uses the word “instinctive.” It is instinctive. It just comes out of you naturally.

BILL: And, that all came to me back when I started thinking about what it means to “walk in the Spirit” or “walk as Jesus walked”? That’s when I really started pondering, and it took me back into the *Gospel* of John where I gained a pretty strong sense that Jesus probably walked “instinctively” also. This made me start looking at His life and I saw simple things that kept getting repeated in John’s Gospel. Jesus would say everything that the Father would say to Him, and whatever He heard from the Father, He would repeat. This was the moment-by-moment lifestyle that Jesus lived.

MIKE: Yes.

BILL: And that’s when I started thinking, “How do we describe that?” Well, He was *instinctively* living out of the Father’s life! And, of course, in the now famous prayer by

Jesus to his Father, in John 17, He prayed (essentially), “All of you who are right here with me today, along with those who will come along someday ... this spiritual ability to instinctively live out of the Father's life, I am now passing that onto all of you!” It's a free gift, you know? Part of the enjoyment of being a Christian is that we don't have to live a mechanical, boring, tedious, cumbersome, kind of lifestyle. We can now just live out of the Father's life, and He invites everyone to do so. And what happened when Jesus was doing that? Well, every moment was pretty dynamic, and it was also mysterious. The disciples would often stand back and say, “Where did that come from? Why is He doing that?” And then they would see the results that they never, ever saw coming or even predicted.

MIKE: We no longer have to try to become more like Jesus. We don't have to try to become a better Christian. You can't be any better than you already are, and you can't be any more like Jesus than you already are! What you need to do is to discover what you already are, and then walk *in* who you already are. This is the simplicity of the Christian life. And you must walk in who you are *already*, not who you are trying to *become*.

CARL: Paul spoke of the “simplicity of the Gospel” and that he had no real agenda beyond “preaching Jesus as crucified” – in other words ... the cross!

The proof of all this that we have been discussing is not in arguing Bible verses, supportive as they are. It is good to bring them in and we could have spent these past five shows doing nothing but that and trying to prove what we believe by bringing more and more verses to try to convince people. But I am glad we did not take that route. It is so easy for Christians to get lost in “proof texts” – of which, everyone has their own set! Instead, for the past month, we've been talking about living the intuitive life of love, what happens to us in eternity, what love is, looking at what Jesus did on the cross for us, and what God has done *for* us by grace alone. This passionate, heart-felt presentation of who God is, His boundless love for His world and all who are in it (from the very best to the very worst) – this will convince people, without any doubt, far more than mere “proof texts” ever could.

MIKE: Oh yeah!

BILL: Uh huh!

CARL: And the reason I like to avoid trying to prove everything with just Bible verses and argue about what they say and don't say, is because most of the time it just gets in the way and distracts people from being able to see the big picture and really understand. We have taken a much higher road here, these past few weeks, guys! I know, because I traveled that lower and more destructive road for many years in my past.

BILL: Yeah.

CARL: As an example, there are certain verses that have been made to just loom up in people's minds, like the parable of "the rich man and Lazarus", or the image of the "lake of fire" in the book of Revelation, or maybe Jesus's talk on "the sheep and the goats." And someday maybe we can talk about those and bring them into perspective with all we have been saying. There would be no desire on our part to "explain them away", ignore them, or spin them in any way. Instead we, would only want to understand them in the context of all who God is, and in light of how He has revealed himself in all of the Bible as the God of love, and a God who is good, always, and a God who saves his world by grace through Jesus who died on the cross to take away the sin of the world. We have a wonderful love story that is the basis of all we believe.

But after we go through Bible verses and discuss the pros and cons of each one, we *must* get back to the heart of all we have discussed, because this is where reality is -- in our walk with God -- a real walk with him where we love other people and we're living in peace. It is a daily walk with Him where we're not going around intense, stressed-out, angry, fearful, and judgmental. Not all, but too many religious people are caught up in this negative stuff. They think it's the "Christian life" and the right thing to do.

We can always check and see what we're doing, because we really will notice a difference. If we're going around, always evaluating everybody as soon as we meet them, sizing them up to see if they believe what we believe. We're just judging them and not loving them. Judging belongs to God alone – He does it perfectly. We can't!

BILL: Yeah ... How's their life? What are they doing? What denomination are they in?

CARL: Yes! Instead of ... Hey, my friend, I love you just the way you are. I was watching a show about Mr. Rogers, and that was one of his favorite things he wanted kids to know – that they are loved exactly the way they are. And he instilled this in a lot of kids in America for several generations. And that's what we need to know -- that God loves us, that He accepts us, that He will never throw us away, and that He will never abandon us or leave us!

He's certainly not going to torment people. He's not even going to annihilate them. How could He? He loves this world that He made, came to this earth, joined the human race as one of us, died *with us for us* and even *as us*, and took the sin of the whole world away from us and onto himself! He has to love us; He doesn't have a choice. But He doesn't want to have a choice, nor does He need one, because it's His nature to love and save us. That's what Love does! He's never going to forsake us or give up on us. Right? And that is so good to know. The joy and peace that comes from knowing this message -- that's the "good news"! The good news is that God has done this for us and there's nothing we can do to add to it or subtract from it, or undo it in any way. And there is security, real security, in that work of God for us because it doesn't depend on how much we believe, or whether we believe enough, or whether we quit believing, or whether we had the right

statements of belief, or anything else. All of that that muddies salvation. Now, these beliefs will make a big difference in our *experience*, but it doesn't make any difference in who God is, or his disposition toward us, which comes out of his love alone.

So, one other thing – there is yet another passage in 1 John that says, “God is love.”

BILL: I think this is where you just got the name of your Sunday morning fellowship.

CARL: Yes! It's called “God is Love Fellowship”, and I have been accused by some people of placing *love* above all other attributes of God. But, of course, I am not. I'm not saying God is *only* love (though He is *completely* love), but that love is the foundational motivation of God. Everything He does is rooted in his love for humanity: His salvation, His grace, His patience. All of these things He does ... because He loves us. And He loves us because that's who He is. God isn't just a God *of* love, He is what love *is*! Look at what Paul said love is in 1 Corinthians 13. God is patient. God is kind. God does not seek His own best interest (but ours!). He doesn't take into account when we “wrong” Him. (But that's because we can't wrong God anyway. We only “wrong” ourselves and others). He only takes into account our wrongs and how it messes us up! But he's not sitting there thinking, “You robbed me of my dignity and my honor, and so I've got to somehow take it back”, (as Anselm claimed in the Middle Ages). That's a horrible and distorted view of God. And when we have a distorted view of God, we're going to have a distorted view of ourselves and other people, and we will live in tension and without peace as a result.

So I just wanted to say that we can get into some Bible verses someday in greater detail, but that I'm really glad that we did not go that way this past month. I am also very pleased that I got to be a part of this radio show, and that I got to be a part of this discussion rather than just going through a bunch of “proof texts” and making “correct arguments”!

BILL: Well, I was thinking about this too, as far as God's love goes, it's the “change element” for us. That's why love is the most powerful thing in the universe, by far. And because it is, it creates change. It does bring restoration. We were talking about this the other day, that since it does bring restoration by its overwhelming power, then it is also “irresistible.” 1 Corinthians 13 concludes its list with, “Love never fails.” Well, what does that mean? It means that God's ability to change things is going to be irresistible and unstoppable. It's like gravity. It's going to just pull you. Just as gravity is irresistible, so is His love.

MIKE: It's drawing -- it just draws us!

CARL: And it's okay if such “drawing” takes some time. The longer it takes, the more we're going to appreciate what happened to us when we get there. I think some people who will bow down on their knees before God in tears of gratitude, are going to be those who did the worst stuff in this life. They're going to realize, even more than most others,

how much God loves them and has forgiven them and saved them by his grace alone and not of themselves in any way. They're going to be so appreciative and joyful.

MIKE: And the Bible makes clear that those who have been forgiven much will also love much.

CARL: Yes!

MIKE: And bad guys like Hitler are going to see how much they have been loved by God, and they're just going to be blown away – just like all of us will! Every knee is going to hit the floor, and our jaws are almost going to hit the floor too as we confess, “Wow, this Jesus Christ is indeed Lord! And what a wonderful savior He is!”

CARL: And how many times – and I know you've had this happen to you -- people will say, “What? God saved Hitler? That can't be!”

MIKE: Oh yes, I have had this happen!

CARL: But the answer is, “ Yes! ... especially Hitler! Because God saved the “Chief of Sinners” (Paul), and saved him completely by grace and not by anything Paul did.

MIKE: Yep. Absolutely.

CARL: And, do you know why God saved Hitler (or anyone else)? Two reasons. Number one, he needed to be saved. Number two, God loves him. He loves him because he is messed up and sinful and has a need, and God's going to meet that need. And it's an extreme need in Hitler's case, but maybe we too are more in need than we realize! Maybe we are not so un-Hitler-like in other ways than he was?

MIKE: Absolutely.

BILL: Well, it's easy for evangelicals to look at Hitler and say, “How could God save such a hateful and unloving person?” But what about another common evangelical idea that says, “You need to believe in Jesus or you're going to hell.” What about an extremely good person (Hitler's opposite)? What if that person never believes in Jesus? Take Bill Gates, for example. I'm not sure if he's a Christian by the evangelical definition. I've heard that he might not be, but he has done some tremendously good things! Well, you know, if we're going to just run this grid across all of humanity and look at the most evil person like Hitler ... well how about the best person? Isn't God going to look at all of these people, the whole spectrum, and conclude that they're all helpless and in need of salvation?

CARL: And isn't this whole argument an appeal to salvation by works (and not grace)? Aren't we looking at where we are really bad and really good, as compared to others? Salvation really has nothing to do with how good or bad a person is. Salvation is God's

grace, unearned by us, a free gift that He gives us. And most evangelicals have presented salvation as something God puts on the table, and says, “You can take it or not.” But it's not a package!

MIKE: Yes, and it's not an “offer” either!

CARL: Right! It's something God did *to* us, not just *for* us. It was an action, performed by God in our heart and soul, and a declaration of what He did. His gift of salvation is not a little package He puts out there for us to grab, or else leave sitting on the table. The gift is God acting in love.

BILL: And, that's why when I get into conversations and people just say, “Well, I like what you're saying, but I just disagree with you.” So I always come back and say, “That's okay. You don't need to believe in God. But He believes in you!”

MIKE: There you go. Yeah.

BILL: And that just shocks them. But then I see the expression on their face that seems to say, “Wow, I never thought about that.”

MIKE: And the other thing about Hitler is, well ... Hitler was a “Christian”! Ha!

BILL: Ha! Ya, I know!

CARL: Oh, I just wanted to say, since we're about to close, thank you for having me come and be a guest. I've enjoyed it thoroughly the whole month. It just seems like it was one evening! Ha!

MIKE & BILL: Ha, ha!

MIKE: Well, we're both so glad to have you, Carl, and we really would like to have you become a permanent member of this show. Alright, we gotta go, folks. We'll see you next week. Bye.

ANNOUNCER: Thank you for listening to *Conversations in Christ*. Our prayer is that today's program has opened your heart and mind to a greater understanding and curiosity about the gift of grace that God has given to each of us, through his Son, Jesus Christ. If you have any questions or comments about today's program, feel free to send an email to: info@conversationsinchrist.org, or you can send a note to: Conversations in Christ, PO Box 2677, Grass Valley, California, 95945.

Remember, you have been blessed with every spiritual blessing so that you may believe and begin to experience the very life of God in you. Tune in again next week for Conversations in Christ.

#6. Living in Our “New Person” in Jesus (August 12, 2018)

ANNOUNCER: Good morning and welcome to Conversations in Christ, with Bill Rose and Mike Rough. We invite you to sit back, open your Bible and engage in a dialogue as we learn more about the incredible gift of grace that God has given all of us. Now let's reason together in love.

MIKE: Good morning Bill!

BILL: Morning Mike.

MIKE: Good morning Denny.

DENNY (Sound Engineer): Good morning sir.

MIKE: How are you all doing?

BILL: Just doing really well. How about you?

MIKE: I'm doing great. Anyway, this is *Conversation in Christ* and we are glad to be back with you folks again this week. Carl is not with us this week since he was just a guest for the past few weeks and we really enjoyed having him join us. Bill's got something he wants to start with today. So where are we to go today, Billy?

BILL: Well, the last four or five weeks, when Carl was here, we spent a lot of time talking about the difference between the “old person” we were, and the “new person” we now *are* in Jesus. And so, what I want to do this morning is to continue picking up on that theme. Our perspective, on this program, is that we can understand and live in this “new person” that we now are in Jesus, in terms of what God has created in us He built within us this “new creation.” This is really what God wants us to focus on in our Christian life. If we're going to “walk just as Jesus walked”, well ... what did Jesus really focus on? He focused on what his Father was doing in his life, what He created in him. And so, Jesus was, honed in on everything that was pure, holy, perfect, and good.

So, when scripture says, “Fix your eyes on Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith”, we're not supposed to just look at a picture on the wall and say, “Hey, I'm going to focus on Jesus”! What we are meant to do is to look at the *finished work* of Jesus and all that God has done in him. And when we start to look at what that really is, and we see the substance of it, and we understand that it's the “new creation” we now are that God has accepted. And this “new person” is complete because God does not leave anything undone in us and we are made perfect in the very image and likeness of Him.

MIKE: Yes! And it is not just that he accepted us, it is also what He has made us. He, recreated us into this “new creation” that we now are. And so the “old man” (old person)

was crucified on the Cross and we need to understand this. What we all tend to have a problem with is that though we have been crucified with Jesus, we still have to deal with sin today. This is because what God did was to take all sin (from the beginning of time until the end of time), lump it all into one package, and put it all onto Jesus! And so our old sinful nature (person) was crucified with Christ. But all that sin that was crucified with Christ (for all time past and future) we still have to deal with today, living within time itself. As Paul said, “The flesh (old person) has been crucified, so consider yourselves dead to sin.” This means the sins, in time, that we are and will commit. And we have to commit them or there is nothing for Jesus to have taken on himself on the cross! The King James Bibles uses “reckon yourselves dead”, and Paul may have been thinking of “reckoning and debt.”

So, consider your old person and old sinful nature dead. It's been crucified, so do not give it any leeway in your life, don't let it have any sway, and don't let it run your life. Now where most of us go wrong is that we allow the flesh (the old person) to control us. Instead of, like you said Bill, setting our mind on Jesus and how he lived and on good things, and focusing on the Father, we focus on the old person that we were. When we do this, all we get is a pain and sorrow and suffering, and no happiness whatsoever. Right?

BILL: Yeah. And when we start to focus on that old creation (old person), what we try to do is make that old creation better. But all this does is to further facilitate sin in our lives. It has been our perspective on this show, from the beginning, to encourage people to *not* focus on that old person that they were. But, we also do not tell people to get out there and stop sinning! No. And why? Because that's not our role now that God's involved in our lives. This is key! He's the one who's going to change the conditions, the behavior, the conduct in our lives concerning all these things. There is nothing that we're going to be able to do to change this. It comes down to an interpersonal relationship that we each have with God and it is through that one-on-one discipleship with Him that changes our behavior ... not our effort. And so, in one sense it is a waste of time for us to sit around and say, “I need to just stop sinning.”

This is sometimes the message in some churches. “We just need to work on getting better.” And so, it gets confusing for many people because they mistakenly think they can make the “old person” (that we were outside of Jesus) better than it is doomed to be – sinful. Then, they go on and think they can improve also on the new person that they are in Jesus. But neither of these are possible: the *old person* will never get right and the *new person* can never go wrong! As a result, some church ministries become not much more than a self-improvement program.

MIKE: Exactly!

BILL: And then they might as well just stick Tony Robbins in the pulpit because he's the one who motivates and makes the big bucks momentarily changing people's lives.

MIKE: Yeah. Well, you can change your behavior. People do this all the time But you cannot make yourself *righteous* (in a right-standing with God), and you cannot make the “old man” (old person) any better than he is. Okay? Your behavior is something else again. Righteousness can only come from God alone as a free gift, by His grace, through what Jesus did for us on the cross. Period! And, really, this whole thing is very simple. *Religion* is complicated because it says, “You need to *try* to be more like Jesus.” But try as you might, you will never be able to make yourself like Jesus or righteous . And therefore, as Paul said, we are *not* focus on the flesh (the old person). We are to focus instead on the new person, on Jesus. This is why Paul said, “If you walk in the power of the spirit, you will not fulfill the lust of the flesh.” Gee, how simple is that? But how do we walk in the spirit? Well, first, you just read what has been written by the followers of Jesus about this. But, second, recognize that the Holy Spirit resides *in* you! This means Jesus resides in you also. And ... guess what ... so does the Father! We are complete in Him and the fullness of all who God is (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) who dwells in us. They dwell in us, they are there, they are guiding us, and our *new man* that was created in Jesus on the cross is absolutely perfect. If we you'll walk in the new man that we *already* are, we need not try to become better or make the new person we are better ... because we can't! We can't make the *new person* any better than it is, and so we just walk in who we now are in Jesus ... forever! That's all you need to do, okay? That's it. In fact, that's all you *can* do! You don't have to try not to sin. You just say, okay, I'm walking in and through the power of the Spirit.

BILL: Yes. And, you bring up a point that sometimes I hear as I'm talking with people outside of this radio program. What comes up is that people often feel that they need to seek the Holy Spirit a little bit more. And what I try to remind people is the Holy Spirit is already living within them. It doesn't get any closer than that! So when we start to seek the Holy Spirit, what happens? We turn our “flesh button” on, and we seek full throttle and start doing whatever is humanly possible to seek the Holy Spirit. As a result, we do not live by faith and understand that the God of the universe is living within us and does not require us to seek him. All He's expecting us to do is just experience Him in his fulness as He lives his life through us! It is so simple and we make it so hard and never reach any real degree of satisfaction and peace. This is because we keep getting in the way. And so, strange as it may sound, I just encourage people as believers to not *seek* the Holy Spirit, but instead just let him seek his will in their lives. Though people mean to do something good by *seeking* the Holy Spirit, it is possible that they are going down the wrong road, spiritually, and enforcing their living in the flesh (in the old person that they no longer are).

MIKE: Yes, and ask the Holy Spirit, “Help me to know your voice. Help me to listen. I know you are in me. I know you're speaking to me. My problem is that I don't have ears to hear. I want the ears to hear. Please give them too me!” And She will. Why would she not? Now this may come gradually as we grow in our experience in the Lord, but it will come! Now, it is essential to understand that the “new man” (the new person we are in

Jesus) is absolutely perfect. Absolutely does everything perfectly righteous. The new man loves the Father with his whole heart, mind, soul, and strength ... just as Jesus did. And this new person that we are loves our neighbor as ourselves.

However, are we operating in the *new man* or in the “power of the flesh” (the old man)? Paul wrote in Romans 12, “Be not conformed to this world, but be *transformed* by the renewing of your mind.” He did not say to be transformed by the things we do and say. Our mind needs to be changed. Our mind needs to have its itself reconditioned. Okay? And this is where the “work area” is for God ... in our minds! We need to say, “Okay, Father, if I'm supposed to walk in the power of the Spirit (as Paul says), caused me to know how to do that. I need my mind renewed. Okay? And so, that's where we do our changing ... in our minds ... it gets renewed to be able to think as the new man is already thinking in us.

BILL: That's a good thought. I was looking at 2 Peter, chapter one, just a few days ago and Peter says, “I know you know all of this, because the Holy Spirit has taught you all of this. So, I'm going to remind you of all of this.”

MIKE: Yeah.

BILL: That's the way I see us. When we say “renew our mind” we just need to pause and remind ourselves of what God has accomplished. That's all it is. It's not meant to be a commandment. It's not meant to somehow make us more disciplined and more empowered. Everything in scripture is just there to remind us of what God's done, where we need to go next, and what we need to experience in Him! And there is nothing that falls under condemnation, guilt, reprimand, burdensome commandments ... none of that stuff. Everything is just there to refresh, renew, and to remind, and to keep walking in the new person we are in Jesus. If and when this is ever understood ... it is absolutely revolutionary. But we have been taught the opposite for so long ... to work, to try, to earn, to achieve (and have done so without ever gaining real satisfaction and peace) ... that it is extremely hard for us to believe there is a better way! And it is a way that is easy ... just as Jesus said, “My burden is light and my pulling harness is easy, so come to me all of you who are burdened.” God does not desire to put more burden on us, but to remove it. Let Him!

MIKE: Yeah, and I'm going to make a blanket statement here. It's going to probably blow a lot of people's minds because I don't think many people have ever heard this before. But it is this: All you folks out there know every bit as much as Bill does, and as I do, and even as much as the Apostle Peter and the Apostle Paul knew. And I will take you even further ... you even know as much as Jesus knows! Now, how's that for a mind-blowing statement? Now people say, “Oh, I don't know *that* much!” But I want to tell you ... yes you do! And I will tell you why. Paul tells us that we are “complete in Jesus.” Really? Yes, every single one of us. We are a *new creation* because of what he did for us, not

because of anything in ourselves. And our *new creation* is every bit as linked in relationship with the Trinity (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) as they are with each other! As Jesus prayed in his “intercessory prayer” for us in John 17, “Father, make them one with me as I am with you.” Wow! Think about that. Therefore, we have the “wisdom of the ages” in every one of us. We have “the mind of Christ.” What else can these things mean?

Now how do we come to know what that is? Well, we don't have the *full* capacity, yet, since our minds have not been *fully* renewed to know (consciously) what we *already* fully know in Jesus. The new person we are in Jesus is perfect, just as Jesus is. But *experientially*, we are still growing, learning, and struggling with the *old person* that we were outside of Jesus. Some of you, folks, as you're hearing Bill and I talk, and as you probably heard when Carl was with us for the last few weeks, ... you are probably saying, “Yeah, that's right. That's true. I know that's true.” But how do you know this, or at least how do you have a *sense* that you know this deep in your soul? Where does this come from? It can only come from God as a result of the *new person* you are in Jesus! Now you may have never thought of this before, and you may have never heard of this before, but you folks all know when something is true. And, you know *how* you know it's true because it resonates in your heart and in your soul, and you can't help but say, “I think I've known that all along, it is as if I already knew this, and I have just now come to realize it! I've been thinking this, somewhat, but I've actually known this all along!”

You just didn't know that you knew it. Okay? Does that make sense? Everybody has the wisdom of the ages in them because they received it in the *new person* that they are in Jesus. Such wisdom comes from the “DNA of Jesus”, if you will. And so we know what he knows. We just don't know *all* that he knows consciously... yet. But that day is coming. It's in there – in us. And so, we're not telling you something, giving you something altogether new, that does not already abide in you. It is in you because you are “born of him”! The Holy Spirit is in you. And so you know the truth and this truth sets you free when you hear it and realize it is true. You cannot even help it. It is automatic. And as we tell you things, some of you who are listening and are seeking to hear the voice of the Holy Spirit will say, “Yes, that is true. That resonates with me.” Right?

BILL: And that's why I coined a phrase, “instinctive Christianity” because I discovered that such instinctive Christianity has so many parts to it. But one of those parts is, is what I discovered is when I looked at Paul's writings and Peter's writings ... that there is something that pops up over and over again. And when they're writing, they sometimes say, “I know you know this. You knew this before I ever shared it with you. And so, I'm just here again just to remind you of what you already know from the Holy Spirit.”

MIKE: Yeah.

BILL: And so, Peter and Paul understood that it was God's power and his way to inform people of the truth, and not solely based on what they were teaching. The apostles just

came along and confirmed it, but people were learning truth before the apostles taught it or wrote it down. God was gracious to provide a written historical record (in the New Testament writings), but He did not need to because He had the Holy spirit to reveal truth. And so, we need to trust the Holy Spirit who is there to be our counselor and says, “These teachers and writers are there to teach you all things. And when that is happening, that's when all of those miraculous moments happen -- when you discover fresh truth. It is truth that does not come from any individual. It is something that, all of a sudden, something finds grounding in your life and becomes foundational. Then someone else comes along and share something similar, and you say to yourself, “Yes, absolutely!” It is something that totally fits with what the Lord has *already* taught you.

MIKE: Yeah. And what's the verse that says, “You needed no man to teach you, because you have the Holy Spirit”?

Bill: Yeah.

MIKE: Now how can that be if we know without needing any man teach us? What's he saying? He is saying that we *already* know it because the Holy Spirit is in us teaching us. We don't know (consciously) what we *already* know (in our new person in Jesus). So, Bill and I are not telling you things that you do not already know, (assuming we are telling you the truth – and even this you must verify with God!). And as we present ideas, you may say to yourself (as I have said before), “Yeah, that resonates with me!” This is what we need to understand. And, even though Bill, or I, or Carl, teach and share what we believe (and I use the word “teach” carefully, because the Holy Spirit is the *real* teacher). And this is what I think it was Paul was meant when She said that we need to know man to teach us”, because the Holy Spirit is our only *real* teacher! Turn to her. Do not trust us alone!

Now, we *communicate* these things to you, but we cannot really *teach* you anything, because that's the Holy Spirit's job. And the Holy Spirit will be the one to make it plain to you and pull this out of your own new mind -- the mind of Christ that you have now in Jesus. And so, remember this. We're not holding ourselves up to the higher, we just may have understood these things before you did. That's all! But you have every bit as much knowledge in you as we do. But some of us might be just little farther along than some of you – just as we had many others who went before us who were farther along than we were. And please know that we know, there's nothing that we can take credit for because it is the Holy Spirit who reveals truth. The Holy Spirit has given this input, and put it into our thinking (and yours) and has enabled us to speak – hopefully accurately and honorably be for him!

BILL: Yeah. And Carl is big on this, and he will say, “It is just my opinion.” And, our whole thing is that these are our opinions. We are not God, and truth resides with Him alone. You may disagree, you may agree, but the fact that matter is, you must verify truth with God... not with us! We've looked at a number of different sides to every topic that

we try to teach, and then we summarize what we think is true. That just makes sense. It makes sense biblically. It is the only act of true humility before God, if we let “God alone be found to be true, though all others be found to be liars”! It makes sense logically and it makes sense experientially. And when we see a change in lives, not only in ourselves but in others, then we start to see that there are some legitimate reasons why these things that we are sharing are true. If we didn't see changed lives, and if we didn't see all kinds of harmonizing, we would not be on this radio show sharing these things. So again, it's our opinions and if you disagree, fine, we appreciate disagreement!

MIKE: Sure!

BILL: When you push back on us, and we push back on you with our thoughts, that's when “iron sharpening iron”, so to speak. And our goal is to think *outside of the box*, get outside of it, outside that *denominational thinking* that we have all been raised in. We need to realize that it is *God* who is teaching us. He's got much more that He can add to any topic that will go way beyond what we've even thought of, or what we've been taught.

MIKE: Yep. Yeah! It's amazing how what you say are just opinions. Some of the things that I share are more than an *opinion* for me. There have been actual revelations that I've received from the Holy Spirit. But the primary revelation is that God is good -- that God is good all the time and He's way bigger, way better, and more loving than we ever could ever imagine or think. We just can't grasp how great, how good, and how loving God is. And so, the more that I see and know learn of this great God -- that He is better than we ever thought -- I find out that God is love and God cannot annihilate or torment anybody! And, you know, He cannot even fathom to make a place called “hell.” He just cannot! There's no possible way that a loving God could ever create a place to torment people forever and ever and ever and ever. Okay?

And so, these are revelations of truth to me that I consider to be far more than mere *opinions*. A friend of mine says, “Well, then you must be infallible in certain areas of belief.” But I say, “No, I'm not infallible, but God is – okay?” And God, through the Holy Spirit, is able to make revelations to us that makes God to appear greater and greater to us. And I know, as I have seen the greatness of God, and how much he loves each and every one of us, that it has increased my love for Him and I no longer *try* to love him. I no longer *try* to love you, Bill. The *new man* that I am *automatically* loves God with all my heart, soul and strength. And my new man love you and everyone out there. Why is this so? Well, it is because his love was first shed abroad in us, in our *new man*. Okay? Therefore love automatically comes right back out. I don't have to make any effort because I've seen the love of God and the magnificent manner that he loves me with his whole heart, mind, soul, and strength.

The other night in the Bible class that I teach, we watched a video on the Hubble telescope and how it has gone to this ultra-deep space. It is incredible all the hundreds of thousands

of universes out there -- not just *this* universe. These scientists have seen this through this Hubble telescope and it's so magnificent. And I cannot help but think, "Wow, could this just all happen by accident? Oh, no way!" Okay? There is a great God who is behind all this, who created all we see, and this great God is bigger than all of these universes. He is bigger than all of the space out there -- our God is bigger! Remember what David said? "I go to the highest heights, and you are there! I go to the deepest depths, and you are there! We cannot go anywhere where God is not. Okay? So, if we shot ourselves into a rocket and went hundreds of millions and billions of miles away ... God's would still be there!

BILL: Even on Mars!

MIKE: Oh yeah.

That's just as paltry. Mars is paltry when we look at this Hubble scope thing, I'm telling you, it just blows my mind, you know, and it's awesome! And that means our God is awesome and He loves us so much -- loves every human being so much. We just don't have any comprehension of it.

BILL: Okay. They're going to colonize Mars, and you know I'm waiting for a pastor to go up there and establish the First Church of Mars! Ha!

I was recently sharing with another person who was talking with me about how great God's love is in 1John. We've kinda gone all over the place this morning in our discussion, but when John wrote that "we love because God first loved us", I started thinking more about that. I thought if God hadn't loved us we would have no definition of what love even is. And it's, in one sense, a reflection on other countries who really lack that kind of instinctive, natural love that we tend to have here in our country. This is because they have been raised with a different understanding of what love is. So, it all goes back to what our perception of God is and how this changes our life and our behavior towards one another.

I know we're running out of time, so do you want to wrap it up, Mike, and add anything else?

MIKE: Well ... just that love itself should tell us clearly that there is a God. There is no way that love could come out of nothing, randomly. Okay? We love because there is a God who loves us!

BILL: Unlike "random acts of kindness."

MIKE: Yeah. Alright. We'll see you all next week, folks.

ANNOUNCER: Thank you for listening to *Conversations in Christ*. Our prayer is that today's program has opened your heart and mind to a greater understanding and curiosity

about the gift of grace that God has given to each of us, through his Son, Jesus Christ. If you have any questions or comments about today's program, feel free to send an email to: *info@conversationsinchrist.org*, or you can send a note to: Conversations in Christ, PO Box 2677, Grass Valley, California, 95945.

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Summary of All Six Broadcasts

The Significance of the Two Adams (#1)

The significance of the two Adams explains God's plan to save all humanity. When the first man (Adam) failed, everyone was placed into his moral failure which resulted in inheriting a sin nature equal to his. This is referred to in the Bible as the "old man" (or the "old person"), sometimes called the "flesh". God's response to this situation was to send His Son to be the Savior of the World. He accomplished this through Jesus, who comes into the world as the "Second Adam" (or, final Adam). This was actually, God Himself becoming a human being!

Through the finished work on the cross, everyone is placed into the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. Our participation in that work (through Jesus as our representative) is how we have all been saved from sin and death. All of mankind has now been made into a "new person", in the flawless image of Jesus. Through that crowning achievement and unmerited favor (grace) of God, everyone is secured in salvation and redemption. The choice to be in Adam was never ours to make, and the decision to be placed into Jesus was never our choice as well. Therefore, Jesus is not a *potential* Savior, but an *actual* one for all of humanity. Our "old person" is gone forever, and our "new person" has come!

The Good News: Announcing Salvation by Grace (#2)

The Gospel was designed by God to be an *announcement* that His plan to save all humanity through Jesus was complete, and was done so without any human reasoning or choice. The gospel is not an *offer* for us to accept or decline in order to be saved. Instead, it is a salvation by God's grace alone, which is an unmerited gift with no requirement whatsoever. Since it is by God's grace alone that all are saved, it does not *require* anyone to decide, believe, receive, accept anything – though these things may indeed happen when a person hears the Good News message. The decision of salvation with everlasting consequences has enormous ramifications, and God lovingly spares all of mankind from that responsibility. This is what grace is all about. And since it is all done for us by God, what is left for us to do? Simply believe, receive, accept, and experience our salvation that was given to us as a free gift from God by his grace!

We Believe in Him Because He Believes in Us (#3)

There is a principle that exists in how God interacts with his creation. It is simply this: He wants and even requires us to be as perfect as He is, but then He is the one who brings this about in us through Jesus! For example, concerning salvation John wrote, "We love Him because He first loved us." God fully understands that His role with humanity is to fully

achieve for us we cannot. This principle is also true concerning our faith. We believe in Him because He believed in us. We all become "new creations" in Jesus out of His love for us, wanting to restore what is broken in us and bring correction and healing? How could God want or do anything else and still be God? Therefore, everyone was "born again" when Jesus was "born again" on the cross because he fully represented us in relation to God.

The "new creation" (or, our being "born again"), has both an objective (factual) and subjective (experiential) aspect. When Jesus reconciled and forgave the whole world on the cross, He finished and fully completed his work ... because that's what Saviors do (they finish what they start). And this is what *objectively secures* the salvation of every man, woman and child throughout history. Our "born again" nature doesn't require a *subjective experience* in order to be saved. But such experience does open up an awareness that we are living out of the faith of Jesus implanted in us. Our experience of being a "new creation" makes us realize all that God has done for us. And this shapes our lives daily.

Our salvation wasn't completed when we started experiencing forgiveness from God (as many Christians think), because God doesn't save people individually. Instead, God saves humanity as a whole, based solely of the atonement of Jesus on the cross. Jesus was God who became human and joined humanity, as a human, and experienced everything we do. But we also, in turn, experience what he did on the cross. So we all, as a human race under his "second Adam headship," died, were buried, and raised from the dead to newness of life! God is not as much a *personal savior* as He is a *total savior*. And yet, subjectively, when our eyes are open to this Good News message, our relationship with God through faith becomes very personal and real!

The "Old Person" vs. the "New Person" (#4)

When we are "born again" we are a "new person" in Jesus that *cannot* sin! (1 John 3:9). This amazes most people and seems impossible and not consistent with what we see. However, it is true ... but only in our *new* person, not in the *old* that still lingers with us in this life. But there is great comfort, victory, and peace in knowing this reality and in knowing that something in our lives is continually going right! On the other hand, we can occasionally lose sight of that "new person" that we are, (and its state of perfection), and we try to live in the "old person" that can never be made perfect. We do this because we give into temptation, experience weakness, become discouraged, or engage in the illusion that sin is not destructive. But it is. And this is what Jesus came to deliver us from by making us *a new creation* in himself. We can now either live in, and focus on, the "new person" we are in Jesus, or on the "old person" we were outside of Him! What a frustrating battle! It is as if the "old person" has boxing gloves and tries to knock the daylights out of the "new person" who knows the battle is already over and won! The

apostle Paul understood the dilemma of this worldly engagement and highlights it logically and emotionally in chapter 7 of his letter to believers in Rome.

We can conclude that we are all (in one sense) “bi-polar”, going back and forth while living in and out of the minds of two different people: the *old* person and the *new* one. But we know it is impossible to be living out of both at the same time since God has designed our *new person* to live sin free, perfect, and always victorious. And this is what allows us to come to rest with our “inconsistent” condition in this world. Paul gave Jesus credit for this discovery when he wrote, “Thanks be to God, who delivers me through Jesus Christ our Lord! And so, I myself in my mind (in the new person) am a willing servant to God's way, but in my sinful nature (the old person) a slave to sin and failure.”

This spiritual principle of the battle with the *new vs. old person* helps explain many of the things in the Bible including the “Sheep and the Goats” (in Matthew 25). Our old person is an illustration of the goats, and our new person is represented by the sheep. We are sometimes double-minded as we function back and forth in this world. The old person (goats) eventually gets annihilated, and the new person (sheep) live eternally with God who saved us. Thank God He burns away the *old person* we were outside of Jesus, and recreates everyone into the *new person* we all are in him! All of us will live forever since none can ever be lost. Everyone will be refined and restored to God, and those that love Him in this present age have the joy of being in continual fellowship with Him. We have the ability to live the abundant life in Christ now. God is patient and longsuffering and will not allow any to perish (2 Peter 3:9). Isn't that a great promise!

God's Unconditional Love as Irresistible (#5)

Can God's love for everyone be resisted, or is it irresistible? If it is irresistible, mankind will be universally saved and everyone will live together with Him forever. If God's love is resistible, then everyone is in trouble with the insecurity of salvation based from our flawed behavior and unmet godly expectations. This is where fear has its spiritual roots in our Old Man (nature). It is only natural to doubt the security of salvation if one believes God's character and love have observable cracks and weaknesses that can justify resistance and untrustworthiness.

On the other hand, if God's love is unconditional wouldn't it be irresistible in both this life and the next? Does His love ever change for those whom He created in His very own image? Aren't the qualities of being long-suffering, patient, kind, never provoked into anger, never doing evil, always rejoicing in truth, believing all things and enduring all things and knowing all things and His love never failing – are these not just as eternal as God Himself? This is the spiritual fuel for the *new person* in Jesus. This truth of God's never-ending, never-failing, irresistible love empowers to live just as Jesus did each day. He lived instinctively, always aware of how unlimited and never-ending God's love is for

the whole world. Is this not what John 3:16 is all about? And this is what makes faith so wonderful as it motivates us to be fully dependent upon Him.

Living in Our “New Person” in Jesus (#6)

We are often asked the question, “How does a person live daily in the *new person* they now are in Jesus? The best response is simply, “We can't, but Jesus always will.” This is a promise given to us in a prayer that Jesus shared with His disciples before going to the cross (John 17), “Father, make them to be one just as You and I are one -- You in Me and I in You, so that they also may be one in us, causing the world to believe that You sent Me.” Living in our “new person” is really nothing more than just believing that this prayer is true for us ... and everyone. It is taking God seriously about His promises! Jesus gave us the ability to live just as He did, coming directly from the Father's life by understanding and trusting the deep intimacy of “oneness” that can only come from God. This unity was passed on to all humanity by being placed in Christ and inheriting our new person in (an from) Him. There is nothing more for us to do (and nothing we even *can* do) to make our spiritual development happen. We simply are as He is in this world (1 John 4:17).

Our spiritual maturity is our day-to-day activity of just being and experiencing what He has completed *for* us. This new life is an *instinctive* one, since it organically comes from the Father's life which is also exactly how Jesus lived it. His life wasn't simply a reflection of discipline, proper motivation, and daily commitments. That is why He could say, “everything I hear, do, and say is coming from the Father.” Wow! Oh, to live like this ... and we can! The focus is not on the *old person* we were outside of Jesus because that person is effectively dead. And with the death of that old person (which happened on the cross when Jesus died *for* us, *with* us, and *as* us), all of its sins and failures are forgiven and done away. Living daily in the *new person* brings a keen awareness of what Jesus finished on the cross and what delivered to us in terms of *oneness*. When we fail (and there are many times when we do), and live in the *old person*, we must remember to *renew* our minds by putting on the right-thinking cap. This is what Paul was communicating in chapter 12 of Romans when he wrote, “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the *renewing* of your mind.”

Concluding Remarks

It is my great hope (along with Bill and Mike) that you are encouraged by these broadcasts. We did our best to present the awesome realization that we are all “new persons” in Jesus because of his birth, death, and resurrection from the dead, in which he won final and complete victory over evil, sin and death ... forever. We also hope that you have learned that the *key to life* is found in living in this “new person” you now are. You will never be able to reform or improve your “old person” that was crucified with Jesus on the cross. So, quit trying to live in that “old person” that you *were* outside of Jesus, and instead walk in “the newness of life in the Spirit” who indwells you. Only here will you find real peace, joy, and success. And how do we do this? Simple. Paul said to “consider yourselves dead to sin”. So quit focusing on sin, death and condemnation, and focus instead on salvation, a savior who actually saves you, and on a God who loves you and will never forsake you!

If you are a thinking person, then you will naturally have many questions after reading (or listening to) these six broadcasts. Obviously, all related and supportive information cannot be included in such a relatively short presentation. So, I have included a number of *supplementary sections* that provide related and foundational information. Here are the topics (with brief descriptions):

Salvation by Grace Alone

What Is “The Good News” (Gospel)?

The “good news” (gospel) is commonly misunderstood. It is not an *offer* made by God, providing a way for humanity to save itself by believing. Instead, it is an *announcement* of the salvation of all humanity by Jesus, as an act of unearned favor (grace), so that people can hear, believe, then turn *from* sin and turn *to* God who has already saved them.

The Role of Faith in Salvation

Most Christians believe that their “act of faith” ultimately saves them. For them, Jesus and his death on the cross was only *potential*, and through faith a person becomes saved. This is “salvation by faith”. But actually, salvation is by “grace, *through* faith.” Faith earns us nothing with God and we are saved by grace alone through the finished atonement of Jesus on the cross.

“The Plan” (The central theme of the Bible: The Redemption of Humanity)

This is a summary of the plan God had from eternity past to save the whole world as an act of his grace (unmerited favor toward humanity) through the birth, death, and resurrection of Jesus.

The Meaning of John 3:16

This is the most famous (and in some ways perhaps the most misunderstood) passage in the Bible. For sure, it presents the Good News about God's love and sending His only Son into the world to save it. But do we read it completely correctly? Or do we "read *into* it" based on what we have been told for so long, repeatedly, about it?

The Atonement of Jesus

What Jesus Did and for Whom

Looks at all the passages in the NT about the atonement of Jesus on the cross. In doing so, it becomes clear that *what* He did was actual (not potential), and *who* he did it for was all of humanity (not just some).

Anselm's View of the Atonement

The view that humanity, by sinning, "robbed God of his honor" and therefore God had to gain it back by punishing Jesus in our place, came from Anselm around 1000 AD. This is very different from the Bible's view of the atonement where Jesus died to take away our sin because *sin* is our enemy ... not God!

Justice and Judgement

Holy Justice!

Most Christians believe that the holiness and justice of God require him to send the majority of humanity into never-ending torment and agony as punishment for unbelief and/or unrepented sin. But is this true? Or, does holiness and justice mean something quite different (and much better) than the common understanding of these words?

George MacDonald's View of Justice

George MacDonald was CS Lewis' mentor. In this "unspoken sermon" he correctly identifies *justice* as "making things right." But he goes on and logically concludes that God's justice must be *ultimate* justice, and that ultimate justice must be God making things ultimately right.

God's Judgment: Love in Action

The salvation of all humanity by grace can leave many people wondering if there really is any judgment by God at all. Well, for sure there is. But the real question is what *purpose* God has in his judgment. Is it pure "retribution" with no corrective purpose whatsoever? Or are his judgments (and all other "negative" actions by him) a good thing, carried out with an "all-good purpose"?

Emergence of Hell (After Augustine)

Stubborn Facts about Hell

This is a study on all of the words in the Bible that are commonly translated as “hell.” But it turns out that none of these words (in the original Greek and Hebrew) have the same meaning as our modern day word hell, as “a place of never-ending punishment”.

Augustine’s View of Hell

The doctrine of hell and eternal punishment was best (and most thoroughly) articulated by Augustine in his monumental work titled the City of God. It is very clear that the Roman Catholic (and therefore Protestant) tradition of *eternal punishment* finds its foundation in Augustine.

Early Church (Before Augustine)

The Creeds of the Christian Church

Looking carefully at the early creeds of the Christian church, it is clear that *eternal punishment* was never officially held by the church before 500 AD, nor was the *restoration of all humanity* ever declared to be heresy or false teaching.

Early Church Writers on *Restoration*

The early Christians predominately believed that God would eventually restore all people and things, and therefore all humanity would be saved. 150 quotes by 17 early Christians are presented as evidence of this.

Resources

New Testament Sources

All of the New Testament passages quoted in the six KNCO broadcasts are provided, including the context in which they are found.

Book Sources

This is a list of over 75 books (and book sets) that were read, studied, and utilized over the past seven years as the basis for all that has been presented in this booklet

What Is “The Good News” (Gospel)?

The “good news” (gospel) is commonly misunderstood. It is not an *offer* made by God, providing a way for humanity to save itself by believing. Instead, it is an *announcement* of who Jesus is and the salvation of all humanity through his resurrection. Instead, it is a salvation completely by God’s grace (unearned favor toward humanity), so that people can hear this good news, believe what they hear, then turn *from* their sin, and turn *to* God who has already saved them.

What is the Good News? Some say it is an *offer* from God based on what Jesus did on the cross, that if we believe in Jesus we will be saved from eternal punishment in hell. But is this true? Where does this come from? Does it come from the Bible, or from church tradition? Well, it seems like the best place to start is by looking at *all* of the New Testament passages that say what the gospel (Good News) is.



The Good News (gospel) is mentioned many times in the New Testament. But usually it is mentioned by way of *reference*, not by way of *definition*. That is, it *refers* to the Good News many more times than it *tells* what it is. But there are a number of passages that clearly define what the Good News (gospel) is. The first occurrence is in Mark chapter one in the opening words. They are:

This is the Good News about Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God.

Three things can be noticed in this verse: (1) The Good News is about Jesus, (2) Jesus is the “Messiah”, the promised savior, and (3) Jesus is the “Son of God” -- God who became human. And these same items occur repeatedly in other passages that identify the Good News (gospel).

Another excellent identification of the Good News from the New Testament is how Paul opens his letter to believers in Rome:

1 This letter is from Paul, a slave of Christ Jesus, chosen by God to be an apostle and sent out to preach his Good News. 2 God promised this Good News long ago through his prophets in the holy Scriptures. 3 The Good News is about his Son. In his earthly life he was born into King David’s family line, 4 and he was shown to be the Son of God when he was raised from the dead by the power of the Holy Spirit. He is Jesus Christ our Lord.

This is one of the most complete definitions of what the Good News is. Paul has a lot to say about it. First, the Good News is *about Jesus* (verse 3) and that Jesus is the *Son of God* (verse 4). Notice that these two items are also present in Mark's claim of what the Good News is. But here Paul adds more information. The Good News was something *promised* a long time ago in the Old Testament writings (verse 2), and that Jesus is a *descendent of King David* (verse 3). But one other feature of the Good News is important. When Paul says (in verse 4) that Jesus is the *Son of God*, he also says that his *resurrection* from the dead is proof of this Sonship. This will come up repeatedly in Acts when Paul preaches the Good News.

A third major passage that clearly identifies the Good News is found in Paul's second letter to Timothy (a young, up and coming pastor), in chapter 2:

Always remember that Jesus Christ, a descendant of King David, was raised from the dead. This is the Good News I preach.

Again, some of the features found in previous passages are found here also. Paul says to Timothy that the Good News he preaches is *about Jesus*, that Jesus is a *descendent of David*, and that Jesus *raised from the dead*.

When Paul wrote his letter to believers in Galatia, he started it out by warning them not to accept any *other* Good News message.

Let God's curse fall on anyone, including us or even an angel from heaven, who *proclaims* a different Good News than the one we announced to you. I say again what we have said before: If anyone *proclaims* any other Good News than the one you *accepted* from us, let that person be cursed.

And what was this original Good News that was *proclaimed* to them and that they *accepted*? The best evidence is in Luke's account commonly known as "The Acts of the Apostles." In it, Dr. Luke chronicles the travels and events of Paul's three missionary journeys throughout the Eastern Mediterranean region. This included all of his sermons that he preached. Anyone who would take the time to carefully read through this book of "Acts" and mark all of Paul's sermons (as I once did) would find a number of themes that Paul repeats in his preaching of the Good News (Gospel). Here is a list of what I found, with the number of occurrences in parentheses (no number assigned indicates a single occurrence):

- | | |
|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| • About Jesus (9) | • Jesus is the Messiah (8) |
| • Things God has done | • The Messiah had to suffer (2) |
| • The resurrection of Jesus (9) | • Resurrection of believers |
| • Repent and turn to God (10) | • The name of Jesus (4) |
| • Be baptized (2) | • The kingdom of God (7) |
| • Save yourself | • The Word of God/Lord (7) |

- Son of God
- Peace through Jesus
- Lord of all
- The message of salvation (4)
- Forgiveness
- The grace of God (5)
- Believe
- The way of God/Lord
- Faith (2)
- All God wants us to know
- Judge/Judgment (3)

Several observations are helpful in defining Paul's Good News message. First, the topics that had the highest occurrences were (in order):

- Repent and turn to God (10)
- About Jesus (9)
- The resurrection of Jesus (9)
- Jesus is the Messiah (8)
- The kingdom of God (7)
- The Word of God/Lord (7)
- The grace of God (5)

Notice that three familiar items are at the top: *about Jesus*, the *resurrection* of Jesus, and Jesus as the *Messiah*. These are familiar because they are the same topics seen in the three main passages (previously presented) that identified what the Good News is. This clearly demonstrates that Paul's Good News message is an *announcement* of who Jesus is (The Messiah) and what he has *done* (raised from the dead).

But also at the top of this list is "Repent and turn to God." This is because this is logically what people are invited to do after they have heard the Good News of what Jesus has already done for them. Notice that there is no hint of earning or merit in this invitation. It seems to be more a message of, "Now that you have heard what Jesus has already done – raised from the dead – you are free to turn away from your sin that destroys you, and turn to God who loves you and will keep you safely away from sin and its harm!"

Further support of this is the fact that the lowest topics in Paul's preaching were: judgement, *baptism*, *faith*, and even *forgiveness*. There is never any mention of Gehenna or eternal punishment in Paul's sermons proclaiming the Good News! Why is there never any warning for lack of belief, if indeed eternal punishment is the consequence of unbelief? This is a very powerful and telling observation. When it comes to *faith* in the book of Acts, however, most people will think of the story of the *Philippian Jailor*, and how he asked Paul, "What must I do to be saved". But how Paul answered him is, perhaps, even more memorable: "Believe in Jesus and you will be saved." It is very tempting to turn this into a "*formula* for salvation by faith", rather than salvation by grace alone based on the finished work of Jesus on the cross on the behalf of all humanity (which it must be). A couple of factors put this story into correct perspective and prevent it from being heralded as "the way to get saved" as so many Christians do in reference to this passage.

1. As shown above, the “Good News” is not essentially about believing or anything else that any human does. Instead, it is clearly about *who* Jesus was (messiah, Son of God) and *what* He did in His resurrection. (See a section below in this booklet titled What Jesus Did, and for Whom for a complete presentation of all that the New Testament teaches about this.)
2. The context of the *Philippian Jailor* story in Acts is that in an earthquake the jail doors flew open, enabling all the prisoners to escape. Thus, the jailor was about to kill himself knowing what the penalty would be from the Roman government if they did escape. But Paul stopped him and assured him that no one was going to escape. The jailor, in his fear, cried out to Paul asking what he must do to be “saved”. But *saved* from what? The word *saved* in the Greek does not mean “to escape going to hell.” It simply means “to be delivered.” What was the jailor in need of being delivered from (in the context of this story)? Not the wrath of God, but the wrath of Rome. Paul was exhorting him to believe in Jesus to deliver him from this situation of crisis.
3. Paul, for sure, also told him the Good News about who Jesus was and what he had done, before and after this event, just as he told everyone he met throughout his journeys, as recorded all the way through the book of Acts. But his exhortation to “believe in Jesus” was not Paul’s message of the gospel (Good News) or how people are saved from sin that leads to death. Such salvation, Paul always makes clear, is by grace alone, *through* faith in Jesus who is “Savior of the World”!

So, it seems reasonable to conclude that the Good News in the New Testament is an *announcement* about Jesus, who he is, and what he has done for humanity in his death and resurrection, as “the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world” (according to John in his gospel account). The Good News does not seem to be an *offer* graciously made by God to provide a way for people to save themselves from eternal punishment in hell, by exercising faith. In fact, the word “gospel” (“evangel” in Greek) means “to announce.” It comes from a description of those who came in from the battle field and proclaimed that the victory had already been won. It had nothing to do with anyone believing it (or not), nor was it an “offer” to activate the victory by believing. It was simply a *declaration* of good news.

But not only is the Good News an *announcement*, it is also very much about *grace*! Grace is the very reason why the Good News is an announcement of something fully accomplished rather than an offer, allowing people to complete their salvation by exercising faith. Grace is “unmerited favor.” This means that there is *nothing* we can do (not even believe!) to earn salvation, add to it, or complete it in any way. Salvation is a free gift from God for all humanity, by his grace alone, through the *finished* work of Jesus on the cross. It is that simple!

Grace is tied in with the Good News (gospel) and with salvation thoroughly throughout the New Testament. Paul described it simply like this: “The Good News of the grace of God.” And this says it all ... the Good News is about the grace of God (not the faith of man!). Faith is very important and without it we miss out on a full and wonderful relationship with God. But there is no merit or earning, whatsoever, in faith. Faith is only our humble and correct response to God, realizing what He has *already* done for us through the birth, death, and resurrection of Jesus. (See the following section titled *The Role of Faith in Salvation* for more details).

Here are just a few key verses about *grace* from the New Testament writings:

But I do not consider my life of any account as dear to myself, so that I may finish my course and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify solemnly of the gospel of the grace of God. Acts 20:24

When he arrived and witnessed the grace of God, he rejoiced and began to encourage them all with resolute heart to remain true to the Lord; Acts 11:23

If by the transgression of Adam many died, much more did the grace of God and the gift by the grace of the one Man, Jesus Christ, abound to many. Romans 5:15

In the ages to come He will show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. Ephesians 2:7

The Good News has come to you, just as in all the world also it is constantly bearing fruit and increasing, even as it has been doing in you also since the day you heard of it and understood the grace of God in truth. Colossians 1:6

But we do see Him who was made for a little while lower than the angels, namely, Jesus, because of the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, so that by the grace of God He might taste death for everyone. Hebrews 2:9

For the grace of God has been revealed, bringing salvation to all people. Titus 2:3

As each one has received a special gift, employ it in serving one another as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. 1 Peter 4:10

To see how the grace of God works in the salvation of humanity, from start to finish (eternity past to eternity future), see the section later in this booklet titled *The Plan*. It summarizes all major aspects of theology in plain English:

- The God of the Plan (God)
- People and Their Need (Sin)
- God’s Rescue of People (Salvation)
- How People Respond (Faith)
- God’s Completion of His Plan (Judgment)

The Role of Faith in Salvation

Most Christians believe that their “act of faith” ultimately saves them. For them, Jesus and his death on the cross was only *potential* and through faith a person becomes saved. This is “salvation by faith”. But actually, salvation is “*by grace, through faith.*” Faith earns us nothing with God and we are saved by grace alone through the finished atonement of Jesus on the cross.

Recently, I shared with a pastor friend my view of salvation of all humanity through the finished atonement of Jesus on the cross as a free gift from God, by His grace alone, and not a result of anything we do – including our faith! His response was simply, “But doesn’t there need to be a response?” My answer was also very simple ... No! There is no *requirement* whatsoever for salvation from sin that results in death. This was taken care of *completely and finally* by Jesus when he hung his head to die and utter his final words, “It is finished!” There is not only nothing we *need* to add to what he has done for us, there is nothing we even *can* do to improve on (or contribute to) what he has *already* done for all of us by grace alone.

However, this does not mean that there is not a proper and correct response on our part to all that has been done for us. And this response is to *believe* the Good News that we have been told about the birth, death, and resurrection of Jesus. When we believe, we also receive, accept, turn *from* sin that destroys us, and turn *to* God who loves us unconditionally. There is no earning or merit whatsoever on our part, but there sure as heck is much to gain! When we believe and choose to live in the “new person” that we all are now in Jesus, our lives change, we feel “born again”, and we enter into fellowship with God – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. And, all three together came, as a human being in Jesus, to join us in our misery, die *for* us, *with* us, and even *as* us. This is the Good News!

When reading the New Testament, it is easy for people to come to a conclusion that their act of faith (believing) is what saves them from going to hell forever. This is a very common belief and, perhaps, the most common among Christians. With verses like “Believe in your heart that God raised Jesus from the dead, and you will be saved”, and “believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved” – it is no wonder that such conclusions about the role of faith in salvation are held.

But is this not really “salvation by faith” rather than “salvation by grace” as Paul so clearly states in chapter two of Ephesians? Who or what saves us? When all is said and done, who does the saving work and who, therefore, gets credit for salvation? Remember, Paul also, in many places, cautioned us that “no one can boast” about their salvation! He did



not say no one *should* boast, but that no one *can* boast. There is no basis whatsoever for us to boast about being saved. God alone gets credit, because He alone saves! It is a free gift, by his grace (unearned favor toward humanity), though the finished work of atoning for sin by Jesus on the cross.

Salvation is not “*by faith through grace*.” Instead it is “*by grace through faith*”! What is the difference? Salvation “*by faith, through grace*” means that the basis of salvation is our own act of believing (it is *by faith*). Faith then becomes the deciding factor in our salvation. This turns the *moment we believe* also into the *moment we are saved* (no longer destined for eternal punishment in hell). And, this makes faith something that *we* do that makes the difference (rather than God). Additionally, this faith-based salvation is made available *through grace*. In other words, God *offers* all humanity salvation, as an act of his grace. But it is only an offer. This is why it is *through grace*.



In the above illustration, salvation is **by** faith (as the ultimate determining basis), and is **through** God's Grace (made possible and available).

On the other hand, very much in contrast, Paul says “salvation *by grace, through faith*”! What does this mean? Well, it is quite opposite from “salvation by faith” described above. In chapter 2 of Paul's letter to believers in Ephesus, he formulated salvations as “by grace, through faith”. For Paul, the basis (“by”) of salvation is grace, not faith. It is totally God's doing for us, apart from ourselves or anything we do – including faith! However, this salvation that God does for us comes *through* faith. This mean that we receive it, realize it, accept it, acknowledge it, and experience it *through* our faith. But there is no earning of salvation on our part whatsoever when we believe.



In the above illustration, salvation is **by** God's Grace (as the ultimate determining basis), and is received, accepted, and experienced **through** faith.

So, if we are not saved by our faith (and are saved only by grace, through the atoning work of Jesus) ... then what is the role of faith in our lives? Faith is a wonderful and important activity that we engage ourselves in. When we believe, everything changes in our life. We hear the Good News announced that Jesus *already* saved us from our sin, and took all of our sin on himself on the cross. We then respond by believing (faith), we become “born again” (experience a new life in fellowship with God), and we begin to “walk in the Spirit” so that we will no longer desire to do what is destructive in our life (sin). That is a lot of accomplishment in our faith, but still there is no aspect of earning anything with God in believing.

None of our believing and experiencing fellowship with God in any way earns the slightest amount of favor with him! This is because salvation from sin (which results in death) is *completely* the work of God for us by His grace alone. It is His doing and we neither contribute to it in any way, nor can we take any credit whatsoever for such a wonderful salvation. Clearly, we are said to be “justified” by our faith. But what does this mean? It does not mean “saved by faith”! We are saved by grace alone. All of the New Testament makes this abundantly clear. The word “justify” means “to make right.” We are indeed made right with God when we believe. In other words, we come into a right relationship with God when we believe. And this is a wonderful thing. But there is no merit or earning in this act of faith on our part whatsoever. We merely *respond* to the Good News about what God has *already* done for us. And, more importantly, God’s disposition toward us does not change when we believe. He loves us, has always loved us, and always will love us (more than we could ever know). And this love never changes because God never changes! So, *our disposition* toward God does indeed change -- when we believe. Our mind is renewed, just as Paul says in Romans 12. But, *God’s disposition* toward us does not change when we believe.

Once we understand that faith is a “non-meritorious work” on our part, that it is no more than a proper and reasonable response to the Good News, and that salvation is by God’s grace alone ... we can then rest in him and rest in the finished work he did on the cross (not in what we did by believing). We realize that He alone makes us eternally secure with him, right along with all humanity that he saved by taking away the sin (not sins) of the world through his birth, death and resurrection. It is no more complicated than this. And the result is that we can fully (and only) trust the God who loves His world and saves it by His grace alone.

