



GOD'S GIFT TO HUMANITY

HELL OR RECONCILIATION?

JAMES R. BARNES

God's Gift to *H*umanity

Hell or Reconciliation?

J A M E S R . B A R N E S

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CONTENTS

Preface	ix
Dedications	xiii
Chapter 1 A Theological Fork in the Road	1
Chapter 2 A Doctrine Maligning the Character of God.....	14
Chapter 3 Commentary: Endless Punishment, In the Very Words of Its Advocates	26
Chapter 4 The Controversy: Eternal Conscious Torment and Universal Reconciliation in Opposition	29
Chapter 5 Universal Reconciliation.	41
Chapter 6 Orthodox Tradition: Eternal Conscious Torment	50
Chapter 7 Descriptions of Hell in the Words of Its Advocates	62
Chapter 8 Various Accounts of Hell.....	71
Chapter 9 Peculiar Properties of Hell's Fire	77
Chapter 10 Other Means of Torture	87
Chapter 11 Complementary and Accessory Torments.....	100
Chapter 12 Eternal Torment Is the Just Punishment of Sin	148
Chapter 13 The General / Final Judgment.....	195
Chapter 14 Conclusion	202
Chapter 15 Universal Reconciliation Found in the Old Testament....	207
Chapter 16 Universal Reconciliation Found in the New Testament....	252
Chapter 17 Heresy?.....	349
About the Author.....	363

**MODELED ON THE BOOK “ENDLESS
PUNISHMENT: IN THE VERY WORDS
OF ITS ADVOCATES” BY THOMAS
J. SAWYER, STD. 1879**

“Endless Punishment: In the Very Words of Its Advocates” ¹ was published in 1879. It is a book within the Public Domain. The work is cited extensively in this book. “Endless Punishment: In the Very Words of Its Advocates” is available at Tentmaker.org in its entirety. I appreciate Gary Amirault’s effort to make Dr. Sawyer’s book available in electronic format.

Holy Scripture receives much focus in this book. Scripture references made by the author are from The World English Bible (WEB) ². Other versions of the Bible are used by cited resources and are noted where possible. The WEB version is in the Public Domain. The authors freely, consciously and deliberately give their work to the community. I am grateful beyond words for the gift they give in the Name of Christ Jesus. I pray they are blessed.

I urge folks to study the evidence for the doctrine of universal reconciliation. There are many useful resources available on the Internet. Gary Amirault’s website, Tentmaker.org, is a repository of information dedicated to the doctrine. The Christian Universalist Association

¹ Thomas J. Sawyer, STD. *Endless Punishment: In The Very Words Of Its Advocates*. (University Press, Cambridge, 1880) <http://www.tentmaker.org/books/InTheWords.html>. Date accessed: 04/02/2018.

² Michael Johnson, ed. *World English Bible*. <http://ebible.org/study>. Date accessed 05/24/2018.

provides a history of Christian Universalism when read is an eye-opener. I strongly urge all interested in this topic to read “Bible Verses Banned By Bible Believing Believers”³ by Peter Hiatt. Please take the time to read works by Thomas Talbott, Robin Parry, Gerard Beauchemin and Julie Ferwerda. These are a few references supporting the doctrine of universal reconciliation. An honest look, an open mind, and the guidance of the Holy Spirit will likely cause one to doubt the veracity of the doctrine that is eternal conscious torment.

³ Peter Hiatt. *Bible Verses Banned by Bible Believing Believers.*” The Sanctuary Downtown, Denver, CO. <http://tsdowntown.org/articles/bible-verses-banned-bible-believing-believers/>. Date accessed 5/24/2018.

PREFACE

I became troubled by the doctrine of eternal conscious torment around 2006. My father-in-law and my mother died in that year. We called him “Pops.” He and I had many wonderful conversations about Christ. Pops was a believer. His philosophy on life and living was simple. I admired Pops greatly. When he died I knew he was going to heaven and I preached that at his funeral. My mother died in November of that year. Mom lived the proverbial life of “quiet desperation.” She did all she was able to raise four sons mostly alone. She did without so that her boys would not. Her philosophy on life was not complicated. She wrote once that her greatest wish was that her sons would grow to be honorable men. Mom never confessed to me she was a believer in Christ Jesus. I could hardly bear the thought that she might not know heaven. It bothered me greatly. Two really good people lived lives dedicated to their families. One went to heaven and the other perhaps not. I found ways to rationalize my mother’s passing into heaven.