The role of our faith really comes down to how we understand *grace*. If grace really is “unmerited favor” toward us on the part of God, then there is nothing whatsoever that we can do to earn salvation or even contribute to it, improve on it, or “activate” it in any way. It is a complete and finished work by God (through Jesus), as a free gift of his grace for all humanity, simply because He loves us so much and wants the very best for us. But, on the other hand, if grace is merely a *kind offer* by God, providing (through Jesus) a way for us to save ourselves (ultimately) by exercising our faith, then there is much for us to do (believe), and in fact, much that we *must* do! So how we view grace is everything. This

second view of grace (as only an *offer* on the part of God) comes from the Roman Catholic Church, over the past 1500 years of church tradition, based on the heavy influence of Augustine.

In a large two-volume work opposing all forms of universalism, titled *The Devil's Redemption* (see the description of this book in the *Book Resources* section near the end of this booklet), the chapter of Grace presents very clearly the Roman Catholic view of grace. It is primarily the view that grace is the act of God giving each person the *opportunity* to freely choose or reject Him (and therefore salvation). But this RC view also holds that if God were to *force* salvation in any way, even automatically saving all humanity without allowing this free choice, then such salvation would no longer be *grace*. When I first read this chapter, it was a real “head-scratcher” since it is clear in the Bible that grace is the act of God freely saving on an unearned, non-meritorious basis. But this other (RC) view of grace seems to be what 1500 years of church tradition produces, especially when it becomes the monstrous institution of brutality and fear that it was in the middle ages! Unfortunately, many Protestants and Evangelicals today follow and hold this *offer view* of grace. However, most Calvinistic and Reformed churches hold to a *meritless view* of grace (as did Luther before modern-day Lutheranism). But all of these groups do so believing also that God has not, and will not, save all humanity by such grace. Instead they believe that God will only save an elected part of humanity and that such choosing of some and not others is an act of grace. But a careful study of what grace is from a full historic perspective, all the way back to the New Testament, is a very worthwhile study and a real eye-opener. Not all things “modern” are necessarily accurate and Biblical.

Recently I watched the movie “God Is Not Dead”. It is an Evangelical-promoted movie. (And, there is nothing wrong with this since every other ideological group promotes their movies that portray their ideals and beliefs.) But in this movie a college student challenges his professor (who is an atheist) on the existence of God. The movie is a little “rigged” in that it lead the viewer into a favorable view of the popular Evangelical position of “salvation by faith”. But this is OK too! What movie does not promote something and lead its viewers down some intended path? I always told my kids (when they were living at home) to look for the lesson and purpose in every movie. I emphasized that none of them are *pure entertainment*. Some lessons found in movies are very good moral reinforcement. But other lessons are more subtle and questionable. I wanted them to be aware of this and to watch for it. I told them that it is hard to be fooled when you know what it is that is coming at you ... and why!

This “God Is Not Dead” movie ended with the professor lying in the street, having just been hit by a car. He is surrounded by all the main figures in the movie (the student, the student’s pastor, and some bystanders). As this atheist professor is dying, but still conscious, he is hammered (even begged) by the pastor and the evangelical student to “believe in Jesus before it is too late!” They added to their pressure by letting him know that God had kept him alive and conscious as one last chance to save himself from going to hell forever. Now if this message is indeed true, they certainly have done the right thing

in warning him. And, I am not in any way against people doing this, if they sincerely believe that the act of faith is what ultimately saves each person. In fact, I would say that they *must* say this to everyone not just a dying man on a road! But I do not see people who believe in salvation by faith warning people ... certainly not often or with any real urgency or passion. It is seldom preached on or warned about (clearly and passionately) at funerals of unbelievers by Evangelicals. It makes me wonder if they *really* believe it!

But I also found this final scene in the movie to be a curious and desperate scene where God in all His mighty power, love, mercy, and grace was nowhere to be found (except in the background having already done all He could to save). God really did not factor in at this point for this dying atheist, because God had already done all He could by *providing a way* for this dying man to be saved ... but only if he believes. In other words, the salvation of this man (his eternal destiny of either heaven or hell) all comes down to his decision, and his alone. Clearly, in this “salvation by faith” view, God nor Jesus are the ultimate deciding factor. They only made salvation *possible* by providing an atonement that did not actually save anyone – though it did *potentially* save everyone. This is a perfect picture of *Salvation by Faith* (as opposed to *Salvation by Grace*) discussed above. God, the pastor, the evangelical student, any onlooking angels, and all bystanders --- all of these can only hope and try to convince this poor dying soul to believe in what Jesus did potentially for him, knowing that ultimately his eternal destiny lies solely in his final decision!

Again, if salvation really is just God *providing* a way for people to get saved by believing, then this scene is indeed an accurate presentation and it should motivate all people who hold this view to do all they can to get this desperate message out to all people, and get as many people saved as they can convince to believe. And, I fully commend them for such sincere effort! But if salvation is what God has *accomplished* fully and finally in the birth, death, and resurrection of Jesus, then it is not a desperate situation at all. Instead, it is a victory over sin and death for all humanity, and something to be announced to poor struggling souls (like this dying atheist), encouraging them to believe in the Good News they are hearing about what God, who so loves them, has *already* done for them! Such salvation is something they can never do for themselves by faith or deed. These are indeed two very different Gospels (Good News messages), and two very different roles of faith in salvation.

I will finish this chapter with a song I heard and sang a few weeks ago at the Evangelical church I attend (and have done so for the past 40 years). We sing many such songs (hymns) and when I sing them, I really mean them – more than I ever have in my long church-going life of nearly 70 years. Here is the hymn (with my probing and honest questions):

Jesus paid it all

(All? Do we really mean *all* when we sing?
Did he actually pay it *all* for us, or just *some*, or maybe just all *potentially*?)

All to him I owe

(Again, all? Do we owe him for a *complete and final* work of salvation – all –
or do we just owe him for *providing a way* to save ourselves by believing?)

Sin had left a crimson stain

He washed it white as snow

(Did he really, actually, wash away my crimson stain caused by sin and self-destruction?
Or did he only *potentially* wash it away, or *act like* he did on the cross,
waiting for me to believe before he actually does any washing?)

I love this hymn and so many others (Amazing Grace, Wonderful Grace of Jesus, The Old Rugged Cross, etc.) and I sing them like I mean them ... because I do, fully! I hope you do too. Read all hymn words carefully!

“The Plan”

(The central theme of the Bible: The Redemption of Humanity)

This is a summary of the plan God had from eternity past to save the whole world as an act of his grace (unmerited favor toward humanity) through the birth, death, and resurrection of Jesus.

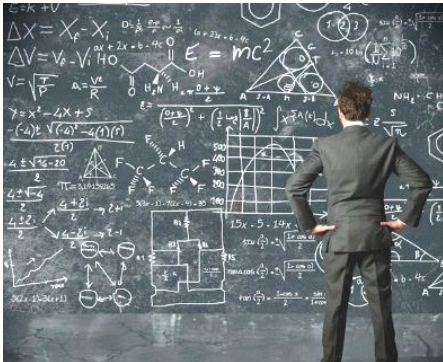
Introduction

We are not alone in the universe. There is indeed a God who created it and all of us. God loves his creation and wants only the very best for us. In fact, this “bringing about the best” is his plan, and he will carry it out with unfailing success.



The God of the Plan

God is good, and only good, all the time, forever. And everything he does has a good purpose. If you could ever meet God (and you will someday) you would find him to be the most wonderful, enjoyable, engaging, supportive, caring, and helpful person you could ever imagine. He is *loving* beyond measure, so *kind* it would bring you to tears, *patient* without end, *good* with no room to be better, *merciful* with eyes that stare with compassion, *gracious* to the point of eliminating all obligation, *holy* and pure without falling short of perfection for even a moment, and he is so *just* that everything will be made right in the end.



People and Their Need

When God created us, he made us in his own image so that we are nothing less than limited versions of himself. This makes us extraordinarily valuable to him and therefore we are beings he will never forsake, annihilate, or torment. He loves us so much he created us with the wonderful gift of freedom that enables us to accomplish either great or terrible things. God created us knowing that we would exercise our freedom foolishly and bring destruction and misery upon ourselves. But he also created us knowing that he would redeem us from our self-inflicted misery, and would make us forever perfect like himself through a process we now know as “life.” This was his plan for us that always existed in his heart and mind.

God's Rescue of People

After failing miserably in the exercise of our freedom, God himself came into the world he created as a fellow human being. He allowed himself to be born in a horse-feeding tray and lived a life as a humble carpenter named Jesus. But his purpose in becoming a fellow human being was to fully join us in our suffering and misery, and to die *with* us. But he also died *for* us, and even died *as* us, taking the penalty of sin (death) on himself. He came into this world so that all the trouble that happens to us, also happens to him. But in doing so, what happens to him also happens to us! So when he conquered death by raising from the dead, he brought a new and everlasting life to everyone. This is the wonderful gift that he gave to humanity that he so loves -- a free gift that is unearned by us in any manner of behavior or belief. He saved us, all of us, simply because he loves us!

How People Respond

The message of this “good news” of salvation of all humanity by grace alone, is announced to the world so that all people may hear and believe what has *already* been done for them. When we hear the message and believe it, we are accepting, acknowledging, and receiving what God has *already* fully done for us. We do not believe in order to get saved, we are saved in order that we might believe! Believing in Jesus does not save us ... Jesus himself saves us, and then we believe as a result! Those who do not believe (whether unaware or unwilling) are just as saved by the work of God alone in Jesus on their behalf -- as saved as any believer. The only difference is that unbelievers do not realize or acknowledge that they are saved, and therefore they do not fully benefit from it and experience it. But they, along with all who believe, will be fully reconciled to God in eternity as a result of his wonderful plan to save all humanity who he created and loves.

God's Completion of His Plan

God loved us and created us, even knowing we would abuse our freedom, and had a plan to save us and transform us into perfect beings like himself. Therefore, it is inevitable that everyone will eventually be fully reconciled to God. However, there are a number of severe steps that God takes to accomplish this good purpose in us. First, he *judges* all people. But this judgement is a good thing because in it God accurately assesses our condition. Judgement reveals the truth of our failure and our need for correction. As a result of this accurate and true judgment, God pronounces *condemnation* of the sin in us that is destroying us. Because God loves us, he hates sin because of what it does to us. Judgment is God's way of saying that something needs to be done about our sin. Condemnation is God's way

of saying that he has done something about it by taking it away. Salvation of the world by Jesus is his solution in judgement and condemnation.

When we sin, it does *not* make God want to punish us by inflicting pain on us. Instead, our sin makes God want to save us from its punishing pain that inflicts us! It is sin that God hates, not us. Sin is the enemy ... not God! We do not need to be saved from what God will do to us because of our sin, we need to be saved from what sin will do to us because of God who loves us and saves us.

Love is by far the strongest force in the universe, and God *IS* love. His love will win because God will win in defeating sin completely and finally. He will, in eternity, reconcile all things to himself. Someday every knee will bow in thanks before God when his unfailing love wins, when sin and death are forever conquered, all things are made right (ultimate justice), and all things are recreated as they were intended, perfectly, according to Gods great plan.

The Plan summarizes all major aspects of theology in plain English:

- The God of the Plan (God)
- People and Their Need (Sin)
- God's Rescue of People (Salvation)
- How People Respond (Faith)
- God's Completion of His Plan (Judgment)

The Meaning of John 3:16

This is the most famous (and in some ways perhaps the most misunderstood) passage in the Bible. For sure, it presents the Good News about God's love and sending His only Son into the world to save it. But do we read it completely correctly? Or do we "read *into* it" based on what we have been told for so long, repeatedly, about it?

Introduction

Do Not Add or Subtract

What *is* in John 3:16

What is *not* in John 3:16

Understand Word Meanings

The meaning of "Perish"

The Meaning of "Eternal"

Look at the Context

The Context of John Chapter 3

What it Means to be "Born Again" (verses 1-13)

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A Perspective on John the Baptist (verses 22-36)

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Conclusions

Introduction

There is no more famous verse in the Bible than John 3:16. And, perhaps, rightly so! In it is the most compact presentation of the "Good News". It tells of God's incredible love for the world that He created, what He did to prove His love by giving His only Son, and what a wonderful result of eternal life that comes about as a result. Here is that verse:



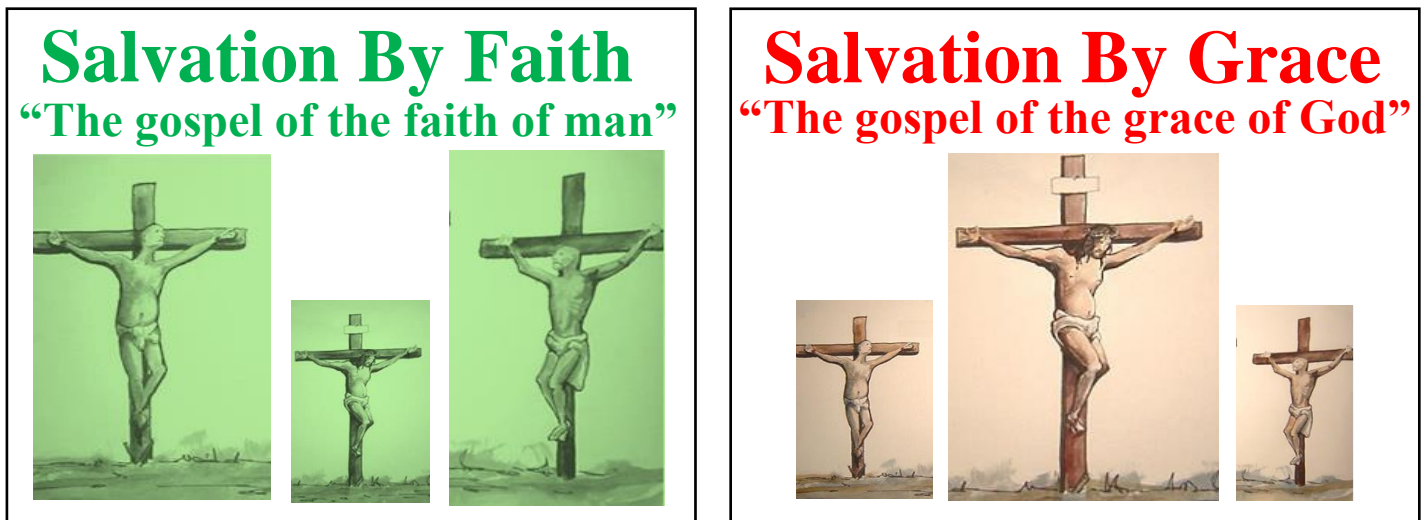
For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.

But, there are at least two ways of understanding this verse. One focuses on God, the other on man (humans). The man-focused understanding typically interprets John 3:16 this way: *God loved people so much that He sent His Son to die on the cross and offer everyone a chance to believe, causing them to go to heaven instead of hell when they die.* This view sees God as providing an *opportunity* for anyone to be saved, if they accept it by believing. Here, salvation is determined (ultimately) by the action of each person (by their belief), and not by God who only made salvation possible by giving His Son. This is a reasonable understanding of this verse and it is held by many Christians today and in the past. People

who have been told this interpretation of John 3:16 tend to believe it without question because they have heard it so many times. But in this interpretation, salvation is ultimately determined by the belief of each person and not by the death of Jesus on the cross (though his death made such “saving faith” possible).

The other view of John 3:16, the God-focused understanding, interprets the verse this way: *God loved people so much that He sent His Son to die on the cross and save all humanity so that they can believe, not be destroyed by sin, and live eternally with God.* This view sees God as *actually* saving people and letting them know so they can hear about it, believe, not be destroyed by sin in this life, and live forever with God. Here, salvation is determined (ultimately) by God through the death of Jesus on the cross, and each person who believes escapes destruction in this life. This, too, is a reasonable understanding of this verse and it is also held by many Christians today and in the past. People who have not been told this their whole lives (and have only heard the other view) will tend to reject it, even though it is God alone, by His grace, who does all the saving and gets all the credit for doing so.

On the front cover of a book I am working on titled *The Two Competing Views of the Gospel within Christianity*, I display this contrast:



The contrast could not be more dramatic. On the left (Salvation by Faith), the two thieves (humans) are the focus. What each thief does determines whether or not (ultimately) he will end up in heaven or hell. Jesus only provides an *opportunity* for each thief to believe (and be saved) or not. Thus, the two thieves loom up over Jesus who is incidentally in the middle because it is what each of the thieves do that really matters! But on the right (Salvation by Grace), Jesus looms over the two thieves because it is what he does that determines (ultimately) the salvation of these two thieves (or any other human being). This is because salvation is by grace alone (not by faith), and humans cannot add to, improve, or even “activate” what God has already done (and what God alone can do) to

save. (For more detailed information on salvation by *Faith vs. Grace*, see the previous section titled *The Role of Faith in Salvation*).

So, a good question to ask is: Have we, in the modern-day church, understood this verse correctly? Have we *left out* anything, *added* anything to it, or *misunderstood* it in any way? Perhaps we have, or maybe not. But make no mistake, it is very easy to do any of these three things. And it is done quite often by all of us when we become well-intentioned, but sometime overly-indoctrinated Christians. Our goal should always be to read this verse (and every verse) accurately and not just the way we want to, or the way we have been taught. This does not mean that when we read verses the way we want (and in the way we have been taught) that we are reading them incorrectly! We all read many verses (perhaps most verses) correctly – or *correctly enough* -- in order to obtain the essential meaning.

Both of the above views of John 3:16 are reasonable, respectable, and can legitimately be concluded from reading this verse in *isolation*. But there are a number of things we can do to ensure that we are reading any verse correctly and not adding, subtracting, or changing the meaning intended by the original writer. And this is our goal, isn't it? Do we really want to read anything incorrectly and misunderstand the meaning, no matter how such a particular understanding appeals to us? I hope not.

Three safeguards for obtaining a correct understanding of any verse will be presented below. These will help us understand John 3:16 (or any verse) correctly. The first principle is to *not add or subtract* anything from the verse. Both of these errors (adding and subtracting) are deadly. The second principle is to *understand the meanings* of the words used. The third principle is to *look at the context* of the verses surrounding any verse you want to understand.

1. Do Not Add or Subtract

In my first year at Dallas Theological Seminary, I had Howard Hendricks for my Hermeneutics (Bible Interpretation) class. Hendricks (as most people who have heard him speak can attest) is a master communicator. If you think hearing him on audio, or even seeing him on video is dynamic ... sitting in front of him, just a few feet away in a classroom was overwhelming! There were many times at the end of a lecture that I could not move from my seat for a minute or two -- even though I needed to get to my next class. What he had to say, and how he said it, pierced my mind and my heart. It was often stunning.

For example, on the first day of class, his very first words were: “*If you guys believed just one-tenth of what you claim to believe, you would be frothing at the mouth to tell people*

about it and not sitting here in this classroom!” Wait a minute! (I thought to myself). I quit my job, uprooted my family, came all the way from California to Dallas, and paid my exorbitant tuition ... just to listen to you insult me? Then I thought about what he said (a very dangerous thing to do when listening to Howard Hendricks), and realized ... he was right! Why was I here? Did I really believe as much as I claimed? What are my real motive for being here? You see, Hendricks knew why all us young guys were there and that our motives were a mixture of both noble and selfish. After all, he too was a young zealous guy, many years before. But he also knew we needed to be hit smack in the face with reality and get humbled down to our socks, before we could ever really learn anything. He did us all a great (but painful) service that day in September, 1982.

But there was yet another amazing experience in Howard Hendricks’ class (and there were many) that relates very much to this first safeguard of *Do Not Add or Subtract*. One of our early assignments was to look at just *one* verse and make fifty (yes 50!) observations about it! I went home, worked on it, and came up with about 35 observations after exhausting all my mental energy on that one verse. But how, I wondered, could I ever find another 15 observations? So, I got creative (rather sheepishly inside) wanting to complete the assignment and get full credit. I began listing things that were *not* in the verse. I came up with things like: “Nothing mentioned about peanut butter and jelly sandwiches!” Somehow, I came up with my needed fifty observations and went to class the next day, hoping I would not be called upon to account for my rather lame excuse for *fifty observations*. But in class I was rather surprised. I was not way-off in my reach for unusual kinds of observations. It turned out that my idea of *noticing what is not there* was one of Howard’s main points! Man, was I proud of myself even though I did not know what I was doing. Hendricks told us that day, that we need to first observe (and never ignore) what *is there* in a verse. But he added that it is equally important to observe what *is not there*, and to resist the temptation to add something to make the verse say what we want or expect. Accuracy and “staying true to the text” were his keys. I never forgot this lesson and it has served me well for the past 35 years of careful study.

What is in John 3:16

So, what *is there* that we can observe for sure in John 3:16? Here is a list:

1. God loves His world.
2. He gave His Son.
3. It was His only Son.
4. His Son was given as proof of his love.
5. He gave him to benefit those who believe.
6. Everyone is invited to believe.
7. Believers will not perish.
8. Believers will have eternal life.

This is a very good list. It should never be forgotten or forsaken! You can count on these things being true about God and the Good News, concerning the free (unearned) gift of His Son who took away the sin of the world. Never let anyone – Calvinist, Catholic, Universalist, or Arminian – ever take any of these precious truths away or diminish them in any way!

What is *not* in John 3:16

But, being true to the Howard Hendricks' principle of "seeing all that *is* there, without reading-in what is *not* there", here is a list of what *is not there* in John 3:16:

1. God's love does not depend on man's belief.
2. The fate of unbelievers is not revealed.
3. Perish is not defined as "eternal punishment."
4. Belief is not required to avoid being punished.
5. There is no earning or merit associated with believing.

All of these are important to recognize because they are the kinds of things that are typically read-into John 3:16. And this is very easy to do if we have been taught to do so over and over all our lives (as so many have been taught to do). But hearing something repeatedly, even when it makes perfectly good sense, does not make it necessarily true (though it may *feel* true). However, hearing things repeatedly and feeling good about them does not render them false either! And this is the very point I am making – truth is not determined by familiarity or feelings ... but by context, meaning of words, and by not modifying the verse in any way by adding or subtracting from it. And looking carefully at the above list of what is *not* in John 3:16 – if any of these things are added they diminish God's grace in salvation and place the work and determination of salvation on each person in their act of believing! This is important.

Take another look at the two ways of reading John 3:16, as presented in the introduction above:

1. The Man-focused view: *God loved people so much that He sent His Son to die on the cross and offer everyone a chance to believe, causing them to go to heaven instead of hell when they die.*
2. The God-focused view: *God loved people so much that He sent His Son to die on the cross and save all humanity, so that they can believe, not be destroyed by sin, and live eternally with God.*

It is my hope that the difference is clear, and more importantly the *significance* of the difference. One view (Man-centered) is salvation "*by faith through grace*". The other is God-centered and is salvation "*by grace through faith*". Paul clearly preached the second

view, not the first. (For more detail on the difference between these two, see the section above titled *The Role of Faith in Salvation*.)

2. Understand Word Meanings

The second safeguard for obtaining a correct understanding of any verse is to make sure we understand the meanings of key words. And this must be done in the original language in which the passage was written. In the case of the Gospel of John, the original language in which John wrote his gospel account was Greek (along with all of the New Testament writings). Translators do their best (or, at least we hope they do) to find the best English word (or words) to communicate the meaning of a Greek word being translated.

Sometimes they get it wrong, or just something less than perfect. Translation is not an easy or exacting task. So it is always best to go look at what the original word means, not just in the New Testament writings themselves but also what they mean in other writings (in the Greek language) during that same era and culture. I depend on Kittel's ten-volume set titled *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* to help me understand the meanings of key words. (See the description of Kittel's work in the section below titled *Book Sources*).

The Meaning of "Perish"

The word "perish" does *not* mean "go to hell forever". Yet, this is exactly what most Christians believe when they read John 3:16. Why? Partly due to the fact that we have been taught (falsely) by 1500 years of Roman Catholic Church tradition to view every severe word in the New Testament as a reference to eternal punishment. Judgment, condemnation, destroy, and others are also treated this way. But in reality, none of these words imply or require "eternal punishment" at all. They are just severe words that are used to convey God's severe actions as *corrective judgment* upon the world He so loves and desires to rescue from sin and destruction.

The word perish simply means "to destroy". It does not mean to utterly destroy (annihilate) or to continually destroy (eternal punishment). And why would we expect this from God even if it did? Does he not desire for all people to be saved? Isn't this at the very heart of who we know God to be – to rescue, redeem, heal and save those He loves who are lost? Is not the desire to save and bring the best for all His creation overwhelmingly in the Bible? Do not almost all of the Old Testament Prophecy books start out with God's severe warning, but then ends up in hope of a savior who saves because he wants to?

The Meaning of “Eternal”

The word translated as “eternal” in John 3:16 is the word for “age”, or “indefinite period of time” in the Greek language. It is the word *aionios* (from which we get our English word aeon) and it is *not* the Greek word for “eternal”. However, there is a different word used in the New Testament writings and elsewhere in Greek literature that *does* mean “eternal.” It is *aidios*, and it is not used here in John 3:16. But it is used elsewhere in the New Testament (twice) and was known to the various writers. Only Paul and Jude used this word (once each), and all other writers and speakers (including Jesus) avoided using it. And why? Why would they (including Jesus) avoid using a word that clearly means “eternal”, and instead exclusively use a word that means *age* or *period of time*? Was the Holy Spirit preventing them, or did they have some rational hesitation and caution in using the word “eternal?”

Based on my education in the sciences (engineering), I became convinced that the whole idea of “eternal” is a false one (or an *unsure* one, at best). We really have no idea of what “forever” or “infinity” really means, yet we so confidently speak of God inflicting *never-ending torment* as punishment on those who oppose Him! We don’t even have a clear idea of what time is, or how it works. Time has been found to be experienced at different rates by different observers. A person (or even a clock) traveling at a high velocity (near the speed of light) will experience a different rate of change than and other persons (or clocks) that are at rest in comparison. This has actually been measured in very small differences. But in theory (and there is no reason to doubt the probability of this), travel at the speed of light would result in no passage of time at all! Wow, what does this do to our idea of “eternal”? And what happens when we use zero as a denominator in a simple fraction? Undefined! Infinity! Eternity! Yet we do not know what this means and we flag a computer to be in error if such a fraction is attempted! How then is it possible, that we are so quick to accuse God of “eternal punishment” when we do not really understand what “eternity” means? How do we draw such dogmatic conclusions about Him when it is a concept so obviously avoided by Jesus and almost all other New Testament writers? My sense is that we need to be very careful before we *tag* God with the worst possible thing we can imagine anyone ever doing to anyone (never-ending torment!) – unless, of course, we have clear and convincing proof (from the Bible, or elsewhere) supporting this. But we do not seem to have such evidence ... at least, I have not seen it – not clear and convincing – just a bunch of isolated and stretched “proof texts!”

In John 3:16, the adjective form of *aion* (age) is used (*aionios*). Adjectives are nouns used to modify (say something about) other words. In John 3:16 *aionios* is used to say something about “life”. Since the word *aionios* literally means “indefinite time-period”, John is saying “indefinite time-period life”! But since most translators logically believe that the life we receive from God through the death of Jesus never ends, they translate *aidios* as “eternal.” But just how accurate is this? Does it mislead the reader and cause him or her to draw a theological conclusion that is not literally in the text of the verse (at

least not in the Greek language in which it was originally written)? Some translators, (like Young's Literal Translation), while exercising great care and respect for the Bible, translates this phrase as "age-during life". This is a much more accurate and honest (and respectful of the Bible) translation. But it does not fit the preconceived theological narrative that has been for centuries imposed on John 3:16 (and elsewhere) by Roman Catholic Church tradition, and so it is not used. This is a tragedy and leads people to believe something different than John was communicating.

When "eternal life" is falsely used in close proximity to "perish" (a word looked at previously) readers falsely assume that perishing (like life) must also be eternal. What a horrible thing to tag the loving God of the universe with, based on such poor evidence! Can you think of anything worse than to accuse God of tormenting unbelievers forever, as pure retribution, with no corrective or restoring purpose whatsoever? And this is exactly what is concluded by most Christians today, thinking (and being told) that this is some kind of absolute truth about God. Shameful! (For more detailed information on the meaning of the words "age" and "eternal" in the New Testament, see the book *Terms for Eternity: Aiônios and Aídios in Classical and Christian Texts* by Ilaria Ramelli in the *Book Sources* section near the end of this booklet. This is a very scholarly work. For a layman's level of the use of these words, see *The Greek Word Aion-aionios* by J. W. (John Wesley) Hanson in the same *Book Sources* section.)

3. Look at the Context

The third safeguard for obtaining a correct understanding of any verse is looking at the context of the passage under consideration. Ignoring context (surrounding passages) is one of the greatest causes of error when people read the Bible and try to understand it. And, it is quite amazing to see how quickly and easily people ignore this important principle as they allow bias, prejudice, ego, and influential upbringing to shove context considerations right out of the picture in order to maintain all existing beliefs! This does not mean, however that any pre-existing beliefs are wrong! In fact, for many people, most of their existing beliefs are full of great and wonderful truths that define their faith. We get ourselves into trouble in discovering the intended meaning of a writer only when such ungrounded beliefs take precedent over context, correct word meanings, resting the temptation to add or subtract ideas, and seeking a good common-sense reading using our rational mind that God has given us.

The Context of John Chapter 3

Any time we read anything -- *context* is essential! Nothing is written in a vacuum. So, we must look at all that is written *before* and *after* to understand the writer's true intention. If, for example, you received a "Dear John" (or Dear Jane) letter, you could (and may even

want to) pick out certain favorable phrases in the letter to make it say what you want. But in doing so you would miss the true intent of the writer ... that you have been dumped! Though it might be your preference to “fool yourself” in this matter, doing so will certainly not render the truth of the letter to you. The same is true of all passages in the New Testament. We may very well be satisfied reading them as we want to (or, perhaps, as we’ve been taught), but if we want to know the intent and true meaning of the writer, we must look at the *context* of his or her own words.

In the case of John 3:16 there is plenty of helpful information that comes *before* and *after* this one well-known verse. John starts chapter 3 discussing what it means to be “born again”. Then he builds a basis for John 3:16 by relating an event from ancient Israel of “lifting up a bronze snake on a pole” to bring healing (a symbol of modern medicine to this day!) Then after John 3:16, John discusses condemnation and judgement! Wow, all of this might actually be important context to consider in order to understand the meaning of John 3:16, even if it results in a different understanding than what we expected!

What it Means to be “Born Again” (verses 1-13)

John begins chapter 3 by explaining what it means to be “born again”.

There was a man named Nicodemus, a Jewish religious leader who was a Pharisee. After dark one evening, he came to speak with Jesus. “Rabbi,” he said, “we all know that God has sent you to teach us. Your miraculous signs are evidence that God is with you.” Jesus replied, “I tell you the truth, unless you are born again, you cannot see the Kingdom of God.” “What do you mean?” exclaimed Nicodemus. “How can an old man go back into his mother’s womb and be born again?” Jesus replied, “I assure you, no one can enter the Kingdom of God without being born of water and the Spirit. Humans can reproduce only human life, but the Holy Spirit gives birth to spiritual life. So don’t be surprised when I say, ‘You must be born again.’ The wind blows wherever it wants. Just as you can hear the wind but can’t tell where it comes from or where it is going, so you can’t explain how people are born of the Spirit.” “How are these things possible?” Nicodemus asked. Jesus replied, “You are a respected Jewish teacher, and yet you don’t understand these things? I assure you, we tell you what we know and have seen, and yet you won’t believe our testimony. But if you don’t believe me when I tell you about earthly things, how can you possibly believe if I tell you about heavenly things? No one has ever gone to heaven and returned. But the Son of Man has come down from heaven.

Staying true to the *Howard Hendricks’ principle* of “observing what *is* there, and not making it say what is *not* there”, some good and honest observations are in order.

1. A person must be “born again” to see the kingdom of God.
2. Nicodemus mistakenly assumed Jesus was referring to physical birth.
3. Jesus says he is talking about spiritual birth, not physical
4. The Holy Spirit causes spiritual birth.
5. Being “born again” is as mysterious and unexplainable as the wind blowing.
6. If *earthly things* are not understood, *heavenly things* will not be either.
7. No one has gone into heaven and returned.
8. The son of man has come down from heaven.

The main take-away from the above list is that being “born again” is not something we do! It does not depend on our works or even our faith. It depends completely on God, through the Holy Spirit who brings about spiritual birth in us! Peter put it this way in his first letter:

All praise to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is by his great mercy that we have been born again, because God raised Jesus Christ from the dead. (1Peter 1:3).

Peter bases being “born again” on both God’s mercy and the resurrection of Jesus. Then later in his letter he says that being born again is based on the “living word of God” (which is *Jesus*, according to the beginning of both John’s gospel account and his first letter).

For you have been born again, but not to a life that will quickly end. Your new life will last forever because it comes from the eternal, living word of God. (1Peter 1:23).

So, before John gets to 3:16, he begins his chapter by revealing that being “born again” is not based on anything we do or believe, but instead on God through the unpredictable work of the Holy Spirit. This is clearly a God-centered view of salvation.

The Bronze Snake on a Pole (verses 14-15)

But John continues quoting Jesus and relates an event in ancient Israel about lifting up a bronze snake on a pole to bring healing. This is briefly recorded in the Old Testament book of Numbers. Here is that passage beginning in verse 4:

Then the people of Israel set out from Mount Hor, taking the road to the Red Sea to go around the land of Edom. But the people grew impatient with the long journey, and they began to speak against God and Moses. “Why have you brought us out of Egypt to die here in the wilderness?” they complained. “There is nothing to eat here and nothing to drink. And we hate this horrible manna!” So the Lord sent poisonous snakes among the people, and many were bitten and died. Then the people came to Moses and cried out, “We have sinned by speaking against the Lord and against you. Pray that the Lord will take away the snakes.” So, Moses prayed for the people. Then the Lord told him, “Make a replica of a poisonous snake and attach it to a pole. All who are bitten will live if they simply look at it!” So Moses made a snake out of bronze and attached it to a pole. Then anyone who was bitten by a snake could look at the bronze snake and be healed!

Several things must be understood about this ancient event in order to understand how John 3:15 introduces John 3:16. First, God sent snakes to afflict the Israelites who were complaining about their miserable conditions. Their complaining is humanly understandable, and I would probably have complained right along with them. But complaining is not usually the best way to respond. It solves nothing and puts us in a paralyzing, self-centered mindset. And so, God in his love, acting in the best interest of stubborn people (who, more often than not, require severe corrective judgment in order to move on to a place where a solution can be understood and implemented), sent snakes to

afflict them and get their attention. As always, God did not afflict them in retaliation, revenge, or in pure retribution with no corrective and healing purpose whatsoever. And, it seemed to have worked. The Israelites repented, admitted their error, and asked for help from God. And so, as always, God provided a solution to heal them by having Moses lift up a bronze snake on a pole for all to look at, believe in God provision (represented by the bronze snake), and be healed by Him. (And this *snake on a pole* is a symbol of modern medicine to this day!)

But why did God have Moses lift-up a replica of the very thing that was judgment on them for their complaining, sinning, and unbelief? Because God's judgment, even in the form of snakes that bring deathly bites, is always *corrective* judgment! How could it not be? Can the God of the universe, who loves his whole world that He created in His very own likeness, do anything less? They needed to look at what God provided in judgment and corrective healing, and then believe in Him turning away from their self-centered focus, anger, and unbelief. This is how healing starts, but it is not the *act of believing* that heals ... God does! It is the object of belief – God himself – that heals, not what they do. But looking at the lifted-up snake was required to receive the healing. Those who did not believe, died ... perished.

And so, Jesus in verses 14 and 15 says the following (in preparation for verse 16):

And as Moses lifted up the bronze snake on a pole in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, so that everyone who believes in him will have eternal life.

The parallel could not be clearer with the use of “as ... so ...” to relate the two verses. Just as Moses did what he did with the snake on the pole, so God did with Jesus on the cross. Both were lifted-up; both were instruments of loving, corrective, healing judgment by God; and both were looked upon in belief to receive healing!

God So Loved His World (verse 16)

Now, John 3:16 can be seen in the light of all that came before it. (In the next section it will be seen in light of all that comes after it!) Here is John 3:16, again:

For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.

So, in light of (1) what *is there* and what is *not there* in John 3:16, (2) the *meanings* of the words perish and eternal, and (3) the *context* of what come before this verse (“born again” and the bronze snake), our options in how to interpret John 3:16 begin to narrow. But this is good! This means that interpretation is being taken out of the hands of our background, self-interests, habitual thinking, ego, and feelings. Instead, the interpretation is placed into the very capable and objective hands of considering context, understanding words, and the discipline of letting a verse say all that it does ... but no more! But there are still two more

important things to consider: (1) What comes *after* John 3:16, and (2) what is the *context* of the whole New Testament writings, in which this verse is found.

Judgment and Condemnation (verses 17-21)

When it comes to *context*, John 3:17 is also of great help. It is interesting that the traditional Christian Church has selected John 3:16 to be the great summary of the Good News, and not John 3:17 (which is just as important if not more so) or John 3:16 and 3:17 together (which make a more complete presentation! And why not? Perhaps getting *too much context* will ruin the already accepted narrative! If the generally accepted interpretation of John 3:16 is that the Good News is no more than a kind and gracious offer on the part of God, to give people a way (by believing in Jesus) to alleviate themselves from going to hell forever – how does all this context, word meanings and restraint in reading this verse help? It may not. In fact, it may very well go against the intended meaning of the writer (John) and leave us with a Good News that is not as good, powerful, or successful as it really is. Maybe the Good News is a lot more than just a kind and gracious offer. Maybe the true Good News what God has *already* done, fully, to save all of humanity through Jesus, who joined the human race as its “new Adam”, and as a new and better representative. Maybe the true Good News is something to be announced to all the world so all people, everywhere, can hear and believe and not be destroyed by sin!

John continues in verses 17-21 to discuss judgment and condemnation. And this is exactly what is missing in verse 16 that most people (by traditional influence) read-into it. Here are verses 17-21:.

God sent his Son into the world not to judge the world, but to save the world through him. “There is no judgment against anyone who believes in him. But anyone who does not believe in him has already been judged for not believing in God’s one and only Son. And the judgment is based on this fact: God’s light came into the world, but people loved the darkness more than the light, for their actions were evil. All who do evil hate the light and refuse to go near it for fear their sins will be exposed. But those who do what is right come to the light so others can see that they are doing what God wants.”

John 3:17 goes on after John 3:16 and clearly states that Jesus’ purpose in coming to this world was to *save* it and not to *judge* it! Well, did he succeed? Or did he come just to *try* to save the world? Did he come and die only to render all people *savable*, waiting for each person to save his or her self by believing? Is this really how salvation works? Many Christians believe this! Or, did Jesus come to *actually and fully* save the world that he so loves, and not fail (even in the slightest degree) to accomplish his mission? (See the section in this booklet titled *What Jesus Did and for Whom* for all the passages in the New Testament on the atoning work of Jesus).

But John goes on and writes that there is no judgment against anyone who believes in Jesus, but that anyone who does *not* believe has already been judged! Perhaps this is the condemning judgement so many seek in John 3:16, even though they must read such

judgment into that verse in order to find it there! But how could John so quickly forget what he just wrote in the previous verse that God did not send Jesus into the world to judge it? Ah... context to the rescue! John is clearly not talking about “condemning judgment” against those who do not believe. Instead, he is talking about correctly assessing the condition of humanity – an “assessing judgment”. Look at what John writes immediately after saying that all who do not believe are already judged:

And the judgment is based on this fact: God’s light came into the world, but people loved the darkness more than the light, for their actions were evil.

Wow, John explains what he means by “judgment”! Man oh man, ya gotta love context when it comes to getting the intended meaning of the writer (unless, of course the *intended* meaning is not desired more some *preferred* meaning). God’s judgment is an assessment that “people love darkness more than light.” And, of course, darkness and light are figurative here, meaning “truth” (light) and a lack of it (darkness). For the meaning of *light* and *darkness*, see the introduction of both John’s gospel and his first letter.

A Perspective on John the Baptist (verses 22-36)

John closes out chapter 3 (verses 22-36) with a perspective on John the Baptist (who was a different John).

Then Jesus and his disciples left Jerusalem and went into the Judean countryside. Jesus spent some time with them there, baptizing people. At this time John the Baptist was baptizing at Aenon, near Salim, because there was plenty of water there; and people kept coming to him for baptism. (This was before John was thrown into prison.) A debate broke out between John’s disciples and a certain Jew[i] over ceremonial cleansing. So John’s disciples came to him and said, “Rabbi, the man you met on the other side of the Jordan River, the one you identified as the Messiah, is also baptizing people. And everybody is going to him instead of coming to us.” John replied, “No one can receive anything unless God gives it from heaven. You yourselves know how plainly I told you, ‘I am not the Messiah. I am only here to prepare the way for him.’ It is the bridegroom who marries the bride, and the bridegroom’s friend is simply glad to stand with him and hear his vows. Therefore, I am filled with joy at his success. He must become greater and greater, and I must become less and less. “He has come from above and is greater than anyone else. We are of the earth, and we speak of earthly things, but he has come from heaven and is greater than anyone else. He testifies about what he has seen and heard, but how few believe what he tells them! Anyone who accepts his testimony can affirm that God is true. For he is sent by God. He speaks God’s words, for God gives him the Spirit without limit. The Father loves his Son and has put everything into his hands. And anyone who believes in God’s Son has eternal life. Anyone who doesn’t obey the Son will never experience eternal life but remains under God’s angry judgment.”

Verse 36 needs special explanation. Read it carefully:

And anyone who believes in God’s Son has eternal life. Anyone who doesn’t obey the Son will never experience eternal life but remains under God’s angry judgment.”

First, what can we observe in verse 36 (what is *there*)? (1) Those who *believe* have eternal life. (2) Those who do *not obey* do not experience eternal life. (3) Those who do *not obey* remain under God's angry judgment. (4) The contrast/comparison is not between believers and unbelievers, but between those who *believe* and those who do *not obey*!

But also, what is *not there*? (1.) The word translated as "eternal" is actually the word "age" (indefinite time period) in the original Greek text, so it is unlikely to mean "eternal" and more likely refers to the "age to come". (See the explanation above of the meaning of the word "eternal" in Greek). (2.) It does not say that unbelievers fail to experience eternal life, but instead those who *disobey*! (3.) The consequence for disobeying is not eternal punishment but God's angry judgment. From all of this it is very hard to conclude that unbelievers go to hell forever. We must read something into the text to conclude this. In other words, there is not clear and convincing evidence here (or anywhere in chapter 3) that God will send unbelievers to hell forever.

The Context of the Whole Bible

Reading the Bible (or any other book) in light of its own context – in other words, looking at all that comes *before* and *after* any passage – forces us to narrow down our scope of interpretation (what we think it means) to a much closer understanding of what the writer intended to communicate. And this is our ultimate goal, isn't it? If not, then we are just using the passage for our own selfish agenda.

And, the context of any passage goes far beyond just the verse that precede and follow it (though this is indeed the most important context). The whole book in which a passage is found is also context – just a greater one. Just as John 3:16 must be read in the full context of chapter three, so also chapter three must be read in the full context of the whole Gospel of John. But even further, the John's Gospel must be read in the full context of all the other books that John wrote (like his three letters and his Revelation of Jesus). And there is one more important context to consider, and that is how John's writings fit into the full context of all the New Testament writings (assuming they have a connection with each other in content and purpose).

It is this full context of the New Testament writings (and even the whole Bible) that need to be looked at as a final safeguard in attempting to understand what John intended when he penned John 3:16. And, what is the most striking thing we see in the full context of the whole Bible when it comes to understanding John 3:16? Is it not that "God is Love" and that He is "rich in Mercy", forgiving, patient, kind, holy and just (in the true sense of these words), and not desiring that anyone perish? Isn't it true that the character and moral excellence of God throughout all of the Bible is not in doubt? Does not all of the Old Testament accounts of God's dealings with Israel demonstrate His grace, forgiveness, never-ending cycles of taking them back after sinning, and never giving up on them in the book of Judges and elsewhere? Are not all of the prophetic books clear and consistent

presentations of God's anger concerning Israel's sin, but also always ending in hope that they will be redeemed by a Messiah-Savior who would someday come? With all of this overwhelming evidence of the greatness of God and his love for humanity, how can we conclude in John 3:16 (that focuses on how much God loves His world and sent His Son to save it), that He would ever *eternally torment* anyone within the humanity that he so dearly loves and came to save?

Conclusions

In order to understand the meaning of John 3:16 we must disciple ourselves to do several things. First, we must look honestly at this verse and let it say all that it does ... but no more than that. But we must also understand the meanings of key words as they exist in their original language and setting (in this case, Greek). And, finally, we must read John 3:16 in its own chapter, book, and overall context of the whole New Testament writings and the Bible. All of these things are safeguards and keys if we really want to understand the intent of the writer (in this case, John). To ignore this and just accept what we have been taught (just because we have been taught it) will not deliver the truth to us. But, if we engage these wonderful safeguards, seek the correct meaning of the text at all cost, and find that what we have always been taught is true – we are even more confident of what we believe. But ... if in this process, we find our long-held conclusions to be wrong, and as a result we change what we believe – then we are so much better off, even though we had to go through the painful process of changing! No one likes to change, but what we gain from doing so (when we discover we were wrong) is well worth the struggle to get there.

In the case of John 3:16, to be able to see the love of God and His salvation of the world through Jesus as something that is a free gift of His grace, unearned by any of us whatsoever is beyond mere words. The peace, joy, and confident trust in a God who cannot (and does not) fail, is overwhelming and wonderful. If true, such knowledge will for sure forever change anyone's life. It sure did change mine!

Take one more look at the two ways of reading John 3:16, as presented in the introduction above:

1. The Man-focused view: *God loved people so much that He sent His Son to die on the cross and offer everyone a chance to believe, causing them to go to heaven instead of hell when they die.*
2. The God-focused view: *God loved people so much that He sent His Son to die on the cross and save all humanity so that they can believe, not be destroyed by sin, and live eternally with God.*

It is my hope that the difference is clear, and more importantly the *significance* of the difference. One view (man-centered) is “salvation *by* faith *through* grace”. The other is God-centered and is “salvation *by* grace *through* faith”. Paul clearly preached the second view, not the first. Remember, John 3:16 is famous for good reason. It is, perhaps, the best presentation of the Good News message! But keep the good news “good”, and keep it squarely based on the *infinite grace of God* and not the *finite faith of man*.

Finally, in the picture below, John 3:16 is like a house that contains the unconditional love of God, through Jesus who He sent to save the world. The people on the left side are pushing a flimsy bamboo foundation of the *Faith of Man* under the house, while also pushing out the solid brick foundation of the *Grace of God*. And this seems to be what has happened to John 3:16 (and the “Gospel of Grace”) over the past 1500 years -- after the dominating influence of Augustine and Roman Catholic Church tradition.



What Jesus Did and for Whom

Looks at all the passages in the NT about the atonement of Jesus on the cross.
In doing so, it becomes clear that *what* he did was actual (not potential),
and *who* he did it for was for all of humanity (not just some).

Introduction

Listed below are about 80 passages from the New Testament writings, identifying what Jesus did and who he did it for. Pretty much every passage on this subject is listed. These passages are listed in two groups: (1) What Jesus did, and (2) who he did it for.

What Jesus did on the cross for us was actual (not potential), fully applied at the cross, and complete. As Jesus himself said, “It is finished.” What Jesus did was not a “kind gesture”, a promise of future completion, a down payment, or a “good faith offer.” What he did was actual and complete. When Jesus paid for sin, it was a one-time, complete (and final) payment .



Who he died for is equally clear. He died for everyone – for all, for the whole world, and for all humanity. Though there are many places in the Bible that say Jesus died for “us” (when it is addressing a particular group of people – believers), still this in no way changes the clear unlimited scope of the work of Jesus on behalf of all people. When Paul tells believers that Jesus died for *them*, it does not mean that what he wrote elsewhere about Jesus dying for all people was invalid. He was just telling them what Jesus did for them, because he is writing personally to them.

When these two facts are understood (what Jesus did and for whom), it becomes very clear that the salvation of all people has been secured by the death and resurrection of Jesus. This does not mean that all people believe it. However, all people are saved from the penalty of sin (whether they believe or not) simply because salvation is a free gift from God for all humanity, completely based on His grace and totally unearned by anyone. Salvation is accomplished by Jesus alone. When people believe, they are acknowledging what God has *already* done for them, and they begin to benefit from that knowledge through the relationship they experience in their faith relationship with God. Those who do not believe are equally loved and forgiven by Jesus who died for everyone. But they miss out on having a *full* relationship with God. However, eventually, everyone will be fully reconciled to God and will joyfully worship Him and call him their Lord and Savior.

1. What Jesus did was actual (not potential), applied at the cross, complete and finished.

God made you perfect through Jesus, just as he did for all people everywhere who call on the name of Jesus, who is their Lord and ours. 1Cor 1:2

Everyone dies because we all belong to Adam, but everyone who belongs to Jesus will be given new life. There is an order to this resurrection: Jesus was raised as the first of many; then all who belong to Jesus will be raised when he returns.
1Cor 15:20

The first man, Adam, became a living person. But the “last Adam” (Jesus) is a life-giving spirit. What comes first is the natural body, then the spiritual body comes later. Adam, the first man, was made from the dust of the earth; but Jesus, the second man, came from heaven. Earthly people are like the earthly man, and heavenly people are like the heavenly man. Just as we are now like the earthly man (Adam), we will someday be like the heavenly man (Jesus). 1Cor 15:45

I, Paul, try to forget everything -- except Jesus Christ, the one who was crucified. 1Cor 2:1

No one can lay any foundation other than the one we already have—Jesus, who is the Messiah.
1Cor 3:11

God united you with Jesus. For our benefit, He made him to be wisdom itself. Jesus made us right with God; he made us pure and set us apart from this crazy world, and he freed us from our wrongdoing. 1Cor 1:30

If Jesus did not raise from the dead, then your faith is useless and you are still guilty of your wrongdoing. And if this were true, all believers who died would be lost. If our hope in Jesus is only for this life, we are more to be pitied than anyone in the world – but, thankfully, none of this is true!
1Cor 15:17

It is a fact that Jesus raised from the dead and he is only the first to do so of many to come. Death came into the world through Adam, but now the resurrection from the dead has begun through Jesus. Just as everyone dies because we all belong to Adam, everyone will be given new life because we belong to Jesus.
1Cor 15:20

I want to pass on to you this important fact: Jesus died for our failure and wrong-doing. He was buried, and then raised from the dead on the third day. 1Cor 15:3

Death has been consumed by the victory won by Jesus, so death has no victory or sting. Our wrongdoing results in our death, but thanks to God, he gave us victory over death through Jesus who is our lord. 1Cor 15:54

God gave you his spirit to live in you. You really do not own yourself because God purchased you with the high price of the death Jesus, his son. So honor God with your life. 1Cor 6:19

You were a slave when God called you, but you are now a slave of Him -- which really means you are free in Him. God paid a high price for you, so don't be enslaved by the world. Remain as you were when God first called you. 1Cor 7:22

If we live in "the light" (as God is in "the light"), then we have fellowship with each other, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, cleanses us from all our wrong-doing and failure. 1John 1:7

I am writing to you who are God's children because your wrong-doing and failures are forgiven through Jesus. 1John 2:12

Real love is giving up our life for others. We know this because Jesus gave up his life for us. 1John 3:16

Jesus came to take away our wrong-doing and failure – of which he has none! 1John 3:4

Jesus, the Son of God, came to destroy the works of the devil. 1John 3:8

God showed how much he loved us by sending his only Son into the world to give us eternal life through him. This is real love—not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as our substitute to take away our sins. 1John 4:9

God paid a ransom to deliver us from our empty lives. This ransom was not paid in mere gold or silver, but paid by the precious blood of Jesus, who was God's perfect "sacrificial lamb." Though this ransom was paid by Jesus recently, God chose him to be our ransom long before the world began. 1Pet 1:18

God knew you and chose you long ago, and his Spirit made you special in his eyes. As a result, you were cleansed by the blood of Jesus Christ and you followed him. Thanks to God, by his great mercy, it is like we have been "born all over again" when God raised Jesus from the dead. 1Pet 1:2

You have been "born again" -- not to a life that will quickly end, but to a new life that will last forever because it comes from Jesus who is the eternal living "Word of God." 1Pet 1:23

Jesus personally carried our sins in his body on the cross so that we can be dead to our sin and live for what is right. By his wounds we are healed. 1Pet 2:24

God raised Jesus from the dead and he rescued us from the terrors of the coming judgment. 1Thess 1:10

Christ died for us so that (whether we are dead or alive) when he returns, we will live with him forever. So encourage each other and build each other up. 1Thess 5:10

Jesus, the Son of God, does not waver between "Yes" and "No." He is God's ultimate "Yes", and he always does what he says. All of God's promises have been fulfilled in Jesus with a resounding "Yes"! 2Cor 1:19

The “old way” (with a bunch of laws etched in stone), led to death. The “new way” comes through God’s spirit who gives us life. The “old way brought condemnation, but the “new way” (a better way) makes us right with God and lasts forever. 2Cor 3:7

Jesus died for all and we have all died to our old life. He died for everyone so that those who receive his new life will no longer live for themselves. Instead, they will live for him, who died and was raised from the dead in their place. Anyone who belongs to Christ has become a new person. The old life is gone; a new life has begun, and all of this is a gift from God, who brought us back to himself through Christ. And so, God has given us the task of reconciling people to him, because God was in Jesus reconciling the world to himself, no longer counting people’s sins against them. God made Jesus, who never sinned, to become sin for us, so that we are made right with God through Christ . 2Cor 5:14

This is the generous grace of our Lord (Jesus). Though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that by his poverty he could make you rich. 2Cor 8:9

Those who fail to grow and be productive (in their knowledge of Jesus) are shortsighted and blind, forgetting that they have been cleansed from their old sins. 2Pet 1:8

Just as there were false prophets in ancient Israel, there will be false teachers among you who will cleverly teach destructive heresies and even deny the Master who bought them. 2Pet 2:1

This is a trustworthy saying, and everyone should accept it: Jesus came into the world to save sinners—and I, Paul, am the worst of them all. 1Tim 1:15

Praying for kings and all who are in authority is good and pleases God our Savior, who wants everyone to be saved and to understand the truth. There is only one God and one Mediator who can reconcile God and humanity—the man Jesus. He gave his life to purchase freedom for everyone. This is the “good news” message God gave to the world. 1Tim 2:2

Training for godliness promises benefits in this life and in the life to come. This is why we work hard and continue to struggle, for our hope is in the living God, who is the Savior of all people and particularly of all believers. 1Tim 4:8

God has made everything plain to us by the appearing of Jesus, who is our Savior. He broke the power of death and illuminated the way to life and immortality through the announcement of the “Good News.” 2Tim 1:10

We believe that we are all saved the same way, by the undeserved grace of the Jesus. Acts 15:11

God said to Abraham, “Through your descendants all the families on earth will be blessed.” When God raised up his servant, Jesus, he sent him first to you people of Israel, to bless you by turning each of you back from your sinful ways. Acts 3:25

This is the message of Good News: there is peace with God through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all. Acts 10:36

Jesus is one of King David’s descendants, and is also God’s promised Savior. Acts 13:23

God's flock is his church, purchased with his own blood. Acts 20:28

Moses and the prophets predicted that the Messiah (Jesus) would suffer and be the first one ever to rise from the dead, and by doing so, announce God's light to both Jews and non-Jews. Acts 26:22

God has rescued us from the kingdom of darkness and transferred us into the Kingdom of his dear Son, who purchased our freedom and forgave our sins. Col 1:13

Through Jesus God reconciled everything to himself. He made peace with everything in heaven and on earth by means of Christ's blood on the cross. This includes you who were once far away from God. You were his enemies, separated from him by your evil thoughts and actions. Yet now he has reconciled you to himself through the death of Jesus in his physical body. As a result, he has brought you into his own presence, and you are holy and blameless as you stand before him without a single fault. Col 1:20

When you came to Christ, he performed a "spiritual circumcision" — the cutting away of your sinful nature. You were buried with Christ when you were identified with him (baptized in him). And with him you were raised to new life because you trusted the mighty power of God, who raised Christ from the dead. You were dead because of your sins and because your sinful nature was not yet cut away. Then God made you alive with Christ, for he forgave all our sins. He canceled the record of the charges against us and took it away by nailing it to the cross. In this way, Jesus disarmed the spiritual rulers and authorities. He shamed them publicly by his victory over them on the cross. Col 2:11

God's spirit is a guarantee that he will give us the inheritance he promised and that he has purchased us to be his own people. Eph 1:14

We thank God for the wonderful undeserved favor he has poured out on us who belong to his dear Son (Jesus). He is so rich in kindness and grace that it caused him to purchase our freedom with the blood of his Son and forgave our sins. Eph 1:6

God is so rich in mercy, and he loved us so much, that even though we were dead because of our sins, he gave us life when he raised Jesus from the dead. He raised us from the dead along with Jesus and seated us with him in the heavenly realms because we are united with Jesus. And so God will point to us in all future ages as examples of the incredible wealth of his grace and kindness shown in all he has done for us who are united with Jesus. Eph 2:4

Jesus loved us and offered himself as a sacrifice for us, a "pleasing aroma" to God. Eph 5:2

God called you to himself through the loving mercy of Jesus. Gal 1:6

Jesus has rescued us from the curse pronounced by the law. When he was hung on the cross, he took upon himself the curse for our wrong doing. Gal 3:13

Before Jesus came, we were like children -- slaves to the basic spiritual principles of this world. But God sent his son (Jesus) to buy our freedom from spiritual slavery, so that he could adopt us as his very own children. Gal 4:3

The cross of Christ alone can save. Gal 6:12

Jesus radiates God's own excellence and expresses the very character of God, and he sustains everything by his mighty power. When Jesus cleansed us from our sins, he sat down in the place of honor, right along-side God himself in heaven. Heb 1:3

God will never again remember our sins and rebellious deeds, and because we are forgiven there is no longer any need for Jesus to take our place in death. Therefore we can boldly approach God in heaven because Jesus died for us. By his death, he opened a new and life-giving way into God's presence. Jesus is our great representative who rules over all that belongs to God and enables us to go right into God's presence with a sincere heart, fully trusting him. Our guilty consciences have been cleared and made clean when Jesus died for us. Heb 10:17

You have come to Jesus, the one who mediates a new agreement between God and people. And you have come to the realization that he bled to death on the cross which brought us forgiveness instead of vengeance. Heb 12:22

Jesus suffered and died outside Jerusalem's city gates to make his people special in the eyes of God through his death. Heb 13:12

Because God's children are human beings—made of flesh and blood—the Son of God (Jesus) also became flesh and blood. Only as a human being could he die, and only by dying could he break the power of the devil who once had the power of death. Only in this way could Jesus set free everyone who feared dying. The Son did not come to help angels; he came to help humans. Therefore, it was necessary for him to be made like us in every respect, so that he could be our merciful and faithful representative before God. This enabled Jesus to die and take away the sins of all people. Heb 2:14

Since we have a great representative who has entered heaven (Jesus the Son of God), let us hold firmly to what we believe. As our representative, he understands our weaknesses because he experienced all of the same problems we have -- yet he did not sin. So let us come boldly to God (who is very gracious), and there we will receive mercy and help when we need it most. Heb 4:14

Without shedding blood and dying, there would be no forgiveness. Heb 9:21

God's will was for us to be made special to him when Jesus gave himself for us. He only did this once, and it covered all time. When priests offer symbolic animal sacrifices they never take away anyone's sins. But Jesus, as our representative, gave himself as a one-time "sacrifice" for our sins, good for all time. After he was done, he sat down in the place of honor next to God where he waits until all his enemies are humbled before him. By his one-time giving of himself for us, he made us forever perfect and special to God. Heb 10:10

Jesus became a little lower than the angels. But because he suffered death for us, he was given great honor. By God's grace, Jesus tasted death for everyone. Heb 2:9

Animal sacrifices could never do what Jesus did for us when he died and then entered the most sacred place in heaven. Once, for all time, he secured our redemption forever. Animal sacrifices could only make people "ceremonially correct." But what Jesus did purifies our consciences

concerning our sin so that we can worship God who lives. By the power of the eternal spirit, Jesus offered himself to God as a perfect sacrifice for our sins. So he is the one who mediates a new agreement between God and people, causing them to receive the eternal inheritance God promised. Jesus died to set them free from the penalty of the sins they had committed under the old agreement with God under the law. Heb 9:12

Jesus did not need to die again and again because he died once, for all time, and he removed sin by his own death for us. And just as everyone is destined to die once (and after that comes judgment), so also Jesus died once, for all time, giving himself for us to take away people's sins. He will come again, not to deal with our sins, but to bring salvation to all who are eagerly waiting for him. Heb 9:26

From the abundance in Jesus, we have all received one gracious blessing after another. Legalistic requirements were given through Moses, but God's unfailing love and faithfulness came through Jesus who is the promised Messiah. John 1:16

One day, when John (known as the "baptizer") saw Jesus coming toward him, he said, Look. It is the "Lamb of God" who takes away the sin of the world! John 1:29

Jesus said, "I am the good shepherd, and I give up my life for my sheep. I know my own sheep, and they know me, just as my Father knows me and I know the Father. Therefore I give up my life for my sheep. I have other sheep, too, that I must bring in. My Father loves me because I give up my life so I may take it back again. No one can take my life from me; I give it up voluntarily because I have the authority to lay it down when I want to and also to take it up again." A John 10:11

Jesus knew that his mission was finished. They held a sponge of vinegar up to his lips and when he had tasted it, he said, "It is finished!" Then he bowed his head and released his spirit. John 19:28

No one has ever gone to heaven and returned, but the Son of Man has come down from heaven. And as Moses lifted up the bronze snake on a pole in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, so that everyone who believes in him will have eternal life. God loved the world so much that he gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life. God did not send his Son into the world to judge it, but to save the world through him. John 3:13

God offers you the true bread from heaven – Jesus, who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world. John 6:32

The Son of Man (Jesus) did not come to be served but to serve others and to give his life as a ransom for people. Matt 20:28

Jesus said, "Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you. Let me teach you, because I am humble and gentle at heart, and you will find rest for your souls. My yoke is easy to bear, and the burden I give you is light. Matt 11:28

Jesus took a cup of wine and gave thanks to God for it, then he gave it to his followers and said, "Each of you drink from it, for this represents my blood, which confirms the agreement I made

between God and his people. My blood will be shed as I give myself to forgive people's sins.
Matt 26:27

When Jesus saw the crowds, he had compassion on them because they were confused and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Matt 9:36

When God, our savior, revealed his kindness and love, he saved us, not because of any good things we have done, but because of his mercy. He washed away our sins giving us a "new birth" and a new life through his spirit. God generously poured out his spirit upon us through Jesus our Savior. Because of his grace he declared us "right in his eyes" and gave us confidence that we will inherit eternal life. Titus 3:4

When anyone sins, we have an advocate who pleads our case before God. He is Jesus, the one who is truly good and pure. He is the substitute that pays the penalty for our sins—and not only our sins but the sins of all the world. 1John 2.1

Jesus suffered for our sins, once -- for all time. He never sinned, but he died for sinners to bring us safely home to God. He suffered physical death, but he was raised to life in the spirit. He went and proclaimed the good news about what he had done to people who are dead. 1Pet 3:18

Here is a summary of *what* Jesus has done:

(notice the *actuality* and *completeness* of what he has done)

- Made us perfect (x2)
- Gave us new life (x4)
- United us with him (x2)
- Made us right with God (x3)
- Made us pure
- Set us apart from the world
- Freed us from sin
- Died for our sins
- Won our victory over death (x2)
- Purchased us with his death (x2)
- Freed us
- Paid a high price for us
- Cleansed us from sin (x4)
- Forgave our sins (x4)
- Gave up his life for us (x2)
- Took away our sins (x5)
- Destroyed the works of the devil
- Gave us eternal life (x2)
- Paid a ransom for us
- Delivered us from empty lives
- Chose us
- Made us special to him (x2)
- Caused us to be "born-again"(x2)
- Gave us new life forever
- Bore our sins in his body for us
- Healed us
- Rescued us (x2)
- Died for us (x6)
- Fulfilled all God's promises to us
- Gave us life (x3)
- Raised us from the dead (x2)
- Made us a new person
- Brought us back to himself
- Reconciled us to himself (x3)
- Made us rich
- Saved us (x5)
- Purchased our freedom
- Made everything plain to us

- Broke the power of death
- Illuminated the way to life
- Blessed us
- Turned us back from our sinful ways
- Gave us peace with God
- Transferred us into his kingdom
- Purchase our freedom (x2)
- Made peace with us
- Brought us into his presence
- Made us holy and blameless before him
- Cut away our sinful nature
- Identified us with himself
- Raised us to new life
- Made us alive with himself
- Canceled & took away our spiritual debt
- Nailed our spiritual debt to his cross
- Disarmed spiritual rulers & authorities
- Won victory over them
- Gave us the promised inheritance
- Purchased us to be his own people
- Poured out undeserved favor on us
- Loved us
- Seated us with him in heaven
- Offered himself for us (x2)
- Called us to himself
- Rescued us from a curse
- Took the curse of our sin on himself
- Bought our freedom
- Forgot our sins (no longer remembered)
- Forgave us
- Opened a new life-giving way to God
- Enabled us to go into God's presence
- Cleared our conscience
- Made our conscience clean
- Mediated new agreement with God (x2)
- Brought us forgiveness
- Made us special in God's eyes
- Broke the power of the devil
- Set us free
- Came to help us
- Was our merciful and faithful rep.
- Gave us mercy and help
- Gave himself for us (x2)
- Gave himself as a sacrifice
- Suffered & tasted death for us
- Secured our redemption forever
- Purified our conscience
- Gave us an eternal inheritance
- Died to set us free
- Removed our sin
- Brought salvation to us
- Gave us many gracious blessings
- Drew us to himself
- Gave his life as a ransom for us
- Gave himself to forgive us
- Washed away our sins
- Gave us a "new birth"
- Declared us right in his eyes
- Gave us confidence about eternal life
- Paid the penalty for our sins
- Suffered for our sins
- Will bring us safely home

2. What Jesus did was intended for everyone, all people, the whole world, the entire human race.

Note: When the word "many" is used in passages below, the meaning in Greek is "an undetermined number." It can be some, most, or even all. So one fair way to think of "many" is to think in terms of "people" (in general).

It is a fact that Jesus raised from the dead and he is only the first to do so of many to come. Death came into the world through Adam, but now the resurrection from the dead has begun through

Jesus. Just as everyone dies because we all belong to Adam, everyone will be given new life because we belong to Jesus. 1Cor 15:20

Jesus died for all and we have all died to our old life. He died for everyone so that those who receive his new life will no longer live for themselves. Instead, they will live for him, who died and was raised from the dead in their place. Anyone who belongs to Christ has become a new person. The old life is gone; a new life has begun, and all of this is a gift from God, who brought us back to himself through Christ. And so, God has given us the task of reconciling people to him, because God was in Jesus reconciling the world to himself, no longer counting people's sins against them. God made Jesus, who never sinned, to become sin for us, so that we are made right with God through Christ. 2Cor 5:14

This is a trustworthy saying, and everyone should accept it: Jesus came into the world to save sinners—and I, Paul, am the worst of them all. 1Tim 1:15

Praying for kings and all who are in authority is good and pleases God our Savior, who wants everyone to be saved and to understand the truth. There is only one God and one Mediator who can reconcile God and humanity—the man Jesus. He gave his life to purchase freedom for everyone. This is the “good news” message God gave to the world. 1Tim 2:2

Training for godliness promises benefits in this life and in the life to come. This is why we work hard and continue to struggle, for our hope is in the living God, who is the Savior of all people and particularly of all believers. 1Tim 4:8

God said to Abraham, “Through your descendants all the families on earth will be blessed.” When God raised up his servant, Jesus, he sent him first to you people of Israel, to bless you by turning each of you back from your sinful ways. Acts 3:25

Through Jesus God reconciled everything to himself. He made peace with everything in heaven and on earth by means of Christ's blood on the cross. This includes you who were once far away from God. You were his enemies, separated from him by your evil thoughts and actions. Yet now he has reconciled you to himself through the death of Jesus in his physical body. As a result, he has brought you into his own presence, and you are holy and blameless as you stand before him without a single fault. Col 1:20

Because God's children are human beings—made of flesh and blood—the Son of God (Jesus) also became flesh and blood. Only as a human being could he die, and only by dying could he break the power of the devil who once had the power of death. Only in this way could Jesus set free everyone who feared dying. The Son did not come to help angels; he came to help descendants of Abraham. Therefore, it was necessary for him to be made like us in every respect, so that he could be our merciful and faithful representative before God. This enabled Jesus to die and take away the sins of the people. Heb 2:14

Jesus became a little lower than the angels. But because he suffered death for us, he was given great honor. By God's grace, Jesus tasted death for everyone. Heb 2:9

Animal sacrifices could never do what Jesus did for us when he died and then entered the most sacred place in heaven. Once, for all time, he secured our redemption forever. Animal sacrifices could only make people “ceremonially correct.” But what Jesus did purifies our consciences concerning our sin so that we can worship God who lives. By the power of the eternal spirit, Jesus offered himself to God as a perfect sacrifice for our sins. So he is the one who mediates a new agreement between God and people, causing them to receive the eternal inheritance God promised. Jesus died to set them free from the penalty of the sins they had committed under the old agreement with God under the law. Heb 9:12

Jesus did not need to die again and again because he died once, for all time, and he removed sin by his own death for us. And just as everyone is destined to die once (and after that comes judgment), so also Jesus died once, for all time, giving himself for us to take away the sins of many people. He will come again, not to deal with our sins, but to bring salvation to all who are eagerly waiting for him. Heb 9:26

One day, when John (known as the “baptizer”) saw Jesus coming toward him, he said, Look. It is the “Lamb of God” who takes away the sin of the world! John 1:29

Jesus said, “I tell you the truth, you will all see heaven open and the angels of God going up and down on the Son of Man, the one who is the stairway between heaven and earth.” John 1:51

The High priest said, “It is better that one man should die for the people than for the whole nation to be destroyed.” He did not say this on his own because (as high priest) he was led to prophesy that Jesus would die for the entire nation -- and not only for that nation, but to bring together and unite all the children of God scattered around the world. John 11:50

No one has ever gone to heaven and returned, but the Son of Man has come down from heaven. And as Moses lifted up the bronze snake on a pole in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, so that everyone who believes in him will have eternal life. God loved the world so much that he gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life. God did not send his Son into the world to judge it, but to save the world through him. John 3:13

Now we believe, not just because of what you told us, but because we have heard Jesus for ourselves. Now we know that he is indeed the Savior of the world. John 4:42

God offers you the true bread from heaven – Jesus, who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world. John 6:32

Jesus said, “Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you. Let me teach you, because I am humble and gentle at heart, and you will find rest for your souls. My yoke is easy to bear, and the burden I give you is light. Matt 11:28

If a man has a hundred sheep and one of them wanders away, he will leave the other ninety-nine and go search for the one that is lost. When he finds it, he will rejoice over it more than over the other ninety-nine that didn’t wander away. In the same way, it is not my heavenly Father’s will that even one of these little ones should perish. Matt 18:12

The Son of Man (Jesus) did not come to be served, but to serve others and to give his life as a ransom for many. Matt 20:28

O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones God's messengers! How often I have wanted to gather your children together as a hen protects her chicks beneath her wings, but you wouldn't let me. Matt 23:37

Jesus took a cup of wine and gave thanks to God for it, then he gave it to his followers and said, "Each of you drink from it, for this represents my blood, which confirms the agreement I made between God and his people. My blood will be shed as I give myself to forgive the sins of many." Matt 26:27

Jesus said, "I did not come to call those who think they are righteous, but those who know they are sinners." Matt 9:13

When anyone sins, we have an advocate who pleads our case before God. He is Jesus, the one who is truly good and pure. He is the substitute that pays the penalty for our sins—and not only our sins but the sins of all the world. 1John 2:1

We (followers of Jesus) have seen with our own eyes and now verify that God sent his Son to be the Savior of the world. 1John 4:14

Then Jesus told them, "The time for judging this world has come, when Satan, the ruler of this world, will be cast out. And when I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw everyone to myself." John 12:30

Jesus suffered for our sins, once -- for all time. He never sinned, but he died for sinners to bring us safely home to God. He suffered physical death, but he was raised to life in the spirit. He went and proclaimed the good news about what he had done to people who are dead. 1Pet 3:18

Here is a summary of for whom Jesus did what he did.

Note: Passages that say "we" and "us" are not listed since they are logically within the "all" and "everyone" passages listed below.

- Everyone who dies is given new life
- Jesus died for all
- Jesus died for everyone
- Jesus died in everyone's place
- Jesus reconciled the world to himself
- Jesus came to save sinners
- God wants everyone to be saved
- Jesus reconciled God and humanity
- Jesus purchased freedom for everyone
- God is the savior of all people
- All families of the earth will be blessed
- Jesus came to turn every Jew from sin
- Through Jesus, God:
 - Reconciled everything to himself

- Made peace with everything
- Did not count people's sins against them
- Jesus set free everyone who fears dying
- Jesus came to take away sins of people
- Jesus tasted death for everyone
- Jesus mediates between God & people
- Jesus died to set people free
- Jesus took away sins of many people
- Jesus takes away the sins of the world
- Jesus is stairway btwn heaven & earth
- Jesus died for the entire nation
- Jesus united worldwide children of God
- Jesus came to save the world
- Jesus is savior of the world
- Jesus came to give life to the world
- Jesus gave rest to weary & burdened
- Searches for even the last lost sinner
- God not willing that any little one perish
- Gave his life as a ransom for many
- Father does not will that anyone perish
- Jesus wanted to gather all Jerusalem
- Gave his life as a ransom for people
- Gave himself to forgive sins of many
- Jesus calls all who know they're sinners
- Jesus paid for sins of whole world
- Jesus sent to be savior of the world
- Jesus draws everyone to himself
- Jesus died for sinners

Conclusion

When these two facts are realized and taken seriously – Jesus died for *everyone* (all humanity), and that what he did was *actual* and complete (not *potential*) – we are compelled by scripture to believe that salvation is universal in nature.

And isn't this what we would expect of God? After all he is love itself, he is a redeemer, a savior, reconciler, deliverer, and rescuer. God is fully able to save everyone – nothing stops him – and he has the motive to do so (his infinite love!). How could he not save every single person -- all who were made by him in his very own likeness?

If this is true, then what does God's judgment mean, and what is the meaning of faith? God's judgment is an act of his love, just like everything else that he does. He accurately assessed our lost condition and determined (in love) that he would do something about it. It is far beneath him to torment, abandon, or annihilate anyone. He is a savior, and that is exactly what he has done. The "Savior of the world" has saved the world! Nothing less.

He condemned us in our sinful state, but came to earth and became one of us, died *for* us (and *with* us), then rose from the dead and brought all of us with him into newness of life. This is the true meaning of "grace." Grace is God doing for us – all of us – something we could not do for ourselves, and giving salvation to us – all of us – as a free gift motivated by his love.

What about faith? Some believe, some do not. But all are equally forgiven and saved from sin. Believing is our response to what God has *already* done for us through Jesus. Faith earns nothing. When we believe, God's disposition does not change toward us

because he fully reconciled us – all of us – in Jesus. It was all done and finished on the cross.

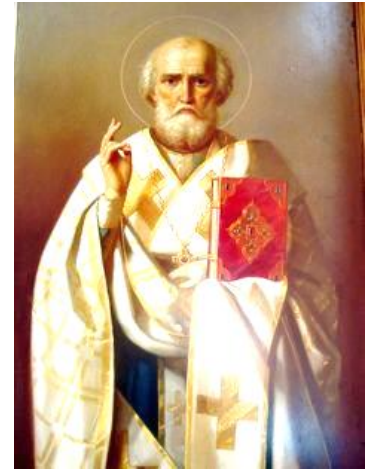
Our faith is our acknowledging what was *already* done for us. Unlike God, our disposition and attitude toward Him very much changes when we believe. Radically! When we believe we benefit fully from the forgiveness that we *already* have in Jesus. But we gain nothing in our standing before God because that was completely secured for all people by Jesus in what he did when he died on the cross and rose again from the dead.

Anselm's View of the Atonement

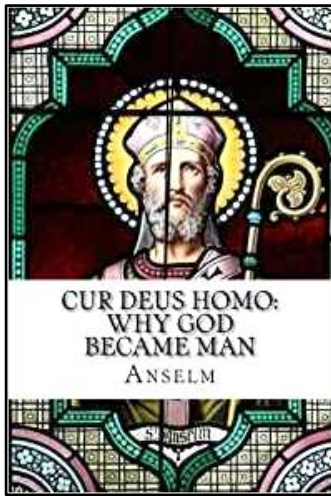
The view that humanity, by sinning, “robbed God of his honor” and therefore God had to gain it back by punishing Jesus in our place, came from Anselm around 1000 AD. This is very different from the Bible's view of the atonement where Jesus died to take away our sin because *sin* is our enemy ... not God!

Anselm (1033-1109), Archbishop of Canterbury, is probably best known in church history for his writing titled “Cur Deus Homo” (Why God Became Man). In it he lays out his view of the atonement of Jesus on the cross, what it means, why it was needed, and what it accomplished.

I was taught all my life, in a Baptist church well within *Evangelical Christianity*, that the atonement for sin that Jesus made on the cross was to take the wrath and punishment from God that He had stored up for all of humanity because of our sin. This is commonly known as *Penal Substitutionary Atonement*. Like many people I had many questions about this, including: How could God *justly* punish a totally innocent person ... for any reason?



Then I discovered Anselm's “Cur Deus Homo” (Why God Became Man). One big *Ah ha* moment! So, this is where PSA came from! As a result, Penal Substitutionary Atonement is alive and well in the Roman Catholic, Protestant, and Evangelical churches today. For example, the Southern Baptist Convention produced a document in 2017 declaring the importance of PSA. Another great modern-day source that proclaims and defends Penal Substitutionary Atonement is John Stott's book titled “The Cross of Christ.” This is, perhaps, the standard work on this subject of our day. But, interestingly, PSA is certainly not resident in the early church writers. Why not? (For some examples, along with detailed information about PSA, see *Penal Substitutionary Atonement* following the Anselm quotes below).



Below are key excerpts from Anselm. Portions that are the historical basis for PSA are underlined for easy discovery. However, I strongly suggest that you take the time and read *all* of what is provided. Context is important! And, it is important that Christians everywhere know WHY they believe what they do, WHO it came from, WHEN and WHY. My hope is that this will cause many to look into the atonement of Jesus, what it

means, get it right and fully benefit from all Jesus did by grace alone for humanity ... for the world he created and so loves.

Keep in mind, as you read about the atonement of Jesus that *sin* is our enemy ... not God! We did not “rob him of his honor” (as Anselm claims). God does not need to punish someone (anyone, either Jesus or us) as long as *someone* gets inflicted with pain and agony so that he can *regain* His honor. Read what Anselm is proposing, and ask yourself... who is our enemy? Is it God or is it or sin? Did God come in the person of Jesus and join the human race to save us from *sin* that is killing us, or did God need to save us from *Himself* (as the One who wants to punish us for our sin)? Is not sin the punisher and God (through Jesus) the savior?

This particular work by Anselm is presented in dialog form. This is an ancient communication style that goes back to Plato in his dialogs of Socrates. Anselm presents himself having a dialog with Boso, who seems to be a naive and uninformed individual, asking all the right questions so that Anselm can “hit it out of the park” with his answers. Because of this, I could not help but to affectionately call him “Bozo” (in my mind) in my mind when I first read this. However, such dialog is an effective way to communicate and makes interesting reading with the dynamic of back and forth between teacher and student.

The transcripts of the *Conversations in Christ* broadcasts (which make up the main body of this booklet) stand in stark contrast to Anselm’s dialog in several ways. First, there are three of us involved in the discussions (Mike, Bill, and Carl). Second, this “tri-alog” was very real and was not rigged in any way. We had no agenda (except the opening question in the first broadcast), no notes, and no plan as to where the conversation would go except to feed off of each other spontaneously. It was all done “off the top of our heads”, but it was also very much from the “depths of our hearts.” However, what we have in common with Anselm is that the dynamic interaction of dialog (tri-alog) is a wonderful and engaging form of communication.

So please enjoy reading this very influential writing from Christin church history, ask good questions about it, and discover from where, when, and from whom your perspective on the atonement of Jesus *may* have come!

ANSELM'S CUR DEUS HOMO

(Why God Became Man)

Book One

CHAPTER XI. What it is to sin, and to make satisfaction for sin.

ANSELM: We must needs inquire, therefore, in what manner God puts away men's sins; and, in order to do this more plainly, let us first consider what it is to sin, and what it is to make satisfaction for sin.

BOSO: It is yours to explain and mine to listen.

ANSELM: If man or angel always rendered to God his due, he would never sin.

BOSO: I cannot deny that.

ANSELM: Therefore to sin is nothing else than not to render to God his due.

BOSO: What is the debt which we owe to God?

ANSELM: Every wish of a rational creature should be subject to the will of God.

BOSO: Nothing is more true.

ANSELM: This is the debt which man and angel owe to God, and no one who pays this debt commits sin; but every one who does not pay it sins. This is justice, or uprightness of will, which makes a being just or upright in heart, that is, in will; and this is the sole and complete debt of honor which we owe to God, and which God requires of us. For it is such a will only, when it can be exercised, that does works pleasing to God; and when this will cannot be exercised, it is pleasing of itself alone, since without it no work is acceptable. He who does not render this honor which is due to God, robs God of his own and dishonors him; and this is sin. Moreover, so long as he does not restore what he has taken away, he remains in fault; and it will not suffice merely to restore what has been taken away, but, considering the contempt offered, he ought to restore more than he took away. For as one who imperils another's safety does not enough by merely restoring his safety, without making some compensation for the anguish incurred; so he who violates another's honor does not enough by merely rendering honor again, but must, according to the extent of the injury done, make restoration in some way satisfactory to the person whom he has dishonored. We must also observe that when any one pays what he has unjustly taken away, he ought to give something which could not have been demanded of him, had he not stolen what belonged to another. So then, every one who sins ought to pay back the honor of which he has robbed God; and this is the satisfaction which every sinner owes to God.

BOSO: Since we have determined to follow reason in all these things, I am unable to bring any objection against them, although you somewhat startle me.

CHAPTER XII. Whether it were proper for God to put away sins by compassion alone, without any payment of debt.

ANSELM: Let us return and consider whether it were proper for God to put away sins by compassion alone, without any payment of the honor taken from him.

BOSO: I do not see why it is not proper.

ANSELM: To remit sin in this manner is nothing else than not to punish; and since it is not right to cancel sin without compensation or punishment; if it be not punished, then is it passed by undischarged.

BOSO: What you say is reasonable.

ANSELM: It is not fitting for God to pass over anything in his kingdom undischarged.

BOSO: If I wish to oppose this, I fear to sin.

ANSELM: It is, therefore, not proper for God thus to pass over sin unpunished.

BOSO: Thus it follows.

ANSELM: There is also another thing which follows if sin be passed by unpunished, viz., that with God there will be no difference between the guilty and the not guilty; and this is unbecoming to God.

BOSO: I cannot deny it.

ANSELM: Observe this also. Every one knows that justice to man is regulated by law, so that, according to the requirements of law, the measure of award is bestowed by God.

BOSO: This is our belief.

ANSELM: But if sin is neither paid for nor punished, it is subject to no law.

BOSO: I cannot conceive it to be otherwise.

ANSELM: Injustice, therefore, if it is cancelled by compassion alone, is more free than justice, which seems very inconsistent. And to these is also added a further incongruity, viz., that it makes injustice like God. For as God is subject to no law, so neither is injustice.

BOSO: I cannot withstand your reasoning. But when God commands us in every case to forgive those who trespass against us, it seems inconsistent to enjoin a thing upon us which it is not proper for him to do himself.

ANSELM: There is no inconsistency in God's commanding us not to take upon ourselves what belongs to Him alone. For to execute vengeance belongs to none but Him who is Lord of all; for when the powers of the world rightly accomplish this end, God himself does it who appointed them for the purpose.

BOSO: You have obviated the difficulty which I thought to exist; but there is another to which I would like to have your answer. For since God is so free as to be subject to no law, and to the judgment of no one, and is so merciful as that nothing more merciful can be conceived; and nothing is right or fit save as he wills; it seems a strange thing for us to say that he is wholly unwilling or unable to put away an injury done to himself, when we are wont to apply to him for indulgence with regard to those offences which we commit against others.

ANSELM: What you say of God's liberty and choice and compassion is true; but we ought so to interpret these things as that they may not seem to interfere with His dignity. For there is no liberty except as regards what is best or fitting; nor should that be called mercy which does anything improper for the Divine character. Moreover, when it is said that what God wishes is just, and that what He does not wish is unjust, we must not understand that if God wished anything improper it would be just, simply because he wished it. For if God wishes to lie, we must not conclude that it is right to lie, but rather that he is not God. For no will can ever wish to lie, unless truth in it is impaired, nay, unless the will itself be impaired by forsaking truth. When, then, it is said: "If God wishes to lie," the meaning is simply this: "If the nature of God is such as that he wishes to lie;" and, therefore, it does not follow that falsehood is right, except it be understood in the same manner as when we speak of two impossible things: "If this be true, then that follows; because neither this nor that is true;" as if a man should say: "Supposing water to be dry, and fire to be moist;" for neither is the case. Therefore, with regard to these things, to speak the whole truth: If God desires a thing, it is right that he should desire that which involves no unfitness. For if God chooses that it should rain, it is right that it should rain; and if he desires that any man should die, then is it right that he should die. Wherefore, if it be not fitting for God to do anything unjustly, or out of course, it does not belong to his liberty or compassion or will to let the sinner go unpunished who makes no return to God of what the sinner has defrauded him.

BOSO: You remove from me every possible objection which I had thought of bringing against you.

ANSELM: Yet observe why it is not fitting for God to do this.

BOSO: I listen readily to whatever you say.

CHAPTER XIII. How nothing less was to be endured, in the order of things, than that the creature should take away the honor due the Creator and not restore what he takes away.

ANSELM: In the order of things, there is nothing less to be endured than that the creature should take away the honor due the Creator, and not restore what he has taken away.

BOSO: Nothing is more plain than this.

ANSELM: But there is no greater injustice suffered than that by which so great an evil must be endured.

BOSO: This, also, is plain.

ANSELM: I think, therefore, that you will not say that God ought to endure a thing than which no greater injustice is suffered, viz., that the creature should not restore to God what he has taken away.

BOSO: No; I think it should be wholly denied.

ANSELM: Again, if there is nothing greater or better than God, there is nothing more just than supreme justice, which maintains God's honor in the arrangement of things, and which is nothing else but God himself.

BOSO: There is nothing clearer than this.

ANSELM: Therefore God maintains nothing with more justice than the honor of his own dignity.

BOSO: I must agree with you.

ANSELM: Does it seem to you that he wholly preserves it, if he allows himself to be so defrauded of it as that he should neither receive satisfaction nor punish the one defrauding him.

BOSO: I dare not say so.

ANSELM: Therefore the honor taken away must be repaid, or punishment must follow; otherwise, either God will not be just to himself, or he will be weak in respect to both parties; and this it is impious even to think of.

BOSO: I think that nothing more reasonable can be said.

CHAPTER XIV. How the honor of God exists in the punishment of the wicked.

BOSO: But I wish to hear from you whether the punishment of the sinner is an honor to God, or how it is an honor. For if the punishment of the sinner is not for God's honor when the sinner does not pay what he took away, but is punished, God loses his honor so that he cannot recover it. And this seems in contradiction to the things which have been said.

ANSELM: It is impossible for God to lose his honor; for either the sinner pays his debt of his own accord, or, if he refuse, God takes it from him. For either man renders due submission to God of his own will, by avoiding sin or making payment, or else God subjects him to himself by torments, even against man's will, and thus shows that he is the Lord of man, though man refuses to acknowledge it of his own accord. And here we must observe that as man in sinning takes away what belongs to God, so God in punishing gets in return what pertains to man. For not only does that belong to a man which he has in present possession, but also that which it is in his power to have. Therefore, since man was so made as to be able to attain happiness by avoiding sin; if, on account of his sin, he is deprived of happiness and every good, he repays from his own inheritance what he has stolen, though he repay it against his will. For although God does not apply what he takes away to any object of his own, as man transfers the money which he has taken from another to his own use; yet what he takes away serves the purpose of his own honor, for this very reason, that it is taken away. For by this act he shows that the sinner and all that pertains to him are under his subjection.

CHAPTER XV. Whether God suffers his honor to be violated even in the least degree.

BOSO: What you say satisfies me. But there is still another point which I should like to have you answer. For if, as you make out, God ought to sustain his own honor, why does he allow it to be violated even in the least degree? For what is in any way made liable to injury is not entirely and perfectly preserved.

ANSELM: Nothing can be added to or taken from the honor of God. For this honor which belongs to him is in no way subject to injury or change. But as the individual creature preserves, naturally or by reason, the condition belonging, and, as it were, allotted to him, he is said to obey and honor God; and to this, rational nature, which possesses intelligence, is especially bound. And when the being chooses what he ought, he honors God; not by bestowing anything upon him, but because he brings himself freely under God's will and disposal, and maintains his own condition in the universe, and the beauty of the universe itself, as far as in him lies. But when he does not choose what he ought, he dishonors God, as far as the being himself is concerned, because he does not submit himself freely to God's disposal. And he disturbs the order and beauty of the universe, as relates to himself, although he cannot injure nor tarnish the power and majesty of God. For if those things which are held together in the circuit of the heavens desire to be elsewhere than under the heavens, or to be further removed from the heavens, there is no

place where they can be but under the heavens, nor can they fly from the heavens without also approaching them. For both whence and whither and in what way they go, they are still under the heavens; and if they are at a greater distance from one part of them, they are only so much nearer to the opposite part. And so, though man or evil angel refuse to submit to the Divine will and appointment, yet he cannot escape it; for if he wishes to fly from a will that commands, he falls into the power of a will that punishes. And if you ask whither he goes, it is only under the permission of that will; and even this wayward choice or action of his becomes subservient, under infinite wisdom, to the order and beauty of the universe before spoken of. For when it is understood that God brings good out of many forms of evil, then the satisfaction for sin freely given, or if this be not given, the exaction of punishment, hold their own place and orderly beauty in the same universe. For if Divine wisdom were not to insist upon things, when wickedness tries to disturb the right appointment, there would be, in the very universe which God ought to control, an unseemliness springing from the violation of the beauty of arrangement, and God would appear to be deficient in his management. And these two things are not only unfitting, but consequently impossible; so that satisfaction or punishment must needs follow every sin.

BOSO: You have relieved my objection.

ANSELM: It is then plain that no one can honor or dishonor God, as he is in himself; but the creature, as far as he is concerned, appears to do this when he submits or opposes his will to the will of God.

BOSO: I know of nothing which can be said against this.

ANSELM: Let me add something to it.

BOSO: Go on, until I am weary of listening.

CHAPTER XXIII. What man took from God by his sin, which he has no power to repay.

ANSELM: What did man take from God, when he allowed himself to be overcome by the devil?

BOSO: Go on to mention, as you have begun, the evil things which can be added to those already shown for I am ignorant of them.

ANSELM: Did not man take from God whatever He had purposed to do for human nature?

BOSO: There is no denying that.

ANSELM: Listen to the voice of strict justice; and judge according to that whether man makes to God a real satisfaction for his sin, unless, by overcoming the devil, man restore to God what he took from God in allowing himself to be conquered by the devil; so that, as by this conquest over man the devil took what belonged to God, and God was the loser, so in man's victory the devil may be despoiled, and God recover his right.

BOSO: Surely nothing can be more exactly or justly conceived.

ANSELM: Think you that supreme justice can violate this justice?

BOSO: I dare not think it.

ANSELM: Therefore man cannot and ought not by any means to receive from God what God designed to give him, unless he return to God everything which he took from him; so that, as by man God suffered loss, by man, also, He might recover His loss. But this cannot be effected except in this way: that, as in the fall of man all human nature was corrupted, and, as it were, tainted with sin, and God will not choose one of such a race to fill up the number in his heavenly kingdom; so, by man's victory, as many men may be justified from sin as are needed to complete the number which man was made to fill. But a sinful man can by no means do this, for a sinner cannot justify a sinner.

BOSO: There is nothing more just or necessary; but, from all these things, the compassion of God and the hope of man seems to fail, as far as regards that happiness for which man was made.

ANSELM: Yet wait a little.

BOSO: Have you anything further?

CHAPTER XXIV. How, as long as man does not restore what he owes God, he cannot be happy, nor is he excused by want of power.

ANSELM: If a man is called unjust who does not pay his fellow-man a debt, much more is he unjust who does not restore what he owes God.

BOSO: If he can pay and yet does not, he is certainly unjust. But if he be not able, wherein is he unjust?

ANSELM: Indeed, if the origin of his inability were not in himself, there might be some excuse for him. But if in this very impotence lies the fault, as it does not lessen the sin, neither does it excuse him from paying what is due. Suppose one should assign his slave a certain piece of work, and should command him not to throw himself into a ditch, which he points out to him and from which he could not extricate himself; and suppose that the slave, despising his master's command and warning, throws himself into the ditch before pointed out, so as to be utterly unable to accomplish the work assigned; think you that his inability will at all excuse him for not doing his appointed work?

BOSO: By no means, but will rather increase his crime, since he brought his inability upon himself. For doubly hath he sinned, in not doing what he was commanded to do and in doing what he was forewarned not to do.

ANSELM: Just so inexcusable is man, who has voluntarily brought upon himself a debt which he cannot pay, and by his own fault disabled himself, so that he can neither escape his previous obligation not to sin, nor pay the debt which he has incurred by sin. For his very inability is guilt, because he ought not to have it; nay, he ought to be free from it; for as it is a crime not to have what he ought, it is also a crime to have what he ought not. Therefore, as it is a crime in man not to have that power which he received to avoid sin, it is also a crime to have that inability by which he can neither do right and avoid sin, nor restore the debt which he owes on account of his sin. For it is by his own free action that he loses that power, and falls into this inability. For not to have the power which one ought to have, is the same thing as to have the inability which one ought not to have. Therefore man's inability to restore what he owes to God, an inability brought upon himself for that very purpose, does not excuse man from paying; for the result of sin cannot excuse the sin itself.

BOSO: This argument is exceedingly weighty, and must be true.

ANSELM: Man, then, is unjust in not paying what he owes to God.

BOSO: This is very true; for he is unjust, both in not paying, and in not being able to pay.

ANSELM: But no unjust person shall be admitted to happiness; for as that happiness is complete in which there is nothing wanting, so it can belong to no one who is not so pure as to have no injustice found in him.

BOSO: I dare not think otherwise.

ANSELM: He, then, who does not pay God what he owes can never be happy.

BOSO: I cannot deny that this is so.

ANSELM: But if you choose to say that a merciful God remits to the suppliant his debt, because he cannot pay; God must be said to dispense with one of two things, viz., either this which man ought voluntarily to render but cannot, that is, an equivalent for his sin, a thing which ought not to be given up even to save the whole universe besides God; or else this, which, as I have before said, God was about to take away from man by punishment, even against man's will, viz., happiness. But if God gives up what man ought freely to render, for the reason that man cannot repay it, what is this but saying that God gives up what he is unable to obtain? But it is mockery to ascribe such compassion to God. But if God gives up what he was about to take from unwilling man, because man is unable to restore what he ought to restore freely, He abates the punishment and makes man happy on account of his sin, because he has what he ought not to have. For he ought not to have this inability, and therefore as long as he has it without atonement it is his sin. And truly such compassion on the part of God is wholly contrary to the Divine justice, which allows nothing but punishment as the recompense of sin. Therefore, as God cannot be inconsistent with himself, his compassion cannot be of this nature.

BOSO: I think, then, we must look for another mercy than this.

ANSELM: But suppose it were true that God pardons the man who does not pay his debt because he cannot.

BOSO: I could wish it were so.

ANSELM: But while man does not make payment, he either wishes to restore, or else he does not wish to. Now, if he wishes to do what he cannot, he will be needy, and if he does not wish to, he will be unjust.

BOSO: Nothing can be plainer.

ANSELM: But whether needy or unjust, he will not be happy.

BOSO: This also is plain.

ANSELM: So long, then, as he does not restore, he will not be happy.

BOSO: If God follows the method of justice, there is no escape for the miserable wretch, and God's compassion seems to fail.

ANSELM: You have demanded an explanation; now hear it. I do not deny that God is merciful, who preserveth man and beast, according to the multitude of his mercies. But we are speaking of that exceeding pity by which he makes man happy after this life. And I think that I have amply proved, by the reasons given above, that happiness ought not to be bestowed upon any one whose sins have not been wholly put away; and that this remission ought not to take place, save by the payment of the debt incurred by sin, according to the extent of sin. And if you think that any objections can be brought against these proofs, you ought to mention them.

BOSO: I see not how your reasons can be at all invalidated.

ANSELM: Nor do I, if rightly understood. But even if one of the whole number be confirmed by impregnable truth, that should be sufficient. For truth is equally secured against all doubt, if it be demonstrably proved by one argument as by many.

BOSO: Surely this is so. But how, then, shall man be saved, if he neither pays what he owes, and ought not to be saved without paying? Or, with what face shall we declare that God, who is rich in mercy above human conception, cannot exercise this compassion?

ANSELM: This is the question which you ought to ask of those in whose behalf you are speaking, who have no faith in the need of Christ for man's salvation, and you should also request them to tell how man can be saved without Christ. But, if they are utterly unable to do it, let them cease from mocking us, and let them hasten to unite themselves with us, who do not doubt that man can be saved through Christ; else let them despair of being saved at all. And if this terrifies them, let them believe in Christ as we do, that they may be saved.

BOSO: Let me ask you, as I have begun, to show me how a man is saved by Christ.

CHAPTER XXV. How man's salvation by Christ is necessarily possible.

ANSELM: Is it not sufficiently proved that man can be saved by Christ, when even infidels do not deny that man can be happy somehow, and it has been sufficiently shown that, leaving Christ out of view, no salvation can be found for man? For, either by Christ or by some one else can man be saved, or else not at all. If, then, it is false that man cannot be saved all, or that he can be saved in any other way, his salvation must necessarily be by Christ.

BOSO: But what reply will you make to a person who perceives that man cannot be saved in any other way, and yet, not understanding how he can be saved by Christ, sees fit to declare that there cannot be any salvation either by Christ or in any other way?

ANSELM: What reply ought to be made to one who ascribes impossibility to a necessary truth, because he does not understand how it can be?

BOSO: That he is a fool.

ANSELM: Then what he says must be despised.

BOSO: Very true; but we ought to show him in what way the thing is true which he holds to be impossible.

ANSELM: Do you not perceive, from what we have said above, that it is necessary for some men to attain to felicity? For, if it is unfitting for God to elevate man with any stain upon him, to that for which he made him free from all stain, lest it should seem that God had repented of his good intent, or was unable to accomplish his designs; far more is it impossible, on account of the same unfitness, that no man should be exalted to that state for which he was made. Therefore, a satisfaction such as we have above proved necessary for sin, must be found apart from the Christian faith, which no reason can show; or else we must accept the Christian doctrine. For what is clearly made out by absolute reasoning ought by no means to be questioned, even though the method of it be not understood.

BOSO: What you say is true.

ANSELM: Why, then, do you question further?

BOSO: I come not for this purpose, to have you remove doubts from my faith, but to have you show me the reason for my confidence. Therefore, as you have brought me thus far by your reasoning, so that I perceive that man as a sinner owes God for his sin what he is unable to pay, and cannot be saved without paying; I wish you would go further with me, and enable me to understand, by force of reasoning, the fitness of all those things which the Catholic faith enjoins upon us with regard to Christ, if we hope to be saved; and how they avail for the salvation of man, and how God saves man by compassion; when he never remits his sin, unless man shall have rendered what was due on account of his sin. And, to make your reasoning the clearer, begin at the beginning, so as to rest it upon a strong foundation.

ANSELM: Now God help me, for you do not spare me in the least, nor consider the weakness of my skill, when you enjoin so great a work upon me. Yet I will attempt it, as I have begun, not trusting in myself but in God, and will do what I can with his help. But let us separate the things which remain to be said from those which have been said, by a new introduction, lest by their unbroken length, these things become tedious to one who wishes to read them.

Penal Substitutionary Atonement

Penal Substitutionary Atonement is the belief that Jesus came and died to take the wrath and punishment that God intended to apply to all humanity because of their sins. But there is a better, more Biblical view that is rooted in the Early Christian church, prior to Augustine. This view sees Jesus as Savior of the World who came to save humanity from sin (which is the real punisher), and not from God. Sin is our enemy, not God. God is the one who loves us and saves us from sin that destroys us!

The Southern Baptist Convention produced a document in 2017 declaring the importance of PSA. Another great modern-day source that proclaims and defends Penal Substitutionary Atonement is John Stott's book titled "The Cross of Christ." This is, perhaps, the standard work on this subject of our day. (See a description of Stott's book in the section below titled, *Book Sources*.) This PSA document by the SBC is titled *On The Necessity Of Penal Substitutionary Atonement* and it is presented below. It contains about two dozen statements, each introduced with "WHEREAS" and ending with a "RESOLVED." However, I have removed all of these words (along with all Bible references) in order to make this statement more readable in a paragraph format. You are encouraged to go on-line and review this document in its complete format at:

<http://www.sbc.net/resolutions/2278/on-the-necessity-of-penal-substitutionary-atonement>. Here is that PSA statement (with underlining to call attention to key points):

On The Necessity Of Penal Substitutionary Atonement

Southern Baptist Convention, Phoenix, AZ. 2017

<http://www.sbc.net/resolutions/2278/on-the-necessity-of-penal-substitutionary-atonement>

In recent days numerous voices from the Protestant world have boldly attacked the doctrine of penal substitutionary atonement. These voices have publicly labeled penal substitution “monstrous,” “evil,” “a terrible doctrine,” and indicative of “the Father murdering a son.” The “anti-violence” model of the cross of Christ weakens the Bible’s teaching by recasting the atonement as a basis for God is perfect in His holiness and perfect in His justice, as He is also perfect in His love. On the cross of Christ Jesus the perfect love of God perfectly applies the perfect justice of God to satisfy the perfect holiness of God in order to redeem sinners.

The denial of penal substitutionary atonement in effect:

1. denies the holy and loving God the exercise of His justice, the overflow of which in a sinful world is the outpouring of His just retributive wrath.
2. displays in effect the denial of the perfect character of the one true God.
3. constitutes false teaching that leads the flock astray and leaves the world without a message of a sin-cleansing Savior.
4. necessarily compromises the biblical and historical doctrines of propitiation, expiation, ransom, satisfaction, Christus Victor, Christus Exemplar, and more.

The Lord promised a warrior-savior who would crush the head of the serpent to obliterate the enemy. The sacrificial system of the Old Testament culminated in the blood sacrifice of a spotless lamb on the Day of Atonement. Jesus Himself unveiled the salvific mission that necessitated His incarnation when He said, “the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many.” The confession of the Scriptures is that Christ is our passive and active righteousness, forgiving all our sin by His death and imputing to us all His righteousness through faith. Peter, an apostle of the Lord Jesus Christ, called the shed blood of the Savior “precious.” The Bible teaches that “without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness” of sin.

Baptist pastor-theologians and scholars with differing soteriological convictions have made the preaching of the substitutionary sacrifice of Christ the foundation of their ministry, heralding the Good News all over this world. Countless missionaries and martyrs of the Christian faith have laid down their lives in order to tell fellow sinners about the death of Christ for the wicked, thus obeying the Great Commission. Baptists preach the cross of Christ, sing about the cross, cling to the cross, share the cross, love the cross, and take up their own crosses to follow their Lord, even as the world despises His cross and the proclaimers of His cross. The Baptist Faith & Message was revised in 2000, incorporating for the first time the language of substitution to make plain what evangelical Baptists have long since preached and believed. Around the throne of God into all eternity, the redeemed from every tribe, tongue, ethnicity, and nation will cry out, “Worthy is the Lamb who was slain!” Therefore, be it resolved, that the messengers to the Southern Baptist Convention meeting in Phoenix, Arizona, June 13–14, 2017, reaffirm the truthfulness, efficacy, and beauty of the biblical doctrine of Penal Substitutionary Atonement as the burning core of the Gospel message and the only hope of a fallen race.

Holy Justice!

Most Christians believe that the Holiness and Justice of God require him to send the majority of humanity into never-ending torment and agony as punishment for unbelief and/or unrepented sin. But is this true? Or, does holiness and justice mean something quite different (and much better) than the common understanding of these words?

Introduction

The strangest thing happens whenever I tell Christians that Jesus has *already* saved the world: rejection, recoil, pride, fear, anger, scoffing, pity and more. You would think I had just told them that God was some kind of monster that does the worst possible thing that could ever be done to anyone! Oh, wait, that is what many Christians believe -- that God will send a majority of humanity to never ending agony and suffering as a result of their unbelief and unrepented sin! Yet When they hear the greatest “good news” they could ever hear possibly hear -- that God has saved his world (everyone) through Jesus dying on the cross to take away sin -- they immediately reject it as if something completely contrary to the love, grace, mercy and moral excellence of God had been uttered!

Why? Why do Christians usually respond this way, instinctively? Why do they not say, “Wow, that is great news! I don't believe it, but I sure would like to look into this and see if it is true.” Instead there is immediate rejection, often accompanied by anger, fear, scoffing, insecurity, and a desire to flee! Why is there not, instead, a desire to “examine everything carefully” as Paul so clearly exhorted us to do? Why is there not an instinctive desire to be noble, like the Bereans in the book of Acts, who looked into what they were taught to make sure it was true? Why instead do they feel threatened and prefer to assume what they believe is automatically true and cannot be wrong?

What do they possibly gain by doing this? Does rejecting assuming and fleeing increase their confidence in what they believe? Or is it a purely emotional reaction based in fear, anger, and prejudice? What do they possibly have to lose by looking into something and possibly finding out they are wrong, need to change, and will no longer be wrong! Or, perhaps they will find out, with even greater certainty, just how *right* they are? How can they possibly lose by doing what Paul exhorts us all to do when presented with new information -- especially if it is clearly positive information and presents God as a totally good and loving Creator who never fails in what He sets out to do (save the world!)? Yet, sadly, this is not the instinctive response of most Christians.

The first reason I usually hear as to why Christians reject the idea of God saving everyone is that he is “holy and just”, and that He must punish sin. Well, he is for sure holy and just, but it is possible that most Christians have some wrong thinking and misunderstandings about what holiness and justice really mean?

The Holiness of God

The holiness of God is indeed very important. Many Christians correctly quote Isaiah who wrote, “Holy, holy, holy, is our Lord God almighty.” And indeed he is! Repeating it three times makes it all the more significant. But what does “holy” mean? It does *not* mean “spooky” (as many people think), rendering God to be the equivalent of the image in The Wizard of Oz where Dorothy and her friends are shaking in fear as smoke and fire arise from an angry face that projects a stern and loud voice intended to scare and subdue. Sadly, this is



exactly the view of God that many Christians have, but it is not what “holy” means.



The word holy simply means “to set apart”, or to make something special and altogether different from other things. And this is what God is. He is holy in that he is totally set apart from evil, wrongdoing, injustice and anything else that would render God less than the perfect being of highest moral excellence! God cannot lie, He

cannot deceive or even tempt someone to do evil. He is good and always good, all the time, and has *only* a good purpose in all that he does.

A few years ago I visited a church in Albuquerque, New Mexico, where they opened and closed their service with, “God is good all the time; All the time God is good.” They are very wise to remind themselves of this every week. The goodness of God is of extreme importance because if he is not good all the time, in everything he does, then he is not *wholly* “set apart” from all evil and wrongdoing either. God’s goodness and holiness *requires* him to save, redeem, restore, reconcile and heal all people who he created to be very much like Himself. How could he not? He made the world and all people in it, but He also made us able to fall into sin by granting us the wonderful (but very dangerous) gift of free choice. God is responsible for who we are, what we are, and what happens to us -- especially when we have so great a need as desperately lost creatures so loved by our Creator! God is not free to “save, or not save”! He *must* save, simply because he is a *savior*. Saviors save -- that’s what they do! They do not stand back and watch a desperately drowning person perish and then blame it on them for not knowing how to swim, especially if they’re drowning as a result of the savior allowing them to be there drowning.

The Justice of God

Not only is God *holy*, but he is also *just*. But what does it mean to be “just”? Is it possible that we have misunderstood God’s “justice”, just as we also misunderstood His holiness? Most people think of justice is “getting back at someone” when they have wrong us. And to some degree this is a form of justice because it is an attempt to make things right. This kind of justice is about the best we can do as humans to bring about justice. But does this ever really make things right, which is what justice really means? No, it does not. It just makes us feel better and it is better than doing nothing. True, justice God’s kind of justice, is making things completely and permanently right.

If someone committed a horrible crime against you or one of your love ones, what would *ultimately* justice be? What would you want done that would satisfy you the most (in the sense of *ultimate* justice)? Would it be to lock him up and throw away the key? Would it be to take his life since he took the life of one of my loved ones? That would be better than nothing and it would give you *some* sense of justice. But in the end things are still not made right. But what if this horrible person who committed this horrible crime became fully repentant and was sorry to the point of tears and love for you and your family? What if he became a close and trusted friend that would do anything for you the rest of his life? Wouldn’t this be *ultimate* justice if you could somehow bring it about?

Would this not also be ultimate justice on God’s part? Would we not expect God also to bring this kind of ultimate justice -- the kind that actually makes things right and does not just keep things wrong as pure revenge and retribution? Would not full and complete restoration of all sinners back with God be the ultimate justice and the ultimate making things right? Of course! How could it ever be anything less? How is it that Christians (of all people) have come to believe that tormenting people in hell forever in never-ending agony could ever achieve true, complete and ultimate justice? How could doing this ever make things right? The truth is that it never can! Things just stay wrong.

Conclusion

Many Christians immediately and forcefully reject the idea that Jesus has already saved the world through his birth, death and resurrection. It certainly is not a ridiculous idea, nor is it something inconsistent with the high moral character of God. Salvation of all humanity is not beyond God’s ability as One who repeatedly presents himself as a savior, redeemer, restorer, reconciler and healer. Is it impossible for God to save everyone? Is it not clear in the Bible that he “desires everyone to be saved” and “does not want anyone to perish”? Is there anything in God that prevents him from saving everyone? Is he fully able to do so? Is this something too difficult for him? And when we add the fact that we cannot save ourselves to the previous facts that God *wants* to save us and is *able* to save ... how is it possible for all people to not be saved? What would be the reason? Let me restate this

important idea: If God *wants* everyone to be saved, is fully *able* to save everyone, and he is the *only one who can* save anyone ... then how is it possible that all humanity is not saved? What would be the reason? He *wants* to, He is *able* to do so, and only he can. So why would we not expect God to save everyone? Is this so unreasonable an idea that we must automatically reject it, simply because we have been told to do so all our lives? His *holiness* and *justice* certainly do not prevent this!

For a complete exposition of what Justice means, see the section later in this booklet titled *George MacDonald's View of Justice*.

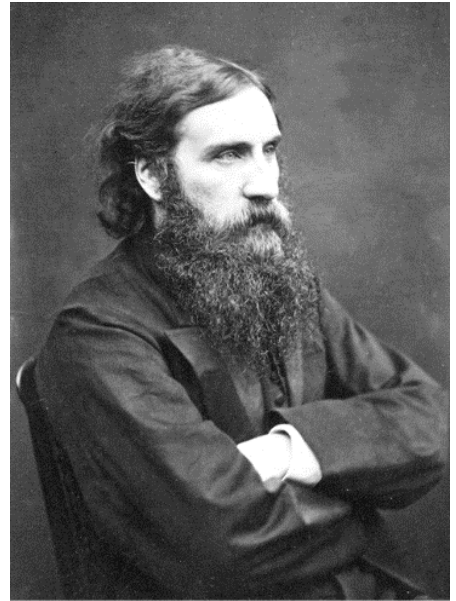
George MacDonald's View of Justice

George MacDonald was CS Lewis' mentor. In this "unspoken sermon" he correctly identifies *justice* as "making things right." But he goes on and logically concludes that God's justice must be *ultimate* justice, and that ultimate justice must be God making things ultimately right.

George MacDonald had an impressive list of people he influenced. Wikipedia has this to say about George MacDonald:

George MacDonald (10 December 1824 – 18 September 1905) was a Scottish author, poet and Christian minister. He was a pioneering figure in the field of fantasy literature and the mentor of fellow writer Lewis Carroll. His writings have been cited as a major literary influence by many notable authors, including W. H. Auden, C. S. Lewis, J. R. R. Tolkien, Walter de la Mare, E. Nesbit, and Madeleine L'Engle.

C. S. Lewis wrote that he regarded MacDonald as his "master": "Picking up a copy of Phantastes one day at a train-station bookstall, I began to read. A few hours later", said Lewis, "I knew that I had crossed a great frontier." G. K. Chesterton cited The Princess and the Goblin as a book that had "made a difference to my whole existence." Elizabeth Yates wrote of Sir Gibbie, "It moved me the way books did when, as a child, the great gates of literature began to open and first encounters with noble thoughts and utterances were unspeakably thrilling."



Even Mark Twain, who initially disliked MacDonald, became friends with him, and there is some evidence that Twain was influenced by him. The Christian author Oswald Chambers wrote in his "Christian Disciplines" that "it is a striking indication of the trend and shallowness of the modern reading public that George MacDonald's books have been so neglected."

In addition to his fairy tales, MacDonald wrote several works on Christian apologetics.

MacDonald has an impressive list of lifetime publications (which demonstrates why he was so influential on CS Lewis who was also a writer):

Fantasy

- Phantastes: A Fairie Romance for Men and Women (1858)
- "Cross Purposes" (1862)
- The Portent: A Story of the Inner Vision of the Highlanders, Commonly Called "The Second Sight" (1864)
- Dealings with the Fairies (1867), containing "The Golden Key", "The Light Princess", "The Shadows", and other short stories
- At the Back of the North Wind (1871)
- Works of Fancy and Imagination (1871), including Within and Without, "Cross Purposes", "The Light Princess", "The Golden Key"
- The Princess and the Goblin (1872)

- The Wise Woman: A Parable (1875) (Published also as "The Lost Princess: A Double Story"; or as "A Double Story".)
- The Gifts of the Child Christ and Other Tales (1882; republished as Stephen Archer and Other Tales)
- The Day Boy and the Night Girl (1882)
- The Princess and Curdie (1883), a sequel to The Princess and the Goblin
- Lilith: A Romance (1895)

Fiction

- David Elginbrod (1863; republished in edited form as The Tutor's First Love), originally published in three volumes

- Adela Cathcart (1864); contains many fantasy stories told by the characters within the larger story, including "The Light Princess", "The Shadows", etc.
- Alec Forbes of Howglen (1865; edited by Michael Phillips and republished as *The Maiden's Bequest*;
- Annals of a Quiet Neighbourhood (1867)
- Guild Court: A London Story (1868; republished in edited form as *The Prodigal Apprentice*)
- Robert Falconer (1868; republished in edited form as *The Musician's Quest*)
- The Seaboard Parish (1869), a sequel to *Annals of a Quiet Neighbourhood*
- Ranald Bannerman's Boyhood (republished in edited form as *The Boyhood of Ranald Bannerman*) (1871)
- Wilfrid Cumbermede (1871)
- The Vicar's Daughter (1871), a sequel to *Annals of a Quiet Neighborhood* and *The Seaboard Parish*
- The History of Gutta Percha Willie, the Working Genius (1873; republished in edited form as *The Genius of Willie MacMichael*),
- Malcolm (1875)
- St. George and St. Michael (1876; edited by Dan Hamilton and republished as *The Last Castle*)
- Thomas Wingfold, Curate (1876; republished in edited form as *The Curate's Awakening*)
- The Marquis of Lossie (1877; republished in edited form as *The Marquis' Secret*), the second book of *Malcolm*
- Sir Gibbie (1879): *Sir Gibbie*, Volume 1. London: Hurst and Blackett. 1879. With simultaneous publication of Vol. 2 and Vol. 3, each of ca. 300 pages.
- Paul Faber, Surgeon (1879; republished in edited form as *The Lady's Confession*), sequel to *Thomas Wingfold, Curate*
- Mary Marston (1881; republished in edited form as *A Daughter's Devotion* and *The Shopkeeper's Daughter*)
- Warlock o' Glenwarlock (1881; republished in edited form as *Castle Warlock and The Laird's Inheritance*)
- Weighed and Wanting (1882; republished in edited form as *A Gentlewoman's Choice*)
- Donal Grant (1883; republished in edited form as *The Shepherd's Castle*), a sequel to *Sir Gibbie*
- What's Mine's Mine (1886; republished in edited form as *The Highlander's Last Song*)
- Home Again: A Tale (1887; republished in edited form as *The Poet's Homecoming*)
- The Elect Lady (1888; republished in edited form as *The Landlady's Master*)
- A Rough Shaking (1891; republished in edited form as *The Wanderings of Clare Skymer*)
- There and Back (1891; republished in edited form as *The Baron's Apprenticeship*).