Rationalizations gave way to serious study about the doctrine known in traditional Christian church circles as eternal conscious torment. I learned to doubt the authenticity and veracity of the doctrine. I believe God leads me to understand a better way. God will reconcile all men to Himself. God’s Word says no less. He will reconcile all men to Himself.

Gerard Beauchemin wrote “Hope Beyond Hell.”⁴ He gives the book away at his website having the same name. He also gives an audio book narrated by George Sarris. Mr. Sarris has also written on the subject of universal reconciliation. Mr. Beauchemin acknowledges Gary Amirault

⁴ Gerard Beauchemin. “*Hope Beyond Hell.*”, Malista Press, Olmita, TX, 2007, 2010. <http://www.hopebeyondhell.net/>. Date accessed: 04/01/2018.

in his book. Mr. Amirault is convicted in his belief eternal conscious torment is a doctrine constructed by men. Mr. Amirault has gathered together hundreds of thousands of electronic documents exposing a doctrine he calls “The Blessed Hope.” “The Blessed Hope” is more commonly known as universal reconciliation. He and many others believe universal reconciliation is God’s will to save all mankind. Mr. Amirault’s website, Tentmaker.org,⁵ is thorough and contains the works of prominent scholars and Biblical authorities who expose “The Blessed Hope” in the light it deserves.

Dr. Thomas J. Sawyer wrote a book entitled “Eternal Punishment: In the Very Words of Its Advocates.” I “found” it at Mr. Amirault’s website. Dr. Sawyer’s work had a profound impact on my thinking about eternal conscious torment. Dr. Sawyer quoted great scholars of his generation and of eras before his. He gathered the “very words” of the advocates of the doctrine and presented them in his book.

Dr. Sawyer exposed the callousness and cruelty of a doctrine he believed maligned the character of God. God’s primary and foremost attribute is love, but the doctrine of eternal conscious torment denies that. God’s love is the keystone of all basic Christian doctrines. Dr. Sawyer exposed “eternal punishment” by sharing the words of the theologians advocating it. The words used to describe hell in 1879 are the same kinds of words used to describe it in contemporary times. The words and the language used today to describe the doctrine of eternal conscious torment have not softened. Those proposing, preaching and advocating the doctrine today use the same kinds of words as those used by respected Biblical scholars and theologians of Dr. Sawyer’s era.

Dr. Sawyer quotes Jonathan Edwards often. He explains that Dr. Edwards was a preeminent Bible and doctrinal authority. Dr. Edwards had much to say describing hell. I quote Dr. John MacArthur and Dr. R. C. Sproul often. Drs. MacArthur and Sproul are preeminent Bible scholars in our era. Both are highly qualified theologians and prolific in their writings. They preach a great deal about “hell.” They have much to say describing “hell’s” torments. They preach sermons defining the kinds of people consigned by Almighty God to eternal conscious torment.

⁵ Gary Amirault. “Tentmaker” website. <https://www.tentmaker.org>. Date accessed: 5/25/2018

Drs. Edwards, MacArthur and Sproul are Biblical authorities in different centuries. Their thoughts and teachings regarding hell are remarkably similar. These are men so well regarded as Scriptural authorities that their sermons impact and form current and common precepts of basic Christian doctrine including the doctrine of eternal conscious torment.

Dr. Sawyer took pains to present the words of the advocates of this doctrine fairly and completely. The words of contemporary scholars and authorities are cited in this work. Citations are in footnote form.

Dr. Sawyer did not judge the men and women he cites. He had no intention to impugn the character of any of the scholars he refers to. He does judge the doctrine. I have no intention to impugn the character of any other person. I pray I am not being judgmental of the men I cite.

I am convinced God is far greater than anything any man could possibly imagine. I am convinced His love overwhelms all things. The eternal rest Pops is living is the same eternal rest my Mom is living. All honor, glory and praise to God, the Father of all.