- The Flight of the Shadow (1891)
- Heather and Snow (1893; republished in edited form as *The Peasant Girl's Dream*)
- Salted with Fire (1896; republished in edited form as *The Minister's Restoration*)
- Far Above Rubies (1898)

Poetry

- Twelve of the Spiritual Songs of Novalis (1851), privately printed translation of the poetry of Novalis
- Within and Without: A Dramatic Poem (1855)
- Poems. Longman, Brown, Green, Longmans, & Roberts. 1857. Retrieved 15 March 2017.
- "A Hidden Life" and Other Poems (1864)
- "The Disciple" and Other Poems (1867)
- Exotics: A Translation of the Spiritual Songs of Novalis, the Hymn-book of Luther, and Other Poems (1876)
- Dramatic and Miscellaneous Poems (1876)
- Diary of an Old Soul (1880)
- A Book of Strife, in the Form of the Diary of an Old Soul (1880), privately printed
- The Threefold Cord: Poems by Three Friends (1883), privately printed.
- Poems. New York: E. P. Dutton. 1887. Retrieved 3-15-2017.
- The Poetical Works of George MacDonald, 2 Vols (1893)
- Scotch Songs and Ballads (1893)
- Rampolli: Growths from a Long-planted Root (1897)

Nonfiction

- Unspoken Sermons (1867)
- England's Antiphon (1868, 1874)
- The Miracles of Our Lord (1870)
- Cheerful Words from the Writing of George MacDonald (1880), compiled by E. E. Brown
- Orts: Chiefly Papers on the Imagination, and on Shakespeare (1882)
- "Preface" (1884) to *Letters from Hell* (1866) by Valdemar Adolph Thisted
- The Tragedie of Hamlet, Prince of Denmarke: A Study With the Text of the Folio of 1623 (1885)
- Unspoken Sermons, Second Series (1885)
- Unspoken Sermons, Third Series (1889)
- A Cabinet of Gems, Cut and Polished by Sir Philip Sidney; Now, for the More Radiance, Presented Without Their Setting by George MacDonald (1891)
- The Hope of the Gospel (1892)
- A Dish of Orts (1893)
- Beautiful Thoughts from George MacDonald (1894), compiled by Elizabeth Dougall

One of his publications was “Unspoken Sermons” (under *Non-fiction* above), and one of his sermons was titled “Justice.” In this written sermon, MacDonald spells out (in no uncertain terms) what *justice* is ... and more importantly, what *ultimate justice* is, especially in light of God eventually bringing about such ultimate justice. I have provided only the first part of his sermon which I hope you will find interesting and helpful. I have underlined key thoughts and added some section titles in **bold** to help break up the sermon into readable sections. These section titles are *not* part of MacDonald’s sermon! You can download the complete sermon at the following link: (http://www.amazon.com/Unspoken-Sermons-l-11/dp/1612035272/ref=sr_1_6?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1420842799&sr=1-6&keywords=george+macdonald+books)

Justice

(From George MacDonald's "Unspoken Sermons", with key passages underlined)

And to you, O Lord, belongs unfailing love; for you give to everyone according to what he has done. -- Ps 62:12

Introduction

Some translations say "kindness" and others "goodness", but I don't think there's any dispute as to the underlying meaning of the phrase which in this translation, is "unfailing love". Most Christians, however, following what they've heard and been taught, would see in this verse something different to what they're used to seeing. In order for the psalm to fit with what they understand, the verse would need to be changed to say "And to you, O Lord, belongs justice; for you give to everyone according to what he has done. In and of itself, this passage is quite remarkable. But at present, I won't clarify exactly why I've chosen this text for the sermon that follows. It goes without saying that I don't intend to use it as a basis for logical persuasion.

Let's try to see clearly what we mean when we use the word *justice*, and whether what we mean is true – especially in relation to God. Let's come closer to knowing what we should understand by justice - that is, God's justice - for God's justice is the living and active justice, and it's this justice of God which makes it possible for us to have the idea of justice in our hearts and minds. Because God is just, we too have the capability to know what justice is. It's because God is just that we have the idea of justice so deeply rooted within us.

What do we normally mean by *justice*? Don't we mean the carrying out of the law, the application of the penalty assigned to a crime? And when we think of a just judge, we mean a person who administers the law without any prejudice, without any favor for or against someone. And where the person is guilty, a just judge will punish the person to the extent the law allows, but certainly no more. Yet even here, justice may not have been done. It may be that the law itself is an unjust law, or perhaps that the judge makes a mistake. Probably more likely, the outworking of the law may be tainted by those who have the power to do so, for their own gain. Yet even if the law is good, and carried out properly, it's still not a "given" that justice is done.

Example of a stolen watch

Suppose my watch has been stolen from my pocket. I find the thief and drag him before the magistrate. He is proven guilty of the theft and sentenced to a just imprisonment. Does it follow that I must then go home satisfied with this result? Has justice been done to me? Certainly, the thief may have had justice done to him, but where is my watch? It's gone, and I remain a man wronged. Who has wronged me? The thief. Who can make the wrong right? The thief, and only the thief. Nobody except the man that did the wrong can make the wrong right. God may be able to move the man to right the wrong, but God himself cannot right the wrong without the man.

Suppose my watch is found and restored to me. Is the debt settled between me and the thief? By all means I may forgive him, but is the wrong removed? In no way! But suppose the thief repents. Let's say he's not able to return the watch, but he comes to me and tells me he's sorry he stole it. He begs me to accept for now the little he can bring as a beginning of making it up to me. How then should I regard things between us? Wouldn't I feel that he'd gone a long way to make it up to me, and that he'd actually done more to right the wrong than if he had simply returned the watch? And when the thief confessed to me, submitted himself to me and restored to me what he could, wouldn't I feel an appeal to the character of God within me, and that after all, we were brothers? Wouldn't this in fact be a sufficient atonement from one man to another? If he offered to take whatever suffering or further punishment I chose to lay on him, would I feel it necessary, so that justice was done, to inflict some particular suffering on him as righteousness demanded? He would still owe me my watch, but wouldn't I be liable to want to forget about it? The one who commits the crime can make up for it, and only that person.

One thing should be very clear: the punishment of the wrongdoer does not make atonement for the wrong done. How could the punishment of the man make it up to me for the stealing of my watch? The wrong done would still exist. I

am not saying the man should not be punished; far from it. I'm only saying that the punishment does not make anything up to the man wronged. Suppose the thief, with the watch in his pocket, were to inflict the most severe self-harm: would that lessen my sense that I had been wronged? Would it make anything right between us? Would it in any way atone? Would it give him a right to keep the watch? Punishment may indeed do some good to the thief, but while punishment is important, it is completely different to justice. Something else which should be clear is that even if it were impossible for the actual watch to be returned to me, the repentance of the thief takes away the offence, where no amount of suffering can. As for me, I would feel that there was nothing more between us. I would even feel that what he had given to me – a repentant brother – was infinitely more valuable than the returning of the watch he had taken from me. True: he owed me himself as well as the watch; but giving me the greater thing of himself in repentance contains even more than the return of a watch.

If you say to me: "You might forgive him, but the man has still sinned against God!", then I say to you that mercy must not be a part of God's character, and that a man is able to be more merciful than his maker! At least that's what your logic says. You're really saying that a man may do something which would be too merciful for God to do! If that's the case, then mercy is not an attribute of God, because it might be too much. Mercy must not be infinite and therefore cannot possibly be of God. "Mercy can be different from, and even opposite to justice." Never – if you mean what I mean by justice. If there is such a thing against justice, it cannot be called mercy, because it's cruelty. *And to you, O Lord, belongs mercy; for you give to everyone according to what he has done.* There is absolutely no conflict between mercy and justice. Those who say that justice means the punishing of sin, and mercy means the not punishing of sin, and then say that both justice and mercy are of God, would force a division in the very idea of God. And this leads me to the question: What is meant by divine justice, God's justice?

What is divine (God's) justice?

Human justice may well be a poor distortion of justice, more like a shadow of justice; but the justice of God must of course be perfect. We cannot outwit or outsmart justice, but are we fair to justice in our own idea of what it is? If you were to ask any ordinary church-goer what was meant by the *justice of God*, wouldn't 95% of them answer that it means his punishing of sin? But think for a moment what kind of justice it would show if the justice of a man was that he punished every wrong. A Roman emperor or a Turkish prince might do that, and indeed be the most unjust of both men and judges. Ahab might be just when sitting on his kingly throne, and yet the murderer of Naboth in his own home.

In God, are we to pretend that there is a difference in what he does and in who he is? God is one, and a theology which speaks of God as if he had different functions and different actions is surely the most foolish of theologies. It puts a division in the very nature of God himself. As an example, it portrays God as having to do that as a judge which he would never do as a father! Think of it: the love of the father makes him desire to be unjust as a judge!

How foolish the mind that explains God before obeying him! How foolish the mind that tries to logically compartmentalize God, instead of crying out, "Lord, what do you want me to do?" God is no judge, but if he were, he would be a judge only because he was a father. God's rights as a father cover every right that anyone might suppose him to have. And even though the following phrase is not perfect, but will have to do, this then is the justice of God: that he gives every man, woman, child, animal, and everything else that has breath, fair play. He gives to everyone according to what he has done.

And there lies his perfect mercy, for nothing else could be merciful to the person, and nothing but mercy could be fair to him. God does nothing to which any man would not say "That is fair" – assuming, of course, that the man was just, and had the thing put fairly and fully before him so he understood it plainly.

I repeat: who would say that a man was a just man because he insisted on punishing every single offender? A scoundrel might do that. Yet the justice of God, apparently, is his punishment of sin! No! A just man is one who cares for, and always tries to give fair play to everyone in everything. When we speak of the justice of God, let's make sure we do indeed mean justice! Punishment of the guilty may be connected with justice, but it is not the justice of God one iota more than it is the justice of man. "But no-one has any doubt that God gives fair play."

That may be true – but it doesn't count for much, if you claim that God does something which is not in itself fair. "If God does something, you can be sure it is, by definition, fair." Without doubt; or he wouldn't be God – except of course to demons. But you say he does this thing, and is just in doing it; I say he does not do that same thing, and is just in not doing it. You say that he does so, because the Bible says it; I say that if the Bible did say it, then the Bible would lie. But the Bible does not say so. The Lord of life rebukes men for not judging correctly. To say on the authority of the Bible that God does a thing that no honorable man would do is to lie against God. To say that it's therefore right, is to lie against the very spirit of God. To continue with a lie for God's sake is in reality to be against God, not for him. God cannot be lied for. He is the truth. The truth alone is on his side. And even if his child could not see the rightness of something, God would infinitely rather have the child claim that God could not do that thing, than to have him believe that he did do it. If the man were convinced that God did it, the thing he should say would be "Then there must be something about it which I don't know, and which if I did know, would cause me to see the thing differently."

Believing something evil

But where something evil is invented to explain and account for something good, and someone who loves God is called on to believe the invention or else be shunned, then he should not mind being shunned, for he is shunned into the company of Jesus. Where the only reason to believe that God does something is that others have believed and taught it, then the man who listens to such men instead of his own conscience of God is not a true man. If some authority tells me to believe something about God which I do not and could not believe about a fellow man, then I ignore that authority. If some explanation of God means that I need to believe something about God which I would reject as false and unfair in a man, then I don't accept that explanation. If you say, "It might be right for God to do something which would not be right for man to do", then I answer: Yes, it might, because the relation between the maker and his creatures is very different from the relation between one creature and another. And so God has to do things to and for his creation which require of him what no man would have the right to do to his fellow-man. Nevertheless, God cannot do anything which is not both just and merciful. More is required of God, by his own act of creation, than can be required of men. More justice and righteousness, and indeed higher justice and righteousness, are required of God by himself, the Truth – greater nobleness, more penetrating sympathy, and nothing that an honest man would not say was right. If it's something man cannot understand, then man can't comment on whether it's right or wrong.

He can't even know for sure that God does it, when he can't even understand the it. What the man calls it might well be just the smallest part of a complex action. His part in it should be silence. If it's said by anybody that God does something, and that thing seems to me to be unjust, then either I don't really know what that thing is, or else God does not do it at all. Either the thing can't mean what it seems to mean, or else it's not true. If, for example, it was said that God visits the sins of the fathers on the children, then a man who thinks that visits upon means punishes, and that the children means the innocent children should say: "Either I do not understand the statement, or else it's not true, whoever says it." God may well do what to a man does not seem right, but it should seem not right to the man because God works on far higher and different principles; principles which are too right for a selfish, unfair or unloving man to understand. But in no way at all should we ever accept some low understanding of justice in a man, and then argue from that that God is just in doing exactly the same.

Why must God punish sin?

To summarize: most people's understanding of the justice of God is that his justice is his punishing of sin. And so in the hope of providing a bigger idea of the justice of God than simply punishment, I now ask: "Why is God bound to punish sin?" "How could he be a just God and not punish sin?" Mercy is a good and right thing and if it weren't for sin, there would be no mercy. We are implored to forgive and to be merciful; to be as our Father in heaven. Two rights cannot possibly be opposed to each other. If God punishes sin, then it must be merciful to punish sin. If God forgives sin, then it must be just to forgive sin. We are required to forgive, and the reason given is that our father forgives. This means that it must be right to forgive. Every attribute of God must be as infinite as himself. It's impossible for God to sometimes be merciful but not always merciful. He can't be just, but not always just. Mercy is of

God, and needs no theological wrangling to justify it. "So you're saying that it's wrong to punish sin, and therefore God does not punish sin?" Not at all. God does punish sin, but there is no conflict between punishment and forgiveness. The one might well be essential to the possibility of the other. Why, I repeat, does God punish sin?

That's the real question I'm asking. "Because sin, as sin, deserves punishment." If that were true, how could God tell us to forgive it? "What about this: He punishes first, and then he forgives?" That won't do. If it's true that sin demands punishment, and the righteous punishment is given, then it must be true that as a result of the punishment the man is free. Why then should he be forgiven? "He needs forgiveness because no amount of punishment will make up for what he has done." At present, I avoid the logical consequence of this reply. Then why not forgive him straight away if the punishment is not enough? Even more, can that which is not adequate – punishment – be therefore required? You might answer that God should be pleased to take what little he can get, and that answer brings me to the major problem in the whole idea.

Punishment in no way compensates for sin. Sometimes foolish people will say "When I have sinned, I have suffered." True enough, but so what? What good is there in that? Even if you had put the suffering on yourself, what did that do to make up for the wrong done? It might be good for you that you were made better because of your suffering, but how has the suffering made amends for the wrong? The whole idea is false. Punishment, when it's deserved, is not an antidote to sin. It's no use trying to balance sin with punishment. The punishment won't move the scale even a hair's breadth. Against sin, suffering weighs nothing. It's not of the same kind, nor under the same laws, any more than are the immaterial and the material. We say a man deserves punishment. However, when we forgive and do not punish him, we do not always feel that we have done wrong. Neither do we feel that any amends have been made for his wrongdoing when we do punish him. If in fact punishment were a counterbalance to sin, then God would be bound to punish for the sake of the punishment. But he cannot be so bound, because he forgives. This means that the punishment God gives is not given for its own sake, as an end in itself, but rather for some other reason, as a means to some other outcome. It is not given for justice; otherwise, how could God show mercy, since that would involve injustice?

God must destroy sin

The important thing is that God is not bound to punish sin, but he is bound to destroy sin. If he were not the maker, he might not be bound to destroy sin – I don't know. But since he has created creatures who sin, and therefore sin has, through the creating act of God, come into the world, God is, in his own rightness, bound to destroy sin. "But that must mean he is to show no mercy." You are mistaken. God does destroy sin; he is always destroying sin. I trust that God is destroying sin in me. He is always saving the sinner from his sins, and that is destroying sin. But punishment of the sinner in return for sin, the law of a tooth for a tooth, is not in the heart of God, nor in his hand. If the object of the divine wrath is the sinner and the sin, then there can indeed be no mercy. In that case, sin will certainly come to an end with the destruction of the sinner along with sin. But by this, no atonement – no making amends for wrongdoing – would take place. Nothing would be done to make up for the wrong God has allowed to come into existence by creating man. There must be an atonement, a making amends, a bringing together, an atonement which, I stress, cannot be made except by the man who has sinned.

I repeat: Punishment is not what God requires. God requires the absolute destruction of sin. How is the world better, how is the sinner better, how is God better, how is truth better, if the sinner suffers, and even continues suffering through all eternity? Would there somehow be less sin in the universe? Would there be any making amends for sin? Would it show God right in doing something which he knew would bring sin into the world, and right in making creatures who he knew would sin? What putting-things-right would result from the sinner's suffering? If justice demands it, if suffering is the counterbalance for sin, then the sinner must suffer and God is bound to make sure the sinner suffers and is not pardoned. This would mean that the making of man was a tyrannical act, a creative cruelty.

But even if the sinner deserves to suffer, no amount of suffering can in any way make amends for his sin. To suffer throughout all eternity could not make up for one unjust word. Does that imply, then, that for one unjust word I deserve to suffer through all eternity? The unjust word is an eternally evil thing, and nothing but God in my heart can cleanse me from the evil that spoke it. But does it logically follow that I was so perfectly aware of the evil I did, that

eternal punishment for it would be just? Sorrow and confession and humbling oneself will make up for the evil word; suffering will not. For abstract evil, nothing can be done. It is eternally evil. But I may be saved from it by learning to loathe it, to hate it, to flee from it with an eternal avoidance. The only vengeance worth having on sin is to make the sinner himself its executioner.

Forgiveness *and* punishment

Sin and punishment are not in conflict within man, any more than forgiveness and punishment are in conflict within God. They can perfectly co-exist. The one naturally follows from the other. Punishment is born from sin, because evil exists only by the life of good, and has no life of its own, since it is in reality death. Sin and suffering are not natural opposites. The opposite of evil is good, not suffering. The opposite of sin is not suffering, but righteousness. The path across the gulf that divides right from wrong is not the fire of suffering, but repentance. If my friend has wronged me, will it console me to see him punished? Will that be a making amends of what is due to him? Will his agony be healing to my deep wound? Would I even be fit for any friendship, if that were possible even with regards to my enemy? But wouldn't the shadow of repentant grief, the light of reviving love in his being, heal the wound at once, no matter how deep?

You can download the complete sermon at the following link: (http://www.amazon.com/Unspoken-Sermons-I-II/dp/1612035272/ref=sr_1_6?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1420842799&sr=1-6&keywords=george+macdonald+books)

God's Judgment: Love in Action.

The salvation of all humanity by grace can leave many people wondering if there really is any judgment by God at all. Well, for sure there is.

But the real question is what purpose God has in his judgment.

Is it pure "retribution" with no corrective purpose whatsoever?

Or are his judgments (and all other "negative" actions by him) a good thing, carried out with an "all-good purpose"?

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Introduction

My study into "judgment" in the New Testament has been, by far, the most difficult and time-consuming. It has been in progress for several years now, and has required all of my past training and preparation to wrestle successfully with the unique difficulties this subject presents.

It is very clear that God brings judgment on all people (including believers), and with the commonly held negative perception of "judgment", there is a natural tension between our view of judgment and our instinctive sense of the love, mercy, and grace of God that is so clearly heralded in all of the Biblical writings.

The struggle exists in determining how these two very opposite aspects of God work together to preserve both his holiness and justice, and also his love and mercy. It has been my personal conclusion that judgment must be understood in terms of his love and mercy, and not the other way around. The reasons for this are (1) the greater context of the Bible, by far, emphasizes the later over the former, and (2) God is identified as "Love", not just "loving" but identified as actually being what love is. This is an essential characteristic of his being. Other attributes of God are not presented in this way. But the attributes of God cannot be divided or separated either. All of them must always be taken together. (3)



Repeatedly in nearly all narratives, accounts, prophesy, and letters of encouragement, the theme is that “mercy triumphs over judgment.” It is explicitly stated as such in one instance, but it is also always the underlying truth in all of God’s (and Jesus’s) dealings with people. As a result, I look for and expect to find in judgment a good, loving, merciful (but also holy and just) purpose on the part of God. This not only seems reasonable but something demanded by the very nature of God when everything is considered.

Judgment is Good

The photo at the beginning of this section shows a condemned building being destroyed. Someone made a judgment about that building – that it was moldy, old, deteriorated, unsafe, and worthy only of being destroyed. But it was destroyed only with a plan to build a new, better building -- one that is good and safe and beautiful, and can serve the purpose of its creator with excellence.

This is what God has done for the human race that he loves so much. All people everywhere during all ages have fallen into ruin and have become less than they were intended to be by God, their creator. In His love, God declared (judged) mankind to be less than all they were meant to be, so he took action – because that is what love does.

He came to this world, himself, as a humble carpenter some 2000 years ago, showed us who he is and what love is, joined us in our destruction (death) by dying *with* us and *for* us. But his love did not stop there, he raised from the dead, bringing all humanity with him into life. This was the Creator’s plan from eternity past, long before he ever created any of us. In the resurrection, everyone will be a “new building” that will last forever, never again to be destroyed or condemned. It is what the New Testament calls the “old man” (or old person) -- our fallen sinful nature -- that is destroyed.

But until that day when God judges us (everyone), here on earth, within time itself, we are all still struggling with the sins that he has saved us from eternally on the cross. God’s judgment is His love in action because love *is* action (not just claims and feelings). Love always acts in the best interest of the one it loves. God’s love actually shines in judgment, because in judgment God acts in the best interest of the world He loves. Through judgment he disciplines, corrects, and punishes us, but always in love. He never over or under does any of this. It is always exactly what we need to eventually bring everyone into full reconciliation with himself, which fully completes the salvation he accomplished on the cross for everyone.

What Judgment Is

Through judgment God demonstrates to us – sometimes in severity – what right and wrong is, drawing us to Himself in loving judgment. This is exactly what we do with our children. We love them unconditionally and would give our life for them, if ever required

to do so just as God did for us. When we punish our children (who are made in our own likeness) we do so in love. Our goal is never to abandon them, annihilate them, or torment them for wrong-doing, no matter how bad they have been. We “judge” them, in that we make a determination about their right and wrong behavior in any given situation, then we take action to correct them – even via punishment that fits the offense – because we love them. This is all true of God concerning us as well.

Generally, “Judgment” is assessing a situation accurately, determining what is right and wrong in it, and deciding what benefit or punishment should be imposed. For example, when a human judge judges, he or she hears the evidence, evaluates a situation concerning those involved, then decides who is right and wrong, to what degree, and what is to be done to bring about justice (make things right).

Judging is a huge responsibility – one that no human judge will ever do in perfect equity and free from error. Even the best judge can only make the best ruling he or she can make, flawed and limited as it might be, to keep life and society in some kind of decent order.

Judgment Belongs to God

No wonder God tells us not to judge others in areas of their personal lives! When we set ourselves up as the judge of others we attempt (falsely and without authority) to determine right and wrong for them. Such judgment of others is far beyond our moral, mental, and emotional capability. It is clearly “above our pay grade.” This is why God says very clearly to leave all judgment of others to Him since he is the only one who has the authority, wisdom, and pure motive (of love) to judge accurately.

What are we to do, then, when we see someone doing what we believe is wrong? Well, first ... just love them! This is not trivial. But this is what God tells us to do – even to love our enemies! True, love is often not easy, but it is also not complicated. Love always acts in the best interest of those we love.

Love, of course, includes telling others the truth and giving them good advice – but only when invited by them to do so when we have earned their trust. But it does not include judging them -- setting ourselves up as the ones who decide for them what they should and should not do. Some time back, I gave a friend “advice” about his personal life that he had not requested from me. But God made it clear in my heart that I had really only judged him and had not loved him. So I went back to him, admitted my wrong, and asked him to forgive me. I had not earned his trust or the right to be heard. This takes time and true love.

Judgment belongs to God alone – leave it with him; he is very good at it. In fact God judges perfectly and justly. So we are wise to leave all judgment to God where it belongs. When we do, we find that we are much more able to love others and truly act in their best interest by having a genuinely caring relationship with them – one that demonstrates God’s love for them as we love them unconditionally just as he does. When, and only when, we

have earned their trust, then, and only then, are we ready to share with them our perspective and what we have learned from God about life. We must earn the right to be heard, and this always begins with love, not judging.

Love -- The Basis of Judgment

God's judgment is always rooted in his love – nowhere else. If love is not his motive, what else could it possibly be? Hate? Revenge? Complacency? What else is there? What is your motive when you judge and correct your children who you love? Is it not, ultimately, love? Could it be anything else for the God who *is* love?

God is love, and everything he does is motivated by his love – especially judgment! He always wants the very best for everyone because he loves everyone and will not fail to eventually bring about the very best in them. This is what love does. He loves us because we are all created by him in his very own image and likeness. There is so much of God in each and every person! He created us to know him, love him, and become more like him, and he will not fail to eventually bring this about in every person. This is what “reconciling all things to himself” is all about.

Love is kind and gentle, patient and long suffering, and it does not seek its own. Paul's first letter to the Corinthian believers makes this clear. And this is who God is – all of these things and much more – simply because God *is* love. And love is also who he wants us to be.

But love is also severe. It has to be, because true love always acts in the very best interest of those who are objects of it. Judgment is love acting severely, to bring about the very best in us. Love takes action. It is not passive. God does not sit back and watch us destroy ourselves and do nothing about it. He takes action, severe as it needs to be, to bring us into reconciliation with himself.

Unlike us, God has everything in life at his disposal to accomplish this great and wonderful (but often severe) purpose in us: difficulty, illness, accidents, natural disaster, betrayal of others, even death (of ourselves or loved ones). None of these things are ever done capriciously, without exact purpose, or short of perfect wisdom, love, and precise timing. Could we ever expect anything less of God who is perfect?

God first acted with severe love in the person of Jesus on the cross of Calvary, where God was “in Christ, reconciling the world to himself.” This was not an *attempt*, or just an “offer” made to us, or something in *potential* form waiting for us to somehow apply it to ourselves. God saved the human race, completely and finally on the cross in Jesus who was the promised Messiah (Christ). This is why he is called the “Savior of the world” and is identified as the one who “takes away the sin of the world.” It is said of Jesus that he actually “became sin” for us. As Jesus said in his final words, “It is finished.” And finished

it was, concerning all sin for all time for everyone (just as the writer of the New Testament book of Hebrews repeatedly stated).

But God also takes severe action for us in judgment. Such judgment is always based in his love for us and always accomplishes a good purpose in us. This is because God is good and only good – always! Everything he does has a good purpose. How could it not? His severe judgment is the ongoing action of saving us from the entanglement of sins we commit – sins that were all taken away by Jesus, for us, on the cross. God’s judgment accurately assesses our situation and takes whatever action is needed to bring us to repentance, turning us away from sin and back to himself.

Reconciliation -- The Goal of Judgment

God’s goal in loving judgment is reconciliation with himself. And this is exactly what God promises – that everything in heaven and on earth will eventually be reconciled to himself. How could he possibly do anything less for those he loves and paid such a supremely high price to purchase? He certainly cannot abandon, annihilate, or torment anyone!

Reconciliation *must* be his ultimate and final goal for everyone. His sovereignty, grace, mercy, and love are all focused on this goal and he will not – indeed, he cannot -- fail. His judgment is the lovingly severe means by which he will faithfully, and finally, bring all this about. Mercy will, for sure, ultimately triumph over judgment!

God always judges justly. Justice is “making things right.” Justice is not retaliating or getting back at someone. Retaliation is the *petty* kind of “justice” that puny man does, because it is all he has the power to do. Only God can make things right. And ultimate justice – the ultimate “making things right” – can only be the full reconciliation of man with God. God retaliates against sin with love! What a concept.

For example, suppose someone committed a horrible crime against you or a loved one. (You can decide which horrible crime to use in this example.) What would ultimate justice be in this terrible situation? Lock up the offender of this crime for life? Take his/her life? Torment him or her in the same way he or she tormented others, physically or mentally? Is any of this ultimate justice – making things ultimately right? Are things really “right” for you if any of the above things are done to the perpetrator? As finite humans, this is all we can get out of justice in this life, but it will never be the ultimate and total justice that only God can bring about. And he will bring about such justice through full and final reconciliation.

But what if the person who wronged you came to full repentance and expressed complete and genuine sorrow for what they had done. And suppose somehow, by God’s grace and with his help realizing how much he had forgiven you, you were able to forgive this person and eventually be fully reconciled to him or her? This, and only this, would be *ultimate* justice. It would bring peace to you and the one who wronged you. It would bring

real peace, final peace. Ongoing, unending punishment can never accomplish this. Things would remain less than ultimately right. Something would still be wrong, forever!

The same is true of God. Abandoning, annihilating, or tormenting someone (even forever) can never accomplish ultimate justice – making things ultimately right. Only full reconciliation with sinners brings this about. And this is God’s goal and purpose in Judgment. The best-selling book “The Shack” portrays one of the worst and most heart-breaking of all possible wrongs that can be done. This is what makes this book such a powerful presentation of who God is and what true justice and judgment really are.

And so, God makes things right – he brings us to justice to make everything right in us. But he does so by judging us and taking loving, corrective, reconciling action. How could he possibly do anything less and still be God? Could he stand by and do nothing? Never! Could he abandon, annihilate, or even torment us in an act of retaliation? Not the God who is love and always has a good purpose in all that he does! What good and loving purpose could these things ever bring to those who are created by him in his own likeness designed to have a loving relationship with himself?

If God does not (through his power, love, mercy, and grace) bring about complete restoration of all things, and leaves even a spec of sin and rebellion to linger anywhere in the universe or beyond, then he fails in his mission to save the world – something that was clearly the mission of Jesus when he came.

So as you read through all of these passages (below) from the New Testament writings on judgment, condemnation, and other severe descriptions of God’s actions, keep in mind who God is, what is good purpose he has for everyone, and his goal of complete reconciliation (and therefore ultimate justice) for all people everywhere.

The Absence of Torment by God

One of the most interesting things that came out of my study of God’s judgment was the fact that the Bible never ascribes to God an act of deliberate torment. In all of the many verses portraying judgment, condemnation, and punishment, the idea of God directly bringing torment on anyone just does not exist. Gnashing of teeth, outer darkness, torment, etc., are all spoken of, but not as a result of God’s direct action. Though at first I was surprised, once I thought about who God really is – one who is love, who is a savior, a redeemer, a rescuer, a restorer, and reconciler – I realized it could really be no other way. God does not need to be a tormentor, nor does he in anyway desire to be one. Torment is something done by those who are void of God – brutal dictators, terrorists, haters, evil-doers, and those void of God’s love who have a sadistic desire to hurt and destroy others without and good purpose.

There are, however, a few of passages that could be taken that God is the active agent of torment. But when these are taken in the full context of the New Testament writings that

overwhelmingly describe God as loving, merciful, gracious, patient, kind and good, there is really no question how to read them. And this is the error of all misguidance: to take the few exceptional verses on a particular subject and make the vast body of truth (that states otherwise) agree with these few. It is just bad “hermeneutics” (method of interpretation)!

Here is one of those very few passages with some explanation about it:

Then the king called in the man he had forgiven and said, ‘You evil servant! I forgave you that tremendous debt because you pleaded with me. Shouldn’t you have mercy on your fellow servant, just as I had mercy on you?’ Then the angry king sent the man to prison to be tortured until he had paid his entire debt. That’s what my heavenly Father will do to you if you refuse to forgive your brothers and sisters from your heart. Matt 18:21

This is a story (parable) used by Jesus to teach a truth about the importance of forgiveness. Like all illustrative devices, not every detail is directly and completely applicable to the lesson presented. The evidence in the Bible against God being any kind of a tormentor is vast, so the angry king that “tortures” does not represent God in every aspect. Yet, the story clearly teaches a lesson about forgiveness. But even in this story, the evil man is only tormented until he had paid his debt! His torment was not eternal!

The Absence of Eternal Judgment

Another important and interesting thing that came out of my judgment study was the absence of any *eternal* aspect of judgment -- except, perhaps, the idea that God will forever destroy all evil in us due to our “old man” (old person), our “fallen nature”, also known as “the flesh.” Whatever kind of refining fire God has in future judgment, it will not be “eternal”, though the *results* of such refinement and correction will be. In other words, God will destroy all of the bad in us while keeping the good in us that he brought about when He made us in his own image.

As it turns out, the word in Greek that is often translated “eternal” (“aion” -- from which we get our word *eon* or *age*) simply means “age-long.” It does not automatically mean eternal. Aion is, by its nature, a word that takes its meaning from the word it modifies. If aion is used with God, then it is an “eternal” age-long time period, because God has no beginning or end.

But when the disciples came to Jesus and asked what would be the signs of his coming and the “end of the aion”, it could only mean “world” or “age”, since it is a time period that has an end. We even refer to people as having an “age”, and what we really mean is how many years make up their “aion” (age-long period of time).

JW Hansen in his excellent book “The Greek Word Aion-aionios” (available on Amazon) demonstrates all of this very clearly and convincingly. I checked out his work and it proved valid. As he suggested in his book, I did a word study in the Greek NT on the word “aion” and clearly it is used primarily as “age” and other such finite durations. But

occasionally, when “aion” is used with some aspect of God, it rightly takes on the idea of “eternal.”

In the case of using “aion” with punishment (as Paul does in 2 Thess 1:9), there is no justification to conclude that God’s punishment is eternal (without end), and therefore without any restoring or correcting purpose. We as humans do not execute punishment in this way to either our children (who we love), or even criminals (who we despise). Punishment always has a goal of correction and demonstrating right from wrong. It is not eternal retribution with no other good purpose on the part of God toward those He so dearly loves.

Judgment in the Book of Revelation

The book of Revelation is a very special book in the collection of New Testament writings.

First, it is the only book that is presented as the “Revealing of Jesus” (who is the promised Messiah). It is not a typical letter to a particular church or person, like most other NT books. But this highly symbolic revelation by John attaches to it seven “letters” to groups of believers around the Mediterranean Sea.

Second, the book of Revelation is highly symbolic. No other New Testament writing comes even close. All of the other writings are just straight talk – letters, narratives, accounts, and a travel log (in the case of the second half of “The Acts of the Apostles”).

But John, after he wrote letters of criticism and commendation to the seven churches, launches into a description of what he saw in a vision on the Island of Patmos where he was exiled. And the symbolism is very extreme. It is extreme to the point that many people who have studied this book carefully disagree greatly as to what it means. But that is OK because this is the kind of writing it is. It is intended to give the reader an “experience” as much as to give him factual information. After all, it is the “Reveling of Jesus” – not just facts about him, but a *picture* of him! The impressions you get of his majesty and divinity are as important (if not more so) than what few clearly stated facts about him.

Whenever I teach from this book, I encourage people to look for “what”, “how”, and “why”, rather than “who”, “when”, and “where.” All questions are important, but the questions you ask determine what answers you will get. If you ask, for example, *who* is the anti-Christ, *where* will he appear, and *when* is he coming, etc., you will miss out on the greater revealing of the person of Jesus in this book. But if you ask, *what* is God (and Jesus as the central figure) doing, *how* does he do what he does, and *why* – then you will gain great and wonderful insight to who God is in the person of Jesus and what he has planned for us (the human race) that he loves.

Third, a balance between reading Revelation too literal and too figurative must be maintained. Either extreme will end in erroneous understanding of this important book.

Finally, the Revelation of Jesus Christ is the very last book in the Bible. This is for good reason. In it all things are concluded and summed up in future. Everything is presented in terms used throughout the Old Testament writings that came before it. It is in these writings that the understanding to Revelation's symbolism lies. Turning locus into futuristic helicopters (as done by Hal Lindsay) seems foolish and short-sighted. This sells books and gets people excited, but it does not aid in presenting the book of Revelation in the historic context from which it was framed by John.

The point of all of the above information is that as a reader you are very wise to draw conclusions from the book of revelation with great caution and care. You are also wise to find the bases of what you believe (about judgment or any other subject) in the writings that are less symbolic and, therefore, less subject to speculation. Once this has been done, then, and only then, should the book of Revelation be considered.

The book of Revelation is clearly tied to the time period in which it was written. This does not mean that everything in it is a prediction of that age, for much of it may be predictions of the "end of the age" and into eternity. But the book was very clearly written to first-century believers, for them to read and understand, and for them to "pay attention to what is written *because* the time is near." The book of Revelation had to first mean something to those to whom it was written, then, secondarily, we can gain from it as we see what was being communicated to them in their day.

The great judgment throne of God and the lake of fire in Rev 20 are always popular passages of those who believe that God is an eternal tormentor. Often it is the first "bible verse" that is presented by those who object to the idea that God will eventually reconcile all things to himself. Here is that passage, along with some comments about it:

"The devil, who had deceived people, was thrown into the fiery lake of burning sulfur, joining the beast and the false prophet. There they will be tormented day and night forever and ever."

The above translation of "forever and ever" is literally "ages of the ages" in the Greek text. It is the word "aion" (age-long) used twice—once as an object and once as a "possession" of that object. As in other cases in the New Testament writings, there is nothing here that requires this to be "forever and ever." This is just translators acting as interpreters. Shame on them! Their goal *should* be to faithfully represent the Greek writings in English. And good old faithful Robert Young, in his literal translation, renders it "ages of the ages", exactly as it is in Greek! And why not do this and give the reader the correct translation rather than to change it into something else that serves a theological agenda!

"And I saw a great white throne and the one sitting on it. The earth and sky fled from his presence, but they found no place to hide. I saw the dead, both great and small, standing before God's throne. And the books were opened, including the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to what they had done, as recorded in the books. The sea gave up its dead, and death and the grave gave up their dead. And all were

judged according to their deeds. Then death and the grave were thrown into the lake of fire. This lake of fire is the second death. And anyone whose name was not found recorded in the Book of Life was thrown into the lake of fire."

As stated previously, we should approach the highly symbolic book of Revelation with great care. If we find that here alone our beliefs lie, especially in opposition to the rest of the New Testament writings, we are on very shaky ground. Context, especially the full and complete context of the Bible will be your best friend in studying it. Really!

On the other extreme (also to be avoided) is ignoring what is clearly written that has value and meaning to be sought. That the above is a "judgment scene" cannot be denied or explained away as trivial. Nor should anyone want to do so! But the nature of this judgment and the degree to which it is administered, must be determined by the reader.

It seems fair to ask what we would expect God's purpose to be in this judgment. Is it to destroy all together those who are judged, or is it to destroy what needs to be destroyed in those he loves, as an act of love, in order to reconcile them to himself? This passage, alone, does not tell us. Such questions can only be answered in the full context of who God claims to be and in who he really is! It is reasonable to say that all of the Bible, in its full context, compels us, on almost every page, that God is good, loving, merciful, patient, kind, and desires all people to be redeemed from their fallen state. He is also holy and just and such holiness demands perfection in all his creatures -- creatures who can never, on their own, bring about the holiness God requires and desires in his creatures for their own happiness and good. Only God himself can bring this about. Humans never can and never will. But God does this because this is his plan of love before the world was ever created.

We rightly expect the judgment of God to be good and in the very best interest (and improvement) of the creatures he loves. And, alas, we see that God throws both death and Hades into the lake of fire to be forever destroyed. Because of his redeeming and reconciling purposes for the human race that he created and loves, we would rightly expect (based on what he does with death and Hades) that he will destroy the "old man" (old person) in us, and our "old nature" that has been defeated on the cross of Christ.

One writer has said, "There is no *death column* in the book of life!" And, sure enough, this passage never says how many, if any, are *not* written in the book of life. If in Adam all died, and in Christ all (the same "all") are made righteous, then why would we not expect all names to be written in the book of life? -- especially since all names are *only* written there on the basis of Jesus dying on the cross to take away the sin of the world? Does someone have to be lost in order for God's salvation to be valid? As asked by Isaiah: "Is God's ear so dull that he cannot hear, or his arm so short that he cannot save?" In other words, is God not able to save everyone, or is he unwilling?

The point of all of this is that what is written in Revelation chapter 20 is hardly conclusive and should be understood in the much greater context of who God so clearly presents himself to be in the New Testament writings and in the whole Bible

Commentary on Judgment Passages

The passages that follow are a collection of the most serious verses I could find on judgment, condemnation, punishment etc., in the New Testament writings. Each writer deals with the subject of God's loving judgment in a somewhat unique way and presents his own message of what God is doing as He faithfully and lovingly pronounces accurate judgment on every human being to bring about the changes in them that will bring them to himself and be fully reconciled.

But my goal is to demonstrate and explain how God's judgment is an act of love – his love in action – and not hate or retaliation (something we only find in fallen human beings). There must be a good and eventually positive benefit for all people that he judges because everything he does is motivated by his love and is ultimately good.

So, as you read through all of these passages (below) from the New Testament writings on judgment, condemnation, and other severe descriptions of God's actions, keep in mind who God is, what is good purpose he has for everyone, and his goal of complete reconciliation (and therefore ultimate justice) for all people everywhere. There are really only two views of "judgment" (and all of its related severe actions by God: punishment, condemnation, etc.). One view is that judgment is basically *retaliation* for wrong-doing or unbelief on the part of humans as wayward sinners, and has only a negative and destructive purpose. The other view is that "judgment" it is basically corrective and has an ultimately good purpose (not in spite of its severity, but *because* of its severity) because God is good and always has a good purpose in everything He does.

When you read these many passages in the NT, ask yourself, "Is the purpose in these severe things ultimately good and corrective, or is the purpose pure *retribution* (retributing sin or unbelief) with no corrective, redeeming, restoring, healing or reconciling purpose whatsoever?" And keep in mind that as soon as punishment becomes never-ending, all corrective and restoring purpose disappears completely and our view of God must become altogether different that a God who punishes temporally and has a goal of correction.

As for whether or not there really is eternal punishment from God, consider running this simple three question test on each severity passage listed below:

1. Is the torment directly applied by God, or from some other source or situation.
2. Is the torment clearly never-ending?
3. Is the torment for the purpose of pure retribution?

When I apply these three criteria to NT passages of judgement, punishment and correction, no passage seems to be able to pass this three-fold test to ensure that God eternally punishes (torments) anyone. For example, when considering the parable of *The Rich Man and Lazarus*, though the rich man is in Hades being tormented, there is no indication that God is the *source* of that torment. And, although there is said to be a "fixed gulf"

separating the rich man from Abraham, there is no indication that this separation is *never-ending* (eternal). Additionally, the rich man seems to be improving in his disposition and is repenting of his wrong-doing enough to want to warn others. Is this a place of *pure retribution* with no corrective purpose whatsoever? So as you read passages on judgment, ask yourself about the source, duration, and purpose of the severity that is presented in them. Keep in mind, also, the vast and overwhelming evidence throughout the Bible of the grace, forgiveness, passion, care concern, mercy, patience, self-sacrificing love of God that renders Him as the only being in all of the universe with the highest possible moral excellence!

So, is there judgement, condemnation, punishment, etc., on the part of God expressed in the Bible? Of course! But the real question is ... what is His purpose in it: good or bad, corrective or retributive? You be the judge. But always give God (of all persons) “benefit of the doubt”, and never let anyone “sell God short” on who He is in His perfection and ability to succeed at what he sets out to do on His mission to save His world!

Judgment Categories

- Judgment
- Judgment in Romans chapter 2
- Everyone Judged
- No Favoritism in God’s judgment
- Eternal judgment
- Condemnation
- Wrath and Anger
- Punishment
- Gehenna

Judgment

“Judgment” is the largest category of all the various aspects of God’s severity presented in the New Testament writings. Unfortunately, most people have been taught that “judgment” means to send someone to hell and is a negative action. But actually, “judgment” is not necessarily a bad thing. It simply means “to make an accurate assessment”. People make judgments all the time that are not necessarily negative or bad – though sometimes they are. But judgment, especially when it comes from God who is always good and does everything with a good purpose, can be a good thing! When God judges He makes an accurate assessment of us and our situations with the good purpose of revealing the truth about who we are and what we have done, good and bad.

Kittle, my favorite Greek word lookup source” (see the *Book Resources* section below for a description of Kittle) devotes 30 pages to this word. It is a fairly involved word study, and well worth the effort, but Kittle sums it up this way (paraphrased): *The word at its root means to part, to sift, to part out or select. Its most common meaning is simply to decide or assess, or even to seek justice (to make things right!). In the New Testament it is*

used as the judgment of God, but can also be personal human judgments seeking to resolve or determine situations, including law suits.

But the bottom line is that although judgment can be, and often is, a very serious matter on the part of God concerning his creation, there is nothing in the word itself that requires never-ending torment as pure retribution for sin or unbelief. But it does, for sure, include God judging, and therefore acting, severely – as he should! But the *purpose* in judgment is in question, not the *fact* of it. So look for all the good (but severe) purpose of God in his judgment and not some extreme retributive purpose that does not reflect all of the good and highly moral attributes that God so fully reveals about himself in the Bible.

Every tree that does not produce good fruit is chopped down and thrown into the fire. Yes, just as you can identify a tree by its fruit, so you can identify people by their actions. Not everyone who calls out to me, 'Lord! Lord!' will enter the Kingdom of Heaven. Only those who actually do the will of my Father in heaven will enter. On judgment day many will say to me, 'Lord! Lord! We prophesied in your name and cast out demons in your name and performed many miracles in your name.' But I will reply, 'I never knew you. Get away from me, you who break God's laws.' Matt 7:17

You people of Capernaum, will you be honored in heaven? No, you will go down to the place of the dead. For if the miracles I did for you had been done in wicked Sodom, it would still be here today. I tell you, even Sodom will be better off on judgment day than you. Matt 11:21

You testify against yourselves that you are indeed the descendants of those who murdered the prophets. Go ahead and finish what your ancestors started. Snakes! Sons of vipers! How will you escape the judgment of Gehenna? Therefore, I am sending you prophets and wise men and teachers of religious law. But you will kill some by crucifixion, and you will flog others with whips in your synagogues, chasing them from city to city. As a result, you will be held responsible for the murder of all godly people of all time—from the murder of righteous Abel to the murder of Zechariah son of Barachiah, whom you killed in the Temple between the sanctuary and the altar. I tell you the truth, this judgment will fall on this very generation. Matt 23:29

There is no judgment against anyone who believes in him. But anyone who does not believe in him has already been judged for not believing in God's one and only Son. And the judgment is based on this fact: God's light came into the world, but people loved the darkness more than the light, for their actions were evil. John 3:18

And anyone who believes in God's Son has eternal life. Anyone who doesn't obey the Son will never experience eternal life but remains under God's angry judgment. John 3:36

The Father has life in himself, and he has granted that same life-giving power to his Son. And he has given him authority to judge everyone because he is the Son of Man. Don't be so surprised! Indeed, the time is coming when all the dead in their graves will hear the voice of God's Son, and they will rise again. Those who have done good will rise to experience eternal life, and those who have continued in evil will rise to experience judgment. I can do nothing on my own. I judge as God tells me. Therefore, my judgment is just, because I carry out the will of the one who sent me, not my own will. John 5:26

I will not judge those who hear me but don't obey me, for I have come to save the world and not to judge it. But all who reject me and my message will be judged on the day of judgment by the truth I have spoken. John 12:47

But in fact, it is best for you that I go away, because if I don't, the Advocate won't come. If I do go away, then I will send him to you. And when he comes, he will convict the world of its sin, and of God's righteousness, and of the coming judgment. The world's sin is that it refuses to believe in me. Righteousness is available because I go to the

Father, and you will see me no more. Judgment will come because the ruler of this world has already been judged. John 16:7

And he ordered us to preach everywhere and to testify that Jesus is the one appointed by God to be the judge of all—the living and the dead. Acts 10:42

Then Paul and Barnabas spoke out boldly and declared, “It was necessary that we first preach the word of God to you Jews. But since you have rejected it and judged yourselves unworthy of eternal life, we will offer it to the Gentiles”. Acts 13:46

We should not think of God as an idol designed by craftsmen from gold or silver or stone. God overlooked people’s ignorance about these things in earlier times, but now he commands everyone everywhere to repent of their sins and turn to him. For he has set a day for judging the world with justice by the man he has appointed, and he proved to everyone who this is by raising him from the dead. Acts 17:29

A few days later Felix came back with his wife, Drusilla, who was Jewish. Sending for Paul, they listened as he told them about faith in Christ Jesus. As he reasoned with them about righteousness and self-control and the coming day of judgment, Felix became frightened. Acts 24:24

But, some might say, our sinfulness serves a good purpose, for it helps people see how righteous God is. Isn’t it unfair, then, for him to punish us? (This is merely a human point of view.) Of course not! If God were not entirely fair, how would he be qualified to judge the world? Rom 3:5

If you eat the bread or drink the cup without honoring the body of Christ, you are eating and drinking God’s judgment upon yourself. That is why many of you are weak and sick and some have even died. But if we would examine ourselves, we would not be judged by God in this way. Yet when we are judged by the Lord, we are being disciplined so that we will not be condemned along with the world. 1Cor 11:29

The sins of some people are obvious, leading them to certain judgment. But there are others whose sins will not be revealed until later. In the same way, the good deeds of some people are obvious. And the good deeds done in secret will someday come to light. 1Tim 5:24

I solemnly urge you in the presence of God and Christ Jesus, who will someday judge the living and the dead when he appears to set up his Kingdom: Preach the word of God! 2Tim 4:1

Alexander the coppersmith did me much harm, but the Lord will judge him for what he has done. Be careful of him, for he fought against everything we said. 2Tim 4:14

Just as every person is destined to die once and after that comes judgment. Heb 9:27

Dear friends, if we deliberately continue sinning after we have received knowledge of the truth, there is no longer any sacrifice that will cover these sins. There is only the terrible expectation of God’s judgment and the raging fire that will consume his enemies. For anyone who refused to obey the law of Moses was put to death without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. Just think how much worse the punishment will be for those who have trampled on the Son of God, and have treated the blood of the covenant, which made us holy, as if it were common and unholy, and have insulted and disdained the Holy Spirit who brings God’s mercy to us. For we know the one who said, I will take revenge. I will pay them back. He also said, God will judge his own people. It is a terrible thing to fall into the hands of the living God. Heb 10:26

So whatever you say or whatever you do, remember that you will be judged by the law that sets you free. There will be no mercy for those who have not shown mercy to others. But if you have been merciful, God will be merciful when he judges you. James 2:12

Look here, you rich people: Weep and groan with anguish because of all the terrible troubles ahead of you. Your wealth is rotting away, and your fine clothes are moth-eaten rags. Your gold and silver have become worthless. The very wealth you were counting on will eat away your flesh like fire. This treasure you have accumulated will stand as evidence against you on the day of judgment. James 5:1

Dear brothers and sisters, be patient as you wait for the Lord's return. Consider the farmers who patiently wait for the rains in the fall and in the spring. They eagerly look for the valuable harvest to ripen. You, too, must be patient. Take courage, for the coming of the Lord is near. Don't grumble about each other, brothers and sisters, or you will be judged. For look—the Judge is standing at the door! James 5:7

Judgment in Romans chapter 2

All of chapter two of Paul's letter to the believers in Rome is provided. This is an amazing presentation of God's judgment, but it starts off with an exhortation that we are not to judge others! This chapter should be read very carefully for it contains many truths about how God judges and why. But notice how Gehenna, Hades, hell, or any kind of never-ending is not described or warned of. In fact, no where in the whole book of Romans does Paul ever mention or warn of such things. Certainly there are severe consequences for unbelief and lack of repentance, but it is always wise to look for and find God's good purpose in his judgment based on his goodness, mercy, grace, holiness (perfection) and justice (making things right).

You may think you can condemn such people, but you are just as bad, and you have no excuse! When you say they are wicked and should be punished, you are condemning yourself, for you who judge others do these very same things. And we know that God, in his justice, will punish anyone who does such things. Since you judge others for doing these things, why do you think you can avoid God's judgment when you do the same things? Don't you see how wonderfully kind, tolerant, and patient God is with you? Does this mean nothing to you? Can't you see that his kindness is intended to turn you from your sin? But because you are stubborn and refuse to turn from your sin, you are storing up terrible punishment for yourself. For a day of anger is coming, when God's righteous judgment will be revealed. He will judge everyone according to what they have done. He will give eternal life to those who keep on doing good, seeking after the glory and honor and immortality that God offers. But he will pour out his anger and wrath on those who live for themselves, who refuse to obey the truth and instead live lives of wickedness. There will be trouble and calamity for everyone who keeps on doing what is evil—for the Jew first and also for the Gentile. But there will be glory and honor and peace from God for all who do good—for the Jew first and also for the Gentile. For God does not show favoritism. When the Gentiles sin, they will be destroyed, even though they never had God's written law. And the Jews, who do have God's law, will be judged by that law when they fail to obey it. For merely listening to the law doesn't make us right with God. It is obeying the law that makes us right in his sight. Even Gentiles, who do not have God's written law, show that they know his law when they instinctively obey it, even without having heard it. They demonstrate that God's law is written in their hearts, for their own conscience and thoughts either accuse them or tell them they are doing right. And this is the message I proclaim—that the day is coming when God, through Christ Jesus, will judge everyone's secret life. Rom 2

Everyone Judged

There are many passages in the New Testament that make it clear that all people will fall under God's judgment. Tied with this is often the fact that God shows no favoritism (does not favor one person over another) and that he renders to all people according to what they have done. The fact that God judges all people according to their deeds is undeniable. But this is a good thing. We all hold our children accountable because we love them and we want them to understand what is right and wrong. Our love for them never changes and we will never abandon them or torment them, but our judgment of them is necessary and good. The same is true of God. His love, salvation, forgiveness, and faithfulness to us never changes, but his judgment of us is to expose the garbage that needs to be eliminated from our lives so we can be fully reconciled to him for eternity.

For the Son of Man will come with his angels in the glory of his Father and will judge all people according to their deeds. And I tell you the truth, some standing here right now will not die before they see the Son of Man coming in his Kingdom. Matt 16:27

The Father has life in himself, and he has granted that same life-giving power to his Son. And he has given him authority to judge everyone because he is the Son of Man. Don't be so surprised! John 5:26

And he ordered us to preach everywhere and to testify that Jesus is the one appointed by God to be the judge of all—the living and the dead. Acts 10:42

We should not think of God as an idol designed by craftsmen from gold or silver or stone. God overlooked people's ignorance about these things in earlier times, but now he commands everyone everywhere to repent of their sins and turn to him. For he has set a day for judging the world with justice by the man he has appointed, and he proved to everyone who this is by raising him from the dead. Acts 17:29

And this is the message I proclaim—that the day is coming when God, through Christ Jesus, will judge everyone's secret life. Rom 2:16

But, some might say, our sinfulness serves a good purpose, for it helps people see how righteous God is. Isn't it unfair, then, for him to punish us? (This is merely a human point of view.) Of course not! If God were not entirely fair, how would he be qualified to judge the world? Rom 3:5

So why do you condemn another believer? Why do you look down on another believer? Remember, we will all stand before the judgment seat of God. For the Scriptures say, 'As surely as I live, every knee will bend to me, and every tongue will confess and give praise to God.' Yes, each of us will give a personal account to God. So let's stop condemning each other. Decide instead to live in such a way that you will not cause another believer to stumble and fall. Rom 14:10

I solemnly urge you in the presence of God and Christ Jesus, who will someday judge the living and the dead when he appears to set up his Kingdom: Preach the word of God! 2Tim 4:1

Just as every person is destined to die once and after that comes judgment. Heb 9:27

Of course, your former friends are surprised when you no longer plunge into the flood of wild and destructive things they do. So they slander you. But remember that they will have to face God, who will judge everyone, both the living and the dead. That is why the Good News was preached to those who are now dead—so although they were destined to die like all people, they now live forever with God in the Spirit. 1Pet 4:4

Even “believers” are judged. This is because God does not treat people differently (shows no favoritism). What he graciously does for one person, he does for another. Salvation is completely by grace and not by works, and it is the action of God on behalf of all people. What he requires of one, he also requires of all others – whether a “believer” or not.

For the time has come for judgment, and it must begin with God’s household. And if judgment begins with us, what terrible fate awaits those who have never obeyed God’s Good News? And also, If the righteous are barely saved, what will happen to godless sinners? 1Pet 4:17

No Favoritism in God’s judgment

It is important to notice in the New Testament writings that God is always presented as one who deals fairly and honestly with all people, not showing favor for some people over others. This does not mean that everyone gets dealt with in exactly the same way. I had two kids with two different personalities and temperaments. I did not always treat them exactly the same, even in the same or similar situations. But I did treat them fairly and without favoring one over the other. I knew how much severity or leniency each kid needed in each situation. I did my best to treat them as they needed to be treated in order for them to learn and become the best person each could be. God does the same with us, only perfectly!

Then Peter replied, “I see very clearly that God shows no favoritism. Acts 10:34

For God does not show favoritism. Romans 2:11

But, some might say, our sinfulness serves a good purpose, for it helps people see how righteous God is. Isn’t it unfair, then, for him to punish us? (This is merely a human point of view.) Of course not! If God were not entirely fair, how would he be qualified to judge the world? Rom 3:5

And the leaders of the church had nothing to add to what I was preaching. (By the way, their reputation as great leaders made no difference to me, for God has no favorites.) Galatians 2:6

Masters, treat your slaves in the same way. Don’t threaten them; remember, you both have the same Master in heaven, and he has no favorites. Ephesians 6:9

But if you do what is wrong, you will be paid back for the wrong you have done. For God has no favorites. Colossians 3:25

I solemnly command you in the presence of God and Christ Jesus and the highest angels to obey these instructions without taking sides or showing favoritism to anyone. 1 Timothy 5:21

But the wisdom from above is first of all pure. It is also peace loving, gentle at all times, and willing to yield to others. It is full of mercy and the fruit of good deeds. It shows no favoritism and is always sincere. James 3:17

And remember that the heavenly Father to whom you pray has no favorites. He will judge or reward you according to what you do. So you must live in reverent fear of him during your time here as “temporary residents.” 1 Peter 1:17

Eternal judgment

(See “*The Absence of Eternal Judgment*” in previous section for more detail).

In the following passages, the literal translation (more accurate and honest) of Robert Young has been inserted in parentheses below where the word “eternal” has been rendered. The resulting difference in meaning is important! As you will see, many times the word for eternal is not even in the Greek text! And, when it (aion) is, it is rightly translated “age-long.”

Jesus is ready to separate the chaff from the wheat with his winnowing fork. Then he will clean up the threshing area, gathering the wheat into his barn but burning the chaff with never-ending (unquenchable) fire. Matt 3:12

Then the King will turn to those on the left and say, ‘Away with you, you cursed ones, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his demons. For I was hungry, and you didn’t feed me. I was thirsty, and you didn’t give me a drink. I was a stranger, and you didn’t invite me into your home. I was naked, and you didn’t give me clothing. I was sick and in prison, and you didn’t visit me.’ Then they will reply, ‘Lord, when did we ever see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and not help you?’ And he will answer, ‘I tell you the truth, when you refused to help the least of these my brothers and sisters, you were refusing to help me.’ And they will go away into eternal (age-long) punishment, but the righteous will go into eternal life. Matt 25:31

I, Paul, know that none of you, to whom I have preached the Kingdom, will ever see me again. I declare today that I have been faithful. If anyone suffers eternal death (“eternal death” is not in the Greek text), it’s not my fault, for I didn’t shrink from declaring all that God wants you to know. Acts 20:25

When you were slaves to sin, you were free from the obligation to do right. And what was the result? You are now ashamed of the things you used to do, things that end in eternal doom. (“eternal” is not in the Greek text) Rom 6:20

Jesus will come with his mighty angels, in flaming fire, bringing judgment on those who don’t know God and on those who refuse to obey the Good News of our Lord Jesus. They will be punished with eternal (age-long) destruction, *forever* (“forever” not in the Greek text) separated from the Lord and from his glorious power. 2Thess 1:7

You don’t need further instruction about baptisms, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal (age-long) judgment. Heb 6:2

The beast you saw was once alive but isn’t now. And yet he will soon come up out of the bottomless pit and go to eternal destruction. And the people who belong to this world, whose names were not written in the Book of Life before the world was made, will be amazed at the reappearance of this beast who had died. Revelation 17:8

Condemnation

The word “condemnation” in the Greek language does not mean “to send to hell forever”, even though this is what many people think and have been taught. It is closely related to “judgment” (above) in Greek, and so it simply means to declare something or someone to fall outside of, or fall short of, what is right and correct. It is clearly a negative word by its nature, but it is not automatically represent the worst possible thing that can be pronounced on someone. But it is a negative pronouncement and it identifies the target as clearly less than it needs to be in order to be declared good or right. Like all severe words used in the

New Testament writings to describe God's severe action, we must always ask, "What is God's purpose in "condemning"? Is it to do away with someone or to forsake and give up on them in some way? Is this the kind of purpose we would expect from God in light of all we know about Him? Always look for the purpose God has in the severe things He does and assume the best of motives in Him. If the best is not always found in God, then where in the universe and beyond can it ever be found? I can't and won't!

And I tell you this, you must give an account on judgment day for every idle word you speak. The words you say will either acquit you or condemn you. Matt 12:36

Anyone who believes and is baptized will be saved. But anyone who refuses to believe will be condemned. Mark 16:16

How can God condemn me as a sinner if my dishonesty highlights his truthfulness and brings him more glory? And some people even slander us by claiming that we say, The more we sin, the better it is! Those who say such things deserve to be condemned. Rom 3:6

In fact, uncircumcised Gentiles who keep God's law will condemn you Jews who are circumcised and possess God's law but don't obey it. Romans 2:27

"But," someone might still argue, "how can God condemn me as a sinner if my dishonesty highlights his truthfulness and brings him more glory?" And some people even slander us by claiming that we say, "The more we sin, the better it is!" Those who say such things deserve to be condemned. Romans 3:7

And since we have been made right in God's sight by the blood of Christ, he will certainly save us from God's condemnation. Romans 5:9

And the result of God's gracious gift is very different from the result of that one man's sin. For Adam's sin led to condemnation, but God's free gift leads to our being made right with God, even though we are guilty of many sins. Yes, Adam's one sin brings condemnation for everyone, but Christ's one act of righteousness brings a right relationship with God and new life for everyone. Romans 5:16

But how can that be? Did the law, which is good, cause my death? Of course not! Sin used what was good to bring about my condemnation to death. So we can see how terrible sin really is. It uses God's good commands for its own evil purposes. Romans 7:13

Yet when we are judged by the Lord, we are being disciplined so that we will not be condemned along with the world. 1 Corinthians 11:32

If the old way, which brings condemnation, was glorious, how much more glorious is the new way, which makes us right with God! 2 Corinthians 3:9

Then the man of lawlessness ... will use every kind of evil deception to fool those on their way to destruction, because they refuse to love and accept the truth that would save them. So God will cause them to be greatly deceived, and they will believe these lies. Then they will be condemned for enjoying evil rather than believing the truth. 2Thess 2:8

For people like that have turned away from the truth, and their own sins condemn them. Titus 3:11

We give great honor to those who endure under suffering. For instance, you know about Job, a man of great endurance. You can see how the Lord was kind to him at the end, for the Lord is full of tenderness and mercy. But

most of all, my brothers and sisters, never take an oath, by heaven or earth or anything else. Just say a simple yes or no, so that you will not sin and be condemned. James 5:11

In their greed they will make up clever lies to get hold of your money. But God condemned them long ago, and their destruction will not be delayed. 2 Peter 2:3

Later, God condemned the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah and turned them into heaps of ashes. He made them an example of what will happen to ungodly people. 2 Peter 2:6

I say this because some ungodly people have wormed their way into your churches, saying that God's marvelous grace allows us to live immoral lives. The condemnation of such people was recorded long ago, for they have denied our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ. Jude 1:4

Wrath and Anger

The word “wrath” in the Greek New Testament writings is the word “orga.” It essentially means “intensity.” It is the Greek word that our English word “orgasm” comes from. There is, for sure, a negative aspect associated with “orga” and that is why translators use the word “wrath.” But the problem with using “wrath” is that it gives the impression that God is in some kind of uncontrollable rage and on the path to destroy everything and everyone that is an object of His intensity (orga). Further, it is falsely assumed that the very worst kind of intentions are transferred from God to his “objects of wrath.”

But this far from the truth. Since God is love and always acts as a result of that love (and not out of hate or any other motive), his wrath (orga) is intense love. Love can be both intense and severe because love takes action, and always acts in the very best interest of the one loved, and will do whatever it takes, no matter how intense and severe, to save, redeem, correct, restore, and reconcile those who are objects of love. Read the following passages with this understanding of “wrath” (orga) or “anger” in mind.

But when he saw many Pharisees and Sadducees coming to watch him baptize, he denounced them. “You brood of snakes!” he exclaimed. “Who warned you to flee the coming wrath?” Matthew 3:7

But God shows his anger from heaven against all sinful, wicked people who suppress the truth by their wickedness. Romans 1:18

But because you are stubborn and refuse to turn from your sin, you are storing up terrible punishment for yourself. For a day of anger is coming, when God's righteous judgment will be revealed. Romans 2:5

But he will pour out his anger and wrath on those who live for themselves, who refuse to obey the truth and instead live lives of wickedness. Romans 2:8

In the same way, even though God has the right to show his anger and his power, he is very patient with those on whom his anger falls, who are destined for destruction. Romans 9:22

Dear friends, never take revenge. Leave that to the righteous anger of God. For the Scriptures say, “I will take revenge; I will pay them back,” says the Lord. Romans 12:19

All of us used to live that way, following the passionate desires and inclinations of our sinful nature. By our very nature we were subject to God's anger, just like everyone else. Ephesians 2:3

You can be sure that no immoral, impure, or greedy person will inherit the Kingdom of Christ and of God. For a greedy person is an idolater, worshipping the things of this world. Don't be fooled by those who try to excuse these sins, for the anger of God will fall on all who disobey him. Eph 5:5

So put to death the sinful, earthly things lurking within you. Have nothing to do with sexual immorality, impurity, lust, and evil desires. Don't be greedy, for a greedy person is an idolater, worshipping the things of this world. Because of these sins, the anger of God is coming. Col 3:5

For some of the Jews killed the prophets, and some even killed the Lord Jesus. Now they have persecuted us, too. They fail to please God and they instead work against all humanity as they try to keep us from preaching the Good News of salvation to the Gentiles. By doing this, they continue to pile up their sins. But the anger of God has caught up with them at last. 1Thess 2:15

For God chose to save us through our Lord Jesus Christ, not to pour out his anger on us. 1Thess 5:9

For only we who believe can enter his rest. As for the others, God said, "In my anger I took an oath: 'They will never enter my place of rest,'" even though this rest has been ready since he made the world. Hebrews 4:3

And they cried to the mountains and the rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the face of the one who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb. For the great day of their wrath has come, and who is able to survive?" Revelation 6:16

The nations were filled with wrath, but now the time of your wrath has come. It is time to judge the dead and reward your servants the prophets, as well as your holy people, and all who fear your name, from the least to the greatest. It is time to destroy all who have caused destruction on the earth." Revelation 11:18

They must drink the wine of God's anger. It has been poured full strength into God's cup of wrath. And they will be tormented with fire and burning sulfur in the presence of the holy angels and the Lamb. Revelation 14:10

So the angel swung his sickle over the earth and loaded the grapes into the great winepress of God's wrath. Revelation 14:19

Then I saw in heaven another marvelous event of great significance. Seven angels were holding the seven last plagues, which would bring God's wrath to completion. Revelation 15:1

Then one of the four living beings handed each of the seven angels a gold bowl filled with the wrath of God, who lives forever and ever. Revelation 15:7

Then I heard a mighty voice from the Temple say to the seven angels, "Go your ways and pour out on the earth the seven bowls containing God's wrath." Revelation 16:1

The great city of Babylon split into three sections, and the cities of many nations fell into heaps of rubble. So God remembered all of Babylon's sins, and he made her drink the cup that was filled with the wine of his fierce wrath. Revelation 16:19

From his mouth came a sharp sword to strike down the nations. He will rule them with an iron rod. He will release the fierce wrath of God, the Almighty, like juice flowing from a winepress. Revelation 19:15

Punishment

Punishment is a Greek word that means (in its most basic form) “to trim”. If we just stop and think about what punishment means when carried out by loving parents, and keeping in mind that God is our Father (not just a cold sterile “god”), it is clear that punishment must have correction as its goal. Otherwise, it becomes pure revenge, retaliation, and retribution. When my dad (now passed) punished me as a boy, he had only the very best in mind for me. His goal was to correct and help me become a better person. He never had any thought of discarding me or retaliating against me. It was always *for* me, and never against me. Was it severe? You bet, and I did not always believe it was good intentioned as an ignorant child. But it was done in love, and had he not punished me ... that would be unloving! Love does whatever it takes to correct, improve, restore, reconcile, and heal. Love never gives up or forsakes, and love never fails! (See 1 Corinthians 13). But love does indeed punish ... and so does God. We should always thank him for it as He acts in faithfulness toward us!

Sometimes the word punish is used with the word “age” or “indefinite time period” (aionios). Traditionally, this is interpreted as “eternal punishment”. But this is not definite justification for such use, and based on the meaning of the Greek word “aionios” (especially in light of the fact that there is a word for “eternal” and that it is seldom used in the NT), it is more likely understood to mean “punishment in the age to come”. (See the section above titled *Absence of Eternal Judgment*, and the book titled *Terms for Eternity* in the *Book Sources* section below).

You have heard the law that says the punishment must match the injury: An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth. Matthew 5:38

And they will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous will go into eternal life. Matthew 25:46

Yet they shamelessly cheat widows out of their property and then pretend to be pious by making long prayers in public. Because of this, they will be more severely punished. Mark 12:40

“And a servant who knows what the master wants, but isn’t prepared and doesn’t carry out those instructions, will be severely punished. Luke 12:47

You may think you can condemn such people, but you are just as bad, and you have no excuse! When you say they are wicked and should be punished, you are condemning yourself, for you who judge others do these very same things. And we know that God, in his justice, will punish anyone who does such things. Since you judge others for doing these things, why do you think you can avoid God’s judgment when you do the same things? Don’t you see how wonderfully kind, tolerant, and patient God is with you? Does this mean nothing to you? Can’t you see that his kindness is intended to turn you from your sin? But because you are stubborn and refuse to turn from your sin, you are storing up terrible punishment for yourself. For a day of anger is coming, when God’s righteous judgment will be revealed. He will judge everyone according to what they have done. Rom 2

But, some might say, our sinfulness serves a good purpose, for it helps people see how righteous God is. Isn’t it unfair, then, for him to punish us? (This is merely a human point of view.) Of course not! If God were not entirely fair, how would he be qualified to judge the world? Rom 3:5

So anyone who rebels against authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and they will be punished. Romans 13:2

Satan disguises himself as an angel of light and so it is no wonder that his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness. In the end they will get the punishment their wicked deeds deserve. 2Cor 11:14

Jesus will come with his mighty angels, in flaming fire, bringing judgment on those who don't know God and on those who refuse to obey the Good News of our Lord Jesus. They will be punished with eternal destruction, forever separated from the Lord and from his glorious power. 2Thess 1:7

For the Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes each one he accepts as his child. Hebrews 12:6

For anyone who refused to obey the law of Moses was put to death without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. Just think how much worse the punishment will be for those who have trampled on the Son of God, and have treated the blood of the covenant, which made us holy, as if it were common and unholy, and have insulted and disdained the Holy Spirit who brings God's mercy to us. For we know the one who said, I will take revenge. I will pay them back. He also said, God will judge his own people. It is a terrible thing to fall into the hands of the living God. Heb 10:26

After all, you have not yet given your lives in your struggle against sin. Have you forgotten the encouraging words God spoke to you as his children? He said, "My child, don't make light of the My discipline, and don't give up when I correct you. For the God disciplines those he loves, and he punishes each one he accepts as his child. Heb 12:4

So you see, the Lord knows how to rescue godly people from their trials, even while keeping the wicked under punishment until the day of final judgment. 2Peter 2:9

Such love has no fear, because perfect love expels all fear. If we are afraid, it is for fear of punishment, and this shows that we have not fully experienced his perfect love. 1 John 4:18

Then I heard another voice calling from heaven, "Come away from her, my people. Do not take part in her sins, or you will be punished with her. Revelation 18:4

His judgments are true and just. He has *punished* the great prostitute who corrupted the earth with her immorality. He has avenged the murder of his servants. Revelation 19:2

Gehenna

Gehenna is a physical location just south of Jerusalem. The manner and infrequency in which Jesus used Gehenna, plus the absence of any other NT writer (except James, one time) to use this word at all, makes it difficult to conclude that Jesus was identifying an actual metaphysical place of eternal torment. (For more detailed information on "Gehenna", see the section in this booklet titled "*Stubborn Facts ... About Hell*." It is also available on the GILF Resources page at: <http://www.godislovethefellowship.com/resources.html>)

Matthew 5:22 But I say, if you are even angry with someone, you are subject to judgment! If you call someone an idiot, you are in danger of being brought before the court. And if you curse someone, you are in danger of the fires of Gehenna.

Matthew 5:29 So if your eye—even your good eye—causes you to lust, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into Gehenna. And if your hand—even your

stronger hand—causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into Gehenna.

Matthew 10:28 “Don’t be afraid of those who want to kill your body; they cannot touch your soul. Fear only God, who can destroy both soul and body in Gehenna.

Matthew 18:9 And if your eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. It’s better to enter eternal life with only one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into the fire of Gehenna.

Matthew 23:15 “What sorrow awaits you teachers of religious law and you Pharisees. Hypocrites! For you cross land and sea to make one convert, and then you turn that person into twice the child of Gehenna you yourselves are!

Matthew 23:33 Snakes! Sons of vipers! How will you escape the judgment of Gehenna?

Mark 9:43 If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It’s better to enter eternal life with only one hand than to go into the unquenchable fires of Gehenna with two hands.

Mark 9:45 If your foot causes you to sin, cut it off. It’s better to enter eternal life with only one foot than to be thrown into Gehenna with two feet.

Mark 9:47 And if your eye causes you to sin, gouge it out. It’s better to enter the Kingdom of God with only one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into Gehenna.

Luke 12:5 But I’ll tell you whom to fear. Fear God, who has the power to kill you and then throw you into Gehenna. Yes, he’s the one to fear.

James 3:6 And among all the parts of the body, the tongue is a flame of fire. It is a whole world of wickedness, corrupting your entire body. It can set your whole life on fire, for it is set on fire by Gehenna itself.

Here is a breakdown of where and how Jesus used the word Gehenna:

1. If you call a person a fool you are in danger of the fire of Gehenna (Matt 5:22)
2. Better to get rid of an offending eye or hand than to keep it and be thrown into Gehenna (Matt 5:29, 18:9, Mark 9:43)
3. Fear God who can destroy body and soul in Gehenna (Matt 10:28, Like 12:5)
4. The Pharisees make their followers into twice the offspring of Gehenna as they are (Matt 23:15)
5. How will you Pharisees escape the sentence of Gehenna? (Matt 23:33)

Wow! That’s it! This brevity about hell (Gehenna) is a very stubborn fact that most people are not aware of. Now, it could be that Jesus is warning everyone about a spiritual place of torment to be avoided at all cost. And if He is, then so be it. But a closer look at these occurrences makes this even harder to believe.

Conclusion

After reading (or at least, looking through) all of the above passages in the New Testament on judgment and other terms used to express God's severe actions, my hope is that you have observed what I did when I read these very carefully, that ...

1. There is, indeed, judgment (including punishment, condemnation, destruction, etc.) that is executed by God, presently and in the age to come (eternity).
2. Though judgment is at times very severe, it does not require a never-ending aspect in order for it to be real and severe.
3. The purpose in judgment need not be *pure retribution* with no corrective, healing, and reconciling purpose in it whatsoever.
4. That no passage in the New Testament passes the three-part test (source, duration, and purpose) required to render God's judgment as "never-ending."
5. All passages *can* be read from the perspective that God is good and that everything has a good purpose based on His well-established, overwhelming evidence in the whole Bible that God is loving, merciful, patient, kind, holy (perfect), and just (making things right), and has the very highest moral excellence.

But, of course, you must be the judge of what you conclude about God's judgment. I only ask that you study, pray (ask God directly and specifically if He is an "eternal punisher" and seek an answer from Him!), give God "benefit of the doubt" before you assign to Him the worst possible thing that could ever be said about anyone (direct, on-purpose, never-ending agony and torment) without clear and convincing evidence that He will actually do this! Go back and read all these passages again with this in mind if you need to. But... make sure.

Stubborn Facts about Hell

This is a study on all of the words in the Bible that are commonly translated as “hell.” But it turns out that none of these words (in the original Greek and Hebrew) have the same meaning as our modern-day word, hell, as “a place of never-ending punishment.”

Introduction

They say facts are stubborn things. And this is true. But facts can also be made to say whatever a person wants them to say -- if presented selectively and out of context. All too often it is not the facts that are stubborn, but those who present them. The facts about hell, when all are considered and seen in their complete context, are indeed stubborn.

When it comes to discovering a word, a topic, or an idea presented in the Bible, there are five very important questions to ask that will keep you on track to discover the stubborn truth that the facts reveal. I have used these questions in many studies I have done in the Bible, and they have served me very well.



Modern-day photo of Gehenna. It is a beautiful park in a valley just south of Jerusalem.

1. What is the Greek meaning of the word you want to understand? This is important because the New Testament was written in Greek, not English, and the meaning of words must be found there.
2. How many times is the word used in the New Testament, and by whom? Why is it used so many or so few times?
3. What did a writer (or speaker) in the New Testament mean by the word he used? Why did he use it and not some other word?
4. What is the context in which this word is used? There are two contexts to look at. One is the immediate context (the words and discussion surrounding that particular use of the word). The other is the greater context – that of the whole Bible, and everything we know about God.
5. How is this word translated in the English Bible, and why did they choose this English word? How much interpreting did they do in making this choice?

Greek Definitions of the Word Hell

There are four Greek words in the New Testament writings that are translated as hell in modern Bibles.

The first is “Tartarus”, and it occurs only one time in 2Peter 2:4: *“God did not spare angels when they sinned, but cast them into hell (Tartarus) and committed them to chains of gloomy darkness to be kept until the judgment.”* This word originated in Greek mythology to describe where the Titans were sent for punishment. It is very common for the New Testament writers to use known terms and phrases in their culture to describe truths they wanted to reveal. This does not mean that Peter was validating any truth in Greek mythology, but rather was using a known concept to describe the truth the Holy Spirit had revealed to him about the fate of fallen angels. This word and how it is used in the Bible seems to fit the modern day idea of hell, somewhat. But it seems to have no eternal duration.

The second word is “Sheol”, which is the Hebrew word for “the grave.” It is used to quote Old Testament writings. It does not include the idea of torment in its meaning, only that it was a place where the dead reside.

The third word is “Hades”, which is the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew word Sheol (the grave, or place of the dead). It occurs eleven times in the New Testament.

The last word is “Gehenna”, used just 12 times in the New Testament. Its most basic and literal meaning is *not* a place of torment in the spiritual realm (as Tartarus is). Instead, it is a physical location in a valley just south of Jerusalem. A modern day photo of Gehenna is shown at the beginning of this section. It is actually a very beautiful and pleasant park today.

Since Sheol and Hades are not places of torment or suffering and are focused on the place of the dead (both good and wicked people), and Tartarus is ascribed only to fallen angels (and only mentioned once), the remaining discussion will be on Gehenna. Is this a place in the spiritual realm where some of the dead are tormented forever by God, or is it something else? The remaining four questions will be asked primarily about this word, Gehenna.

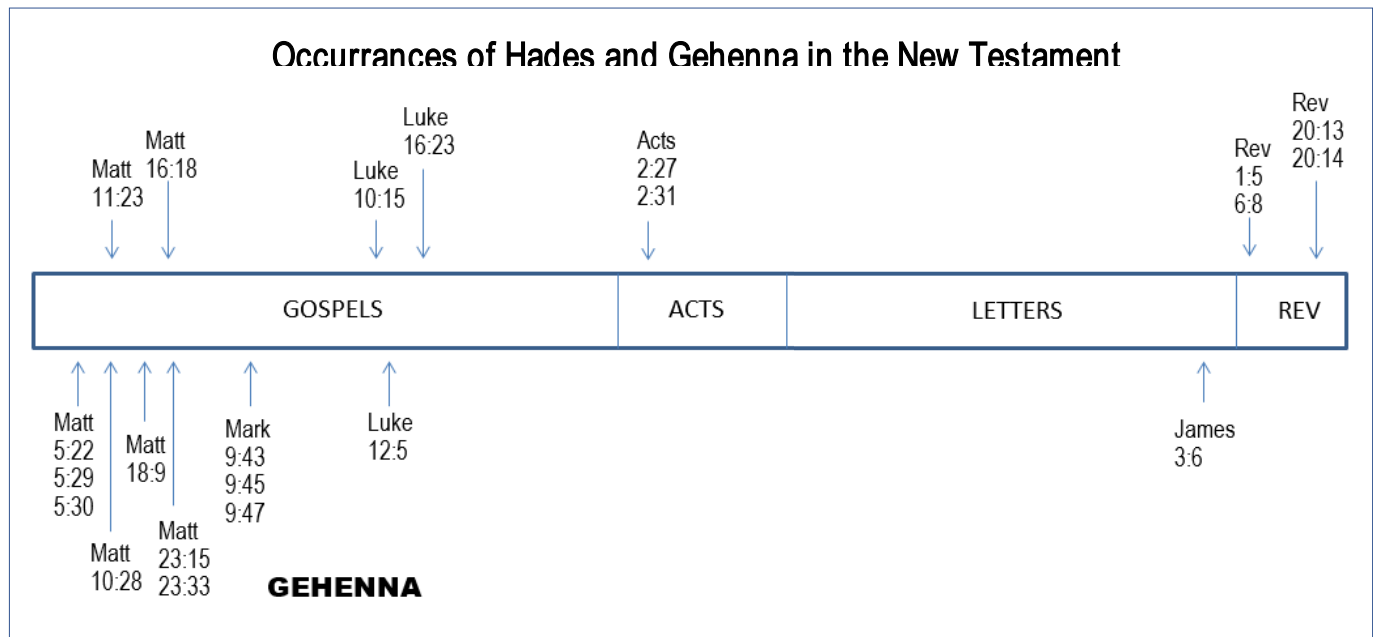
Frequency of Use in the NT

Hades occurs in the NT just eleven times. It is the same word (in Greek) as “Sheol” (in Hebrew). The Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Old Testament in the days of Jesus) always translates “Sheol” as “Hades.” This means that the seventy Jewish translators that did this translation understood Hades to be the same as Sheol. And Sheol was clearly and historically “the grave” or “the place of the dead.” There was no eternal torment

associated with Sheol, and therefore not with Hades either. Additionally, of the eleven occurrences of Hades in the NT, none of them identify it as a place of eternal punishment. In the parable of the *Rich Man and Lazarus*, the rich man is in Hades and is tormented. But the source of the torment is not revealed (is it God or himself?) Also, no duration is given, only that a gulf is fixed that cannot be crossed. But for how long? This is not revealed. Additionally, the Rich Man seems to be repenting! His perspective and his attitude seems to be improving ... enough to warn others of his agony. So, Hades is not “hell” – certainly not in the modern-day definition sense of “a place of never-ending torment”!

The word Gehenna was used almost exclusively by Jesus, and on only four occasions and in only five different ways. This is a striking fact, one that is very stubborn. If Gehenna is an actual place of torment that all people are in danger of, then why so little direct mention of it by Jesus? And why does He never identify it clearly as “a place of never-ending torment”?

But even more amazing is that none of his apostles ever use the word Gehenna, (except for James who said our vicious and vile speech is “set on fire” by Gehenna). No other apostle used the word Gehenna in his writings – writings inspired by the Holy Spirit. Paul never used Gehenna (in all he wrote about redemption, faith, and judgment), nor did Peter, John, Jude, or the author of Hebrews. This is yet another stubborn fact. If Gehenna is a place where God torments people for all eternity, making it by far the greatest single warning in the Bible, why do the apostles (except for James, once) never even mention it by name? And, again, why did Jesus himself only mention it five times?



Observations:

- Hades is never used in any of the NT letters where most Christian doctrine is found.
- Hades is the Greek word for the Hebrew word Sheol, found in the Old Testament some 75 times, and means “the grave.”
- Hades is never presented as a place of eternal punishment
- Gehenna is only used by Jesus, (except once by James).
- Jesus only mentions Gehenna five unique times on just four occasions (when considering duplicate occurrences in the three synoptic gospels).
- Jesus never identifies Gehenna as a place of eternal punishment.
- Over half of the occurrences of Gehenna are in Matthew, a gospel written for Jewish people.
- Gehenna is never used by John, Paul, Peter, Jude, or the Author of Hebrews, nor is it used in Acts or the book of Revelation.

Jesus’ Meaning of Gehenna

Here is a breakdown of where and how Jesus used the word Gehenna:

1. If you call a person a fool you are in danger of the fire of Gehenna (Matt 5:22)
2. Better to get rid of an offending eye or hand than to keep it and be thrown into Gehenna (Matt 5:29, 18:9, Mark 9:43)
3. Fear God who can destroy body and soul in Gehenna (Matt 10:28, Like 12:5)
4. The Pharisees make their followers into twice the offspring of Gehenna as they are (Matt 23:15)
5. How will you Pharisees escape the sentence of Gehenna? (Matt 23:33)

Wow! That’s it! This brevity about hell (Gehenna) is a very stubborn fact that most people are not aware of. Now, it could be that Jesus is warning everyone about a spiritual place of torment to be avoided at all cost. And if He is, then so be it. But a closer look at these occurrences makes this even harder to believe.

First, none of the illustrations that Jesus used has anyone *actually* thrown into Gehenna. Instead, Gehenna is presented as: (1) a place of the *danger* of being thrown into, (2) a place one can *avoid* being thrown into a matter of choice, (3) a place where one *can* be destroyed by God, (4) a place that some are an offspring of, and (5) a place where one can be under the sentence of. But in none of these examples is anyone actually thrown into Gehenna or described as being there. This is yet another stubborn fact.

Secondly, look at the kind of actions that warrant this threat of Gehenna: Calling a person a fool, doing something offensive with your eye or hand, being a follower of the Pharisees, or being a Pharisee. What a peculiar list! Not exactly the worst possible actions a person can do. None of them even break one of God's top ten commandments, except possibly the use of an eye or hand. Do we really believe that calling a person a fool is the essence of deserving eternal torment by God?

Thirdly, the first two examples are directed toward general hearers. The third is a just a statement about God's *capability*, and is not directed toward anyone. The last two examples are directed toward Pharisees who Jesus was much harder on (than average sinners) because of their hypocrisy, arrogance, stubborn heart, greed, and deception of others.

The point of these three observations is that the case for accusing God of being an eternal tormentor is rather weak -- in both the *number* and in the *nature* of the statements made by Jesus. It really makes an honest person seek some other realistic meaning for his words. But this is very hard for some people to do -- especially if they have been taught all their lives that the God, who is love, is also an eternal tormentor.

Gehenna in the Context of the Bible

So what did Jesus mean when He used the word Gehenna? Context is essential in determining this. Remember, the Greek meaning of the word is that it is a physical location in a valley just south of Jerusalem. However, words (even names of places) can take on meanings beyond their literal and original meaning. And this is true of Gehenna. It is obvious that Jesus is using it in some actual (or metaphorical) meaning beyond being a piece of real estate. Reading, again, the list of five uses above by Jesus makes this clear. But what did Jesus have in mind?

There are, basically, two options (or, possibly, some combination of these two). First, He might be using Gehenna in the way it was understood in his day. Jesus drew from all kinds of illustrations, walks of life, activities in nature, etc. Every speaker and writer does this -- we all explain unknown things by using known things. And Jesus was a master of it. This is why He spoke so often in parables.

But, secondly, and more importantly, Jesus might have been referring to some historic place or event. This would be expected when referring to a physical location. Jesus, if He wanted to talk about some location in the spiritual realm, could have used the word Hades, or he could have made up a new word and define it as such, or he could have just stated more clearly that he was referring to someplace other than Hades. But instead he chose a historical location (and event) from the Old Testament writings. This is very significant because Jesus was big on the authority of Scripture. Jesus often appealed to scripture

directly. In this case he used a term, Gehenna, that was already known historically by all Jews.

The word Gehenna literally means “the valley of Hinnom”, and it was a place in the time of Jerimiah when Israel worshipped false gods and even sacrificed their own children to them in that valley. God pronounced judgment on them (through Jerimiah) and told them that their bodies would be burned there.

Jer 7:30 For the sons of Judah have done that which is evil in My sight,” declares the Lord, “They have set their detestable things in the house which is called by My name, to defile it. 31 They have built the high places of Topheth, which is in the valley of the son of Hinnom, to burn their sons and their daughters in the fire, which I did not command, and it did not come into My mind. 32 “Therefore, behold, days are coming,” declares the Lord, “When it will no longer be called Topheth, or the valley of the son of Hinnom, but the valley of the Slaughter; for they will bury in Topheth because there is no other place. 33 The dead bodies of this people will be food for the birds of the sky and for the beasts of the earth; and no one will frighten them away. 34 Then I will make to cease from the cities of Judah and from the streets of Jerusalem the voice of joy and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride; for the land will become a ruin.

This all came true when the dead from wars (that God brought upon them) were burned there. The valley became a place where everything was burned, and so it became well known in Jesus’ day as a place of continual fires.

So the question is, was Jesus using the word Gehenna to symbolize a place of eternal fire and torment of the dead based on the common understanding of Gehenna of that day? Or was Jesus using the word Gehenna to symbolize the judgment that God would bring on the current generation of his day, just as God did back in the days of Jeremiah? What is interesting is that the historical understanding of Gehenna never had any association with torment in the spiritual realm after death. This all came from the Pharisees, who Jesus opposed. Gehenna was, historically, always about God’s temporal judgment against Israel. It is also important to note that Jesus’ judgment on the Jews of those days was embodied in his prediction of the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple in 70 A.D. (See Matt 24). The choice is very simple. Would Jesus choose to use Gehenna to teach what the Pharisees of that day taught about eternal torment of the dead, or would he use Gehenna in reference to its historical meaning in Scripture to pronounce the same kind of temporal judgment on the Jews in his day?

There will always be people who will argue both ways on this, and the answer will always be speculative to at least some degree. But there is a much more important question. Would Jesus base his meaning of Gehenna on the Old Testament event from which it originated, or from the use of it by the Rabi of his day? Is there sufficient evidence to accuse the God who *is* love of being also one who will eternally torment those he loves and has created in his own image? Is this really what the Bible clearly teaches, or is it just

what many people have been told all their lives? Based on the evidence about the word Gehenna shown so far, does the Bible really support a hell of torment? Your call! But, for me, I will never again accuse my Lord of such evil and cruelty when the evidence is so lacking. If God was on trial for being an eternal tormentor ... he would be acquitted for lack of evidence.

How Gehenna has been Translated

The English word hell is defined by Webster's as:

- A nether world in which the dead continue to exist.
- The nether realm of the devil and the demons in which the damned suffer everlasting punishment.
- Often used in curses (go to hell), or as a term of abuse (the hell with it).
- A place or state of misery, torment, or wickedness.
- A place or state of turmoil or destruction.
- A severe scolding (he gave me hell for coming in late).
- Unrestrained fun or sportiveness (the kids were full of hell).
- Often used in the phrase "for the hell of it" especially to suggest action on impulse or without a serious motive (I decided to go, just for the hell of it).
- An extremely unpleasant and often inescapable situation (I was stuck in rush-hour hell).
- Used as an interjection (hell, I don't know!), or as an intensive (hurts like hell; funny as hell).
- Often used in the phrase "hell of a..." (it was one hell of a good fight), or used as "the hell out of ..." (scared the hell out of him), or used with "the" or "in" (moved way the hell up north; what in hell is wrong, now?)

As you can see, the word hell is used in a variety of meanings, ranging from very literal to very figurative. Language needs such a word to express extreme situations (whether literal or figurative). But this is no reason to translate all four Greek words as "hell" in the English translation! Why not translate Gehenna like Hades and Sheol (transliterate the letters from Greek to English) so that the reader will know what was used in the Greek? Why use "hell" for Gehenna? When did this begin and why was this done?

One possible reason for translating Gehenna as "hell" is to accommodate a particular interpretation -- one that assumes that Gehenna is a spiritual location of torment for the dead. But still, why not use "Gehenna" so readers of the English Bible will have some clue of what was in the original language? Is not our goal to be as clear and accurate as possible? Does the Holy Spirit need help in interpreting Scripture? Is he not our "only

teacher”? Young’s translation of the New Testament is one of the few that uses “Gehenna” instead of “hell.” It shows that he had a very high view of Scripture and that translation was not to be a tool for interpretation!

History of Gehenna

When did this all start? A majority of early believers (the generation right after Christ up until about 500 AD, after Constantine and in the days of Augustine) believed that God would fully restore everything and everyone (eventually) . They based this on the fact that the good news message (the gospel) is essentially a proclamation of the victory already won by Jesus for all humanity through his birth, death, and resurrection from the dead. And this is exactly what the word “gospel” (“evangel” in Greek) means. It comes from a description of those who came in from the battle field and proclaimed that the victory had already been won. It had nothing to do with anyone believing it (or not), and it was not an “offer” to activate the victory by believing. It was simply a declaration of good news.

This was also Paul’s gospel message. On Mars Hill he proclaimed the resurrection of Jesus. Some believed it and some did not, but he never presented it as an *offer* by which they could make the resurrection valid by their faith. Those who did not believe were just as loved and forgiven by God (through Jesus) as those who believed. Unbelievers just didn’t acknowledge it or fully benefit from it (experientially). But all are equally saved by Jesus who is “The Savior of the World” and “the savior of all men.” This is why Paul warned (in the opening of his letter to the believers in Galatia) that any other gospel than the one he preached – the resurrection of Jesus – is a false gospel. Faith is our response to what God has done *for us*, through Jesus. As Paul said, “We are saved by Jesus alone.” Even our act of faith does not earn us anything with God. The act of Jesus, alone, earned everything for us. Any other gospel is false because it is not completely by the grace of God.

So, these early believers had every reason to believe that God would restore and bring into complete salvation all of humanity, whose sins were fully paid for by Jesus on the cross. Therefore, they had no reason to believe that God would eternally punish anyone. And, in fact, God *cannot* punish anyone, because Jesus *already* paid the penalty for their sin. What is there to punish? Certainly, God may severely correct and discipline many who refuse to believe -- but he cannot torment them forever with no opportunity to repent, since they were bought with the precious blood of Jesus.

But there were also some during this period that believed that God would indeed *punish and torment* unbelievers for eternity. And, there were others who believed he would *annihilate* them after punishing them for a long period of time. But in those early days these were in the minority. Augustine, who is the great propagator of the idea of eternal damnation (Tertullian seems to have been the father of it many years before), complained

that there were “so many who disagreed” with him, and did not accept his arguments in favor of eternal punishment that he laid out in his book *City of God*.

Things seem to be just about reversed in the church today (among both Protestants and Catholics) -- that those who believe in eternal torment outnumber those who believe in God’s eventual and full restoration. So what happened? It turns out that Augustine’s arguments eventually did take hold in the church. As the early church grew into Roman Catholicism, the tyranny and fear of eternal torment taught by its leaders also grew. And it had great power over people – as the history of the church clearly shows. Perhaps this is why “hell” was used (instead of Gehenna) in most translations.

At the time of the Reformation, Luther saw both the grace of God and the unlimited reach of the work of Jesus. And this was a true reformation of thought. It freed the church (and the world) from a great deal of “religious slavery” that had gained a huge hold. The reformation *claimed* to hold to “scripture alone, grace alone, and Christ alone”, but it seems it was not fully realized. Calvin seemed to truly hold to “grace alone”, but only for some – just those chosen by God. Nowhere in the Bible does it ever say God “passes over” anyone and chooses just some. But it does say many times in the New Testament that God does not show favoritism. Calvin failed to realize its unlimited application to all men. But when both are understood (salvation in Jesus is for all people, and that it is actual and complete – not potential) the gospel of grace, and grace alone, is maintained and proclaimed. (For more information on the history of Gehenna, see my four-part video series titled *The History of Eternal Punishment* on YouTube at:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sdvpcvMPYM8&list=PL1jI9OL0CInDAYiaCJLM6WOp2GmyypN1X>).

Some Conclusions

As Paul often said in his letter to the believers in Rome, “What shall we say then”? Well, first of all, there is no way to prove that hell (as a place of eternal torment) does not exist, but neither can anyone prove that it does – at least not as a “slam-dunk” proof based on some collection of Bible verses, and certainly not to the satisfaction of everyone. But perhaps looking at all of this from a higher level will be of some help.

God is love. He loves everyone, all the time -- he always has and he always will. How could he not? He loves everyone the same; he has no favorites. All people are his favorites. No one is left out, denied, or shunned. And not only does God love everyone, he loves us infinitely. He cannot love us any more than he does – it is impossible.

Since God is love, he always acts in the best interest of those he loves. There is no better definition of love (and, therefore, of who God is) than these words taken from the famous *love chapter* in the Bible:

“Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. Love does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails.”

All these things are true about God, because God is love!

When these same words are read using “God” instead of “love” (since he is love), it now reads: “God is patient, God is kind. He does not envy, He does not boast, he is not proud. God does not dishonor others, he is not self-seeking, he is not easily angered, he keeps no record of wrongs. God does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. He always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. God never fails.” A God like this is irresistibly wonderful. Could we expect any less of Him? This is who God is, and you can know him. He already knows you, and loves you more than you will ever know.

God is more than just “loving”; and love is more than just something God does. It is something he *is* -- it is the essence of his being. God has many attributes: he is eternal, spirit (exists beyond this material world), never changes, everywhere present, all-knowing, all-wise, all-powerful, perfect, good, and patient. But love is what he *is* – always. He never stops loving, nor does his love fluctuate in the slightest amount. Everything God does is from a *motive* of love, always wanting the best for all his creation – especially the human race, created to be a reflection of himself. Because of this, we all have a special connection with God that can never be broken. He will not allow it. We are all very important to him – more so than anything else.

It has been said that the ultimate purpose of man is to “glorify God and enjoy him forever.” And this is true, because it is best when we focus on God rather than ourselves (or someone else). God asks this of us for our own good, not because He is an egotist. He knows that when we focus our attention on ourselves we become miserable people. He wants us to be joyous, happy, and at peace. But, if that is the ultimate purpose of man, what is the ultimate purpose of God? To glorify himself? Not the God who *is* love. Instead, the ultimate purpose of God is “to glorify man and enjoy him forever.” Wow, exactly backwards from our purpose. God wants all of us to become more like himself. And this is ultimate *glorification of mankind*.

God is love and everything he does is motivated by love because he wants only the very best for the whole world. Even his judgment and condemnation are acts of love. They have to be. How could they not be? What other motive could God have? Hate? Revenge? Retaliation? Punishment just for the sake of punishment (with no restoration or correction in mind)? Not possible! Not for the God who is love! God’s judgment is an accurate assessment of our condition – which is not always good. His goal is to make things right and make things better – all things for all people. God does not judge and condemn for the purpose of destroying and retaliating. God is truly magnanimous and forgiving. He is a redeemer and a restorer. He saves, improves, and re-creates the human race that he

originally created very good. The only destroying and condemning God does is to remove forever all the bad and harmful things that reside in us – all the stuff that ruins us and keeps us from being the perfect people he intended us to be. He condemns the “old person” in us and makes us a “new person” in Jesus.

With God (unlike people) judgment and condemnation have only a good and loving purpose. For example, suppose I take my child to a doctor and he diagnoses him to have cancer. A loving doctor who really cares will “judge” my child as one having a terminal illness. This is an accurate statement, made in love, because it communicates the truth about my child’s condition. Would I prefer to be lied to in kindness? But even further, the same loving doctor rightly “condemns” my son when she declares that cancer will indeed take my child’s life if not treated. Judgment and condemnation are good when love is the motive and purpose behind them. In the case of this doctor, the motives are good because he wants to see my child live. In the case of God, he wants us to live a beautiful and abundant life, forever!

The judgment and condemnation of the God (who is love) is likewise grounded in good motives and purpose -- the very best. Like the doctor, God’s purpose is to heal and restore – not to destroy. The only destroying God does is to get rid of the evil in us that destroys us. It is like the proverbial “not throwing out the baby with the bathwater”, where a mother desires only to get rid of the dirty water and not her precious baby. It is no less true of God. He loves his world, and everyone in it, and he wants only to get rid of all that ruins us and keep the good he created in us that is a reflection of himself.

God’s purpose for his the world never changes. It has been the same from all eternity. He loves and he wants only the best for all people, no matter what it takes. He has always loved us and always will. He knew that we would fall into ruin long before he created us. But he made us anyway knowing he had a greater and grander purpose for us, beyond the destruction we would bring upon ourselves. Rather than just creating human beings and preventing them from failing, he made them free and allowed them to do what they would inevitably do -- plunge themselves into ruin and despair. We see this every day, in our own lives and in the lives of others. No exceptions.

God, in his mercy, love, and wisdom, judged and condemned us as “less than good enough” – but only did so in order to make us into something new and better. Much better! This is love, and this is what a God of love does – makes things better. It is like condemning an old house that is moldy, rotten, and dangerous. Condemning such a building is good. But what is much better is the plan and purpose to erect a new and better building in its place. This is how God sees the human race. We are judged and condemned, but done so in love and with the purpose of re-creating new and better human beings to share his own nature and perfection.

For those who believe that God is an eternal tormenter, (without any opportunity to escape, even if one repents), and that He does so without any good purpose in mind, the burden of

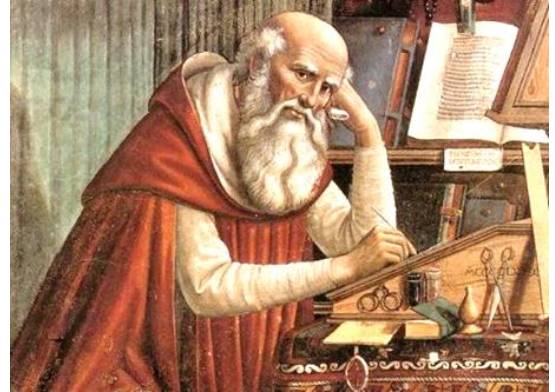
proof is on them to make the Biblical case *against* the infinite love of God. Keep in mind as you ponder this that all humanity was created in God's very own image and were fully paid for, and bought, with the high price of the precious blood of His own Son! Not only does God's perfect moral character not allow him to perform the most evil act of cruelty and retaliation imaginable by man, but the love he demonstrated in the death and resurrection of Jesus (on the behalf of all men) guarantees that God has no reason to torment anyone, since all sin and judgment was paid for in full by Jesus, his Son. Paul summed it up this way, "God was in Jesus, reconciling the world to Himself."

The stubborn facts about hell, along with our understanding of the complete and unlimited work of Jesus on the behalf of all mankind, plus our acknowledgment that God is love and good, and only does good, always – all of this should cause us to never accuse God of torment, torture, and cruelty. Instead, we should forever see him as one who always wants the very best for those he created and loves, and that his grace and mercy will never allow him to forsake or give up on anyone!

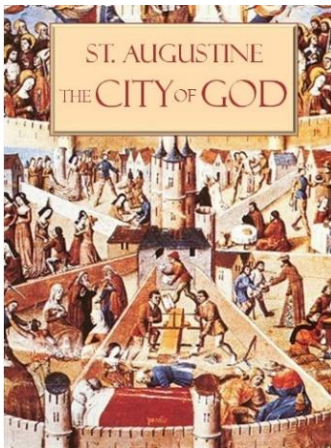
Augustine's View of Hell

The doctrine of hell and eternal punishment was best (and most thoroughly) articulated by Augustine in his monumental work titled the City of God. It is very clear that the Roman Catholic (and therefore Protestant) tradition of *eternal punishment* finds its foundation in Augustine.

It is hard to deny that Augustine is the great champion of eternal punishment in the history of the Christian church. Up until his day, even during his own times, the Christian church predominately held to the belief that God would eventually restore and reconcile all things and people to himself, even if he must do so through very severe means of corrective punishment through a process described as “fire.” (See the section later in this booklet titled *Early Church Writers on Restoration*). But after Augustine, the church in Rome (which became the dominate force in Western Christianity from about 500 AD onward) eventually adopted *eternal punishment* as the official position of the church. They did not officially adopt it until around 1000 AD. But the emperor Justinian promoted eternal punishment around 550 AD when he inserted himself into the Church Council in an attempt to silence the followers of Origen. Additionally, one unofficial creed (the pseudo-Athanasian creed around 500 AD) expressed it clearly, unlike all other official creeds prior to it.



However, in Augustine's own day (and even before), the Christian church never held eternal punishment as an official position (even though there were some Christians who held this view as their personal belief, like Tertullian). Augustine even lamented about how few people believed as he did and semi-mocked them for being too “tender-hearted”! But isn't such “tender-heartedness” clearly and predominately the character and “heart” of



God as we know Him from the Bible as a whole? Over time, the church at Rome (which became the Roman Catholic Church), adopted eternal punishment as its official view of eternal destiny of unrepentant sinners in around 1200 AD (4th Lateran Council, and the 1st and 2nd councils of Lyons). Eternal Punishment is one of many beliefs held by Augustine and adopted by the Western Church that has rendered him the “most influential thinker” in Church History –for better or for worse!

Augustine literally wrote the book on eternal punishment in *Book XXI* of his monumental work titled “The City of God” (here is a

link to it: <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/120121.htm>). This book reveals clearly where Augustine stood on God's purpose in punishment. And his view is clearly different from the view of most Early Christians who came before him (as this booklet demonstrates) who believed that God's purpose in punishment is corrective, restorative, and healing in nature. Big difference! Key chapters from his lengthy twenty-first book in City of God are presented below to demonstrate his clear commitment to eternal punishment. Key passages have been underlined.

AUGUSTINE'S CITY OF GOD

Book XXI.

Of the end reserved for the city of the devil, namely, the eternal punishment of the damned; and of the arguments which unbelief brings against it.

Chapter 1.—Of the Order of the Discussion, Which Requires that We First Speak of the Eternal Punishment of the Lost in Company with the Devil, and Then of the Eternal Happiness of the Saints.

I Propose, with such ability as God may grant me, to discuss in this book more thoroughly the nature of the punishment which shall be assigned to the devil and all his retainers, when the two cities, the one of God, the other of the devil, shall have reached their proper ends through Jesus Christ our Lord, the Judge of quick and dead. And I have adopted this order, and preferred to speak, first of the punishment of the devils, and afterwards of the blessedness of the saints, because the body partakes of either destiny; and it seems to be more incredible that bodies endure in everlasting torments than that they continue to exist without any pain in everlasting felicity. Consequently, when I shall have demonstrated that that punishment ought not to be incredible, this will materially aid me in proving that which is much more credible, viz., the immortality of the bodies of the saints which are delivered from all pain. Neither is this order out of harmony with the divine writings, in which sometimes, indeed, the blessedness of the good is placed first, as in the words, "They that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of judgment;" but sometimes also last, as, "The Son of man shall send forth His angels, and they shall gather out of His kingdom all things which offend, and shall cast them into a furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth, Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of His Father;" and that, "These shall go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into life eternal." And though we have not room to cite instances, anyone who examines the prophets will find that they adopt now the one arrangement and now the other. My own reason for following the latter order I have given.

Chapter 2.—Whether It is Possible for Bodies to Last for Ever in Burning Fire.

What, then, can I adduce to convince those who refuse to believe that human bodies, animated and living, can not only survive death, but also last in the torments of everlasting fires? They will not allow us to refer this simply to the power of the Almighty, but demand that we persuade them by some example. If, then, we reply to them, that there are animals which certainly are corruptible, because they are mortal, and which yet live in the midst of flames; and likewise, that in springs of water so hot that no one can put his hand in it with impunity a species of worm is found, which not only lives there, but cannot live elsewhere; they either refuse to believe these facts unless we can show them, or, if we are in circumstances to prove them by ocular demonstration or by adequate testimony, they contend,

with the same skepticism, that these facts are not examples of what we seek to prove, inasmuch as these animals do not live forever, and besides, they live in that blaze of heat without pain, the element of fire being congenial to their nature, and causing it to thrive and not to suffer,—just as if it were not more incredible that it should thrive than that it should suffer in such circumstances. It is strange that anything should suffer in fire and yet live, but stranger that it should live in fire and not suffer. If, then, the latter be believed, why not also the former?

Chapter 3.—Whether Bodily Suffering Necessarily Terminates in the Destruction of the Flesh.

But, say they, there is no body which can suffer and cannot also die. How do we know this? For who can say with certainty that the devils do not suffer in their bodies, when they own that they are grievously tormented? And if it is replied that there is no earthly body—that is to say, no solid and perceptible body, or, in one word, no flesh—which can suffer and cannot die, is not this to tell us only what men have gathered from experience and their bodily senses? For they indeed have no acquaintance with any flesh but that which is mortal; and this is their whole argument, that what they have had no experience of they judge quite impossible. For we cannot call it reasoning to make pain a presumption of death, while, in fact, it is rather a sign of life. For though it be a question whether that which suffers can continue to live forever, yet it is certain that everything which suffers pain does live, and that pain can exist only in a living subject. It is necessary, therefore, that he who is pained be living, not necessary that pain kill him; for every pain does not kill even those mortal bodies of ours which are destined to die. And that any pain kills them is caused by the circumstance that the soul is so connected with the body that it succumbs to great pain and withdraws; for the structure of our members and vital parts is so infirm that it cannot bear up against that violence which causes great or extreme agony. But in the life to come this connection of soul and body is of such a kind, that as it is dissolved by no lapse of time, so neither is it burst asunder by any pain. And so, although it be true that in this world there is no flesh which can suffer pain and yet cannot die, yet in the world to come there shall be flesh such as now there is not, as there will also be death such as now there is not. For death will not be abolished, but will be eternal, since the soul will neither be able to enjoy God and live, nor to die and escape the pains of the body. The first death drives the soul from the body against her will: the second death holds the soul in the body against her will. The two have this in common, that the soul suffers against her will what her own body inflicts.

Our opponents, too, make much of this, that in this world there is no flesh which can suffer pain and cannot die; while they make nothing of the fact that there is something which is greater than the body. For the spirit, whose presence animates and rules the body, can both suffer pain and cannot die. Here then is something which, though it can feel pain, is immortal. And this capacity, which we now see in the spirit of all, shall be hereafter in the bodies of the damned. Moreover, if we attend to the matter a little more closely, we see that what is called bodily pain is rather to be referred to the soul. For it is the soul not the body, which is pained, even when the pain originates with the body,—the soul feeling pain at the point where the body is hurt. As then we speak of bodies feeling and living, though the feeling and life of the body are from the soul, so also we speak of bodies being pained, though no pain can be suffered by the body apart from the soul. The soul, then, is pained with the body in that part where something occurs to hurt it; and it is pained alone, though it be in the body, when some invisible cause distresses it, while the body is safe and sound. Even when not associated with the body it is pained; for certainly that rich man was suffering in hell when he cried, “I am tormented in this flame.” But as for the body, it suffers no pain when it is soulless; and even when animate it can suffer only by the soul’s suffering. If, therefore, we might draw a just presumption from the existence of pain to that of death, and conclude that where pain can be felt death can occur, death would rather be the property of the soul, for to it pain more peculiarly belongs. But, seeing that that which suffers most cannot die, what ground is there for supposing that those bodies, because destined to suffer, are therefore, destined to die? The Platonists indeed maintained that these earthly bodies and dying members gave rise to the fears, desires, griefs, and joys of the soul. “Hence,” says Virgil (i.e., from these earthly bodies and dying members), “Hence wild desires and groveling fears, And human laughter, human tears.” But in the fourteenth book of this work we have proved that, according to the Platonists’ own theory, souls, even when purged from all pollution of the body, are yet possessed by a monstrous desire to return again into their bodies. But where desire can exist,

certainly pain also can exist; for desire frustrated, either by missing what it aims at or losing what it had attained, is turned into pain. And therefore, if the soul, which is either the only or the chief sufferer, has yet a kind of immortality of its own, it is inconsequent to say that because the bodies of the damned shall suffer pain, therefore they shall die. In fine, if the body causes the soul to suffer, why can the body not cause death as well as suffering, unless because it does not follow that what causes pain causes death as well? And why then is it incredible that these fires can cause pain but not death to those bodies we speak of, just as the bodies themselves cause pain, but not therefore death, to the souls? Pain is therefore no necessary presumption of death.

Chapter 9.—Of Hell, and the Nature of Eternal Punishments.

So then what God by His prophet has said of the everlasting punishment of the damned shall come to pass—shall without fail come to pass,—“their worm shall not die, neither shall their fire be quenched.” In order to impress this upon us most forcibly, the Lord Jesus Himself, when ordering us to cut off our members, meaning thereby those persons whom a man loves as the most useful members of his body, says, “It is better for thee to enter into life maimed, than having two hands to go into hell, into the fire that never shall be quenched; where their worm dieth not, and their fire is not quenched.” Similarly of the foot: “It is better for thee to enter halt into life, than having two feet to be cast into hell, into the fire that never shall be quenched; where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched.” So, too, of the eye: “It is better for thee to enter into the kingdom of God with one eye, than having two eyes to be cast into hell fire: where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched.” He did not shrink from using the same words three times over in one passage. And who is not terrified by this repetition, and by the threat of that punishment uttered so vehemently by the lips of the Lord Himself?

Now they who would refer both the fire and the worm to the spirit, and not to the body, affirm that the wicked, who are separated from the kingdom of God, shall be burned, as it were, by the anguish of a spirit repenting too late and fruitlessly; and they contend that fire is therefore not inappropriately used to express this burning torment, as when the apostle exclaims “Who is offended, and I burn not?” The worm, too, they think, is to be similarly understood. For it is written they say, “As the moth consumes the garment, and the worm the wood, so does grief consume the heart of a man.” But they who make no doubt that in that future punishment both body and soul shall suffer, affirm that the body shall be burned with fire, while the soul shall be, as it were, gnawed by a worm of anguish. Though this view is more reasonable,—for it is absurd to suppose that either body or soul will escape pain in the future punishment,—yet, for my own part, I find it easier to understand both as referring to the body than to suppose that neither does; and I think that Scripture is silent regarding the spiritual pain of the damned, because, though not expressed, it is necessarily understood that in a body thus tormented the soul also is tortured with a fruitless repentance. For we read in the ancient Scriptures, “The vengeance of the flesh of the ungodly is fire and worms.” It might have been more briefly said, “The vengeance of the ungodly.” Why, then, was it said, “The flesh of the ungodly,” unless because both the fire and the worm are to be the punishment of the flesh? Or if the object of the writer in saying, “The vengeance of the flesh,” was to indicate that this shall be the punishment of those who live after the flesh (for this leads to the second death, as the apostle intimated when he said, “For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die”, let each one make his own choice, either assigning the fire to the body and the worm to the soul,—the one figuratively, the other really,—or assigning both really to the body. For I have already sufficiently made out that animals can live in the fire, in burning without being consumed, in pain without dying, by a miracle of the most omnipotent Creator, to whom no one can deny that this is possible, if he be not ignorant by whom has been made all that is wonderful in all nature. For it is God Himself who has wrought all these miracles, great and small, in this world which I have mentioned, and incomparably more which I have omitted, and who has enclosed these marvels in this world, itself the greatest miracle of all. Let each man, then, choose which he will, whether he thinks that the worm is real and pertains to the body, or that spiritual things are meant by bodily representations, and that it belongs to the soul. But which of these is true will be more readily discovered by the facts themselves, when there shall be in the saints such knowledge as shall not require that their own experience teach them the nature of these punishments, but as shall, by its own fullness and perfection, suffice to instruct them in this matter. For “now we know in part, until that which is

perfect is come;" only, this we believe about those future bodies, that they shall be such as shall certainly be pained by the fire.

Chapter 10.—Whether the Fire of Hell, If It Be Material Fire, Can Burn the Wicked Spirits, that is to Say, Devils, Who are Immaterial.

Here arises the question: If the fire is not to be immaterial, analogous to the pain of the soul, but material, burning by contact, so that bodies may be tormented in it, how can evil spirits be punished in it? For it is undoubtedly the same fire which is to serve for the punishment of men and of devils, according to the words of Christ: "Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels;" unless, perhaps, as learned men have thought, the devils have a kind of body made of that dense and humid air which we feel strikes us when the wind is blowing. And if this kind of substance could not be affected by fire, it could not burn when heated in the baths. For in order to burn, it is first burned, and affects other things as itself is affected. But if any one maintains that the devils have no bodies, this is not a matter either to be laboriously investigated, or to be debated with keenness. For why may we not assert that even immaterial spirits may, in some extraordinary way, yet really be pained by the punishment of material fire, if the spirits of men, which also are certainly immaterial, are both now contained in material members of the body, and in the world to come shall be indissolubly united to their own bodies? Therefore, though the devils have no bodies, yet their spirits, that is, the devils themselves, shall be brought into thorough contact with the material fires, to be tormented by them; not that the fires themselves with which they are brought into contact shall be animated by their connection with these spirits, and become animals composed of body and spirit, but, as I said, this junction will be effected in a wonderful and ineffable way, so that they shall receive pain from the fires, but give no life to them. And, in truth, this other mode of union, by which bodies and spirits are bound together and become animals, is thoroughly marvelous, and beyond the comprehension of man, though this it is which is man.

I would indeed say that these spirits will burn without any body of their own, as that rich man was burning in hell when he exclaimed, "I am tormented in this flame," were I not aware that it is aptly said in reply, that that flame was of the same nature as the eyes he raised and fixed on Lazarus, as the tongue on which he entreated that a little cooling water might be dropped, or as the finger of Lazarus, with which he asked that this might be done,—all of which took place where souls exist without bodies. Thus, therefore, both that flame in which he burned and that drop he begged were immaterial, and resembled the visions of sleepers or persons in an ecstasy, to whom immaterial objects appear in a bodily form. For the man himself who is in such a state, though it be in spirit only, not in body, yet sees himself so like to his own body that he cannot discern any difference whatever. But that hell, which also is called a lake of fire and brimstone, will be material fire, and will torment the bodies of the damned, whether men or devils,—the solid bodies of the one, aerial bodies of the others; or if only men have bodies as well as souls, yet the evil spirits, though without bodies, shall be so connected with the bodily fires as to receive pain without imparting life. One fire certainly shall be the lot of both, for thus the truth has declared.

Chapter 11.—Whether It is Just that the Punishments of Sins Last Longer Than the Sins Themselves Lasted.

Some, however, of those against whom we are defending the city of God, think it unjust that any man be doomed to an eternal punishment for sins which, no matter how great they were, were perpetrated in a brief space of time; as if any law ever regulated the duration of the punishment by the duration of the offence punished! Cicero tells us that the laws recognize eight kinds of penalty,—damages, imprisonment, scourging, reparation, disgrace, exile, death, slavery. Is there any one of these which may be compressed into a brevity proportioned to the rapid commission of the offence, so that no longer time may be spent in its punishment than in its perpetration, unless, perhaps, reparation? For this requires that the offender suffer what he did, as that clause of the law says, "Eye for eye, tooth for tooth." For certainly it is possible for an offender to lose his eye by the severity of legal retaliation in as brief a time as he deprived another of his eye by the cruelty of his own lawlessness. But if scourging be a reasonable penalty for

kissing another man's wife, is not the fault of an instant visited with long hours of atonement, and the momentary delight punished with lasting pain? What shall we say of imprisonment? Must the criminal be confined only for so long a time as he spent on the offence for which he is committed? or is not a penalty of many years' confinement imposed on the slave who has provoked his master with a word, or has struck him a blow that is quickly over? And as to damages, disgrace, exile, slavery, which are commonly inflicted so as to admit of no relaxation or pardon, do not these resemble eternal punishments in so far as this short life allows a resemblance? For they are not eternal only because the life in which they are endured is not eternal; and yet the crimes which are punished with these most protracted sufferings are perpetrated in a very brief space of time. Nor is there anyone who would suppose that the pains of punishment should occupy as short a time as the offense; or that murder, adultery, sacrilege, or any other crime, should be measured, not by the enormity of the injury or wickedness, but by the length of time spent in its perpetration. Then as to the award of death for any great crime, do the laws reckon the punishment to consist in the brief moment in which death is inflicted, or in this, that the offender is eternally banished from the society of the living? And just as the punishment of the first death cuts men off from this present mortal city, so does the punishment of the second death cut men off from that future immortal city. For as the laws of this present city do not provide for the executed criminal's return to it, so neither is he who is condemned to the second death recalled again to life everlasting. But if temporal sin is visited with eternal punishment, how, then, they say, is that true which your Christ says, "With the same measure that ye mete withal it shall be measured to you again?" and they do not observe that "the same measure" refers, not to an equal space of time, but to the retribution of evil or, in other words, to the law by which he who has done evil suffers evil. Besides, these words could be appropriately understood as referring to the matter of which our Lord was speaking when He used them, viz., judgments and condemnation. Thus, if he who unjustly judges and condemns is himself justly judged and condemned, he receives "with the same measure" though not the same thing as he gave. For judgment he gave, and judgment he receives, though the judgment he gave was unjust, the judgment he receives just.