This book describes hell. The theologians advocating it describe it. This book reveals “The Blessed Hope.” I pray all who advocate the doctrine of eternal conscious torment may doubt the doctrine’s veracity. I pray this book is used by God for His good purpose. I am an advocate of universal reconciliation. I pray many are convinced by “The Blessed Hope.”

I add a prayer. God is Sovereign over all now. He gives to us faith and that by way of immeasurable grace upon grace. His will will be done. He is salvation and His Son is God with us. Jesus is Lord and no man can say those words unless it is by way of the Holy Spirit. Our Father cautions us about our desire to preach. He reminds us that preachers will be judged more strictly. He tells us not to judge and that when we do the measure we use will be the measure used to judge us. It is good to judge all men in the Light of God’s mercy and grace. He tells us to teach with a good heart, with kindness, and with Truth. It is not my place nor is it the place of other men to persuade anyone. That is the purview of His Spirit in Whom we are led to say “Jesus is Lord.” God bless us all. Maranatha.

DEDICATIONS

God leads my revival. He teaches me. He lets me doubt. He shows me time and again that He is the Light. He erases my doubt. He makes a path for me to understand His Word. He leads my way as I write and publish this book. I pray this book pleases Him. I pray it brings honor to His Name. I pray it is not offensive. I give full credit, honor and glory to Him.

Writing this book fulfilled my mother's wish for me to write a book. I love you Mom.

I wrote this book for my brothers Don and Bud. I wrote it for my spiritual brother Chad. They are good men. We disagree on the doctrine of eternal conscious torment. We agree in most all else. I love my brothers very much. This book helps explain what I now believe.

I wrote this book for my brother Richard and my Aunt Jackie. They encourage me to push through. They understand the change taking place in my heart and they like what they see.

I wrote this book for my darling bride, Dian, and for our children. Dian loves me like no other can. She stands behind me and advocates for me. She does not hold back her criticisms. Her insights are important. She listens intently to me as I share Scriptures. She believes God is love and it is His will that all be saved. "D" and I learned together how to publish a book. She is my editor and proof reader. I am grateful to God for her.

I am hopeful this book appeals to all. If it appeals only to one, then it is a success. God is love. I thank Godly men who explain principles of universal reconciliation. I thank God for men like Dr. Sawyer whose book serves as the model for this. I thank God for men and women who have accumulated years of experience preaching universal reconciliation and who have shared their experience with us in their sermons, books and essays.

I thank God for men and women who disagree with the doctrine of universal reconciliation. I thank God for the advocates of the doctrine that is eternal conscious torment. God's purpose will be realized and we all have a part in it. One thing will always remain constant and unchanging among us. God is love.

I believe the Holy Spirit of God has prepared me for this endeavor. I look forward to the days ahead. It is my humble prayer the Father blesses this work. I pray to be a humble, respectful preacher. I pray for courage. I pray for heavenly wisdom. I praise God for the man or woman reading this book today at this moment. I pray His Spirit gives us all peace in this time. It is in Him we live.

CHAPTER 1

A Theological Fork in the Road

I am a layman. I have no theological credentials. I am not a Bible scholar. God did bless me with His Spirit. He has shown me His overwhelming love. He reveals the doctrine of universal reconciliation in His Word. He saw to it that I was exposed to the doctrine that is “The Blessed Hope.” I have come to believe universal reconciliation is God’s gift to humanity.

For the majority of my Christian life I believed the doctrine of eternal conscious torment. I preached it. Many years ago the doctrine was exposed to me as a doctrine opposing God. The doctrine was exposed to me as unbelievably cruel. The doctrine was exposed to me as being a doctrine denying God’s will that all be saved. Universal reconciliation is a better doctrine that does not oppose God or His will that all be saved. The doctrine of eternal conscious torment prevails in denominations and congregations today.

I was exposed to the doctrine of eternal conscious torment early in my Christian life. Someone said, “Believe in Jesus or burn in hell.” That was a common theme and I heard it often. I learned the traditions of my teachers. I embraced their doctrines. I still believe as my teachers do aside from the doctrine of eternal conscious torment.

I once believed eternal conscious torment was true. I preached it, but I no longer do. I am liberated somehow. I preach freedom that comes in knowing Christ’s purpose for all His creation. He leads me to understand the infinite magnitude of His love. He helps me see His love is for all mankind. I preach God’s love for all. I preach His mercies are limitless

and the Gospel of Christ does not condemn to eternal conscious torment. I preach He will reconcile all of us to Himself. I preach to expose light on the doctrine of universal reconciliation.