Chapter 12.—Of the Greatness of the First Transgression, on Account of Which Eternal Punishment is Due to All Who are Not Within the Pale of the Savior's Grace.

But eternal punishment seems hard and unjust to human perceptions, because in the weakness of our mortal condition there is wanting that highest and purest wisdom by which it can be perceived how great a wickedness was committed in that first transgression. The more enjoyment man found in God, the greater was his wickedness in abandoning Him; and he who destroyed in himself a good which might have been eternal, became worthy of eternal evil. Hence the whole mass of the human race is condemned; for he who at first gave entrance to sin has been punished with all his posterity who were in him as in a root, so that no one is exempt from this just and due punishment, unless delivered by mercy and undeserved grace; and the human race is so apportioned that in some is displayed the efficacy of merciful grace, in the rest the efficacy of just retribution. For both could not be displayed in all; for if all had remained under the punishment of just condemnation, there would have been seen in no one the mercy of redeeming grace. And, on the other hand, if all had been transferred from darkness to light, the severity of retribution would have been manifested in none. But many more are left under punishment than are delivered from it, in order that it may thus be shown what was due to all. And had it been inflicted on all, no one could justly have found fault with the justice of Him who taketh vengeance; whereas, in the deliverance of so many from that just award, there is cause to render the most cordial thanks to the gratuitous bounty of Him who delivers.

Chapter 13.—Against the Opinion of Those Who Think that the Punishments of the Wicked After Death are Purgatorial.

The Platonists, indeed, while they maintain that no sins are unpunished, suppose that all punishment is administered for remedial purposes, be it inflicted by human or divine law, in this life or after death; for a man may be scathless here, or, though punished, may yet not amend. Hence that passage of Virgil, where, when he had said of our earthly

bodies and mortal members, that our souls derive— “Hence wild desires and groveling fears, And human laughter, human tears; Immured in dungeon-seeming night, They look abroad, yet see no light,” goes on to say: “Nay, when at last the life has fled, And left the body cold and dead, Ee’n then there passes not away The painful heritage of clay; Full many a long-contracted stain Perforce must linger deep in grain. So penal sufferings they endure For ancient crime, to make them pure; Some hang aloft in open view, For winds to pierce them through and through, While others purge their guilt deep-dyed In burning fire or whelming tide.”

They who are of this opinion would have all punishments after death to be purgatorial; and as the elements of air, fire, and water are superior to earth, one or other of these may be the instrument of expiating and purging away the stain contracted by the contagion of earth. So Virgil hints at the air in the words, “Some hang aloft for winds to pierce,” at the water in “whelming tide;” and at fire in the expression “in burning fire.” For our part, we recognize that even in this life some punishments are purgatorial,—not, indeed, to those whose life is none the better, but rather the worse for them, but to those who are constrained by them to amend their life. All other punishments, whether temporal or eternal, inflicted as they are on every one by divine providence, are sent either on account of past sins, or of sins presently allowed in the life, or to exercise and reveal a man’s graces. They may be inflicted by the instrumentality of bad men and angels as well as of the good. For even if anyone suffers some hurt through another’s wickedness or mistake, the man indeed sins whose ignorance or injustice does the harm; but God, who by His just though hidden judgment permits it to be done, sins not. But temporary punishments are suffered by some in this life only, by others after death, by others both now and then; but all of them before that last and strictest judgment. But of those who suffer temporary punishments after death, all are not doomed to those everlasting pains which are to follow that judgment; for to some, as we have already said, what is not remitted in this world is remitted in the next, that is, they are not punished with the eternal punishment of the world to come.

Chapter 14.—Of the Temporary Punishments of This Life to Which the Human Condition is Subject.

Quite exceptional are those who are not punished in this life, but only afterwards. Yet that there have been some who have reached the decrepitude of age without experiencing even the slightest sickness, and who have had uninterrupted enjoyment of life, I know both from report and from my own observation. However, the very life we mortals lead is itself all punishment, for it is all temptation, as the Scriptures declare, where it is written, “Is not the life of man upon earth a temptation?” For ignorance is itself no slight punishment, or want of culture, which it is with justice thought so necessary to escape, that boys are compelled, under pain of severe punishment, to learn trades or letters; and the learning to which they are driven by punishment is itself so much of a punishment to them, that they sometimes prefer the pain that drives them to the pain to which they are driven by it. And who would not shrink from the alternative, and elect to die, if it were proposed to him either to suffer death or to be again an infant? Our infancy, indeed, introducing us to this life not with laughter but with tears, seems unconsciously to predict the ills we are to encounter. Zoroaster alone is said to have laughed when he was born, and that unnatural omen portended no good to him. For he is said to have been the inventor of magical arts, though indeed they were unable to secure to him even the poor felicity of this present life against the assaults of his enemies. For, himself king of the Bactrians, he was conquered by Ninus king of the Assyrians. In short, the words of Scripture, “An heavy yoke is upon the sons of Adam, from the day that they go out of their mother’s womb till the day that they return to the mother of all things,”—these words so infallibly find fulfillment, that even the little ones, who by the layer of regeneration have been freed from the bond of original sin in which alone they were held, yet suffer many ills, and in some instances are even exposed to the assaults of evil spirits. But let us not for a moment suppose that this suffering is prejudicial to their future happiness, even though it has so increased as to sever soul from body, and to terminate their life in that early age.

Chapter 17.—Of Those Who Fancy that No Men Shall Be Punished Eternally.

I must now, I see, enter the lists of amicable controversy with those tender-hearted Christians who decline to believe that any, or that all of those whom the infallibly just Judge may pronounce worthy of the punishment of hell, shall suffer eternally, and who suppose that they shall be delivered after a fixed term of punishment, longer or shorter according to the amount of each man's sin. In respect of this matter, Origen was even more indulgent; for he believed that even the devil himself and his angels, after suffering those more severe and prolonged pains which their sins deserved, should be delivered from their torments, and associated with the holy angels. But the Church, not without reason, condemned him for this and other errors, especially for his theory of the ceaseless alternation of happiness and misery, and the interminable transitions from the one state to the other at fixed periods of ages; for in this theory he lost even the credit of being merciful, by allotting to the saints real miseries for the expiation of their sins, and false happiness, which brought them no true and secure joy, that is, no fearless assurance of eternal blessedness. Very different, however, is the error we speak of, which is dictated by the tenderness of these Christians who suppose that the sufferings of those who are condemned in the judgment will be temporary, while the blessedness of all who are sooner or later set free will be eternal. Which opinion, if it is good and true because it is merciful, will be so much the better and truer in proportion as it becomes more merciful. Let, then, this fountain of mercy be extended, and flow forth even to the lost angels, and let them also be set free, at least after as many and long ages as seem fit! Why does this stream of mercy flow to all the human race, and dry up as soon as it reaches the angelic? And yet they dare not extend their pity further, and propose the deliverance of the devil himself. Or if anyone is bold enough to do so, he does indeed put to shame their charity, but is himself convicted of error that is more unsightly, and a wresting of God's truth that is more perverse, in proportion as his clemency of sentiment seems to be greater.

Chapter 23.—Against Those Who are of Opinion that the Punishment Neither of the Devil Nor of Wicked Men Shall Be Eternal.

First of all, it behoves us to inquire and to recognize why the Church has not been able to tolerate the idea that promises cleansing or indulgence to the devil even after the most severe and protracted punishment. For so many holy men, imbued with the spirit of the Old and New Testament, did not grudge to angels of any rank or character that they should enjoy the blessedness of the heavenly kingdom after being cleansed by suffering, but rather they perceived that they could not invalidate nor evacuate the divine sentence which the Lord predicted that He would pronounce in the judgment, saying, "Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels." For here it is evident that the devil and his angels shall burn in everlasting fire. And there is also that declaration in the Apocalypse, "The devil their deceiver was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where also are the beast and the false prophet. And they shall be tormented day and night forever." In the former passage "everlasting" is used, in the latter "forever," and by these words Scripture is wont to mean nothing else than endless duration. And therefore no other reason, no reason more obvious and just, can be found for holding it as the fixed and immovable belief of the truest piety, that the devil and his angels shall never return to the justice and life of the saints, than that Scripture, which deceives no man, says that God spared them not, and that they were condemned beforehand by Him, and cast into prisons of darkness in hell, being reserved to the judgment of the last day, when eternal fire shall receive them, in which they shall be tormented world without end. And if this be so, how can it be believed that all men, or even some, shall be withdrawn from the endurance of punishment after some time has been spent in it? how can this be believed without enervating our faith in the eternal punishment of the devils? For if all or some of those to whom it shall be said, "Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels," are not to be always in that fire, then what reason is there for believing that the devil and his angels shall always be there? Or is perhaps the sentence of God, which is to be pronounced on wicked men and angels alike, to be true in the case of the angels, false in that of men? Plainly it will be so if the conjectures of men are to weigh more than the word of God. But because this is absurd, they who desire to be rid of eternal punishment ought to abstain from arguing against God, and rather, while yet there is opportunity, obey the divine commands. Then what a fond fancy is it to suppose that eternal punishment means long continued punishment, while eternal life means life without end, since Christ in the very same passage spoke of both in similar terms in one and the same sentence, These shall

go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into life eternal! Matthew 25:46 If both destinies are eternal, then we must either understand both as long-continued but at last terminating, or both as endless. For they are correlative — on the one hand, punishment eternal, on the other hand, life eternal. And to say in one and the same sense, life eternal shall be endless, punishment eternal shall come to an end, is the height of absurdity. Wherefore, as the eternal life of the saints shall be endless, so too the eternal punishment of those who are doomed to it shall have no end.

Chapter 26.—What It is to Have Christ for a Foundation, and Who They are to Whom Salvation as by Fire is Promised.

But, say they, the catholic Christians have Christ for a foundation, and they have not fallen away from union with Him, no matter how depraved a life they have built on this foundation, as wood, hay, stubble; and accordingly the well-directed faith by which Christ is their foundation will suffice to deliver them some time from the continuance of that fire, though it be with loss, since those things they have built on it shall be burned. Let the Apostle James summarily reply to them: “If any man say he has faith, and have not works, can faith save him?” And who then is it, they ask, of whom the Apostle Paul says, “But he himself shall be saved, yet so as by fire?” Let us join them in their inquiry; and one thing is very certain, that it is not he of whom James speaks, else we should make the two apostles contradict one another, if the one says, “Though a man’s works be evil, his faith will save him as by fire,” while the other says, “If he have not good works, can his faith save him?”

We shall then ascertain who it is who can be saved by fire, if we first discover what it is to have Christ for a foundation. And this we may very readily learn from the image itself. In a building the foundation is first. Whoever, then, has Christ in his heart, so that no earthly or temporal things—not even those that are legitimate and allowed—are preferred to Him, has Christ as a foundation. But if these things be preferred, then even though a man seem to have faith in Christ, yet Christ is not the foundation to that man; and much more if he, in contempt of wholesome precepts, seek forbidden gratifications, is he clearly convicted of putting Christ not first but last, since he has despised Him as his ruler, and has preferred to fulfill his own wicked lusts, in contempt of Christ’s commands and allowances. Accordingly, if any Christian man loves a harlot, and, attaching himself to her, becomes one body, he has not now Christ for a foundation. But if any one loves his own wife, and loves her as Christ would have him love her, who can doubt that he has Christ for a foundation? But if he loves her in the world’s fashion, carnally, as the disease of lust prompts him, and as the Gentiles love who know not God, even this the apostle, or rather Christ by the apostle, allows as a venial fault. And therefore even *such a man may have Christ for a foundation. For so long as he does not prefer such an affection or pleasure to Christ, Christ is his foundation*, though on it he builds wood, hay, stubble; and therefore he shall be saved as by fire. For the fire of affliction shall burn such luxurious pleasures and earthly loves, though they be not damnable, because enjoyed in lawful wedlock. And of this fire the fuel is bereavement, and all those calamities which consume these joys. Consequently the superstructure will be loss to him who has built it, for he shall not retain it, but shall be agonized by the loss of those things in the enjoyment of which he found pleasure. But by this fire he shall be saved through virtue of the foundation, because even if a persecutor demanded whether he would retain Christ or these things, he would prefer Christ. Would you hear, in the apostle’s own words, who he is who builds on the foundation gold, silver, precious stones? “He that is unmarried,” he says, “careth for the things that belong to the Lord, how he may please the Lord.” Would you hear who he is that buildeth wood, hay, stubble? “But he that is married careth for the things that are of the world, how he may please his wife. “Every man’s work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it,”—the day, no doubt, of tribulation—“because,” says he, “it shall be revealed by fire.” He calls tribulation fire, just as it is elsewhere said, “The furnace proves the vessels of the potter, and the trial of affliction righteous men.” And “The fire shall try every man’s work of what sort it is. If any man’s work abide”—for a man’s care for the things of the Lord, how he may please the Lord, abides—“which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward,”—that is, he shall reap the fruit of his care. “But if any man’s work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss,”—for what he loved he shall not retain:—“but he himself shall be saved,”—for no tribulation shall have moved him from that stable foundation,—“yet so as by fire,” for that which he

possessed with the sweetness of love he does not lose without the sharp sting of pain. Here, then, as seems to me, we have a fire which destroys neither, but enriches the one, brings loss to the other, proves both.

But if this passage [of Corinthians] is to interpret that fire of which the Lord shall say to those on His left hand, "Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire," so that among these we are to believe there are those who build on the foundation wood, hay, stubble, and that they, through virtue of the good foundation, shall after a time be liberated from the fire that is the award of their evil deserts, what then shall we think of those on the right hand, to whom it shall be said, "Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you," unless that they are those who have built on the foundation gold, silver, precious stones? But if the fire of which our Lord speaks is the same as that of which the apostle says, "Yet so as by fire," then both—that is to say, both those on the right as well as those on the left—are to be cast into it. For that fire is to try both, since it is said, "For the day of the Lord shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is." If, therefore, the fire shall try both, in order that if any man's work abide—i.e., if the superstructure be not consumed by the fire—he may receive a reward, and that if his work is burned he may suffer loss, certainly that fire is not the eternal fire itself. For into this latter fire only those on the left hand shall be cast, and that with final and everlasting doom; but that former fire proves those on the right hand. But some of them it so proves that it does not burn and consume the structure which is found to have been built by them on Christ as the foundation; while others of them it proves in another fashion, so as to burn what they have built up, and thus cause them to suffer loss, while they themselves are saved because they have retained Christ, who was laid as their sure foundation, and have loved Him above all. But if they are saved, then certainly they shall stand at the right hand, and shall with the rest hear the sentence, "Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you;" and not at the left hand, where those shall be who shall not be saved, and shall therefore hear the doom, "Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire." For from that fire no man shall be saved, because they all shall go away into eternal punishment, where their worms shall not die, nor their fire be quenched, in which they shall be tormented day and night for ever.

But if it be said that in the interval of time between the death of this body and that last day of judgment and retribution which shall follow the resurrection, the bodies of the dead shall be exposed to a fire of such a nature that it shall not affect those who have not in this life indulged in such pleasures and pursuits as shall be consumed like wood, hay, stubble, but shall affect those others who have carried with them structures of that kind; if it be said that such worldliness, being venial, shall be consumed in the fire of tribulation either here only, or here and hereafter both, or here that it may not be hereafter,—this I do not contradict, because possibly it is true. For perhaps even the death of the body is itself a part of this tribulation, for it results from the first transgression, so that the time which follows death takes its color in each case from the nature of the man's building. The persecutions, too, which have crowned the martyrs, and which Christians of all kinds suffer, try both buildings like a fire, consuming some, along with the builders themselves, if Christ is not found in them as their foundation, while others they consume without the builders, because Christ is found in them, and they are saved, though with loss; and other buildings still they do not consume, because such materials as abide forever are found in them. In the end of the world there shall be in the time of Antichrist tribulation such as has never before been. How many edifices there shall then be, of gold or of hay, built on the best foundation, Christ Jesus, which that fire shall prove, bringing joy to some, loss to others, but without destroying either sort, because of this stable foundation! But whosoever prefers, I do not say his wife, with whom he lives for carnal pleasure, but any of those relatives who afford no delight of such a kind, and whom it is right to love,—whosoever prefers these to Christ, and loves them after a human and carnal fashion, has not Christ as a foundation, and will therefore not be saved by fire, nor indeed at all; for he shall not possibly dwell with the Savior, who says very explicitly concerning this very matter, "He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me." But he who loves his relations carnally, and yet so that he does not prefer them to Christ, but would rather want them than Christ if he were put to the proof, shall be saved by fire, because it is necessary that by the loss of these relations he suffer pain in proportion to his love. And he who loves father, mother, sons, daughters, according to Christ, so that he aids them in obtaining His kingdom and cleaving to Him, or loves them because they are members of Christ, God forbid that this love should be consumed as

wood, hay, stubble, and not rather be reckoned a structure of gold, silver, precious stones. For how can a man love those more than Christ whom he loves only for Christ's sake?

Chapter 27.—Against the Belief of Those Who Think that the Sins Which Have Been Accompanied with Almsgiving Will Do Them No Harm.

It remains to reply to those who maintain that those only shall burn in eternal fire who neglect alms-deeds proportioned to their sins, resting this opinion on the words of the Apostle James, "He shall have judgment without mercy that hath showed no mercy." Therefore, they say, he that hath showed mercy, though he has not reformed his dissolute conduct, but has lived wickedly and iniquitously even while abounding in alms, shall have a merciful judgment, so that he shall either be not condemned at all, or shall be delivered from final judgment after a time. And for the same reason they suppose that Christ will discriminate between those on the right hand and those on the left, and will send the one party into His kingdom, the other into eternal punishment, on the sole ground of their attention to or neglect of works of charity. Moreover, they endeavor to use the prayer which the Lord Himself taught as a proof and bulwark of their opinion, that daily sins which are never abandoned can be expiated through alms-deeds, no matter how offensive or of what sort they be. For, say they, as there is no day on which Christians ought not to use this prayer, so there is no sin of any kind which, though committed every day, is not remitted when we say, "Forgive us our debts," if we take care to fulfill what follows, "as we forgive our debtors." For, they go on to say, the Lord does not say, "If ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will forgive you your little daily sins," but "will forgive you your sins." Therefore, be they of any kind or magnitude whatever, be they perpetrated daily and never abandoned or subdued in this life, they can be pardoned, they presume, through alms-deeds.

But they are right to inculcate the giving of alms proportioned to past sins; for if they said that any kind of alms could obtain the divine pardon of great sins committed daily and with habitual enormity, if they said that such sins could thus be daily remitted, they would see that their doctrine was absurd and ridiculous. For they would thus be driven to acknowledge that it were possible for a very wealthy man to buy absolution from murders, adulteries, and all manner of wickedness, by paying a daily alms of ten paltry coins. And if it be most absurd and insane to make such an acknowledgment, and if we still ask what are those fitting alms of which even the forerunner of Christ said, "Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance," undoubtedly it will be found that they are not such as are done by men who undermine their life by daily enormities even to the very end. For they suppose that by giving to the poor a small fraction of the wealth they acquire by extortion and spoliation they can propitiate Christ, so that they may with impunity commit the most damnable sins, in the persuasion that they have bought from Him a license to transgress, or rather do buy a daily indulgence. And if they for one crime have distributed all their goods to Christ's needy members, that could profit them nothing unless they desisted from all similar actions, and attained charity which worketh no evil. He therefore who does alms-deeds proportioned to his sins must first begin with himself. For it is not reasonable that a man who exercises charity towards his neighbor should not do so towards himself, since he hears the Lord saying, "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself," and again, "Have compassion on thy soul, and please God." He then who has not compassion on his own soul that he may please God, how can he be said to do alms-deeds proportioned to his sins? To the same purpose is that written, "He who is bad to himself, to whom can he be good?" We ought therefore to do alms that we may be heard when we pray that our past sins may be forgiven, not that while we continue in them we may think to provide ourselves with a license for wickedness by alms-deeds.

The reason, therefore, of our predicting that He will impute to those on His right hand the alms-deeds they have done, and charge those on His left with omitting the same, is that He may thus show the efficacy of charity for the deletion of past sins, not for impunity in their perpetual commission. And such persons, indeed, as decline to abandon their evil habits of life for a better course cannot be said to do charitable deeds. For this is the purport of the saying, "Inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to me." He shows them that they do not perform charitable actions even when they think they are doing so. For if they gave bread to a hungry Christian because he is a Christian, assuredly they would not deny to themselves the bread of righteousness, that is, Christ

Himself; for God considers not the person to whom the gift is made, but the spirit in which it is made. He therefore who loves Christ in a Christian extends alms to him in the same spirit in which he draws near to Christ, not in that spirit which would abandon Christ if it could do so with impunity. For in proportion as a man loves what Christ disapproves does he himself abandon Christ. For what does it profit a man that he is baptized, if he is not justified? Did not He who said, "Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he shall not enter into the kingdom of God," say also, "Except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven?" Why do many through fear of the first saying run to baptism, while few through fear of the second seek to be justified? As therefore it is not to his brother a man says, "Thou fool," if when he says it he is indignant not at the brotherhood, but at the sin of the offender,—for otherwise he were guilty of hell fire,—so he who extends charity to a Christian does not extend it to a Christian if he does not love Christ in him. Now he does not love Christ who refuses to be justified in Him. Or, again, if a man has been guilty of this sin of calling his brother Fool, unjustly reviling him without any desire to remove his sin, his alms-deeds go a small way towards expiating this fault, unless he adds to this the remedy of reconciliation which the same passage enjoins. For it is there said, "Therefore, if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath aught against thee; leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift." Just so it is a small matter to do alms-deeds, no matter how great they be, for any sin, so long as the offender continues in the practice of sin.

Then as to the daily prayer which the Lord Himself taught, and which is therefore called the Lord's prayer, it obliterates indeed the sins of the day, when day by day we say, "Forgive us our debts," and when we not only say but act out that which follows, "as we forgive our debtors;" but we utter this petition because sins have been committed, and not that they may be. For by it our Savior designed to teach us that, however righteously we live in this life of infirmity and darkness, we still commit sins for the remission of which we ought to pray, while we must pardon those who sin against us that we ourselves also may be pardoned. The Lord then did not utter the words, "If ye forgive men their trespasses, your Father will also forgive you your trespasses," in order that we might contract from this petition such confidence as should enable us to sin securely from day to day, either putting ourselves above the fear of human laws, or craftily deceiving men concerning our conduct, but in order that we might thus learn not to suppose that we are without sins, even though we should be free from crimes; as also God admonished the priests of the old law to this same effect regarding their sacrifices, which He commanded them to offer first for their own sins, and then for the sins of the people. For even the very words of so great a Master and Lord are to be intently considered. For He does not say, If ye forgive men their sins, your Father will also forgive you your sins, no matter of what sort they be, but He says, your sins; for it was a daily prayer He was teaching, and it was certainly to disciples already justified He was speaking. What, then, does He mean by "your sins," but those sins from which not even you who are justified and sanctified can be free? While, then, those who seek occasion from this petition to indulge in habitual sin maintain that the Lord meant to include great sins, because He did not say, He will forgive you your small sins, but "your sins," we, on the other hand, taking into account the character of the persons He was addressing, cannot see our way to interpret the expression "your sins" of anything but small sins, because such persons are no longer guilty of great sins. Nevertheless not even great sins themselves—sins from which we must flee with a total reformation of life—are forgiven to those who pray, unless they observe the appended precept, "as ye also forgive your debtors." For if the very small sins which attach even to the life of the righteous be not remitted without that condition, how much further from obtaining indulgence shall those be who are involved in many great crimes, if, while they cease from perpetrating such enormities, they still inexorably refuse to remit any debt incurred to themselves, since the Lord says, "But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses?" For this is the purport of the saying of the Apostle James also, "He shall have judgment without mercy that hath showed no mercy." For we should remember that servant whose debt of ten thousand talents his lord cancelled, but afterwards ordered him to pay up, because the servant himself had no pity for his fellow-servant, who owed him an hundred pence. The words which the Apostle James subjoins, "And mercy rejoiceth against judgment," find their application among those who are the children of the promise and vessels of mercy. For even those righteous men, who have lived with such holiness that they receive into the eternal habitations others also who have won their friendship with the mammon of unrighteousness, became such only through the merciful deliverance of Him who

justifies the ungodly, imputing to him a reward according to grace, not according to debt. For among this number is the apostle, who says, "I obtained mercy to be faithful."

But it must be admitted, that those who are thus received into the eternal habitations are not of such a character that their own life would suffice to rescue them without the aid of the saints, and consequently in their case especially does mercy rejoice against judgment. And yet we are not on this account to suppose that every abandoned profligate, who has made no amendment of his life, is to be received into the eternal habitations if only he has assisted the saints with the mammon of unrighteousness,—that is to say, with money or wealth which has been unjustly acquired, or, if rightfully acquired, is yet not the true riches, but only what iniquity counts riches, because it knows not the true riches in which those persons abound, who even receive others also into eternal habitations. There is then a certain kind of life, which is neither, on the one hand, so bad that those who adopt it are not helped towards the kingdom of heaven by any bountiful alms-giving by which they may relieve the wants of the saints, and make friends who could receive them into eternal habitations, nor, on the other hand, so good that it of itself suffices to win for them that great blessedness, if they do not obtain mercy through the merits of those whom they have made their friends. And I frequently wonder that even Virgil should give expression to this sentence of the Lord, in which He says, "Make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness, that they may receive you into everlasting habitations;" and this very similar saying, "He that receiveth a prophet, in the name of a prophet, shall receive a prophet's reward; and he that receiveth a righteous man, in the name of a righteous man, shall receive a righteous man's reward." For when that poet described the Elysian fields, in which they suppose that the souls of the blessed dwell, he placed there not only those who had been able by their own merit to reach that abode, but added,— "And they who grateful memory won By services to others done;" that is, they who had served others, and thereby merited to be remembered by them. Just as if they used the expression so common in Christian lips, where some humble person commends himself to one of the saints, and says, Remember me, and secures that he do so by deserving well at his hand. But what that kind of life we have been speaking of is, and what those sins are which prevent a man from winning the kingdom of God by himself, but yet permit him to avail himself of the merits of the saints, it is very difficult to ascertain, very perilous to define. For my own part, in spite of all investigation, I have been up to the present hour unable to discover this. And possibly it is hidden from us, lest we should become careless in avoiding such sins, and so cease to make progress. For if it were known what these sins are which, though they continue, and be not abandoned for a higher life, do yet not prevent us from seeking and hoping for the intercession of the saints, human sloth would presumptuously wrap itself in these sins, and would take no steps to be disentangled from such wrappings by the deft energy of any virtue, but would only desire to be rescued by the merits of other people, whose friendship had been won by a bountiful use of the mammon of unrighteousness. But now that we are left in ignorance of the precise nature of that iniquity which is venial, even though it be persevered in, certainly we are both more vigilant in our prayers and efforts for progress, and more careful to secure with the mammon of unrighteousness friends for ourselves among the saints. But this deliverance, which is effected by one's own prayers, or the intercession of holy men, secures that a man be not cast into eternal fire, but not that, when once he has been cast into it, he should after a time be rescued from it. For even those who fancy that what is said of the good ground bringing forth abundant fruit, some thirty, some sixty, some an hundred fold, is to be referred to the saints, so that in proportion to their merits some of them shall deliver thirty men, some sixty, some an hundred,— even those who maintain this are yet commonly inclined to suppose that this deliverance will take place at, and not after the day of judgment. Under this impression, someone who observed the unseemly folly with which men promise themselves impunity on the ground that all will be included in this method of deliverance, is reported to have very happily remarked, that we should rather endeavor to live so well that we shall be all found among the number of those who are to intercede for the liberation of others, lest these should be so few in number, that, after they have delivered one thirty, another sixty, another a hundred, there should still remain many who could not be delivered from punishment by their intercessions, and among them every one who has vainly and rashly promised himself the fruit of another's labor. But enough has been said in reply to those who acknowledge the authority of the same sacred Scriptures as ourselves, but who, by a mistaken interpretation of them, conceive of the future rather as they themselves wish, than as the Scriptures teach. And having given this reply, I now, according to promise, close this book.

The Creeds of the Christian Church

(Demonstrating that “Eternal Punishment” was not an officially held belief until 500 AD)

Looking carefully at the early creeds of the Christian church, it is clear that *eternal punishment* was never officially held by the church before 500 AD, nor was the *restoration of all humanity* ever declared to be heresy or false teaching.

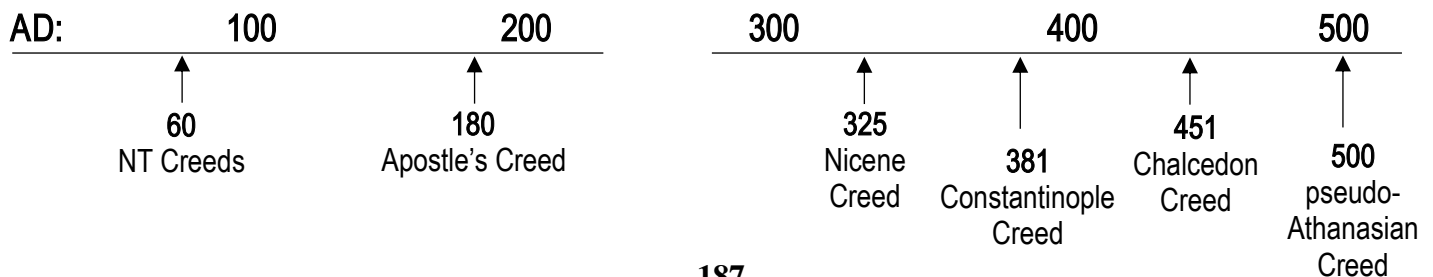
Creeds are statements of faith describing what is officially held by a religion. Christianity has always had creeds in some form since its beginning in the New Testament (the writings by the followers of Jesus after his death and resurrection). The earliest and simplest NT creeds are found in the writings of the apostle Paul.

The early church that emerged after the era of the apostles of Jesus also had creeds. The now famous *Apostle's Creed* (The Old Roman Creed) is the earliest and best known. But it was not until after the *Edict of Milan* by Constantine (declaring Christianity to no longer be illegal) that the Christian Church (the Eastern and Western expressions, together) began to hold official Councils. In these councils, official creeds for the whole church were developed. There were seven great Councils held during the first millennium, but only the first four are presented here for the purpose of establishing at what point *Eternal Punishment*, was included in a creed.



The first four councils produced 3 creeds: Nicene, Constantinople, and Chalcedon (the Council at Ephesus did not produce a creed). None of these creeds included eternal punishment as a belief. It was not until 500 AD, in the pseudo-Athanasian Creed that *Eternal Punishment* was introduced. This creed, however, was not a result of any of the seven great Councils, it was written some 100 years after Athanasius, and therefore not authored by him. It is often referred to as the “pseudo-Athanasian Creed.” So, to what degree it was considered “official” by the church is in question. However, it has been adopted by many Christian organizations throughout church history.

The time chart below shows the creeds from these four earliest Councils, plus the pseudo-Athanasian Creed, and the dates they were produced.



All of these Christian Church creeds are provided below in their fullness. In order to make it easy to confirm the introduction of eternal punishment into the creeds, all items dealing with salvation or eschatology (beliefs about the eternal state) are displayed in underlining below.

New Testament Creeds (55 AD)

1 Cor. 8:6: For us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist.

1 Cor. 15:3-7: I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. Then he appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles.

1 Tim. 3:16: Great indeed, we confess, is the mystery of our religion: He was manifested in the flesh, vindicated in the Spirit, seen by angels, preached among the nations, believed on in the world, taken up in glory.

Apostle's Creed (180 AD)

I believe in God the Father who is almighty, Maker of heaven and earth. I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only begotten Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, and suffered under Pontius Pilate. He was crucified, dead and buried, descended into hell and on the third day he rose again from the dead. He ascended into heaven, and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty. From there he will come to judge the living and the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy universal church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and in life everlasting.

Nicene Creed (325 AD)

We believe in one God, the Father Almighty, the maker of heaven and earth, of things visible and invisible. And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the begotten of God the Father, the only begotten, that is of the essence of the Father. God of God, Light of Light, true God of true God, begotten and not made; of the very same nature of the Father, by Whom all things came into being, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible. Who for us humanity and for our salvation came down from heaven, was incarnate, was made human, was born perfectly of the holy virgin Mary by the Holy Spirit. By whom He took body, soul, and mind, and everything that is in man, truly and not in semblance. He suffered, was crucified, was buried, rose again on the third day, ascended into heaven with the same body, [and] sat at the right hand of the Father. He is to come with the same body and with the glory of the

Father, to judge the living and the dead; of His kingdom there is no end. We believe in the Holy Spirit, in the uncreated and the perfect; Who spoke through the Law, prophets, and Gospels; Who came down upon the Jordan, preached through the apostles, and lived in the saints. We believe also in only one, universal, apostolic, and holy church; in one baptism in repentance, for the remission and forgiveness of sins; and in the resurrection of the dead, in the everlasting* judgement of souls and bodies, and the Kingdom of Heaven and in the everlasting* life.

*The Greek word translated as “everlasting” is the word AIONIOS, which was also commonly used in the New Testament and means “age-long” or “indefinite time period”, and most likely “judgement in the age to come” was the intended meaning.

Constantinople Creed (381 AD)

We believe in one God, the Father, the Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all that is, seen and unseen. And in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, of one being with the Father. Through him all things were made. For us, humans, and for our salvation, he came down from heaven, was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the virgin Mary, and became fully human. For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate. He suffered death and was buried. He rose again on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures. He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and his kingdom will have no end. And in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father, who in unity with the Father and the Son is worshiped and glorified, who has spoken through the prophets. And in one holy universal and apostolic Church. We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins. We look for the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come. Amen.

Chalcedon Creed (451 AD)

We, then, following the holy Fathers, all with one consent, teach men to confess one and the same Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, the same perfect in Godhead and also perfect in manhood; truly God and truly man, of a reasonable [rational] soul and body; consubstantial [co-essential] with the Father according to the Godhead, and consubstantial with us according to the Manhood; in all things like unto us, without sin; begotten before all ages of the Father according to the Godhead, and in these latter days, for us and for our salvation, born of the Virgin Mary, the Mother of God, according to the Manhood; one and the same Christ, Son, Lord, only begotten, to be acknowledged in two natures, inconfusedly, unchangeably, indivisibly, inseparably; the distinction of natures being by no means taken away by the union, but rather the property of each nature being preserved, and concurring in one Person and one Subsistence, not parted or divided into two persons, but one and the same Son, and only begotten, God the Word, the Lord Jesus Christ; as the prophets from the beginning [have declared] concerning Him, and the Lord Jesus Christ Himself has taught us, and the Creed of the holy Fathers has handed down to us.

pseudo-Athanasian Creed (AD 500)

Whosoever will be saved, before all things it is necessary that he hold the catholic faith. Which faith except every one do keep whole and undefiled; without doubt he shall perish everlastingly. And the catholic faith is this: That we worship one God in Trinity, and Trinity in Unity; Neither confounding the Persons; nor dividing the Essence. For there is one Person of the Father; another of the Son; and another of the Holy Ghost. But the Godhead of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, is all one; the Glory equal, the Majesty coeternal. Such as the Father is; such is the Son; and such is the Holy Ghost. The Father uncreated; the Son uncreated; and the Holy Ghost uncreated. The Father unlimited; the Son unlimited; and the Holy Ghost unlimited. The Father eternal; the Son eternal; and the Holy Ghost eternal. And yet they are not three eternals; but one eternal. As also there are not three uncreated; nor three infinities, but one uncreated; and one infinite. So likewise the Father is Almighty; the Son Almighty; and the Holy Ghost Almighty. And yet they are not three Almighties; but one Almighty. So the Father is God; the Son is God; and the Holy Ghost is God. And yet they are not three Gods; but one God. So likewise the Father is Lord; the Son Lord; and the Holy Ghost Lord. And yet not three Lords; but one Lord. For like as we are compelled by the Christian verity; to acknowledge every Person by himself to be God and Lord; So are we forbidden by the catholic religion; to say, There are three Gods, or three Lords. The Father is made of none; neither created, nor begotten. The Son is of the Father alone; not made, nor created; but begotten. The Holy Ghost is of the Father and of the Son; neither made, nor created, nor begotten; but proceeding. So there is one Father, not three Fathers; one Son, not three Sons; one Holy Ghost, not three Holy Ghosts. And in this Trinity none is before, or after another; none is greater, or less than another. But the whole three Persons are coeternal, and coequal. So that in all things, as aforesaid; the Unity in Trinity, and the Trinity in Unity, is to be worshipped. He therefore that will be saved, let him thus think of the Trinity. Furthermore, it is necessary to everlasting salvation; that he also believe faithfully the Incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ. For the right Faith is, that we believe and confess; that our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is God and Man; God, of the Substance [Essence] of the Father; begotten before the worlds; and Man, of the Substance [Essence] of his Mother, born in the world. Perfect God; and perfect Man, of a reasonable soul and human flesh subsisting. Equal to the Father, as touching his Godhead; and inferior to the Father as touching his Manhood. Who although he is God and Man; yet he is not two, but one Christ. One; not by conversion of the Godhead into flesh; but by assumption of the Manhood into God. One altogether; not by confusion of Substance [Essence]; but by unity of Person. For as the reasonable soul and flesh is one man; so God and Man is one Christ; Who suffered for our salvation; descended into hell; rose again the third day from the dead. He ascended into heaven, he sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty, from whence he will come to judge the living and the dead. At whose coming all men will rise again with their bodies; And shall give account for their own works. And they that have done good shall go into life everlasting; and they that have done evil, into everlasting fire. This is the catholic faith; which except a man believe truly and firmly, he cannot be saved.

Several observations are in order. First, the creeds of the Christian church became larger and more speculative in nature over the course of time in church history. The Apostle's Creed seems to be taken from creed-like statements in the New Testament writings of the Apostles of Jesus. The Nicene Creed is an expansion of the Apostle's Creed, with new items of belief and more detailed explanations (speculations) of existing beliefs. The Athanasian Creed was a much greater expansion with new speculations added, including eternal punishment. This was over 400 years after time of Jesus and his Apostles, and was a time in which the Roman Catholic (Western) Church was emerging into its period of monstrous brutality over people under Papal Authority. During these middle ages, eternal punishment was used as a weapon to control people through fear. Eternal Punishment is never found in the Old Testament, New Testament, or in the Early Christian Church which predominately believed God would eventually reconcile all things in heaven and earth to himself, in a re-creation whereby he "fills all in all" (completely fills all beings) and "brings everything in subjection to himself."

Early Church Writers on *Restoration*

The early Christians predominately believed that God would eventually restore all people and things, and therefore all humanity would be saved. 150 quotes by 17 early Christians are presented as evidence of this.

Introduction

In order to demonstrate the overwhelming evidence that the Early Church Writers held predominately (though not exclusively) to the full and final restoration of all things by God, I have provided some excerpts from a booklet I put together that presents some 150 quotes from 17 Early Church Writers. Shown to the right is the cover of this booklet. You can download a copy without cost at: <http://godislovefellowship.com/resources.html>.

Here is what I wrote inside the cover to explain the front cover:

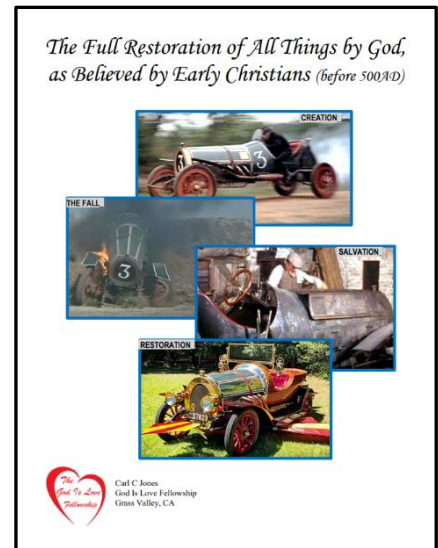
When searching for a front cover for this booklet, I looked for images that reflected “restoration.” I came across houses, furniture, boats and airplanes. Then I saw old cars ... which got me thinking. The most dramatic restoration of a car that I could think of came out of the movie Chitty-Chitty-Bang-Bang.

So I grabbed an image of the beautiful, shiny car from the movie – a car that could also fly and float! I realized that this “restoration” was even greater than the car’s original condition as a race car. But then I realized that the car itself told a greater story than even the plot of the movie.

It is the story of God’s redemption of the human race! The car was created as a fine race car (Creation), crashed and burned (The Fall of Humanity), was bought and hauled to a shop (Salvation), and then fashioned into something beyond its original condition (Restoration).

And this is the message and story of the early Christian writers who clearly and consistently communicated their conviction that the God of the universe, the God of love, mercy, and redemption would (and in fact *must*) eventually restore all things that he originally created, losing nothing as a result.

After doing my own research for about a year and looking up many quotes in the original writings of Early Christians, I came across a very complete and scholarly work on this same subject by Dr. Ilarya Ramelli. Dr. Ramelli teaches at Catholic University and is a true scholar. (Over my forty years of study, I have learned the very important difference



between “pop Christian writers” and true scholars. They both have their place, but it is the *scholar* who does the hard and long work of research that provides what is most useful in any serious study.) Dr. Ramelli spent fifteen years researching Early Church Writers and what they believed about *restoration*. They called this restoration “apokatastasis”, which is a Greek word they got from Acts 3:21, and it means: “The restoration of all things.” Her book is 900 pages, contains some 2000 footnotes, and quotes 150 ancient writers and about 1200 modern authors. Needless to say ... she has “done her homework.” I cannot express my gratitude for the long, tedious and difficult work she has done. I know of no other book like it in quality and quantity on this important subject. I have gained a great deal of encouragement in my faith by reading so many wonderful quotes from these Early Christians who were so much closer in time, culture and language to Jesus and his Apostles than we will ever be! Because of this, I trust what they wrote (all of these amazing quotes) more than any other group of believers in the history of the church.

And so, my booklet is a collection of about 150 quotes taken from Dr. Ramelli’s book, from 17 (of about 60) early Christian writers that she quotes on the subject of eventual restoration by God of all things. And the quotes in my booklet are only a limited sampling of all the quotes she includes. But what is both important and striking about these quotes is that they are from the greatest and most highly respected writers and teachers in the church from this time period. All of my quotes are prior to 500 AD. Such early church giants as Clement of Alexandria and Origen (both founders of the great school of Alexandria are included. Also included is Athanasius (the greatest voice at the Council of Nicaea), Eusebius (perhaps the early church’s best historian), along with Basil and both Gregorys (of Nyssa and of Nazianzus). Other church “greats” are also included.

The purpose of my collection of quotes was not to prove that Restoration was the only view taught and held by early Christians, because there were some who held other views (namely, eternal punishment and annihilation). Tertullian, Justin Martyr, and Augustine (in his later life) are the main proponents of these views. But such an impressive collection of quotes *does* demonstrate (as does Ramelli’s book in greater number) that the majority of early Christian teachers and writers clearly and consistently believed that God would eventually restore all things, and that any punishment by God in the age to come has a *corrective purpose*, in line with God’s ultimate goal of restoration.

It is my sincere hope that you will discover this great truth about how passionately these Early Christians believed in God’s goodness, His unrelenting love for all humanity, mercy, grace, and redemptive success. For me it drove my faith in God through the roof, increased my love for all people, and changed my daily living into a hope that knows no limit or failure.

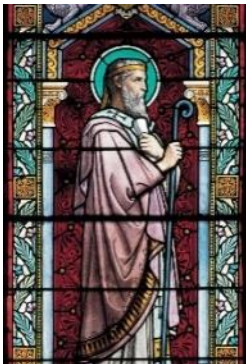
Paraphrases of Quotes

In my booklet of quotes, I also *paraphrased* all of them in an attempt to make them easier to understand. Translations of ancient writings are sometimes hard to understand, so my paraphrasing is an honest attempt to say what each ancient Christian Writer would say today in modern English to convey his/her thoughts. But paraphrasing is very subjective, and although I have tried to be as accurate and faithful to the original text as I can be, I am sure I have failed to some degree nonetheless. I will let you be the judge.

All of the *paraphrases* for each writer have been collected and put into easy-to-read, paragraph format, and presented below. However, some of the ideas in each paragraph may be somewhat disconnected since these paragraphs have been artificially created. So please allow some tolerance and flexibility when reading them. So, it is strongly recommended that you go back and read the original quotes and form your own opinion about each writer based on their actual writings in full context. You can download this booklet at: <http://godislovefellowship.com/resources.html>.

Irenaeus of Lyons (130-202)

From the beginning God did not permit humanity to be engulfed by sin, but instead had a plan to save them. Humanity receives incorruptibility from God in order to love Him even more. Suffering and burning by fire happens for the sake of humanity which is saved!



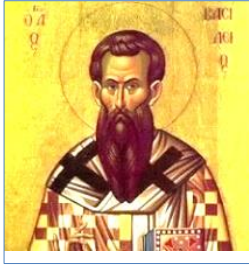
Those who are lost are no different from those who are found because the Lord seeks every lost sheep. God summed up and concluded in Himself all of humanity in order to do away with sin and give life to everyone. Jesus summed up in himself all human nature and provided a new creation through his death that freed humanity from death.

Through the resurrection of Jesus, death will be chased away and humanity will be restored. God never uses violence to accomplish his purpose. God became human in Jesus in order to join humanity to God. God saves all human beings through his wisdom. Jesus accomplished salvation for all humanity.

Clement of Alexandria (150-215)

Everything is ordered by the Lord of the universe for the purpose of universal salvation, leading everyone to something better. God, acts in goodness to compel those who are hardened to repent. Someday, in life after death, sinners will be purified.

Jesus brought the “good news” even to those who were in hell. God is good and can save with impartial justice people here and now or those on the other side of death. Paul teaches that the end of all things will be the restoration we hope for. It is typical of God to only do good, and to always produce (even from evil) a good and useful outcome.



God does not punish, because punishment is paying back evil with further evil. Jesus is the Lord of everyone and saves everyone as a result of his goodness. Jesus inflicts wounds on people to save them from eternal death. After humans become pure in their hearts through suffering, restoration awaits them in eternal contemplation.

Origen (185-254)

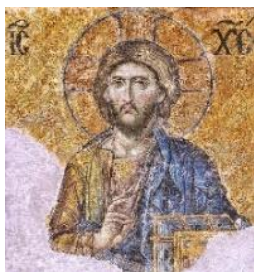
The power of Jesus dying on the cross is so great that it will save, not only all humans, but also all beings from all ages! Evil and meanness are opposed to good. As a consequence, meanness and evil do not really exist. When God is said to be “all in all”, it means that God will completely reside in every single creature.

Eventually, evil will be entirely destroyed. The destruction of the “last enemy” is not the devil who God created, but the hostile will of the devil himself. I do not think death is eternal in the same way that life and justice are, especially when considering that the “last enemy” to be destroyed is death itself. God will become “all” for his creatures who he restores to a state of soundness and purity.



God says “I shall kill and then give life”; he does not say “I shall give life and then kill.” It is not true that the supreme God, who dominates over all rational creatures, cannot also cure them. God assists people, little by little, leading them by the hand, and restores them to their original condition placing them on high.

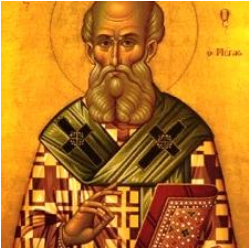
Methodius of Olympus (250-311)



God in his love for humanity has not left it in a state where it will be culpable forever or bear blame indefinitely. Jesus assumed human nature in order to defeat the devil and to destroy the condemnation that arose with the fall of humanity. God put a limit on sin through death so that humanity, living in sin, should not be subject to eternal condemnation. Corruption has disappeared along with the pains of illness that make people shed tears; death has been eliminated and all stupidity has perished.

Athanasius (296-373)

Jesus became human to liberate all humans, resurrect all of them from the dead, and ransom all of them from sin. Jesus set free all beings, and pacified all of them in himself. Christ was born as a human being for our sake, and has liberated humanity from sin completely and entirely.

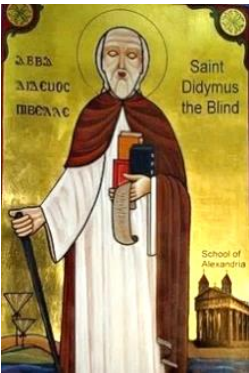


The Father's work for humanity is not in vain because Jesus died to make humans incorruptible, causing death to disappear. Corruption will disappear from all humanity, forever, thanks to the resurrection of Christ when he paid all that was owed for everyone by his death. God's love is by far greater than that of human beings. Though we are dead, he revives us and brings us to heaven.

Our Savior's death has liberated the world, and by his wounds all of us have been healed. Love redeems all human beings to salvation. Christ desired the repentance and conversion of humanity rather than its death. In this way all evil will be burned away from all human beings. Help and salvation was God's plan before the creation of the world, and then it was executed by the Savior who dwelled here on Earth.

Didymus the Blind (313-398)

It must be noted that the Greek word "aionios" has several meanings. Among all rational creatures there are also some who have become wicked, but they will be restored once they have fallen into the hands of Jesus. The fire of corrective punishment is not against people themselves, but against their evil habits and qualities.



If evil has the power to push people in the wrong direction, then good (God) has the power to bring them back again. The Savior looks for the soul in order to lead it to salvation and to bring it back to its original condition. The Father has given to Christ the power and dominion over all beings so that no being who has been given to him should perish.

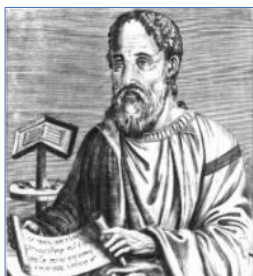
When Jesus returns, the end will be made like the beginning. Every Soul which is subject to death and joined with evil, will eventually be joined to Christ. When immortality is present, death disappears. Therefore, when what is mortal puts on immortality, death is defeated and annihilated.

Eusebius of Caesarea (296-339)

Original sin must be rectified with subsequent remedies. Therefore, it is necessary to return humanity to the condition that is proper. What else does

"until the times of universal restoration" mean, if not that beings in the world to come must receive their perfect restoration?

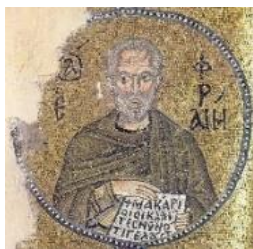
The Savior who loves humanity, having liberated the souls of human beings from death, has also removed every tear from every face. Jesus will eventually destroy death in such a way that it will no longer exist. When the reign of Christ shines forth in the world to come, all human beings will enjoy it. Once all evil has been eliminated and the last enemy (death) has been destroyed, God will be "all in all."



The chief aim of Christ's reign is that all will be submitted to his feet. Jesus, who is savior of absolutely all people, will reign and rectify those who are still imperfect and will heal those who still need healing. All beings will freely submit to Jesus and will see him as Savior and King of all people. He will subject all beings to himself and this must be understood as a saving submission.

Ephrem the Syrian (306-373)

Those who have found mercy can obtain punishment ... and then forgiveness. Thanks to divine mercy, hell will be emptied. God, after giving people retribution in hell, will reward them in the Kingdom. Sin and sheol were scared, death shook, the dead rebelled, and Satan also trembled because sinners revolted against him. God is the healer of humanity and has eliminated death.



Jesus is the healer of all humanity, through his mercy, compassion, goodness, and love. Jesus is the physician who came to this earth to gently heal our wounds and have mercy on sinners. When Jesus went into the grave, he got rid of death and forgave all who sinned. When Jesus was crucified, all humanity (Adam) was redeemed and glorified.

Basil of Caesarea (329-379)

God, in Jesus, came to be one with all people, unifying them in himself. The peace given by the Lord extends to all eternity, since it knows neither limitations nor boundaries. For all humanity will submit to him and recognize his power.

God acts to help humans by dooming sin into disappearance, devouring it through a purifying fire. Restoration is the "absolute fullness" that is brought about in this life and the next by the Holy Spirit. Though people of humanity

are burned by fire, God does not threaten destruction but purification. Those who are made worthy of being restored to their original condition, are saved by means of judgement and mercy.



Because of evil, painful treatment is required. But after evil is destroyed, healing will be administered to bring restoration. Whoever looks for the truth will finally see it face-to-face and will attain the perfection of knowledge when the time of universal restoration comes. God's work is to do away with all evil and liberate His creatures from every illness.

Macrina the Younger (330-379)

Finally, after long cycles of ages, evil will disappear and only good will remain.



God's main purpose in judgement is not to bring about punishment of those who have sinned, but to separate them from evil.

Scripture teaches the complete disappearance of evil. For if God will be resident in all beings, then there will be no evil. Those who are now excluded due to sin, will eventually be able to enter the recesses of divine favor. Sinners will finally recover (after long time periods of purification) in thanks to God's much needed care using the therapy of fire.

Gregory of Nyssa (335-395)

God will be "in all" only when it will be impossible to detect any trace of evil in humanity. God's good purpose, (which is inspired by his love for humanity), and his judgment (which is in accordance with justice) fit together in perfect balance.



God's assistance in time of trouble does not allow us to continue to be inhabitants of hell because we have received therapy from the great physician. Evil will eventually pass away and disappear when everything is restored to its original and good condition. Even if we cross the boundary of evil and reach the culmination of the shadow of sin, we shall return to live again in the light.

When human nature will be elevated again to its original condition, the union of cords and symbols will release that sweet sound of thanksgiving to God for his love of humanity. Someday human nature will be restored to its original condition and the love of God will bring humans and angels together in sweet thanksgiving. The restoration of all things that will come to pass in the Kingdom of Heaven is the restoration of those who have been condemned to hell.

The work of God will not be hindered by annihilation because there will be no destruction of humans. All souls will become the same, and no evil will any longer remain in anyone. Then, God will really be "all in all. God's purest goodness will embrace every rational creature, and none of them will fall out of the kingdom of God. God created and foreknew all humanity as one with himself.

Just as death comes from Adam to all humanity, so also life comes from Jesus through the resurrection to all humanity. Just as Adam brought condemnation of all humans, so also Jesus brought life for all humans and made them just. Once God has brought human nature to its original condition through the resurrection, there is no obstacle that can prevent God from attaining his goal of having everyone share in the benefits of his divinity.

All that belong to the same species and is of the same family, even those who were disinherited, are spared from punishment and adopted to participation in God's divinity. Jesus achieves a common salvation of humanity by resurrecting human beings who are united with him and reconciled to him. In God's wisdom he allows humans to do whatever they want, to taste all the evils they wish, and then come back with desire to their original state of bliss voluntarily.

Gregory of Nazianzus (329-390)

The measure of my love for humanity is greater than the measure of my instruction for them, which is for their purification. What I see as God's torment is really medicine for my salvation. When John speaks of "God's axe" against the tree root, he speaks of amputation of what is incurable in the soul.

If some do not follow the path of Christ, perhaps in the next life they will be baptized by the means of fire which consumes every kind of evil. Someday God will be everything in everyone when the restoration of all things is complete. The purifying fire, which is Jesus himself, consumes the evil and brings the good in us, being a fire applied in love for all humanity. All who descended from Adam were deceived by the devil and destroyed by sin. But they have also been saved by the "heavenly Adam" who is Jesus.



God uses his wrath to open up a way to bring an overflow of goodness, beginning with light remedy and moving on to more severe remedies as needed. Jesus came in human form to restore humanity, to collect them all into one group, and then to place them into the arms of God. Jesus offered his blood to God and purified the whole world. God's punishment is an act of love for Humanity.

Evagrius Ponticus (345-399)

God resides even in the very worst of all humans so that he can someday raise up all humanity to be all that He is. In the age to come, virtue and good will consume and eliminate evil. There was a time when evil did not exist, and there will come a time when it will be no more.



When evil has been eliminated, ignorance will no longer exist among rational creatures. All rational creatures will someday submit to the name of the Lord. Christ will lead all rational creatures throughout the ages into union with God. Eventually ignorance will be overcome, and sinners will be purified. It is God, in Father, Son, and Holy Spirit who restores all of the living and the dead. God's providence pushes people from evil and ignorance into virtue and knowledge.

Theodore of Mopsuestia (350-428)

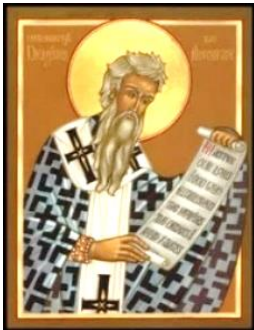
After undergoing punishment, sinners will finally cease to be punished. God will make sinners new after they have fallen, and will restore them again to their original condition. All humans will eventually submit to Jesus, even all sinners, which results in joyous salvation and not suffering.



With the suffering of his own body Jesus has provided the universal removal of sin and elimination of evil. The Father wants, what the Son brings about, and what the Spirit assists him in ... the salvation of all humanity! God has summed up all Humanity in Christ, and has restored the whole creation through him. Just as in Adam all humans died, so in Jesus all humans will be made alive.

Theodoret of Cyrus (393-457)

Jesus seeks every single lost sheep in humanity so that eventually he will restore all of humanity. God will bring an end to His judgment and will not stay angry forever. God torments and punishes humanity because He loves everyone and wants them cured



God will finally be "all in all", because all will be liberated from sin, turn to God, and never again do any evil. In the future life when death will be no more, life will never end and sin will no longer exist, and then God will be "all in all."

Cyril of Alexandria (376-444)

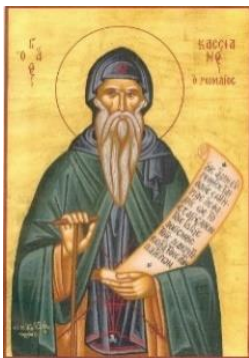
Jesus will bring all salvation to completion by exerting his power over all humanity, restoring them, and then having them return to himself. In Jesus we are all objects of mercy, relieved of death, and have hope of never-ending life. Jesus became human with us to bear our sins, cancel condemnation, and to conform us to perfection.



God's plan, in the fullness of time, is to sum up in himself all humanity in heaven and on earth, and to unify them in himself. The eventual "restoration of all things" is the return of humanity to its original state (before the fall of humanity into sin), or to a state that is even better!

John Cassian (360-435)

The idea that God does not want all humans to be saved, but instead only some, is a grave blasphemy. God is like a kind physician, acting even against our will, to rescue us from evil and hell. God does not want anyone lost, but instead calls them back to himself, demonstrating that even one who has strayed far from him will not perish.