I am grateful for His instruction and His intervention. The Father is showing me a better way. He leads me to love all. He is helping me see my life from His perspective. He commands us to love. I am learning to love. I wait patiently to speak to others about my conversion from eternal conscious torment.

Theologies and doctrines are important. They become traditions. Men become administrators of their doctrine. They become judges of those who do not comply with their rules. Traditions become idols. Traditions of men are divisive and problematic.

I have learned much. I have learned the advocates of the doctrine of eternal conscious torment are passionate. Their doctrine is protected and unassailable. Persons challenging it are often rejected. The proponents of the doctrine are good, well-meaning people. Sadly, these same people label others as heretics, blasphemers or worse for opposing their doctrine. It cannot be ignored, "God will reconcile all men to Himself" (Colossians 1:18-20).

I have converted from the doctrine of eternal conscious torment. I still agree with the basic tenets of my former denominations and congregation. The theological fork in the road has come. One fork's path embraces God's love: universal reconciliation. The other fork embraces His wrath: traditional hell. One fork advocates a doctrine in which "The Father is 'All in All'" (1 Corinthians 15:28) The traditionalist fork insists only a few will be reconciled to Him. Universal reconciliation is "the Blessed Hope." Traditional hell is cruel.

Traditionalists describe the punishments of hell in numerous ways. Every description is horrendous. The traditional view of hell is that it is a place of fire. The fire there has qualities that torment and that heal. The flame has a power that cuts flesh and nearly simultaneously sears the wound closed. The fire is eternal. Traditional hell is eternal. The doctrine teaches hell is God's justice. The advocates are convinced their doctrine is true.

Universal reconciliation proves itself to be true by way of scripture. The doctrine that God reconciles all to Himself is inspired. The doctrine

of universal reconciliation is proven by God's character and nature. God is love. God has blessed me with a desire to know Him better. He leads me to want to be near to Him. He draws me to Himself. I am changed. I am confident that God is love.

He who doesn't love doesn't know God, for God is love.
(1 John 4:8, emphasis added)

God's essence is love. His love changes me. His Spirit led me to challenge many of my long held Christian beliefs. I was trained by Sunday School teachers, preachers, pastors, church elders and my parents. Each of them impacted my early beliefs in God. I was taught God would subject His enemies to eternal conscious torment. Teachers called it hell. It is the traditional orthodox view. I was taught what the traditionalist was teaching. I was taught only a few would be reconciled to God. I taught what I was taught.

God leads me to believe His essence is love. What authority do I have to preach judgment over other men made in the image of God? His essence is love of all, over all, after all. The traditional judgment is eternal conscious torment for unrepentant rebels. Traditional hell is Christ's sentence for the unbelieving. Christ's sentence is eternal conscious torment and traditionalists believe it is a righteous judgment. The "judgment" is a sentence to eternal tortures. The doctrine teaches "judgment" for unbelief is executed at the command and the will of an all-loving God. An all-loving God and an ever wrathful Father are not congruent thoughts about Him.

I am convinced the traditional doctrine of hell is not true. I am convinced a better understanding of His Holy Word leads to universal reconciliation. Humankind's collective end is absolute reconciliation. It is His will that all be saved. I believe God will reconcile all men to Himself and it will glorify Him. I believe it is His purpose and His will to save all men. I believe He through Christ Jesus will reconcile all men to Himself.

Traditions cause divisions in the ways believers relate to God. Men separate into like minded groups and transform into denominations. Each denomination is convicted their brand of the truth is superior to all others. The denominations and congregations find faults in others.

Denominations split along the faults within themselves creating more denominations. The divisions among denominations and congregations are numerous. It is ironic that denominations and congregations share the doctrine of eternal conscious torment and stand together defending it.