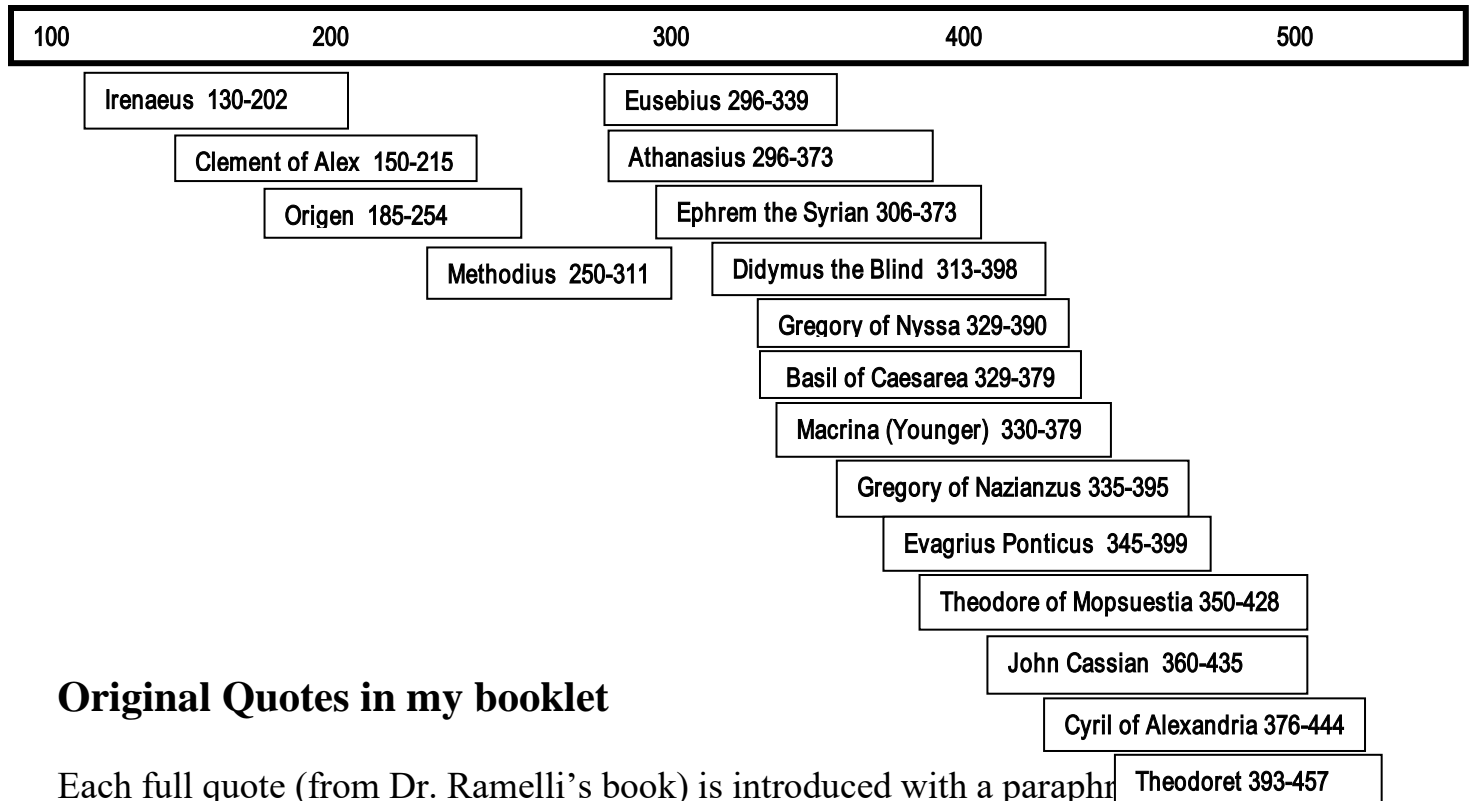
God drags humans into salvation against their own will, and in his goodness he prevents them from falling into evil. God's grace always works with our will for our own sake, and assists, protects, and defends us in everything. God, the Father of all, works indifferently "all in all", like an extremely good father and an extremely benevolent physician. God brings salvation to humanity in various and infinite ways, forcing people who resist him even against their will.

Timeline of Early Christian Writers

The following timeline shows the life-span of each of the 17 early Christian Writers quoted in this booklet. Only four of these lived in the 2nd and 3rd centuries (100 to 300 AD). However, the respect and influence of Clement of Alexandria, and even more so of his student Origen, should not be underestimated. These two were central figures in the great School of Alexandria which was the dominant Christian institution of learning in those early days of the church.

But, in contrast, the 13 remaining writers quoted in this booklet lived in the 3rd and 4th century (300 to 500 AD). There was a lot going on in the Christian Church in this period of time, and is perhaps the most important and foundational period of all time periods up to our present day. It was this time period that the earliest councils were held and creeds were formulated. During this amazing time period, restoration prevailed and eternal punishment is never found in any creed prior to 500 AD! (See a later section of this

booklet titled “The Creeds of the Christian Church” for a complete presentation of the development and contents of the early creeds).



Original Quotes in my booklet

Each full quote (from Dr. Ramelli’s book) is introduced with a paraphrase of the full quote and summarizes it and makes it easier to understand. Translations of ancient writings are sometimes hard to understand, so the paraphrasing is an honest attempt to say what the ancient Christian Writer would say today in modern English to convey his/her thoughts. But paraphrasing is very subjective, and although I have tried to be as accurate and faithful to the original text as I can be, I am sure I have failed to some degree, nonetheless. I will let you be the judge.

This booklet is simply a collection of quotes from the Early Christians. Each quote is taken directly from Ilaria Ramelli’s book, *The Christian Doctrine of Apokatastasis*.

There are three parts in the layout of each quote: (1) a paraphrases of the quote, (2) the full quote itself, and (3) references for the quote. Here is an example from the quotes by Clement of Alexandria:

Everything is ordered by the Lord of the universe for the purpose of universal salvation, leading everyone — 1. Paraphrase of Quote

————— 2. Full Quote

————— 202 ————— 3. Reference

to something better.

everything, both in general and in the single cases, is ordered by the Lord of the universe for the purpose of *universal salvation* [...] God is good and from eternity and *eternally saves* through his Son [...] the task of *salvific justice* is to lead each being to what is better. (Strom. 7,2,12; see also 1,17,86,1–2)

Ramelli page 124

The above format is what you will find throughout my booklet (a paraphrase and the original quote). It is highly recommended that you download this booklet and read the full original quotes for yourself. You can download this booklet at:

<http://godislovefellowship.com/resources.html>.

New Testament Sources

All of the New Testament passages quoted in the six KNCO broadcasts are provided, including the context in which they are found.

The following passages from the New Testament writings are referred to in the six broadcasts transcribed previously. Large portions and whole chapters are provided in order for the complete context of each passage to be seen. However, the specific verses actually referenced in the broadcasts are underlined so they can be carefully considered. This underlining is not for emphasis, but rather for identification within the full context.



John 3

There was a man named Nicodemus, a Jewish religious leader who was a Pharisee. 2 After dark one evening, he came to speak with Jesus. “Rabbi,” he said, “we all know that God has sent you to teach us. Your miraculous signs are evidence that God is with you.” 3 Jesus replied, “I tell you the truth, unless you are born again, you cannot see the Kingdom of God.” 4 “What do you mean?” exclaimed Nicodemus. “How can an old man go back into his mother’s womb and be born again?” 5 Jesus replied, “I assure you, no one can enter the Kingdom of God without being born of water and the Spirit. 6 Humans can reproduce only human life, but the Holy Spirit gives birth to spiritual life. 7 So don’t be surprised when I say, ‘You must be born again.’ 8 The wind blows wherever it wants. Just as you can hear the wind but can’t tell where it comes from or where it is going, so you can’t explain how people are born of the Spirit.” 9 “How are these things possible?” Nicodemus asked. 10 Jesus replied, “You are a respected Jewish teacher, and yet you don’t understand these things? 11 I assure you, we tell you what we know and have seen, and yet you won’t believe our testimony. 12 But if you don’t believe me when I tell you about earthly things, how can you possibly believe if I tell you about heavenly things? 13 No one has ever gone to heaven and returned. But the Son of Man has come down from heaven. 14 And as Moses lifted up the bronze snake on a pole in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, 15 so that everyone who believes in him will have eternal life.”

16 For God loved the world so much that he gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life. 17 God sent his Son into the world not to judge the world, but to save the world through him. 18 “There is no judgment against anyone who believes in him. But anyone who does not believe in him has already been judged for not believing in God’s one and only Son. 19 And the judgment is based on this fact: God’s light came into the world, but people loved the darkness more than the light, for their actions were evil. 20 All who do evil hate the

light and refuse to go near it for fear their sins will be exposed. 21 But those who do what is right come to the light so others can see that they are doing what God wants.

John 17

1 After saying all these things, Jesus looked up to heaven and said, “Father, the hour has come. Glorify your Son so he can give glory back to you. 2 For you have given him authority over everyone. He gives eternal life to each one you have given him. 3 And this is the way to have eternal life—to know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, the one you sent to earth. 4 I brought glory to you here on earth by completing the work you gave me to do. 5 Now, Father, bring me into the glory we shared before the world began. 6 I have revealed you to the ones you gave me from this world. They were always yours. You gave them to me, and they have kept your word. 7 Now they know that everything I have is a gift from you, 8 for I have passed on to them the message you gave me. They accepted it and know that I came from you, and they believe you sent me. 9 My prayer is not for the world, but for those you have given me, because they belong to you. 10 All who are mine belong to you, and you have given them to me, so they bring me glory. 11 Now I am departing from the world; they are staying in this world, but I am coming to you. Holy Father, you have given me your name; now protect them by the power of your name so that they will be united just as we are. 12 During my time here, I protected them by the power of the name you gave me. I guarded them so that not one was lost, except the one headed for destruction, as the Scriptures foretold.

13 Now I am coming to you. I told them many things while I was with them in this world so they would be filled with my joy. 14 I have given them your word. And the world hates them because they do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world. 15 I’m not asking you to take them out of the world, but to keep them safe from the evil one. 16 They do not belong to this world any more than I do. 17 Make them holy by your truth; teach them your word, which is truth. 18 Just as you sent me into the world, I am sending them into the world. 19 And I give myself as a holy sacrifice for them so they can be made holy by your truth. 20 I am praying not only for these disciples but also for all who will ever believe in me through their message. 21 I pray that they will all be one, just as you and I are one—as you are in me, Father, and I am in you. And may they be in us so that the world will believe you sent me. 22 I have given them the glory you gave me, so they may be one as we are one. 23 I am in them and you are in me. May they experience such perfect unity that the world will know that you sent me and that you love them as much as you love me. 24 Father, I want these whom you have given me to be with me where I am. Then they can see all the glory you gave me because you loved me even before the world began! 25 O righteous Father, the world doesn’t know you, but I do; and these disciples know you sent me. 26 I have revealed you to them, and I will continue to do so. Then your love for me will be in them, and I will be in them.

Acts 17

16 While Paul was waiting for them in Athens, he was deeply troubled by all the idols he saw everywhere in the city. 17 He went to the synagogue to reason with the Jews and the God-fearing Gentiles, and he spoke daily in the public square to all who happened to be there. 18 He also had a debate with some of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers. When he told them about Jesus and his resurrection, they said, “What’s this babbler trying to say with these strange ideas he’s picked up?” Others said, “He seems to be preaching about some foreign gods.” 19 Then they took him to the high council of the city. “Come and tell us about this new teaching,” they said. 20 “You are saying some rather strange things, and we want to know what it’s all about.” 21 (It should be explained that all the Athenians as well as the foreigners in Athens seemed to spend all their time discussing the latest ideas.)

22 So Paul, standing before the council, addressed them as follows: “Men of Athens, I notice that you are very religious in every way, 23 for as I was walking along I saw your many shrines. And one of your altars had this inscription on it: ‘To an Unknown God.’ This God, whom you worship without knowing, is the one I’m telling you about. 24 He is the God who made the world and everything in it. Since he is Lord of heaven and earth, he doesn’t live in man-made temples, 25 and human hands can’t serve his needs—for he has no needs. He himself gives life and breath to everything, and he satisfies every need. 26 From one man he created all the nations throughout the whole earth. He decided beforehand when they should rise and fall, and he determined their boundaries. 27 His purpose was for the nations to seek after God and perhaps feel their way toward him and find him—though he is not far from any one of us. 28 For in him we live and move and exist. As some of your own poets have said, ‘We are his offspring.’ 29 And since this is true, we shouldn’t think of God as an idol designed by craftsmen from gold or silver or stone. 30 God overlooked people’s ignorance about these things in earlier times, but now he commands everyone everywhere to repent of their sins and turn to him. 31 For he has set a day for judging the world with justice by the man he has appointed, and he proved to everyone who this is by raising him from the dead.”

32 When they heard Paul speak about the resurrection of the dead, some laughed in contempt, but others said, “We want to hear more about this later.” 33 That ended Paul’s discussion with them, 34 but some joined him and became believers. Among them were Dionysius, a member of the council, a woman named Damaris, and others with them.

Romans 3

9 Well then, should we conclude that we Jews are better than others? No, not at all, for we have already shown that all people, whether Jews or Gentiles, are under the power of sin. 10 As the Scriptures say, No one is righteous— not even one. 11 No one is truly wise; no one is seeking God. 12 All have turned away; all have become useless. No one does good, not a single one. 13 Their talk is foul, like the stench from an open grave. Their tongues are filled with lies. Snake venom drips from their lips. 14 Their mouths are full of cursing and bitterness. 15 They rush to

commit murder. 16 Destruction and misery always follow them. 17 They don't know where to find peace. 18 They have no fear of God at all.

19 Obviously, the law applies to those to whom it was given, for its purpose is to keep people from having excuses, and to show that the entire world is guilty before God. 20 For no one can ever be made right with God by doing what the law commands. The law simply shows us how sinful we are. 21 But now God has shown us a way to be made right with him without keeping the requirements of the law, as was promised in the writings of Moses and the prophets long ago. 22 We are made right with God by placing our faith in Jesus Christ. And this is true for everyone who believes, no matter who we are. 23 For everyone has sinned; we all fall short of God's glorious standard. 24 Yet God, with undeserved kindness, declares that we are righteous. He did this through Christ Jesus when he freed us from the penalty for our sins. 25 For God presented Jesus as the sacrifice for sin. People are made right with God when they believe that Jesus sacrificed his life, shedding his blood. This sacrifice shows that God was being fair when he held back and did not punish those who sinned in times past, 26 for he was looking ahead and including them in what he would do in this present time. God did this to demonstrate his righteousness, for he himself is fair and just, and he declares sinners to be right in his sight when they believe in Jesus.

27 Can we boast, then, that we have done anything to be accepted by God? No, because our acquittal is not based on obeying the law. It is based on faith. 28 So we are made right with God through faith and not by obeying the law. 29 After all, is God the God of the Jews only? Isn't he also the God of the Gentiles? Of course he is. 30 There is only one God, and he makes people right with himself only by faith, whether they are Jews or Gentiles. 31 Well then, if we emphasize faith, does this mean that we can forget about the law? Of course not! In fact, only when we have faith do we truly fulfill the law.

Romans 5

12 When Adam sinned, sin entered the world. Adam's sin brought death, so death spread to everyone, for everyone sinned. 13 Yes, people sinned even before the law was given. But it was not counted as sin because there was not yet any law to break. 14 Still, everyone died—from the time of Adam to the time of Moses—even those who did not disobey an explicit commandment of God, as Adam did. Now Adam is a symbol, a representation of Christ, who was yet to come. 15 But there is a great difference between Adam's sin and God's gracious gift. For the sin of this one man, Adam, brought death to many. But even greater is God's wonderful grace and his gift of forgiveness to many through this other man, Jesus Christ. 16 And the result of God's gracious gift is very different from the result of that one man's sin. For Adam's sin led to condemnation, but God's free gift leads to our being made right with God, even though we are guilty of many sins. 17 For the sin of this one man, Adam, caused death to rule over many. But even greater is God's wonderful grace and his gift of righteousness, for all who receive it will live in triumph over sin and death through this one man, Jesus Christ. 18 Yes, Adam's one sin brings condemnation for everyone, but Christ's one act of righteousness brings a right relationship with God and new life for everyone. 19 Because one person disobeyed God, many became sinners. But because one other person obeyed God, many will be

made righteous. 20 God's law was given so that all people could see how sinful they were. But as people sinned more and more, God's wonderful grace became more abundant. 21 So just as sin ruled over all people and brought them to death, now God's wonderful grace rules instead, giving us right standing with God and resulting in eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. Chapter 6

Romans 6

Well then, should we keep on sinning so that God can show us more and more of his wonderful grace? 2 Of course not! Since we have died to sin, how can we continue to live in it? 3 Or have you forgotten that when we were joined with Christ Jesus in baptism, we joined him in his death? 4 For we died and were buried with Christ by baptism. And just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glorious power of the Father, now we also may live new lives. 5 Since we have been united with him in his death, we will also be raised to life as he was. 6 We know that our old sinful selves were crucified with Christ so that sin might lose its power in our lives. We are no longer slaves to sin. 7 For when we died with Christ we were set free from the power of sin. 8 And since we died with Christ, we know we will also live with him. 9 We are sure of this because Christ was raised from the dead, and he will never die again. Death no longer has any power over him. 10 When he died, he died once to break the power of sin. But now that he lives, he lives for the glory of God. 11 So you also should consider yourselves to be dead to the power of sin and alive to God through Christ Jesus. 12 Do not let sin control the way you live; do not give in to sinful desires. 13 Do not let any part of your body become an instrument of evil to serve sin. Instead, give yourselves completely to God, for you were dead, but now you have new life. So use your whole body as an instrument to do what is right for the glory of God. 14 Sin is no longer your master, for you no longer live under the requirements of the law. Instead, you live under the freedom of God's grace.

Romans 7

4 So, my dear brothers and sisters, this is the point: You died to the power of the law when you died with Christ. And now you are united with the one who was raised from the dead. As a result, we can produce a harvest of good deeds for God. 5 When we were controlled by our old nature, sinful desires were at work within us, and the law aroused these evil desires that produced a harvest of sinful deeds, resulting in death. 6 But now we have been released from the law, for we died to it and are no longer captive to its power. Now we can serve God, not in the old way of obeying the letter of the law, but in the new way of living in the Spirit.

14 So the trouble is not with the law, for it is spiritual and good. The trouble is with me, for I am all too human, a slave to sin. 15 I don't really understand myself, for I want to do what is right, but I don't do it. Instead, I do what I hate. 16 But if I know that what I am doing is wrong, this shows that I agree that the law is good. 17 So I am not the one doing wrong; it is sin living in me that does it. 18 And I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. I want to do what is right, but I can't. 19 I want to do what is good, but I don't. I don't want to do what is wrong, but I do it anyway. 20 But if I do what I don't want to do, I am not really the one doing wrong; it is sin living in me that

does it. 21 I have discovered this principle of life—that when I want to do what is right, I inevitably do what is wrong. 22 I love God’s law with all my heart. 23 But there is another power within me that is at war with my mind. This power makes me a slave to the sin that is still within me. 24 Oh, what a miserable person I am! Who will free me from this life that is dominated by sin and death? 25 Thank God! The answer is in Jesus Christ our Lord. So you see how it is: In my mind I really want to obey God’s law, but because of my sinful nature I am a slave to sin.

Romans 8

1 So now there is no condemnation for those who belong to Christ Jesus. 2 And because you belong to him, the power of the life-giving Spirit has freed you from the power of sin that leads to death. 3 The law of Moses was unable to save us because of the weakness of our sinful nature. So God did what the law could not do. He sent his own Son in a body like the bodies we sinners have. And in that body God declared an end to sin’s control over us by giving his Son as a sacrifice for our sins. 4 He did this so that the just requirement of the law would be fully satisfied for us, who no longer follow our sinful nature but instead follow the Spirit. 5 Those who are dominated by the sinful nature think about sinful things, but those who are controlled by the Holy Spirit think about things that please the Spirit. 6 So letting your sinful nature control your mind leads to death. But letting the Spirit control your mind leads to life and peace. 7 For the sinful nature is always hostile to God. It never did obey God’s laws, and it never will. 8 That’s why those who are still under the control of their sinful nature can never please God. 9 But you are not controlled by your sinful nature. You are controlled by the Spirit if you have the Spirit of God living in you. (And remember that those who do not have the Spirit of Christ living in them do not belong to him at all.) 10 And Christ lives within you, so even though your body will die because of sin, the Spirit gives you life because you have been made right with God. 11 The Spirit of God, who raised Jesus from the dead, lives in you. And just as God raised Christ Jesus from the dead, he will give life to your mortal bodies by this same Spirit living within you.

12 Therefore, dear brothers and sisters, you have no obligation to do what your sinful nature urges you to do. 13 For if you live by its dictates, you will die. But if through the power of the Spirit you put to death the deeds of your sinful nature, you will live. 14 For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. 15 So you have not received a spirit that makes you fearful slaves. Instead, you received God’s Spirit when he adopted you as his own children. Now we call him, “Abba, Father.” 16 For his Spirit joins with our spirit to affirm that we are God’s children. 17 And since we are his children, we are his heirs. In fact, together with Christ we are heirs of God’s glory. But if we are to share his glory, we must also share his suffering.

Romans 12

1 And so, dear brothers and sisters, I plead with you to give your bodies to God because of all he has done for you. Let them be a living and holy sacrifice—the kind he will find acceptable. This is truly the way to worship him. 2 Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God's will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect. 3 Because of the privilege and authority God has given me, I give each of you this warning: Don't think you are better than you really are. Be honest in your evaluation of yourselves, measuring yourselves by the faith God has given us. 4 Just as our bodies have many parts and each part has a special function, 5 so it is with Christ's body. We are many parts of one body, and we all belong to each other. 6 In his grace, God has given us different gifts for doing certain things well. So if God has given you the ability to prophesy, speak out with as much faith as God has given you. 7 If your gift is serving others, serve them well. If you are a teacher, teach well. 8 If your gift is to encourage others, be encouraging. If it is giving, give generously. If God has given you leadership ability, take the responsibility seriously. And if you have a gift for showing kindness to others, do it gladly. 9 Don't just pretend to love others. Really love them. Hate what is wrong. Hold tightly to what is good. 10 Love each other with genuine affection, and take delight in honoring each other. 11 Never be lazy, but work hard and serve the Lord enthusiastically. 12 Rejoice in our confident hope. Be patient in trouble, and keep on praying. 13 When God's people are in need, be ready to help them. Always be eager to practice hospitality. 14 Bless those who persecute you. Don't curse them; pray that God will bless them. 15 Be happy with those who are happy, and weep with those who weep. 16 Live in harmony with each other. Don't be too proud to enjoy the company of ordinary people. And don't think you know it all! 17 Never pay back evil with more evil. Do things in such a way that everyone can see you are honorable. 18 Do all that you can to live in peace with everyone.

1 Corinthians 1

18 The message of the cross is foolish to those who are headed for destruction! But we who are being saved know it is the very power of God. 19 As the Scriptures say, "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise and discard the intelligence of the intelligent." 20 So where does this leave the philosophers, the scholars, and the world's brilliant debaters? God has made the wisdom of this world look foolish. 21 Since God in his wisdom saw to it that the world would never know him through human wisdom, he has used our foolish preaching to save those who believe. 22 It is foolish to the Jews, who ask for signs from heaven. And it is foolish to the Greeks, who seek human wisdom. 23 So when we preach that Christ was crucified, the Jews are offended and the Gentiles say it's all nonsense.

24 But to those called by God to salvation, both Jews and Gentiles, Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God. 25 This foolish plan of God is wiser than the wisest of human plans, and God's weakness is stronger than the greatest of human strength. 26 Remember, dear brothers and sisters, that few of you were wise in the world's eyes or powerful or wealthy when God called you. 27 Instead, God chose things the world considers foolish in order to shame those who think they are wise. And he chose things that are powerless to shame those who are powerful. 28 God chose

things despised by the world, things counted as nothing at all, and used them to bring to nothing what the world considers important. 29 As a result, no one can ever boast in the presence of God. 30 God has united you with Christ Jesus. For our benefit God made him to be wisdom itself. Christ made us right with God; he made us pure and holy, and he freed us from sin. 31 Therefore, as the Scriptures say, “If you want to boast, boast only about the LORD.”

1 Corinthians 2

1 When I first came to you, dear brothers and sisters, I didn’t use lofty words and impressive wisdom to tell you God’s secret plan. 2 For I decided that while I was with you I would forget everything except Jesus Christ, the one who was crucified. 3 I came to you in weakness—timid and trembling. 4 And my message and my preaching were very plain. Rather than using clever and persuasive speeches, I relied only on the power of the Holy Spirit. 5 I did this so you would trust not in human wisdom but in the power of God. 6 Yet when I am among mature believers, I do speak with words of wisdom, but not the kind of wisdom that belongs to this world or to the rulers of this world, who are soon forgotten. 7 No, the wisdom we speak of is the mystery of God—his plan that was previously hidden, even though he made it for our ultimate glory before the world began. 8 But the rulers of this world have not understood it; if they had, they would not have crucified our glorious Lord. 9 That is what the Scriptures mean when they say, “No eye has seen, no ear has heard, and no mind has imagined what God has prepared for those who love him.” 10 But it was to us that God revealed these things by his Spirit. For his Spirit searches out everything and shows us God’s deep secrets. 11 No one can know a person’s thoughts except that person’s own spirit, and no one can know God’s thoughts except God’s own Spirit. 12 And we have received God’s Spirit (not the world’s spirit), so we can know the wonderful things God has freely given us.

1 Corinthians 13

1 If I could speak all the languages of earth and of angels, but didn’t love others, I would only be a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. 2 If I had the gift of prophecy, and if I understood all of God’s secret plans and possessed all knowledge, and if I had such faith that I could move mountains, but didn’t love others, I would be nothing. 3 If I gave everything I have to the poor and even sacrificed my body, I could boast about it; but if I didn’t love others, I would have gained nothing. 4 Love is patient and kind. Love is not jealous or boastful or proud 5 or rude. It does not demand its own way. It is not irritable, and it keeps no record of being wronged. 6 It does not rejoice about injustice but rejoices whenever the truth wins out. 7 Love never gives up, never loses faith, is always hopeful, and endures through every circumstance.

8 Prophecy and speaking in unknown languages and special knowledge will become useless. But love will last forever! 9 Now our knowledge is partial and incomplete, and even the gift of prophecy reveals only part of the whole picture! 10 But when the time of perfection comes, these partial things will become useless. 11 When I was a child, I spoke and thought and reasoned as a child. But when I grew up, I put away childish things. 12 Now we see things imperfectly, like puzzling reflections in a

mirror, but then we will see everything with perfect clarity. All that I know now is partial and incomplete, but then I will know everything completely, just as God now knows me completely. 13 Three things will last forever—faith, hope, and love—and the greatest of these is love.

1 Corinthians 15

1 Let me now remind you, dear brothers and sisters, of the Good News I preached to you before. You welcomed it then, and you still stand firm in it. 2 It is this Good News that saves you if you continue to believe the message I told you—unless, of course, you believed something that was never true in the first place. 3 I passed on to you what was most important and what had also been passed on to me. Christ died for our sins, just as the Scriptures said. 4 He was buried, and he was raised from the dead on the third day, just as the Scriptures said. 5 He was seen by Peter and then by the Twelve. 6 After that, he was seen by more than 500 of his followers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have died. 7 Then he was seen by James and later by all the apostles. 8 Last of all, as though I had been born at the wrong time, I also saw him. 9 For I am the least of all the apostles. In fact, I'm not even worthy to be called an apostle after the way I persecuted God's church. 10 But whatever I am now, it is all because God poured out his special favor on me—and not without results. For I have worked harder than any of the other apostles; yet it was not I but God who was working through me by his grace. 11 So it makes no difference whether I preach or they preach, for we all preach the same message you have already believed.

12 But tell me this—since we preach that Christ rose from the dead, why are some of you saying there will be no resurrection of the dead? 13 For if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ has not been raised either. 14 And if Christ has not been raised, then all our preaching is useless, and your faith is useless. 15 And we apostles would all be lying about God—for we have said that God raised Christ from the grave. But that can't be true if there is no resurrection of the dead. 16 And if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ has not been raised. 17 And if Christ has not been raised, then your faith is useless and you are still guilty of your sins. 18 In that case, all who have died believing in Christ are lost! 19 And if our hope in Christ is only for this life, we are more to be pitied than anyone in the world. 20 But in fact, Christ has been raised from the dead. He is the first of a great harvest of all who have died. 21 So you see, just as death came into the world through a man, now the resurrection from the dead has begun through another man. 22 Just as everyone dies because we all belong to Adam, everyone who belongs to Christ will be given new life. 23 But there is an order to this resurrection: Christ was raised as the first of the harvest; then all who belong to Christ will be raised when he comes back. 24 After that the end will come, when he will turn the Kingdom over to God the Father, having destroyed every ruler and authority and power. 25 For Christ must reign until he humbles all his enemies beneath his feet. 26 And the last enemy to be destroyed is death. 27 For the Scriptures say, "God has put all things under his authority." (Of course, when it says "all things are under his authority," that does not include God himself, who gave Christ his authority.) 28 Then, when all things are under his authority, the Son will put himself under God's authority, so that God, who gave his Son authority over all things, will be utterly supreme over everything everywhere.

2 Corinthians 5

11 Because we understand our fearful responsibility to the Lord, we work hard to persuade others. God knows we are sincere, and I hope you know this, too. 12 Are we commending ourselves to you again? No, we are giving you a reason to be proud of us, so you can answer those who brag about having a spectacular ministry rather than having a sincere heart. 13 If it seems we are crazy, it is to bring glory to God. And if we are in our right minds, it is for your benefit. 14 Either way, Christ's love controls us. Since we believe that Christ died for all, we also believe that we have all died to our old life. 15 He died for everyone so that those who receive his new life will no longer live for themselves. Instead, they will live for Christ, who died and was raised for them.

16 So we have stopped evaluating others from a human point of view. At one time we thought of Christ merely from a human point of view. How differently we know him now! 17 This means that anyone who belongs to Christ has become a new person. The old life is gone; a new life has begun! 18 And all of this is a gift from God, who brought us back to himself through Christ. And God has given us this task of reconciling people to him. 19 For God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself, no longer counting people's sins against them. And he gave us this wonderful message of reconciliation. 20 So we are Christ's ambassadors; God is making his appeal through us. We speak for Christ when we plead, "Come back to God!" 21 For God made Christ, who never sinned, to be the offering for our sin, so that we could be made right with God through Christ.

Galatians 2

Yet we know that a person is made right with God by faith in Jesus Christ, not by obeying the law. And we have believed in Christ Jesus, so that we might be made right with God because of our faith in Christ, not because we have obeyed the law. For no one will ever be made right with God by obeying the law." 17 But suppose we seek to be made right with God through faith in Christ and then we are found guilty because we have abandoned the law. Would that mean Christ has led us into sin? Absolutely not! 18 Rather, I am a sinner if I rebuild the old system of law I already tore down. 19 For when I tried to keep the law, it condemned me. So I died to the law—I stopped trying to meet all its requirements—so that I might live for God. 20 My old self has been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me. So I live in this earthly body by trusting in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. 21 I do not treat the grace of God as meaningless. For if keeping the law could make us right with God, then there was no need for Christ to die.

Ephesians 2

1 Once you were dead because of your disobedience and your many sins. 2 You used to live in sin, just like the rest of the world, obeying the devil—the commander of the powers in the unseen world. He is the spirit at work in the hearts of those who refuse to obey God. 3 All of us used to live that

way, following the passionate desires and inclinations of our sinful nature. By our very nature we were subject to God's anger, just like everyone else. 4 But God is so rich in mercy, and he loved us so much, 5 that even though we were dead because of our sins, he gave us life when he raised Christ from the dead. (It is only by God's grace that you have been saved!) 6 For he raised us from the dead along with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms because we are united with Christ Jesus. 7 So God can point to us in all future ages as examples of the incredible wealth of his grace and kindness toward us, as shown in all he has done for us who are united with Christ Jesus. 8 God saved you by his grace when you believed. And you can't take credit for this; it is a gift from God. 9 Salvation is not a reward for the good things we have done, so none of us can boast about it. 10 For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago.

11 Don't forget that you Gentiles used to be outsiders. You were called "uncircumcised heathens" by the Jews, who were proud of their circumcision, even though it affected only their bodies and not their hearts. 12 In those days you were living apart from Christ. You were excluded from citizenship among the people of Israel, and you did not know the covenant promises God had made to them. You lived in this world without God and without hope. 13 But now you have been united with Christ Jesus. Once you were far away from God, but now you have been brought near to him through the blood of Christ. 14 For Christ himself has brought peace to us. He united Jews and Gentiles into one people when, in his own body on the cross, he broke down the wall of hostility that separated us. 15 He did this by ending the system of law with its commandments and regulations. He made peace between Jews and Gentiles by creating in himself one new people from the two groups. 16 Together as one body, Christ reconciled both groups to God by means of his death on the cross, and our hostility toward each other was put to death. 17 He brought this Good News of peace to you Gentiles who were far away from him, and peace to the Jews who were near. 18 Now all of us can come to the Father through the same Holy Spirit because of what Christ has done for us.

Ephesians 4

17 With the Lord's authority I say this: Live no longer as the Gentiles do, for they are hopelessly confused. 18 Their minds are full of darkness; they wander far from the life God gives because they have closed their minds and hardened their hearts against him. 19 They have no sense of shame. They live for lustful pleasure and eagerly practice every kind of impurity. 20 But that isn't what you learned about Christ. 21 Since you have heard about Jesus and have learned the truth that comes from him, 22 throw off your old sinful nature and your former way of life, which is corrupted by lust and deception. 23 Instead, let the Spirit renew your thoughts and attitudes. 24 Put on your new nature, created to be like God—truly righteous and holy. 25 So stop telling lies. Let us tell our neighbors the truth, for we are all parts of the same body. 26 And "don't sin by letting anger control you." Don't let the sun go down while you are still angry, 27 for anger gives a foothold to the devil. 28 If you are a thief, quit stealing. Instead, use your hands for good hard work, and then give generously to others in need. 29 Don't use foul or abusive language. Let everything you say be good and helpful, so that your words will be an encouragement to those who hear them. 30 And do not

bring sorrow to God's Holy Spirit by the way you live. Remember, he has identified you as his own, guaranteeing that you will be saved on the day of redemption. 31 Get rid of all bitterness, rage, anger, harsh words, and slander, as well as all types of evil behavior. 32 Instead, be kind to each other, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God through Christ has forgiven you.

Colossians 3

1 Since you have been raised to new life with Christ, set your sights on the realities of heaven, where Christ sits in the place of honor at God's right hand. 2 Think about the things of heaven, not the things of earth. 3 For you died to this life, and your real life is hidden with Christ in God. 4 And when Christ, who is your life, is revealed to the whole world, you will share in all his glory. 5 So put to death the sinful, earthly things lurking within you. Have nothing to do with sexual immorality, impurity, lust, and evil desires. Don't be greedy, for a greedy person is an idolater, worshiping the things of this world. 6 Because of these sins, the anger of God is coming. 7 You used to do these things when your life was still part of this world. 8 But now is the time to get rid of anger, rage, malicious behavior, slander, and dirty language. 9 Don't lie to each other, for you have stripped off your old sinful nature and all its wicked deeds. 10 Put on your new nature, and be renewed as you learn to know your Creator and become like him. 11 In this new life, it doesn't matter if you are a Jew or a Gentile, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbaric, uncivilized, slave, or free. Christ is all that matters, and he lives in all of us. 12 Since God chose you to be the holy people he loves, you must clothe yourselves with tenderhearted mercy, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. 13 Make allowance for each other's faults, and forgive anyone who offends you. Remember, the Lord forgave you, so you must forgive others. 14 Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds us all together in perfect harmony. 15 And let the peace that comes from Christ rule in your hearts. For as members of one body you are called to live in peace. And always be thankful. 16 Let the message about Christ, in all its richness, fill your lives. Teach and counsel each other with all the wisdom he gives. Sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs to God with thankful hearts. 17 And whatever you do or say, do it as a representative of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through him to God the Father.

James 2

19 Understand this, my dear brothers and sisters: You must all be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to get angry. 20 Human anger does not produce the righteousness God desires. 21 So get rid of all the filth and evil in your lives, and humbly accept the word God has planted in your hearts, for it has the power to save your souls. 22 But don't just listen to God's word. You must do what it says. Otherwise, you are only fooling yourselves. 23 For if you listen to the word and don't obey, it is like glancing at your face in a mirror. 24 You see yourself, walk away, and forget what you look like. 25 But if you look carefully into the perfect law that sets you free, and if you do what it says and don't forget what you heard, then God will bless you for doing it. 26 If you claim to be religious but don't control your tongue, you are fooling yourself, and your religion is worthless. 27 Pure and genuine

religion in the sight of God the Father means caring for orphans and widows in their distress and refusing to let the world corrupt you.

1 Peter 1

13 So think clearly and exercise self-control. Look forward to the gracious salvation that will come to you when Jesus Christ is revealed to the world. 14 So you must live as God's obedient children. Don't slip back into your old ways of living to satisfy your own desires. You didn't know any better then. 15 But now you must be holy in everything you do, just as God who chose you is holy. 16 For the Scriptures say, "You must be holy because I am holy." 17 And remember that the heavenly Father to whom you pray has no favorites. He will judge or reward you according to what you do. So you must live in reverent fear of him during your time as "foreigners in the land." 18 For you know that God paid a ransom to save you from the empty life you inherited from your ancestors. And the ransom he paid was not mere gold or silver. 19 It was the precious blood of Christ, the sinless, spotless Lamb of God. 20 God chose him as your ransom long before the world began, but he has now revealed him to you in these last days. 21 Through Christ you have come to trust in God. And you have placed your faith and hope in God because he raised Christ from the dead and gave him great glory. 22 You were cleansed from your sins when you obeyed the truth, so now you must show sincere love to each other as brothers and sisters. Love each other deeply with all your heart. 23 For you have been born again, but not to a life that will quickly end. Your new life will last forever because it comes from the eternal, living word of God. As the Scriptures say, "People are like grass; their beauty is like a flower in the field. The grass withers and the flower fades. But the word of the Lord remains forever." And that word is the Good News that was preached to you.

1 Peter 2

21 For God called you to do good, even if it means suffering, just as Christ suffered for you. He is your example, and you must follow in his steps. 22 He never sinned, nor ever deceived anyone. 23 He did not retaliate when he was insulted, nor threaten revenge when he suffered. He left his case in the hands of God, who always judges fairly. 24 He personally carried our sins in his body on the cross so that we can be dead to sin and live for what is right. By his wounds you are healed. 25 Once you were like sheep who wandered away. But now you have turned to your Shepherd, the Guardian of your souls.

1 Peter 3

13 Now, who will want to harm you if you are eager to do good? 14 But even if you suffer for doing what is right, God will reward you for it. So don't worry or be afraid of their threats. 15 Instead, you must worship Christ as Lord of your life. And if someone asks about your Christian hope, always be

ready to explain it. 16 But do this in a gentle and respectful way. Keep your conscience clear. Then if people speak against you, they will be ashamed when they see what a good life you live because you belong to Christ. 17 Remember, it is better to suffer for doing good, if that is what God wants, than to suffer for doing wrong! 18 Christ suffered for our sins once for all time. He never sinned, but he died for sinners to bring you safely home to God. He suffered physical death, but he was raised to life in the Spirit.

19 So he went and preached to the spirits in prison—20 those who disobeyed God long ago when God waited patiently while Noah was building his boat. Only eight people were saved from drowning in that terrible flood. 21 And that water is a picture of baptism, which now saves you, not by removing dirt from your body, but as a response to God from a clean conscience. It is effective because of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. 22 Now Christ has gone to heaven. He is seated in the place of honor next to God, and all the angels and authorities and powers accept his authority.

2 Peter 1

12 Therefore, I will always remind you about these things—even though you already know them and are standing firm in the truth you have been taught. 13 And it is only right that I should keep on reminding you as long as I live. 14 For our Lord Jesus Christ has shown me that I must soon leave this earthly life, 15 so I will work hard to make sure you always remember these things after I am gone. 16 For we were not making up clever stories when we told you about the powerful coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. We saw his majestic splendor with our own eyes 17 when he received honor and glory from God the Father. The voice from the majestic glory of God said to him, “This is my dearly loved Son, who brings me great joy.” 18 We ourselves heard that voice from heaven when we were with him on the holy mountain. 19 Because of that experience, we have even greater confidence in the message proclaimed by the prophets. You must pay close attention to what they wrote, for their words are like a lamp shining in a dark place—until the Day dawns, and Christ the Morning Star shines in your hearts. 20 Above all, you must realize that no prophecy in Scripture ever came from the prophet’s own understanding, 21 or from human initiative. No, those prophets were moved by the Holy Spirit, and they spoke from God.

2 Peter 3

3 Most importantly, I want to remind you that in the last days scoffers will come, mocking the truth and following their own desires. 4 They will say, “What happened to the promise that Jesus is coming again? From before the times of our ancestors, everything has remained the same since the world was first created.” 5 They deliberately forget that God made the heavens by the word of his command, and he brought the earth out from the water and surrounded it with water. 6 Then he used the water to destroy the ancient world with a mighty flood. 7 And by the same word, the present heavens and earth have been stored up for fire. They are being kept for the day of judgment, when ungodly people will be destroyed. 8 But you must not forget this one thing, dear friends: A day is like a thousand years to the Lord, and a thousand years is like a day. 9 The Lord

isn't really being slow about his promise, as some people think. No, he is being patient for your sake. He does not want anyone to be destroyed, but wants everyone to repent. 10 But the day of the Lord will come as unexpectedly as a thief. Then the heavens will pass away with a terrible noise, and the very elements themselves will disappear in fire, and the earth and everything on it will be found to deserve judgment.

11 Since everything around us is going to be destroyed like this, what holy and godly lives you should live, 12 looking forward to the day of God and hurrying it along. On that day, he will set the heavens on fire, and the elements will melt away in the flames. 13 But we are looking forward to the new heavens and new earth he has promised, a world filled with God's righteousness. 14 And so, dear friends, while you are waiting for these things to happen, make every effort to be found living peaceful lives that are pure and blameless in his sight. 15 And remember, our Lord's patience gives people time to be saved. This is what our beloved brother Paul also wrote to you with the wisdom God gave him— 16 speaking of these things in all of his letters. Some of his comments are hard to understand, and those who are ignorant and unstable have twisted his letters to mean something quite different, just as they do with other parts of Scripture. And this will result in their destruction.

1 John 1

5 This is the message we heard from Jesus and now declare to you: God is light, and there is no darkness in him at all. 6 So we are lying if we say we have fellowship with God but go on living in spiritual darkness; we are not practicing the truth. 7 But if we are living in the light, as God is in the light, then we have fellowship with each other, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, cleanses us from all sin. 8 If we claim we have no sin, we are only fooling ourselves and not living in the truth. 9 But if we confess our sins to him, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all wickedness. 10 If we claim we have not sinned, we are calling God a liar and showing that his word has no place in our hearts.

1 John 2

My dear children, I am writing this to you so that you will not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate who pleads our case before the Father. He is Jesus Christ, the one who is truly righteous. 2 He himself is the sacrifice that atones for our sins—and not only our sins but the sins of all the world. 3 And we can be sure that we know him if we obey his commandments. 4 If someone claims, "I know God," but doesn't obey God's commandments, that person is a liar and is not living in the truth. 5 But those who obey God's word truly show how completely they love him. That is how we know we are living in him. 6 Those who say they live in God should live their lives as Jesus did.

1 John 3

1 See how very much our Father loves us, for he calls us his children, and that is what we are! But the people who belong to this world don't recognize that we are God's children because they don't know him. 2 Dear friends, we are already God's children, but he has not yet shown us what we will be like when Christ appears. But we do know that we will be like him, for we will see him as he really is. 3 And all who have this eager expectation will keep themselves pure, just as he is pure. 4 Everyone who sins is breaking God's law, for all sin is contrary to the law of God. 5 And you know that Jesus came to take away our sins, and there is no sin in him. 6 Anyone who continues to live in him will not sin. But anyone who keeps on sinning does not know him or understand who he is.

7 Dear children, don't let anyone deceive you about this: When people do what is right, it shows that they are righteous, even as Christ is righteous. 8 But when people keep on sinning, it shows that they belong to the devil, who has been sinning since the beginning. But the Son of God came to destroy the works of the devil. 9 Those who have been born into God's family do not make a practice of sinning, because God's life is in them. So they can't keep on sinning, because they are children of God. 10 So now we can tell who are children of God and who are children of the devil. Anyone who does not live righteously and does not love other believers does not belong to God.

11 This is the message you have heard from the beginning: We should love one another. 12 We must not be like Cain, who belonged to the evil one and killed his brother. And why did he kill him? Because Cain had been doing what was evil, and his brother had been doing what was righteous. 13 So don't be surprised, dear brothers and sisters, if the world hates you. 14 If we love our Christian brothers and sisters, it proves that we have passed from death to life. But a person who has no love is still dead. 15 Anyone who hates another brother or sister is really a murderer at heart. And you know that murderers don't have eternal life within them. 16 We know what real love is because Jesus gave up his life for us. So we also ought to give up our lives for our brothers and sisters. 17 If someone has enough money to live well and sees a brother or sister in need but shows no compassion—how can God's love be in that person?

18 Dear children, let's not merely say that we love each other; let us show the truth by our actions. 19 Our actions will show that we belong to the truth, so we will be confident when we stand before God. 20 Even if we feel guilty, God is greater than our feelings, and he knows everything. 21 Dear friends, if we don't feel guilty, we can come to God with bold confidence. 22 And we will receive from him whatever we ask because we obey him and do the things that please him. 23 And this is his commandment: We must believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and love one another, just as he commanded us. 24 Those who obey God's commandments remain in fellowship with him, and he with them. And we know he lives in us because the Spirit he gave us lives in us.

1 John 4

7 Dear friends, let us continue to love one another, for love comes from God. Anyone who loves is a child of God and knows God. 8 But anyone who does not love does not know God, for God is love. 9 God showed how much he loved us by sending his one and only Son into the world so that we

might have eternal life through him. 10 This is real love—not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as a sacrifice to take away our sins.

11 Dear friends, since God loved us that much, we surely ought to love each other. 12 No one has ever seen God. But if we love each other, God lives in us, and his love is brought to full expression in us. 13 And God has given us his Spirit as proof that we live in him and he in us. 14 Furthermore, we have seen with our own eyes and now testify that the Father sent his Son to be the Savior of the world. 15 All who confess that Jesus is the Son of God have God living in them, and they live in God. 16 We know how much God loves us, and we have put our trust in his love. God is love, and all who live in love live in God, and God lives in them. 17 And as we live in God, our love grows more perfect. So we will not be afraid on the day of judgment, but we can face him with confidence because we live like Jesus here in this world. 18 Such love has no fear, because perfect love expels all fear. If we are afraid, it is for fear of punishment, and this shows that we have not fully experienced his perfect love. 19 We love each other because he loved us first. 20 If someone says, “I love God,” but hates a Christian brother or sister, that person is a liar; for if we don’t love people we can see, how can we love God, whom we cannot see? 21 And he has given us this command: Those who love God must also love their Christian brothers and sisters.

Book Sources

This is a list of over 75 books (and book sets) that were read, studied, and utilized over the past seven years as the basis for all that has been presented in this booklet.

The following sources (over 75 books and book sets) were read, studied, and utilized over the past seven years as the basis for all that has been presented in this booklet. Some were used extensively and in depth, and some were more informative and inspirational. I have commented on each book to provide an explanation of how it was of help to me. Each book title is an active link to Amazon so that you can get more information.

You are encouraged to look into all of these resources (and any others you can find) in order to do your own study and verification of what is true about God, salvation, life and death. It seems to me that there is no more important subject ... than our eternal destiny!



Here are the categories of book resources below:

- Books on Word Studies
- Books on Church History
- Books on the Atonement of Jesus
- Books Supporting Restoration
- Books with Multiple Views, Moderate Views, or Questioning Views
- Books Supporting Eternal Punishment
- Books on the history and origin of hell
- Books on Justification
- Other Helpful Books

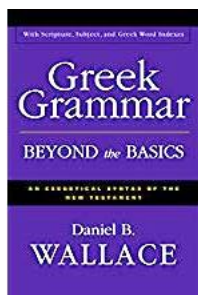
Books on word studies



Theological Dictionary of the New Testament 10-vol set

by Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich

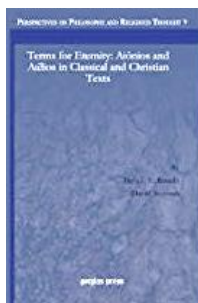
This is of my primary tools for serious study. Kittel is a 10-volume set that covers all Greek words in the New Testament. It is not only a thorough study of each word, but the background of each word in the ancient Greek world is provided. The use of each word in the Septuagint and in the New Testament makes this resource indispensable. I have spent hundreds of hours in it over the past two decades.



Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics

by [Daniel B. Wallace](#)

I took must first year of Greek at Dallas Seminary in 1982. I did a refresher course using Bill Mounce's excellent on-line video course. The for my second-year Greek I did a self-study of Wallace's book. It is often used as a second-year Greek text in many seminaries. I refer to it often. Wallace provides a lot of examples from the New Testament and the book is very well organized.



Terms for Eternity: Aiōnios and Aīdios in Classical and Christian Texts

by Ilaria Ramelli; David Konstan

This book is, without a doubt, the best study on the Greek words *Aiōnios* and *Aīdios* that are used in the NT for "age" and "eternal." Like Kittel (except in much greater detail), Dr. Ramelli spends a lot of time giving the history in ancient Greek of these two important words. She also chronicles how these words are used by Early Christians in their writings. Understanding the meaning and use of these words explains a lot about what is meant by the NT writers who use them in phrases like "eternal life", "eternal fire", eternal punishment", etc., that have become the basis of the belief in hell and damnation by the Western Christian Church over the past 1500 years. I learned of this book after studying he monumental work on Restoration in the Early Church, which is described under the *Books on Church History* section.

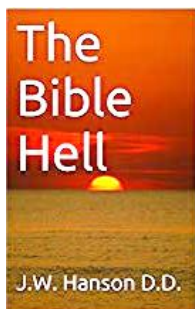


The Greek Word Aion-aionios

by J. W. (John Wesley) Hanson

This book is a layman version of Ramelli's book, Hansen covers the term *aionios*, provides background, meaning and use – but in a more limited way. He also compares it with *aīdios* (eternal) and makes his argument why modern-day translations of *aionios* should not be "eternal." Hanson was a 19th century theologian and writer. This is but one of several very good works done by Hansen. This particular presentation goes into great detail about the meaning of the Greek words used for "eternity" and "age" in the NT. This has turned out to be key in understanding many NT passages that use these words (or sometimes misuses and mistranslates them) and thus "imposes" a theology on an unsuspecting reader. Hansen goes into the meanings of these words in the Greek, including how they were used outside the New Testament (something I spent a lot of time verifying in Kittel and other standard Greek language reference works). He also explains how adjective forms of the word for age are used in the New Testament

– something unknown or ignored by many people who study the Bible. It really comes down to whether or not we want to know what is actually true and verifiable, or whether we are satisfied with whatever is commonly presented to us (without any real proof) and is just claimed to be true! Hansen really helped me here!



The Bible Hell

by J.W. Hanson D.D. and Richard Dean

This book goes through all the words in the New Testament that are commonly translated as “hell”: Gehenna, Hades, and Tartarus. Hanson gives the background and meaning of each and why none of these Greek words are legitimately translated as “hell” which is defined as “a place of never-ending torment.”

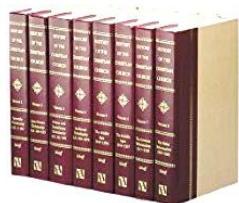
Books on Church History



The Early Church Fathers (38 Vols.)

by [Alexander Roberts](#) (Editor)

The first ten volumes in this set are called the Apostolic Fathers, covering the two centuries after the time of Jesus and his apostles, from about AD 100 to 300. These followers of Jesus were those who learned under the apostles of Jesus and remarked about this in their writings. And they were the succeeding generations after the apostles who remained faithful to what they believed in the midst of great persecution, suffering, and martyrdom. They consistently express in their writings a heart for God and an unwavering faith in Jesus as both their lord and savior. They are remarkably inspiring, in spite of their flaws. Reading this set (not all, but much of it) gave me groundwork for all other readings I have done in church history that followed this period. These Apostolic Fathers were mostly Greek (eastern) as opposed to Latin (western) in their language, culture, and thinking. Their commitment to the idea that God would fully reconcile all people to himself in eternity is clear in the writing of the most prominent of them from that era – namely Clement of Alexandria, Origen, and Gregory. In my reading through this set, when I got to Tertullian I sensed that the tone of writing had changed to harshness of heart. I did not know it at the time, but through later study I discovered that he (Tertullian) was one of the few Latin Fathers of that early era, and was also one of the few committed in his thinking to the idea of eternal punishment on the part of God. Augustine in the 5th century was the next great Latin Father to take up this theme and popularize it.



History of the Christian Church, 8 vols.

by [Philip Schaff](#)

This may very well be the best history of the Christian Church in print. Schaff is a master at history. Enjoyable and easy reading (which is not always the case). It is not, however, without bias since Schaff is a Protestant. Yet, he is a true historian that did a very fair and complete job of covering all periods of church history. In eight volumes and over 7000 pages, Schaff provides a complete and helpful view of where Christians came from, where they are today ... and why!.

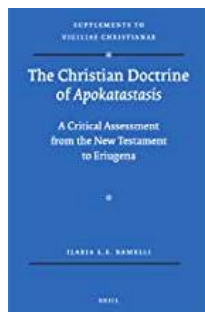


History of Dogma

by Neil Buchanan and Adolph Harnack

Anyone wanting to understand how and why doctrine in Christianity developed, must read this massive work. Harnack is amazing. He answers so many questions that church history never address. This is because he is focused on doctrine, how it

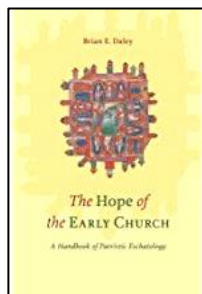
came about, and why. I got into this work because by Gustaf Aulen (see Christus Victor below in the section titled Books on the Atonement) based his thesis that Luther held to a pre-Augustine view of the atonement of Jesus. I spent a lot of time reading his volume on Luther and the Reformation. Someday I hope to read massive amounts of the rest of his work.



The Christian Doctrine of Apokatastasis : A Critical Assessment

by [Ilaria Ramelli](#)

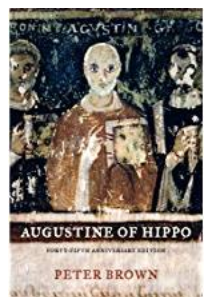
This book has turned out to be absolutely fantastic to read. It is a 900-page chronicle of all the Church Fathers, many of whom held to the full and complete restoration by God of all people in eternity. This was known to them as Apokatastasis, which is the Greek word for restoration. It occurs in the New Testament writings in Luke's account of the Acts of the Apostles (mostly the acts of Peter and Paul). This book was written by a lady scholar at Catholic University named Ilaria Ramelli. It took her a decade to complete this work and she has over 2000 footnotes in it, so it is very well documented! As I read through this work (and I am still working on it), I was compelled to check up on her and see if what she was claiming was really true. This is where the ten-volume set of the Apostolic Fathers (described above) came in handy. (I also have the earlier several volumes in that set in the original Greek, which allows me to check even more carefully when needed). Ms. Ramelli proved to always be accurate when I checked her references. She neither read into any writings of the early fathers, nor did she take them out of context (as far as I could tell). She was also very fair minded about evidence that did not support her thesis – and some of it did not. Her book is clearly an honest effort to present the truth about what the early Church Fathers believed concerning the reconciliation of all things eternally. Overall, this book convinced me, without a doubt, that her thesis is correct. This was in spite of all the empty and ungrounded claims commonly made against Restoration, usually done by quoting other people who have made many assumptions based on very little real information about the early Church Fathers who are usually neglected sadly. This is a book worth spending time in, for anyone who really wants to know what the early Church Fathers believed based on an exhaustive study of all of their writings.



The Hope of the Early Church: A Handbook of Patristic Eschatology

by Brian E. Daley

In *The Devil's Redemption* (see the section below titled *Books Supporting Eternal Punishment*) this book is presented as a good resource for concluding that Early Christians predominately held to eternal punishment. I bought it to verify this claim. But it turned out that this was not at all the case. True, this book cites some 60 early Christians and many did hold to eternal punishment. But many also were Annihilationists and Recreationists. A much better and more complete resource for how many Early Christians believed in Full Restoration is Dr. Ilaria Ramelli's book titled *Apokatastasis*. (See the description of her book above). But this book by Daley is an excellent and rather complete source of all Early Christians and all of their views.

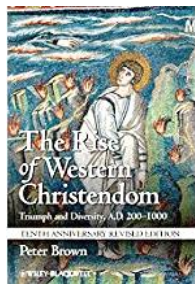


Augustine of Hippo: A Biography

by Peter Brown

This book was a great help in my research on Augustine. Brown goes into detail about Augustine's early years spent in wayward pleasures and his experiences in Manancianism. This helped explain to my why Augustine formed some beliefs as he did in his later years. Some beliefs were *because* of his background, and other were a *reaction* to those same background experiences. This seems a bit contradictory, but I guess this is true for all of us. It also helped to explain why Augustine moved so severely away from the majority of early Christians in his view on eternal

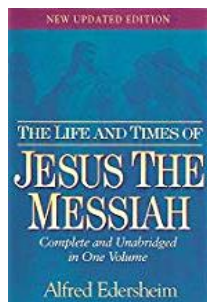
destiny ... from an agreement with (or, at least tolerance) of the Full Restoration view to the one he so adamantly championed (eternal punishment) in City of God near the end of his life.



The Rise of Western Christendom: Triumph and Diversity, A.D. 200-1000

by Peter Brown

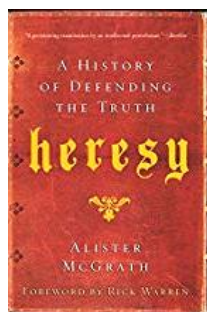
This is yet another great historical work by Peter Brown, but more general in focus (than his book on Augustine described above) on the development of Western Christianity. This book was very helpful in discovering the ways in which Western Christianity turned after the mighty influence of Augustine and the emergence of more and more powerful Popes.



The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah

by [Alfred Edersheim](#)

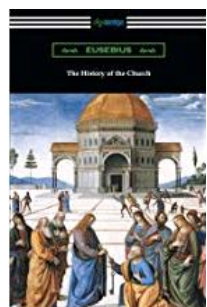
This has got to be one of the greatest historical works of the modern era. It is huge and focuses exclusively on the life of Jesus and the Jewish, Roman, and Greek cultures in which he lived. Edersheim spent nearly a decade researching and writing this book. It is an extremely valuable resource for anyone studying the New Testament and the life of Jesus who is the main focus. This book includes a very interesting appendix on Eternal Punishment. Though Edersheim held to the eternal punishment view, he clearly hesitated and gave a shadow of a doubt about it and even warned about misunderstanding the goodness of God when holding this view.



Heresy: A History of Defending the Truth

by Alister McGrath

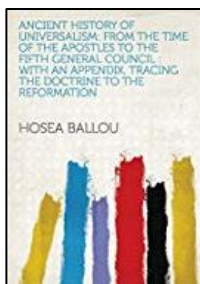
Most people think a *heretic* is someone who believes different than they do. And, I suppose, to them such people are heretics! But heresy has more to do with how and why someone presents what they believe. The Greek word has to do with causing division. This is true in the New Testament and in Church History. Honest differences of opinions by fellow believers should be respected and celebrated. This is healthy and is in line with Paul's exhortation that we are to determine truth by examining everything carefully (in addition to prayer and seeking the Holy Spirits leading). This book explains what heresy is, chronicles its emergence in church history (Recreationists and Annihilationists were never identified as heretics!), and then discusses the results and effects of heresy. Well worth reading *before* you call fellow believers heretics!