Theologians across the spectrum of denominations and congregations rise up to their pulpits to preach. They preach there are people just like them who will suffer unending torment in a place called hell. They preach people just like them will suffer because they did not know Jesus was their Savior. They preach about real people knitted together in their mother's wombs by an eternal Father. These are flesh and blood, brothers and sisters, mothers and fathers. Denominations and congregations insist the doctrine of eternal conscious torment is concretely understood to be absolutely true. Denominations and congregations uniformly teach that those who do not confess the name of Jesus do not know Him. They teach persons who do not know God when they die will never know Him. They teach the unknowing dead are judged guilty and sentenced to suffer an unimaginable eternal punishing fate.

The doctrine of eternal conscious torment is troubling. Think this through with me. Many of our children choose to believe science over scripture. There are children who find pleasure in the world over peace in The Word. Many children know of the Truth, but choose to ignore it. The doctrine of eternal conscious torment demands these children be condemned by their loving Father Who fashioned them in the wombs of their mothers. The doctrine of eternal conscious torment demands these are children sentenced to suffer eternal punishment. Imagine the broken hearts of moms and dads knowing beloved children are never perishing, but always tortured. Their child suffers because as parents they were unable to change their child's heart. Prayers go out to our Lord, "Please, Father, change my child's heart. Make her see that You are her Savior. Make him see that Yours is the path to true freedom. Show my children Your will for them."

Many denominations and congregations establish their doctrines and precepts based upon the studies of John Calvin and Jacob Arminius. Calvinism is a set of doctrinal beliefs based in the studies of John Calvin. Calvinism authoritatively asserts God created some to be chosen for salvation and most are not. Arminianism is a set of doctrinal beliefs based

in the studies of Jacob Arminius. Arminianism authoritatively asserts God created all with free will. An Arminian is a Christian whose theology teaches each man exercises free will to choose God or not. Few choose and many are tortured in hell forever.

It is never our will as our child's father or mother that our child or any child would ever suffer agony in this temporal world much less in an endless hereafter. In both cases, Calvinism or Arminianism, we fail our children! We didn't teach sons to make the right choice. We didn't love our daughters enough so our Lord would choose them. God may hear our prayers, but His mind is already determined. Both theologies teach most of our children are condemned to eternal punishment.

Scripture teaches that the Spirit of God helps us in our weakness.

In the same way, *the Spirit also helps our weaknesses*, for we don't know how to pray as we ought. But *the Spirit himself makes intercession for us* with groanings which can't be uttered. He who searches the hearts knows what is on the Spirit's mind, because *he makes intercession for the saints according to God*. (Romans 8:26-27, emphasis added)

I did not teach my children enough about God. Did my carelessness have a part in their spiritual choices? Could my recklessness cause them a judgment of everlasting torment and anguish? Heaven forbid my children suffer for the sins of their father. I pray my Father will reach from heaven and save my children. I pray that He will save all children. My words are often mutterings. My speech is drowned out for the sake of tears. I blubber and cry out to the Creator of all, "Please, Father, save them. Teach me what I need to say to them to persuade them to look for You. Please change their heart toward You. Love them Lord as I love them. Please."

I do not believe my prayers are falling on deaf ears. I do believe the Spirit knows my heart. I know He hears my prayers. My case is well known by my God. I know that I am right with God and that He has set me apart from the world. I know He intercedes for me.

We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, to those who are called according to his

purpose. For whom he foreknew, he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. Whom he predestined, those he also called. Whom he called, those he also justified. Whom he justified, those he also glorified. (Romans 8:28-30, emphasis added)

I love Him. My children, your children, all children are of consequence to Him. They are “precious in His sight.” He calls us to His purpose. He is our justice. My children will experience His justice as will yours. His purpose is that all are reconciled to Him. That is “The Blessed Hope.” The advocates of the doctrine of eternal conscious torment do not derive the same conclusion. They will argue God loves me. I love Him. I am saved. My child loves me, but does not love Him. Tradition teaches a child like mine is not saved. He will die not knowing God. He will never have another opportunity to repent. He will suffer unimaginable torments because he did not love God. My son in torment while I enjoy paradise?! God loves me, but hates my children?! This is not congruent.

What then shall we say about these things? *If God is for us, who can be against us?* He who didn’t spare his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how would he not also with him freely give us all things? (Romans 8:31-32, emphasis added)

There is nothing in heaven or on earth or under the earth that can remove His love for us from us. His Son’s life given “up for us all.” I am His. By Paul’s reckoning I am a child of Elohim. He is for me not against me. I believe His Son was obedient to the Cross. There is no doubt in me that Christ was crucified, buried and raised again. “Would He not give us all things?”