The History of the Church

by [Eusebius](#)

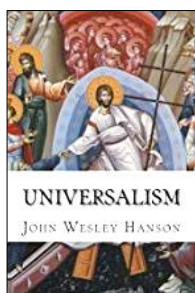
One of the earliest and best historians in the Christian church. What is so great about it is that Eusebius is not a modern-day historian trying to piece together church history. Instead, he is someone who was a part of it and chronicled what he witness and researched. It is not a huge work, at over 300 pages, but it is not skimpy either. Eusebius covers history from the time of Jesus up into his own time-period, in the beginning of the 4th century AD – about 300 years total. This was a very important time in church history since all foundational beliefs and practices were hammered out before the RC (Western) church emerged into dominance in the middle ages. If you read any church history, you *must* include this one!



Ancient History of Universalism

by Hosea Ballou

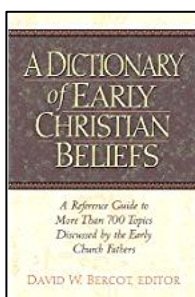
Ballou and Hanson were two of the first Universalists that I came across when I started really looking into this subject after reading Karl Barth. Though neither of these two theologians (from the 19th century) are quite on the high level of notoriety as NT Wright or Barth, still they are solid investigators of church history, and what they have written was very helpful to me. Through reading Ballou (as well as some others) I learned to not too quickly dismiss writers just because they are not in my “camp” or because they do not hold advanced degrees in education. I found that any written presentation really needs to be evaluated based on what is offered, and how well it can be verified ... not just whether or not I like it, agree with it, or if it makes me feel good. Ballou, like Hansen, after checking into the validity of what he wrote, proved himself to be very reliable! And when people write about history, it is pretty easy to verify or expose what is claimed.



Universalism: The Prevailing Doctrine During the 500 Hundred Years

by John Wesley Hanson

Hanson, like Ballou (above), is not a big name in the history of the Christian church. He wrote after Ballou though his subject matter was similar. Both wrote on the history of universalism in the Christian church. Hansen, a few times, takes some liberties in his conclusions, but I did not find him to do this anymore than other writers of that day, or even today. All authors have some bias and it usually is related to their motive in writing. Hansen clearly wanted to prove that the Christian church primarily held the belief of full and complete restoration of all humanity by God in eternity. But in checking up on him (as I do all authors that I read) he proved himself to be much more accurate about early church history (in the first 500 years) than anything I ever got from church, seminary, or my personal study in the past thirty years! I am convinced that these early church fathers are ignored, and sometimes even distorted, to justify some the theology that we have inherited from Roman Catholicism over the past 1400 years.

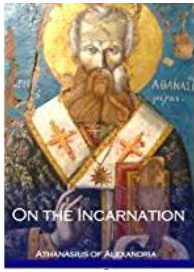


A Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs

by [David W Bercot](#)

This is one of many books by David Bercot. Most of his books are about the Early Christians. Bercot is not a trained theologian... which has advantages and disadvantages. Many years ago I quit evaluating books by their cover. In other words, I learned to look beyond (but not ignore) the publisher, background of the writer (what school or seminary attended, if any), what “camp” he or she is in, etc. I started allowing books to speak for themselves. If they bring good solid, well researched and objective information, then I am interested. Certainly there are many kooky works out there by unqualified people. But, sadly, there is some pretty shabby, unsupported, and terribly biased work by formally trained people who should know better. I learned the hard way to test each writer and book! But often regular (but diligent) people write some good and helpful books. David Bercot is one and Julie Ferwerda is another (Author of *Raising Hell*, described in the section below titled *Books Supporting Restoration*). This particular book by Bercot lists tons of quotes by Early Christians on over 700 topics. At about 700 pages this is a great resource for what the Early Christians believed and wrote.

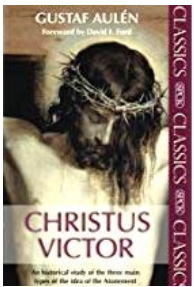
Books on the Atonement of Jesus



On the Incarnation

by Athanasius of Alexandria

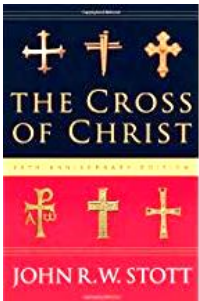
This is not a long book, but it says a lot. And it says a lot about something really important – the *incarnation* (God becoming human). Athanasius lays this out beautifully. And he makes the argument, convincingly, why the incarnation of Jesus is just as much “salvation” as is his death and resurrection. These three work together. It is not a matter of one leading to the other so that the resurrection alone saves. And it is very clear that Athanasius viewed the atonement of Jesus for all humanity, as did most early Christians before Augustine and the rise of the RC church. In some publications of this book (like the one I have) CS Lewis wrote a preface. If you buy this book, look for one with this preface. The link provided above is to such a publication.



Christus Victor

by Gustaf Aulen

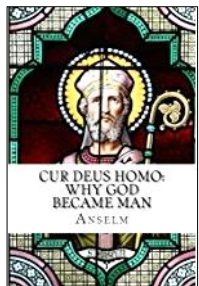
This book was so good and helpful, I read it twice. Aulen caused quite a stir with this book in the first half of the twentieth century. In it he presents several views of the atonement of Jesus. But the view he holds is opposed to Penal Substitutionary Atonement (see the section above titled *Anselm's View of the Atonement* for more information about PSA). His view is that Jesus died to take away the punishment that sin brings on us, not that God brings. This is a very important distinction. Sin is our enemy, not God. God, through Jesus, is our savior. In this book I discovered *The History of Dogma* multi-volume set by Harnack. Aulen argues that Luther held to the view of the atonement that was held by the early church before influence Augustine and Anselm. He uses Harnack's work as his main reference.



The Cross of Christ

by John Stott

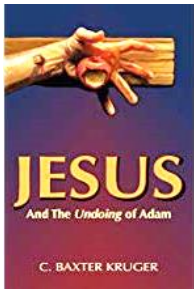
This book is probably the most widely read and accepted modern-day work on the Penal Substitutionary view of the atonement of Jesus. It is very well written and organized (as would be expected from John Stott) and he makes the most convincing presentation in favor of PSA that I have ever read. It is very Biblical and logical.



Cur Deus Homo: Why God Became Man

by Anselm

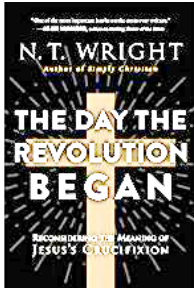
This is probably the best known work by Anselm. To the best of my research and understanding, he is the “father” of Penal Substitutionary Atonement. The Roman Catholic church, the Reformers, and therefore most modern-day protestants and evangelical hold their PSA beliefs based on what Anselm wrote (though most people do not realize this). There is a complete chapter in this booklet dedicated to Anselm and his huge influence on most modern-day views of the atonement. See the section in this booklet titled *Anselm's View of the Atonement* for more detail).



Jesus and the Undoing of Adam

by [C. Baxter Kruger](#)

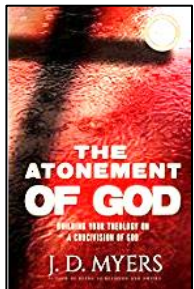
This is yet another fabulous book by Baxter Kruger. (See the section below titled *Books Supporting Restoration* for more books by, and information about, Baxter Kruger). This book focuses on what Jesus accomplished in his atonement for all humanity. It is a great book to read in order to better understand the transcripts of the broadcasts at the beginning of this booklet, which deal with the old and new persons that we were and now are.



The Day the Revolution Began: Reconsidering the Meaning of Jesus's Crucifixion

by [N. T. Wright](#)

NT Wright has so many good books, it is amazing. He writes on the highest scholarly level, yet his layman level books are very readable. This one is all about what happened at 3 PM on the Friday of the crucifixion of Jesus. At the time, on that day ... everything changed because of what Jesus did. He, in a very real sense, started a revolution. And this revolution is based on the beginning of the re-creation of everything by the death of Jesus. Plenty of in-context biblical support in this book. This book will encourage the socks off of you. The optimism that comes from reading this book and understanding it will change your life.



The Atonement of God: Building Your Theology on a Crucivision of God

by [J. D. Myers](#)

This is a terrific book on the atonement of Jesus. JD holds to the classic view (pre-Augustine) that was predominately held by Early Christians and the Eastern Christian Church. His basic premise is that Jesus came to save humanity from sin and its punishment... not God's. The latter is known as Penal Substitutionary Atonement, which came into full development after Anselm, and is very popular today in Catholic and Protestant churches. But if you want to read an easy to understand presentation of the classic and "non-violent" view of the atonement of Jesus ... this book is for you.

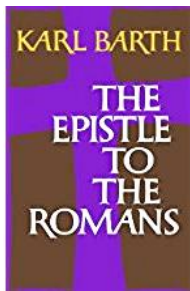
Books Supporting Restoration



Church Dogmatics

by [Karl Barth](#)

I spent about seven months reading a large amount (about a fourth) of this massive work by Karl Barth. This 12 volume set of over four million words presents the grace of God like no other I have ever read (including Lewis Sperry Chafer). In it Barth always centers everything in Jesus as the elected man by God to be the savior of all mankind. Few resources that I have read in life have been as inspiring and informative as Barth. It is not easy to wade through at times, but it becomes more appreciated over time as you learn to understand all he is saying. Barth, of all the thirteen Systematic Theologies that I have read over the past 40 years, has answered my questions about who God is, and how the redemption of mankind works in light of his mercy and justice, better than anyone. It is no surprise that he has been acclaimed by many, worldwide, as the most influential theologian of the twentieth century. Pope Pius XII described him as "the most important theologian since Thomas Aquinas." Wow

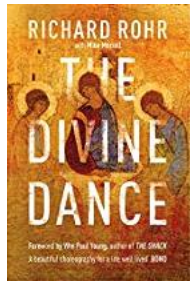


The Epistle to the Romans

by [Karl Barth](#)

This commentary on Romans was actually one of Barth's earliest works. It had a huge impact on the theological world of the first half of the 20th century. As I recall, it went through many editions and Barth honed-in his somewhat new perspective of Romans through these many editions while keeping his main theme. He clearly teaches the universality of the death and resurrection of Jesus for all humanity. There is no clearer presentation of this as what he wrote concerning Romans

chapter 5, about how all humanity fell into condemnation in Adam, and that in the same way the same humanity was represented by Jesus as the new and final Adam, bringing all into righteousness completely by God's grace as a free gift of salvation for all.

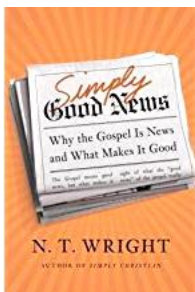


The Divine Dance: The Trinity and Your Transformation

by [Richard Rohr](#)

If you have never read Richard Rohr, you are in for a big treat. Rohr is a clever and entertaining writer ... but not that alone. He has amazingly important and deep things to say about God, mankind, and the relationship between the two. Rohr is Catholic, but not a typical one (much like Kung and Balthasar). He clearly believes and presents the full restoration of all things and people with God as the only possible outcome for a God who is love. It was this book that introduced me

to a book by Catherine Mowry LaCugna titled, *God for Us: The Trinity and Christian Life* (described in the *Other Helpful Books* section below). In Rohr's book he described how he was on a retreat, saw the LaCugna book, started reading it, and could not put it down. The passionate way he described his experience caused me to buy and read this book. And he was right – what a wonderful view of who God is as a Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – and not just some “up there” God!

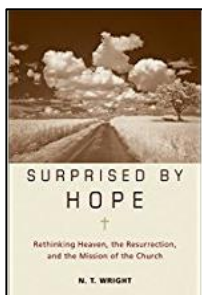


Why the Gospel Is News and What Makes It Good Simply Good News

by [N. T. Wright](#)

This is another terrific and readable book by NT Wright. This has got to be one of the best presentations of what the true “Gospel of the Grace of God” is, that has ever been published. This became the basis for my teaching through the Gospel of Mark, whereby Mark (according to NT Wright) was not presenting the “good news” as an offer of what God will do for you if (and only if) you do something to earn God's favor (be it actions of belief). Instead, the Good News according to Mark is the announcement that the victory has already been won by Jesus against death and

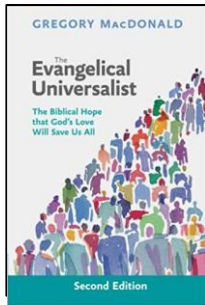
separation from God. And, what Mark presents in his Gospel is just the beginning of what God will do in eternity as he draws all people to himself to be reconciled to him and live resurrected in a newly created world. All of the miracles Jesus did were a statement that that what he did in healing and restoring is just the beginning of all that He will someday do when all people are raised from the dead.



Surprised by Hope

by [N. T. Wright](#)

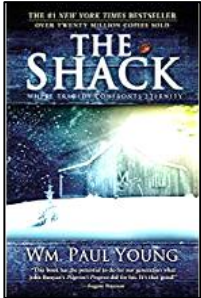
NT Wright not only writes the very top scholarly material, respected by friend and foe alike, but he also writes for the common reader. In this book he challenges traditional thinking concerning the limits (in quantity and quality) that have been placed on the hope we have as humans because of Jesus.



The Evangelical Universalist

by [Gregory MacDonald](#) (Author)

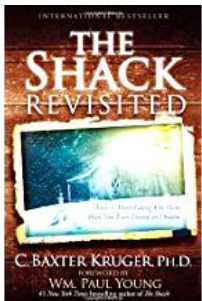
“Gregory MacDonald” (taken from Gregory of the 3rd century AD, and George MacDonald – C.S. Lewis’ mentor) is a name used by Robin Parry to remain anonymous when first releasing this book. “Evangelical Universalism” (God saving all humanity by grace alone through the finished work of Jesus on the cross) is viewed by Roman Catholicism and most churches that emerged from it (Protestant, Reformed, and Evangelical) as heresy and false teaching. I have been labeled a “heretic” and “false teacher”, by long-time and loved fellow-believers, just for holding the position (as a mere opinion) that such love, mercy, grace, and success in salvation by God is *possible*! Amazing! But this is a very good and well thought through book on this subject. I highly recommend it.



The Shack: Where Tragedy Confronts Eternity

by William P. Young

The Shack. What can I say. This is the most amazing book I have ever read. It will make you laugh and make you cry. It was a huge Christian best seller, even though many in Evangelical circles it was proclaimed as heresy. This book was a manuscript Paul Young wrote for his family to read, to communicate what he knew to be true about God who is a wonderful “Father and Daddy”, who loves his creation beyond anything they can think or imagine. It is a story that tells about how God who meets us in the “shack” of our lives – in the most difficult moments and situations -- and shows us who we are and who he is and that he will never ever leave us or forsake us. What a great and wonderful story ... if you can get through the traumatic story that it is. But the lessons are well worth it.

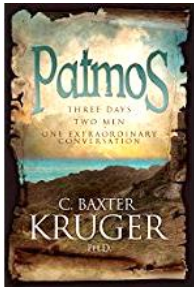


The Shack Revisited

by [C. Baxter Kruger](#)

Baxter Kruger is an acquaintance that I consider a friend. I met him a few years back. It was when I was first looking into Salvation by Grace alone after reading Karl Barth and doing massive studies in the NT on all aspects of salvation. When I met him, I got to hear his story first hand. He had graduated from Reformed Seminary in Jackson, MS. This is the most *reformed* of all reformed seminaries! He told me how in his last year he began to question what he was being told about God, his love, and retribution of unbelievers. He said he took of one semester and spent time in the library (long before the internet) researching the beliefs of the early church fathers. He had come to many of the same conclusions that I had recently come to, independently. Wow! When I heard this I remember saying to him (without thinking), “You are my new best friend!” I realized I had said this because I was hungry for a friend in this matter of who God is. I had recently been declared a heretic and false teacher at my church, for just simply holding this belief as a differing opinion from those in leadership. How sad. But here in Baxter I found a friend who had, independent of me, many years ago, discovered the same wonderful things about God that I had recently discovered.

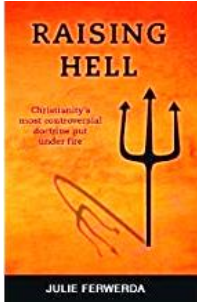
This book explains the theology behind the story in The Shack. It is the theology of the early Christians prior to Augustine and the rise of Roman Catholicism. It is the theology of the Triune God (Father Son and Holy Spirit) that invites all humanity to come into fellowship with these three. It is about not only their love for each other, but their love for humanity ... to the point that they, all together, came into this world in the person of Jesus to save it, restore it, and bring it safely into eternal fellowship with their Creator, forever.



Patmos: Three Days, Two Men, One Extraordinary Conversation

by Kruger PhD, C. Baxter

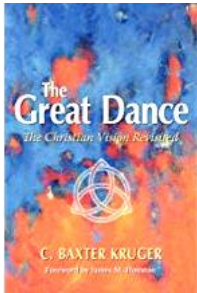
I highly recommend this book. It is a delightful, fictional journey of a modern-day man who is transported in time and location from his own front door to a cave on the island Patmos where the Apostle John was exiled. There he had a three-day conversation with John, while dazed and confused as to how he could possibly be there with John at all. The way Baxter weaves in some great theology and church history into the conversation is masterful. I was both fully entertained, but also (and more importantly) fully informed on so many things about the work of Jesus on the cross, why he came, and what it all means. It was this book that first introduced me to the idea that Jesus came and fully joined humanity, forever, when God became a man on this earth 2000 years ago.



Raising Hell: Christianity's Most Controversial Doctrine Put Under Fire

by [Julie Ferwerda](#)

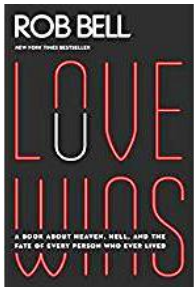
This book is written by a younger woman who travels and lectures. She is neither a theologian or a scholar, and is really just a regular person. But she is a lady who has done her homework! I looked into all that she wrote and she is very solid. She has laid out a great case against the doctrine of hell and done so on a solid Biblical basis. This, like several other books, taught me to evaluate books by their content and the verifiable evidence behind them. Julie passes with flying colors in my estimation. I strongly recommend this book.



The Great Dance: The Christian Vision Revisited

by C. Baxter Kruger

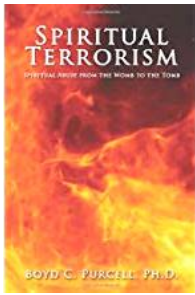
This is an excellent book by Baxter Kruger. It is a heart-felt and accurate description of our "Dance" with God in life. Gotta read it! You will not be disappointed! You can find out a lot more about Baxter and his ministry by visiting: <http://perichoresis.org/>. You can also see many of his very good videos on YouTube. One series worth watching is his "Three Chairs." Search for it on YouTube and you will find it. I will not tell you what the three chairs are all about, but I promise you will like it!



Love Wins

by [Rob Bell](#)

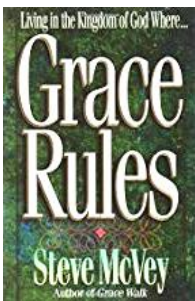
Rob Bell was one of the first in modern times to emerge in the public eye as a Universalist. I remember reading an article in Time Magazine about him while on vacation in Half Moon Bay, California. When I first read it, I knew he was wrong because I had been very well trained in theology and Biblical things. Yet, something in me also knew (as I look back now) that there was something correct in what he was teaching about God being a universal savior. When I finally read Bell's book, many years later, I began to see the truth in some of what he was saying. However, I remember thinking that he was really hostile toward evangelical Christianity. This is, in my opinion, not a necessary response and so I try to avoid it and be as united with all believers as I can possibly be. It is usually others who restrict unity... not me. I really want to be unified with other believers in our common faith, and not allow differences to divide us. But many will not allow this. Still ... I strive for it!



Spiritual Terrorism: Spiritual Abuse From The Womb To The Tomb

by Boyd C. Purcell Ph.D.

At one point in time, well into my research on Universalism, I remember thinking that in so many ways what has come down to us from 6th century Roman Catholicism (in the form of dogmatic eternal torment on the part of God) is “spiritual terrorism” for so many people ... especially children! And then, there it was ... a book titled Spiritual Terrorism! Wow! I bought and read it. It is written by a pastor/counsellor kind of a guy with a lot of experience. He chronicles not only the biblical evidence in favor of Universalism, but more importantly, he tells of what a spiritual terrorizing impact he has seen on people, especially children, who have been indoctrinated in the teaching that God will, in eternity inflict never ending pain and agony upon unbelievers as pure retribution with no restoring purpose for them whatsoever! This is the horror of billions of people, perhaps most of humanity, kept in existence, for the sole purpose of never ending punishment from which there can never be a break or an exit! It is the worst possible thing imaginable by the human mind, and it is ascribed to the God of the universe who presents himself as what love itself is!

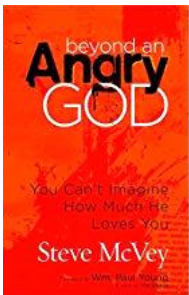


Grace Rules

by [Steve McVey](#)

Steve McVey is a pastor who began looking into Universalism as a result of his realization (like many others) that something in what he was taught (and was teaching) about God was just not right. Many pastors in America have come to doubt what they were taught about eternal punishment by God. However, they cannot admit it publicly (sometimes not even privately, or in their own heart) because their reputation, and therefore their livelihood, depends on them not going “off track” doctrinally. In other words, they really cannot afford to look at the facts objectively.

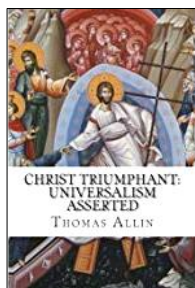
In the case of Steve McVey, he did and it made life as a pastor very difficult for him. But his books and his understanding of Grace, and all that it really means, shines through in all that he writes. This is one of many books he has written on Grace. Grace Rules is one of my favorites and is very easy for anyone to read!



Beyond an Angry God

by [Steve McVey](#)

This is Steve McVey’s excellent treatment of the subject of Gods Wrath. The wrath of God has been misrepresented by many religious people today and over the centuries of church history. Steve reveals the misconceptions and mistranslations concerning God’s wrath and anger, and shows clearly how all this fits into the fact that God IS love!

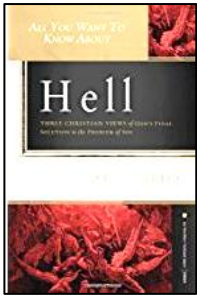


Christ Triumphant: Universalism Asserted

by Thomas Allin

This is a sweet and positive book by the same guy (Thayer) that chronicled the history of Eternal Punishment. This chronicles the overwhelming victory Jesus accomplished on the cross for the whole world ... all humanity ... that he loves so very much.

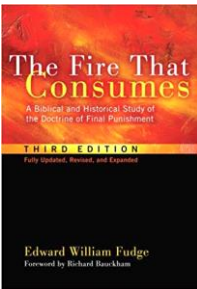
Books with Multiple Views, Moderate Views, or Questioning Views



Hell: Three Christian Views

by [Steve Gregg](#)

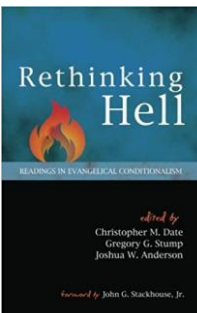
This is a “Three Views” book about hell. In it author and Christian radio talk show host, Steve Gregg, does a super job of presenting all three major views of eternal destiny of unbelievers. He does such a good job that I honestly could not tell which view he personally holds. It was one of the first books I read on this subject, long before I even read Barth. But I think I read this book after I read the Time Magazine article on Rob Bell (see the next book). This book was given to me by a friend and asked for my “take” on it. It took me a while to get around to reading it because I already knew what I believed and why. But when I did finally read it I was amazed at how little I really knew. This book was my first exposure to the reconciliation views of early Christians. I remember reading and thinking that I had better look into this and see if there was any truth to it all. Turns out there was a lot to it! More than I ever imagined.



The Fire That Consumes

by [Edward Fudge](#)

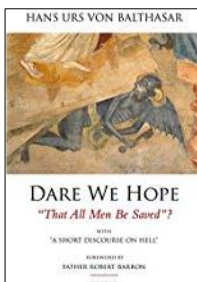
This is one of the best books on Annihilationism. I bought it because I kept finding it referenced in many other books. I was particularly struck by Fudge’s complete and accurate section of Early Christians. Since Fudge does not hold to eternal punishment, he is less biased in favor of it. He also deals with what Jesus meant by “fire.”



Rethinking Hell

by [Christopher M. Date](#) (Editor), [Gregory G. Stump](#) (Editor)

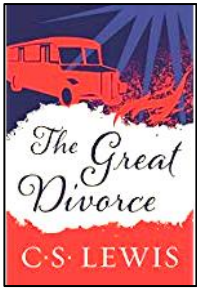
Like Fudge’s book (above) this is an excellent book presenting Annihilationism. But unlike Fudge’s book, this book is a collection of essays by modern-day theologians including: Fudge, John Stott, Pinnock, and Phillip Hughes – about a dozen in all. No slouches on this list! This book was recommended by a pastor friend of mine. He recommended well. It is a treasure of good information on this view!



Dare We Hope That All Men Be Saved?

by [Hans Urs von Balthasar](#)

This book caused a stir in the RC church when it came out in the mid 80’s. In it Balthasar goes about as far as the RC church will allow by claiming that it is *possible* that God will eventually save all humanity. He makes so many good arguments that it is hard to not conclude that he believed in *Restoration*, but did not want to admit it publicly to avoid worse criticism than he got. In *The Devil’s Redemption* (see the section below titled *Books Supporting Eternal Punishment*) McClymond devotes over half of his sixty-page chapter on “Eternal Hope” to Balthasar. Mc Clymond and Balthasar, both being Roman Catholic, I can see (after reading this book) why Mc Clymond shows such concern and spends so much more time analyzing Balthasar than all others in his chapter combined!

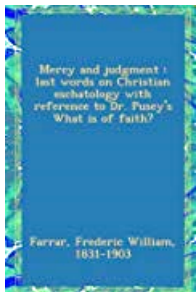


The Great Divorce

by [C. S. Lewis](#)

There is considerable controversy about whether or not CS Lewis believed in eternal punishment. But this book seems to make it clear that he did not. But Lewis was not a universalist either, nor was he an Annihilationist. So where do we place CS Lewis in the spectrum of views on eternal destiny? In a previously produced booklet titled *Full Restoration of All Humanity as a Free Gift of God's Love and Grace* (see the GILF Resources section near the end of this booklet) I placed him in a category all his own that I called "Abandonment." In that booklet I wrote:

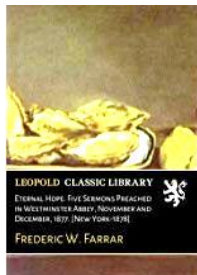
C.S. Lewis seemed to hold this Abandonment view and wrote a book about it called The Great Divorce. In his book he describes a bus ride from hell to heaven. This is, of course, just fiction; but Lewis wrote many fiction books in order to teach spiritual principles – just as he did with The Chronicles of Narnia. In this bus ride to heaven from hell, people can visit and even stay there if they want to, but most choose not to stay because they prefer hell over heaven. As a result, they get back on the bus and go back to hell. The book 10 ends with people getting farther and farther away from each other because they can't stand each other and they end up in outer darkness and isolation. But the idea here for Lewis is that God is not the direct cause of their torment and invites all to come to heaven, any time they want even after death, because God is always there for them. However, God "abandons" these people to their own choice of hell over heaven. Well-known theologian F.F. Bruce also aligned himself with this view.



Mercy and judgment : last words on Christian eschatology with reference to Dr. Pusey's What is of faith?

by Frederic William Farrar

Farrar's work is a pillar in the defense of Universalism among writers of the 19th century. I kept coming across his name in other works that I was reading and eventually got around to this book. Much of my research progressed from one classical work to another by means of reference in some previous work. It is like a chain of resources that fans out, each new one yielding yet another source to examine. At nearly 500 pages, Farrar's work on Mercy and Judgment is very thorough. He focuses his work on both history and examination of New Testament writings. He does a great job of demonstrating how mercy (and especially judgment) have been terribly misunderstood, and sometimes misrepresented, in light of both the Bible and early church history. However, Farrar is careful to not claim to be a universalist. This is why I have placed this book in this *Moderate Views* category. But this also demonstrated to me that he is a very fair-minded source on this subject of mercy, judgment, and eternal punishment on the part of God.

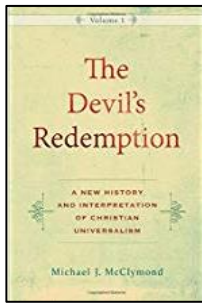


Eternal Hope

by [Frederic William Farrar](#) (Author)

Farrar's book on Mercy and Judgment led me to his book on Eternal Hope. This is a very positive (and rightly so) presentation of the hope all humanity has in both the eternal and infinite love of God, and the expression of that love in the life and death of Jesus as the representative of the entire human race.

Books Supporting Eternal Punishment

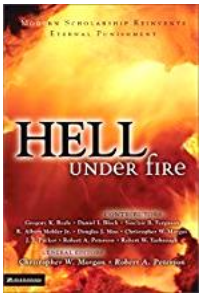


The Devil's Redemption: A New History and Interpretation of Christian Universalism

by Michael J. McClymond

My Jesuit-trained evangelical friend (who I mention in the description of Hans Kung's book on *Justification* below) told me about this book. It is the latest, biggest, most complete, and best presentation *against* all forms of universalism. It is a massive two-volume set and it covers every aspect and position of universalism from the beginning of the church into the modern age.

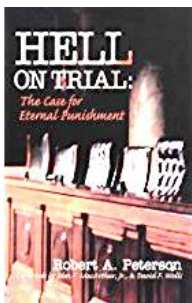
However, most of the book covers universalism from the Enlightenment onward. The presentation from the Early Church period is a bit lacking. But considering the scope and purpose of this book it is not an unreasonable balance. For a more complete and accurate presentation of what the Early Church believed, see Dr. Ilaria Ramelli's massive work titled Apokatastasis (the restoration of all things) in *Books on Church History*, above.



Hell Under Fire: Modern Scholarship Reinvents Eternal Punishment

by Christopher W. Morgan and Robert A. Peterson

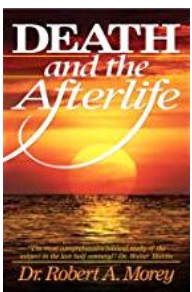
This is a terrific book to read if you want essays written by current theologians presenting the case against universalism. J I Packer, Douglas Moo, and Sinclair Ferguson and just three of the nine contributors to this collection of essays.



Hell on Trial: The Case for Eternal Punishment

by [Robert A. Peterson](#)

This is a layman's level presentation against universal salvation. Peterson lists all the major passages from the New Testament that are commonly used to argue *against* the idea that God saves all humanity. I used his very complete list in this book to double-check that I had included all New Testament passages that deal with *judgement* in my section (in this booklet) titled *The Judgment of God ... Love in Action*.



Death and the Afterlife

by [Robert A. Morey](#)

This is, perhaps, the best known modern-day classic that defends eternal punishment. Morey does a good job, uses reason and scripture to make his arguments. However, I found him to be weak on the Early Church evidence. In his appendix on quotes from early Christians, he quotes primarily Justin Martyr and a couple of others. But there are so many other Early Christians that clearly held to Restoration. These are revealed clearly in Dr. Ilaria Ramelli's massive work titled Apokatastasis (the restoration of all things) in *Books on Church History*, above. Additionally, see the section in

this booklet titled *Early Church Writers on Restoration* where is list quotes from early Christians based on Dr. Ramelli's book.



Burning Down 'The Shack'

by [James B. De Young](#)

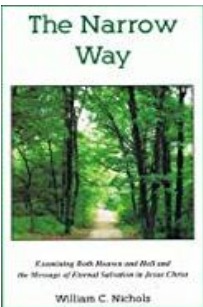
This book is a *must read* if you have read *The Shack* (by Paul Young) and want the other side against it. De Young is a professor at Western Seminary and is well acquainted with this subject. He uses reason, the Bible, and his vast knowledge of theology to attempt to discredit the theology of the Shack. However, there were two things that I observed when reading this book. First, as a long-time friend of Paul Young, Prof De Young seemed to take undue advantage of personal knowledge about Paul Young in previous church situations that he deemed negative. I thought such arguments were not needed in order to present a view contrary to the Shack and would have preferred that he stayed away from the personal divulging of information. It was on no real help and actually detracted from his otherwise reasonable objections about The Shack. But also, it occurred to me that DeYong's book, good as it is, and will relate to a few thousand pastors and laymen readers, it pales in comparison to how the Shack has connected in a very special way with some 25 million readers who saw something of the heart and grace of God in a very special way.



Erasing Hell: What God Said About Eternity, and the Things We've Made Up

by [Francis Chan](#) and Preston Sprinkle

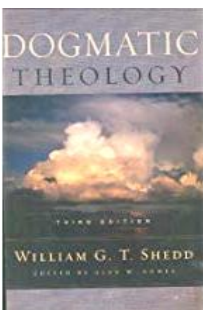
A good friend of mine had bought this book as a result of their concern for all the study and reading I was doing in *salvation by grace alone that results in the restoration of all humanity*. I borrowed the book and found it so interesting I bought my own copy so I could mark it up (as I do all my books!). What interested me early on in the book was Chan's lament that his dying grandmother was destined to eternal punishment as a result of her unbelief in Jesus. He said it made him sick and made him hate this doctrine that was horrible beyond anything else he knew of. Yet ... he continued on and wrote a book to defend what he so greatly abhorred about God. It became an early insight to the dilemma most Christians face, not only about eternal punishment of loved ones, but their own struggle trusting a God of Love who can do such terrible things.



The Narrow Way

by William Nichols

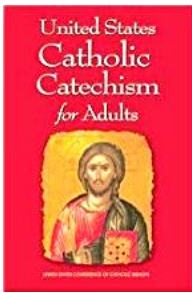
This is a harsh book. Nothing fun or enjoyable about it whatsoever. But I gotta hand it to Nichols for giving the eternal punishment view "straight as hell" to his readers! He pulls no punches and does not soft peddle it any way.



Dogmatic Theology

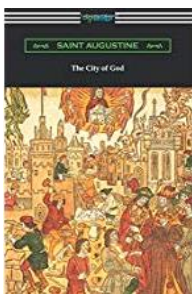
by William G.T. Shedd

Though I have read and carefully studied a dozen Systematic Theologies over the past forty years, I am including this one in my list of resources because of Dr. Shedd's lengthy and intense presentation in his chapter titled "Hell." This chapter is about 60 pages and contains three main parts: Historical, Biblical, and Rational arguments supporting eternal punishment. There is also a lengthy section of supplements. The *Rational Arguments* section was of most interest to me. In it Dr. Shedd describes in detail the nature of punishment and retribution. He also lists five specific rational arguments in support of eternal punishment. I found Dr. Shedd's chapter on *Hell* to be one of the best and most thorough descriptions of the commonly held view of eternal punishment that I have encountered.



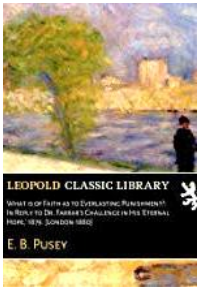
United States Catholic Catechism by US Conference of Catholic Bishops

A friend of mine, who was once an evangelical and became a Catholic after looking into everything carefully and praying sincerely, gave me this book. He was down-sizing to a smaller home and was cleaning things out. He told me he thought it might help me in my historical research on eternal destinies. This is the official and definitive source of doctrine for the Roman Catholic Church. It includes updated improvements produced in the 1990's under Pope John Paul II. It is a huge work of more than 700 pages. As I browsed through it I found two kinds of information. There was the solid, historic and Biblical information that comes out of good objective, sincere, and honest scholarship. The RC church has many such scholars. But I also found a great deal of added doctrines that the RC Church would claim to be true due to its belief that the teachings added but tradition over the past 1500 years (not 2000) are authoritative. And, I am sure, such additions are indeed authoritative for the RC Church. But Protestants, the Eastern Church (which has co-existed with the Western Church from the very beginning of Christianity), and many modern-day Christians who claim the Early Church before Augustine to be their authority --- all of these groups do not accept such "additions of tradition" to be authoritative. So, I read with great interest the areas in this Catechism that deal directly with Biblical theology and ancient church history (before all the RC additions). I found these to be quite good and helpful to my study of eternal destiny. Many RC scholars (today and in history) have certainly done their homework and have articulated most of the fundamental truths of Christianity with a great deal of accuracy and clarity. This realization was confirmed by my reading of Hans Kung's book on justification (see the description of this book in the section above titled Books on Justification).



The City of God by Saint Augustine

This book is probably the most influential book in the history of Western Christianity (which includes Roman Catholicism, Protestants, Reformers, and modern-day evangelicals). Not only is it a very large work that took Augustine over a decade to produce near the end of his life, it is also extremely detailed, historical and philosophical. It showcases not only the sheer genius of Augustine but the breadth and depth of his knowledge in some many areas of thinking (secular and religious). Interestingly, Augustine had a pretty good idea of what kind of book this would be and what kind of impact it would probably have on the Christian world. He was so aware he voiced his concern that his work would be overly accepted and overly applied equal to or in place of Scripture. And, to a great degree his fears came about, but decades and centuries after his death. Augustine was a man with gifts of oratory and articulation clearly above his peers. He wrote extensively. His other great and heavily influential work was his autobiography titled *Confessions*. But it is in *City of God* that Augustine devotes two large chapters (XX and XXI) to the subject of eternal punishment. And he does so dogmatically and in great detail. This sent the Western Church of into a direction away from the less severe views of Restoration and Annihilation that were so widely held before Augustine. In fact, he once complained at how few Christians share his belief in eternal punishment when he was writing *City of God*. (For more detailed information on Eternal Punishment in *The City of God*, see the section above titled *Augustine's View of Hell*.)



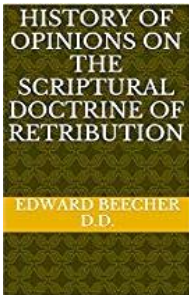
What is of Faith as to Everlasting Punishment?: (In Reply to Dr. Farrar)

by E. B. Pusey

I read this book because it was a direct response to Farrar's book on *Mercy and Judgment*. (see Farrar's two books in the section above titled *Books with Multiple Views, Moderate Views, or Questioning Views*.) In this book Pusey attempts to refute Farrar's "hopeful universalism" position that he so eloquently and thoroughly presented. After reading both, Pusey seemed to be no match for Farrar.

Books on the history and origin of hell

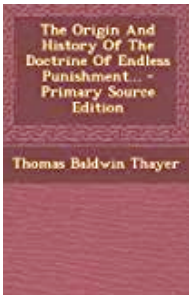
When I first began looking into the subject of hell, after I did a complete study on the meanings of the biblical words translated as hell and the usage of them in the Bible (see the section in this book titled *Stubborn Facts About Hell*), I naturally wanted to know where the belief in eternal punishment came from and when. The following books were essential in answering these questions.



History of Opinions on the Scriptural Doctrine of Retribution

by Edward Beecher D.D.

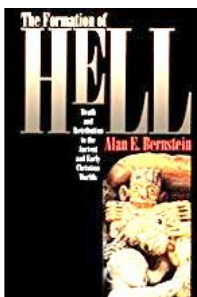
Beecher was an unexpected surprise discovery. I am not sure exactly how I came across it. But once I started reading it I found it contained a great deal of good information on the history of eternal punishment, much like that found in Thayer's book described below.



The Origin And History Of The Doctrine Of Endless Punishment

by Thomas Baldwin Thayer

I forgot how I came across this book, but I am really glad I did. It chronicles the long history of the doctrine of retribution (punishment with no redemptive purpose). Thayer clearly demonstrates how retribution originated in Egyptian paganism, was totally missing from the OT writings, then emerged in the Apocryphal writings of the Maccabean period (in the Book of Enoch and the Apocalypse of Ezra). I have verified these claims by doing my own research based on what he wrote. He also shows how retribution is missing from the New Testament and from early church history until the rise of the RC church in the 6th century.



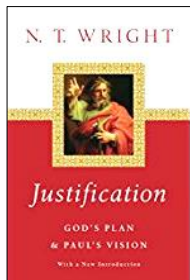
The Formation of Hell: Death and Retribution in the Ancient and Early Christian Worlds

by [Alan E. Bernstein](#)

I discovered this book only recently. It is a little hard to read but Bernstein has done his homework. He goes through Egypt, Babylonia, Greece and Rome before dealing with ancient Judaism, the New Testament Christianity, and then the Early church (after Jesus and the Apostles). He covers it all and exposes clearly the history of how hell and eternal punishment originated and developed.

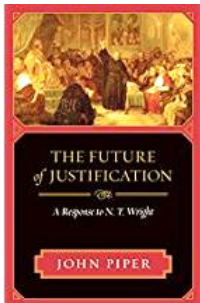
Books on Justification

A few years ago I dedicated a whole year to studying the subject of Justification. Man oh man, I had no idea what I was getting into. I began with NT Wright's book titled Justification. This let me down an unexpected path through many books. (The descriptions below tell this journey). The variety of opinions and views from true scholars (like piper and NT Wright), along with a variety of views held throughout church history makes this subject extra challenging. It got confusing and even discouraging at times. But I plowed on through and did not give up. Though it was one of the most difficult studies I have ever done, it was the also the most interesting and helpful too! But when all was said and done, I had two huge "take-aways." First, justification is not the same as salvation. Salvation delivers us from something. Justification makes us into something. Big difference. One (justification) involved us to some degree, by faith. The other (salvation) is by grace alone and is a free gift from God totally unearned by us. And this leads to my second "take-away." Our faith has no merit with God, whatsoever, even though faith is important and without it we miss out on almost everything as to fellowship with God.



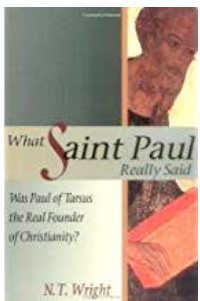
Justification: God's Plan & Paul's Vision by [N. T. Wright](#)

This is one of many great books I have read by NT Wright. NT Wright is a top notch contemporary scholar. He is well-known and greatly respected throughout the world of Biblical scholarship. More NT Wright books are presented below. This book on Justification is excellent. John Piper wrote a book to refute Wright's work in about 2003 (see below), but Wright responded to Piper in his mammoth set on Christianity (described further below). It was fun to read the on-going "debate" between these two very well respected Bible scholars.



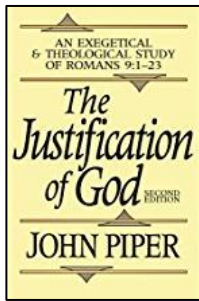
The Future of Justification: A Response to N. T. Wright by [John Piper](#)

Having started with NT Wright's book on Justification, and realizing that he was answering Piper in this book, I ordered and read this book. Piper is a plenty able scholar and writer and he does a great job of presenting the modern Evangelical view of Justification (which is quite different from the view held by NT Wright). But in reading this book, I could tell that Piper was responding to a book NT Wright had previously written in 1997, so I ordered and read it (see below).



What Saint Paul Really Said: Was Paul of Tarsus the Real Founder of Christianity? by [N. T. Wright](#)

This is a book NT Wright wrote in about 1997 about what Paul had in mind when he wrote about Justification in his many letters. But like the above books, I could tell that he was responding to something Piper wrote previously on the subject of Justification. So I ordered and read Piper's book. (see below)



The Justification of God: An Exegetical and Theological Study of Romans 9:1-23

by [John Piper](#)

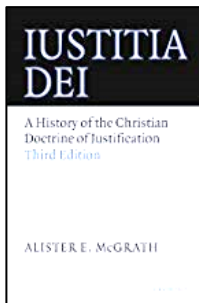
This book on Justification by Piper in about 1993 seems to have started a debate in books with NT Wright that carried on into the 2000-teens. As I read this book I was surprised that Piper would base justification on Romans 9 where the word itself never appears! Why would he not base it on Roman 3 where the subject is more clearly and directly addressed? However, he did, later in his book, present justification in Romans 3. But still, it was curious that he would present first and foremost Romans 9 in his book at 220 pages of about 250 total! (Only 30 pages dedicated to Romans 3!). Then it came to me. Of course. Piper, being a very dedicated Calvinist, bases all of his theology on the *Sovereignty of God* and Romans 9 is the key passage for this. But this is OK. It is certainly his prerogative to select such a basis. It is indeed a good one! But it is also a very different basis than what NT Wright has chosen as his basis for his theology. And this is what makes for such an interesting and helpful debate!



Christian Origins and the Question of God (4 Book Series)

by [N. T. Wright](#)

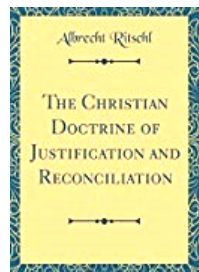
This is NT Wright's massive four-volume set on Christianity. It has caused quite a stir in scholarly circles and seminaries -- a lot like Karl Barth did with his writings in the early part of the last century. I am only part way through this set, but has been amazing so far. In volume 1 he lays important groundwork. Volume 2 is on the person of Jesus. Volume 3 focuses on the Resurrection (just as Paul and all of the NT does). His massive volume 4 is on Paul and his theology -- too big to get into one bound book. It is Wright's somewhat unique perspective on Paul that has caused a stir. In it he answers Piper in enormous detail (though his sole purpose was not to answer Piper). He has been working on this set for some twenty years! Worth reading if you have the time and patience. But I can tell you that you have to read slowly though this stuff. Wright packs a lot into everything he writes. I am always amazed. And organized? Oh ya!



Iustitia Dei: A History of the Christian Doctrine of Justification

by [Alister E. McGrath](#)

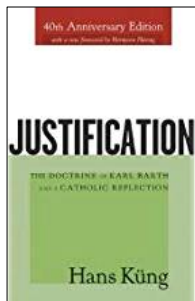
In NT Wright's book on Justification (see above) he makes many references to McGrath's very complete history of Justification (*Iustitia Dei* -- Latin for "Righteousness of God"). So, it was a no-brainer to order it and read it. But what a task! He covers the topic of Justification from the Early Church all the way into the modern era. However, this two-volume set (shown here in one volume) is absolutely essential for an understanding of this very difficult subject.



The Christian Doctrine of Justification and Reconciliation

by [Albrecht Ritschl](#)

Until McGrath's book on Justification (see above) Ritschl's book was the best thing available on the history of Justification. Ritschl is a 19th century writer and it is a large and very complete volume. But it only covered the history of justification from the Reformation onward. McGrath (thankfully) covers all of the history of the church.

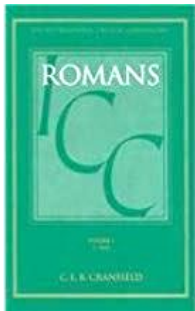


Justification: The Doctrine of Karl Barth and a Catholic Reflection

by Hans Küng

This book was recommended to me by a friend that knew I had just finished my year-long study of justification. My friend is a Jesuit-trained evangelical. Go figure – but he came out of Catholicism and he maintained his knowledge and mindset of a Jesuit. And I am so thankful for him. He has been both a wonderful discussion buddy, but also a great source of good books that I may never have come across on my own. This Hans Kung book was one of his best recommendations. It was so good ... I read it twice. The second time through underlined and outlined the whole book.

In it Kung compares Karl Barth's view of justification with that of Catholicism as found in the Council of Trent. Man oh man, what an education! I discovered that RC scholars (not the parishioners or priests) hold a lot of common ideas with Reformed theologians! Certainly not in every way, but much more than I would have ever guessed. And some of the difference that do exist are other just a difference in definition of terms. I affectionately call it my "Rosetta Stone" that translates between Catholic and Protestant views of justification. And, indeed, it is! But even more importantly, Kung stated the views of Barth so well, that even Barth wrote and told him that he said many things better than Barth himself felt that he did. So it ends up being a great commentary on Karl Barth's *Church Dogmatics*, which is no easy read. I very much recommend this book.

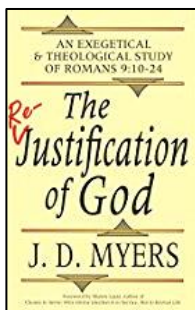


A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans

By C. E. B. Cranfield

I own and used many commentaries in my study of this subject of eternal destiny, but in doing so one name kept popping up. It was Cranfield and his critical work on Romans. As a result, I spent a lot of time in his sections where he deals with justification – especially in chapter three. But his exposition of Romans 9 was also helpful in sorting through John Piper's position presented in his book titled *Justification*. But one big disappointment for me was that even the great Cranfield did not have final answers on this subject of justification and often "hedged his bets" as he expressed

many times what he had to admit was only his opinion. It is not that I did not realize that this is the case for all scholars (that they are not really very far above us in knowledge), but like many people I seek to find real answers that I can count on. It was great reminder that we all must set our favorite books aside, turn to our Lord in prayer and humility, and ask Him to show us what the truth is on any matter we are trying to resolve in our personal life or our study!



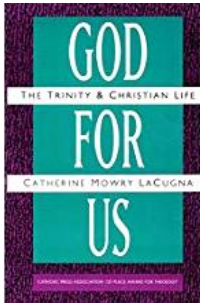
The Re-Justification of God

by [J. D. Myers](#) and Shawn Lazar

One other book on justification worth noting. I came across this book because its cover resembles Piper's book on *Justification* (described above). JD Myers is working on a huge book to answer Piper in detail. This short booklet just presents his argument for the meaning of Romans 9. In it he proposes that it is about "election to serve" rather than "election to save." This is a conclusion I came to quite some time ago after reading Karl Barth's volume on *Election* in his huge *Church Dogmatics* set (described previously). So if you want a quick explanation as to why

Romans 9 is not really about salvation (as is so commonly assumed) take a look at this book.

Other helpful books

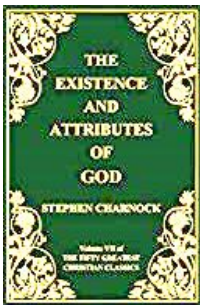


God for Us: The Trinity and Christian Life

by [Catherine Mowry LaCugna](#)

This book was brought to my attention by reading Richard Rohr's book titled *The Divine Dance*. Early in his book he tells of a retreat he attended and happened to pick up this book to read. As he described his experience in reading it and his renewed view of God as a triune God who not only loves His world, but desires to have fellowship with His creation in the most intimate and personal way, I was intrigued enough to purchase this book and read it myself. What a gem! LaCugna has not only done her historical homework but has expressed very clearly how the

church lost its way as to the personal aspect of who God is, rendering Him a cold, "up there" being that is to be worshiped rather than enjoyed. This is a somewhat academic book with a lot of defining terms (which is badly needed), but when taken in and understood it is a refreshing and personal view of the God who is also our very personal and intimate savior!

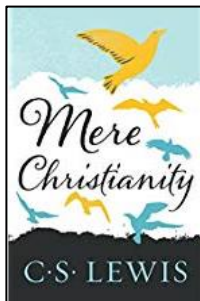


The Existence and Attributes of God

by Stephen Charnock

When my children were still at home, I told them, several times, to make sure they keep these "purple books." What I was referring to was my two volume set of Charnock's Attributes of God. I read through this set some 30 years ago having discovered it to be the very best and most complete presentation of who God is from a solid Biblical perspective. Charnock is an old 19th century writer and the longevity and popularity of his work proves how special it is. I found it to be something I could not read in a hurry. Charnock is not only Biblical but presents God so deeply

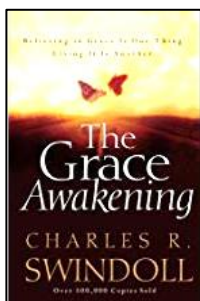
and passionately one has to pause and think a lot when reading his in-depth descriptions of Who God is in all His perfections. He has a chapter on Worship early on in his work that sets the tone for all that follows. This set, if you have time and discipline to wade through it over a long period of time, is well worth your effort!



Mere Christianity

by [C. S. Lewis](#)

This has got to be one of the greatest, all-around best presentation of Christianity ever produced. Lewis demonstrates his genius, insight, and balance (avoiding petty extremes) in this fine classic work. I have given away this book more than all others. Believers and unbelievers alike can learn from and appreciate what true and historic Christianity is.



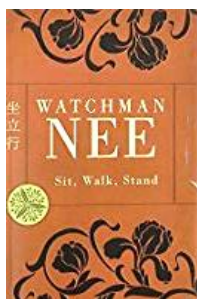
The Grace Awakening

by Charles Swindoll

Though Chuck Swindoll is not a Universalist (in the sense that all people will eventually be fully reconciled to God), he is a big advocate of Grace and how essential an understanding of it is in order to defeat the ill-effects of legalism in the lives of so many Christians. Here is a great quote from Swindoll's book:

There are killers on the loose today. A lot of them carry Bibles and appear to be clean-living, nice-looking, law-abiding citizens. They kill freedom, spontaneity, and creativity; they kill joy as well as productivity. They kill with their words and their pens and their looks. They kill with their attitudes far more often than with their behavior.

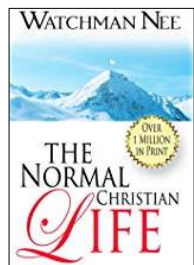
Their intolerance is tolerated. Their judgmental spirits remain unjudged. Their bullying tactics continue unchecked. And their narrow-mindedness is either explained away or quickly defended. The bondage that results would be criminal ... were it not so subtle and wrapped in such spiritual-sounding garb. Millions are living their lives in shame, fear, and intimidation who, instead, should be free, productive individuals. The tragedy is they think this is the way they should be. They have never known the truth that will set them free. Millions are living their lives in shame, fear, and intimidation who, instead, should be free, productive individuals. To show grace is to extend favor or kindness to one who doesn't deserve it and can never earn it. Receiving God's acceptance by grace always stands in sharp contrast to earning it on the basis of works. Every time the thought of grace appears, there is the idea of its being undeserved. In no way is the recipient getting what he or she deserves. Favor is being extended simply out of the goodness of the heart of the giver.



Sit, Walk, Stand

by [Watchman Nee](#)

This was the first book by Nee that I read back in the 1970's as a young Christian. It had a major impact on my thinking. Nee starts out by saying that "Christianity does not begin with a big *do*, but with a big *done*!" Wow, I had never even thought of that. What a load off of me if what Jesus did for me was complete and I could start my journey with Him from there. Nee goes on and follows his book title, demonstrating that we need to *sit* (in the finished work of Jesus) before we *walk* in Him and with Him. But then he also relates how we must *walk* with Jesus daily before we can take any kind of *stand* for Him. How backwards this is from our natural thinking. But it is, once again, what grace is all about. All that we are and do is based squarely in who God is and what he has done as a finished work in Jesus. Incidentally, this Sit-Walk-Stand sequence comes directly from the three main subjects presented (in this order) in Paul's letter to the church at Ephesus (Letter to the Ephesians).



The Normal Christian Life

by [Watchman Nee](#)

Watchman Nee has such a heart for his savior and such special insight to the life of a Christian based on the true meaning of grace. What struck me most about this book, when I read it some three decades ago, was that he reached a point in his book where he challenges the reader that if you are feeling that you just cannot live this *Christian Life* ... then you are ready to realize that it is true, you can't, and you are also ready to trust God completely to live it through you! This is what grace is all about, and also what the transcripts of the broadcasts at the beginning of this booklet are trying to relate – that we can only live in the new person that we now are in Jesus and can never succeed in trying to improve the old person that we were outside of Jesus!

This list of resources is only one small portion (75+) of my larger library that I have acquired over the past 40 years of study (about 1000 volumes). So this small collection is in no way better (or more important) than other books I have acquired over the years. But this is a collection that has been more recently attained, and represents an area of thinking, study, and evidence that I was unaware of until only a few years ago. I had always prided myself in being “widely read” in theology, history, and philosophy. So when I came across this body of information on the Restoration view (eventual salvation of all by grace alone), which is actually quite vastly represented currently and historically, I had to ask myself, “Why I did not know about, and had not come across, such information in the past?”

The answer is that, actually, I was exposed to some of this information many times over the past forty years. But since I was deeply ingrained in a particular theological perspective and approach in determining truth (dispensational, Calvinistic, evangelical), I fell into the age-old problem of “rejecting without examining” anything that did not agree with what was already held to be true. This is not only a dangerous mind set, but one that is foreign from the writings of the followers of Jesus who said things like, “Examine everything carefully, and cling to whatever proves to be good” (as a result of such a process). These writers of the New Testament never encouraged anyone to *blindly* trust the opinions of others – not even those in ecclesiastical authority!

Each person is personally accountable to God for discovering and determining the truth by using prayer, their brain, logic, reason, emotion, common sense, and fair-mindedness with which God has endowed each human being. It has even been recorded in the Old Testament writings that God invites everyone to “come and let us reason together.” Wow! God is a reasonable God who does all he can to reveal the truth to anyone who will take the time, effort, and unfiltered exposure to all that is available to them. And today, with the internet and all its reaches into truth and falsehood, there is no excuse for not coming to good conclusions based on solid and verifiable evidence. But a person has to *want* to know the truth and be *willing* to change their beliefs. And they have to want this more than what comes naturally to human beings, which is to “not have to change”, and instead be assured by someone else that what they *already* believe is true and needs no examination or verification.

Though this list of resources is only a small part of my library and are resources I have found to be flawed in many ways, I also found an agreement within them from the highest scholar (and there are many) to the most common writers (and many of them also). This agreement is that they all see a God of the *highest moral excellence*, wanting only the very best for all his creation, and committed to bringing every lost soul into full and absolute reconciliation with himself in eternity. Many books in this list of resources are scholarly works. They are harder to read for many people, but are usually better documented (but not always) and deal with issues on a higher and more detailed level. But there are also many books in this list that are lower level, academically, and generally easier to read for most people. Both kinds of books are needed. I enjoy reading both.

These resources listed above are far from comprehensive. But they are a fairly complete list of what I have read and studied over the past several years, in addition to a great deal of direct in-depth study of the Old and New Testament writings. My goal was to try to understand what was taught historically by the Jews, by Jesus, by his followers and apostles, and by the early church in the first generations of Christianity. My target subject was God’s plan of redemption for humanity, the fate of people in eternity, and God’s heart and disposition toward His creatures as those who have been made in his very own

likeness. This seems like one of the most important subjects we can ever study or consider, because the implications and results are forever.

About the Author/Speaker

Carl Jones is a retired Sr. Technical Writer living in Grass Valley, California. Prior to this he was a Hardware/Software Engineer for thirty years, He has been married 45 years to the only true love of his life. He has two adult children and one beautiful grand-daughter, all of whom he loves more than life itself.

Carl earned a Bachelor of Science Degree in Electrical Engineering (1979) at California State University in Sacramento, California. He earned a California Community College Life Teaching Credential in 1984 and has taught technology classes at two California colleges. He also graduated from Dallas Theological Seminary with a Certificate of Graduate Studies in 2010. Carl has studied in the Masters of History program at American Public University in W. Virginia.

Carl is an Army veteran and served in Viet Nam in 1970. He has lived in Sacramento, CA; Eatontown NJ; Grand Rapids, MI; Dallas, TX; Beaverton, OR; and Nevada City, CA. He has made two trips to China (Hong Kong, Shenzhen, Shanghai and Beijing); one trip to Bangkok, Thailand; and one trip to England (Loughborough and London).

Carl also plays music publicly, and in about a dozen assisted living centers in Grass Valley.