No child will be abandoned to eternal conscious torment because they do not believe. Christ Jesus was delivered up “for us all.” In what context shall we see “all” Is there any distinction to be made? Are they “all” He chooses? Are they “all” that choose Him? Or is it simply “all” He created? Be careful which “all” you choose.

Choose the first and our Father will have created billions upon billions with intent to punish them eternally. Choose the second and our Father will surrender His Sovereign will to the capriciousness of men. Those choosing against Him will be punished eternally. Choose the last and your Father's love is abundant and certain, even for those who hate Him.

Who could bring a charge against God's chosen ones? It is God who justifies. Who is he who condemns? It is Christ who died, yes rather, who was raised from the dead, who is at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us.

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Could oppression, or anguish, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? Even as it is written, "For your sake we are killed all day long. We were accounted as sheep for the slaughter." No, in all these things, we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For *I am persuaded*, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, *will be able to separate us from the love of God*, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 8:33-39, emphasis added)

The Calvinist and the Arminian will see themselves as "chosen ones." One will be chosen because our Father ordained him to be a "chosen one." The other will be chosen because he, himself, chose to be a "chosen one." Each of these positions is arrogant and self-serving. Both elevate themselves to eternal glory in our Father's presence. The Calvinist could say, "I was chosen by God, therefore I am greater in the Kingdom than the one not chosen." The Arminian might say, "I chose God, therefore I am greater in the Kingdom because I chose to be chosen."

Consider we are all chosen, the third choice above. Will anyone bring a charge against any of us? We are all God's chosen. God alone declares what is righteous. If it were up to our own devices, strength, and intellect none of us would be chosen. We would all fall short of His righteousness.

None of us would come close. It is Christ Jesus Who chooses. He determines our righteousness. Jesus is the Judgment. Judgment is our salvation. Punishment is finished. He chooses to save all.

Theologies do not save. Calvinism does not save. Neither does Arminianism save anyone. Theologies do not reconcile us to the Father. There is nothing that can separate His creation from His love. Nothing can split us away from the love of the Father.

A. E. Knoch explains in his “Commentary on the New Testament”⁶ that God’s love for his creation is never weak or failing. “God’s love never lets us go. The trials and tribulations we endure are not tokens of His displeasure. They are all tempered by His loving heart. A sense of His love hovering over us in the midst of our distresses is the most blessed of all balms and will enable us not only to endure them but to enjoy them.” All the delusions manufactured by Satan cannot separate us from God’s love. All the powers of the universe coming together against us cannot separate us from God’s love. Mr. Knoch declares, “Nothing above or beneath nothing at all has the power to break the bond that binds the humblest and most unworthy saint to the throbbing breast of our great and glorious God. This is more than salvation from sin! This is reconciliation!”

Everything is subject to God. Good doctrine, sound doctrine and false doctrine are subject to God. To reiterate, everything is subject to God. The doctrine of eternal conscious torment and the doctrine of universal reconciliation are subject to God. God is sovereign over both, but both cannot be true.

Imagine the most vile man ever to have lived. That vile man was created by God. That same vile man is loved by Him. Scripture teaches nothing can “separate us from the love of God.” The most disgusting acts committed, even crimes in His Name, cannot separate His love from us. Sin does not and cannot “separate us from His love.” Theologies and traditions cannot “separate us from the love of God.”

What might the Calvinist say? The Arminian? Both theological views teach that the doctrine of universal reconciliation is false. They both preach that rejecting the doctrine of eternal conscious torment is heretical

⁶ A. E. Knoch. *Concordant Commentary on the New Testament*. Concordant Publishing Concern. Santa Clarita, CA 1968. <http://concordant.org/version/intro-to-the-concordant-new-testament/>. Date accessed: 04/02/2018.

or blasphemous. The theologians are rigid in their defense of the doctrine they advocate.

Take a moment to think through the consequences of eternal punishment. Ask yourself how our Father whose love is limitless would deliberately and consciously create any man to be tortured in eternal punishment? Scripture tells us there is nothing that can “separate us from His love.” We are talking about our Father Who creates each of us in our mother’s womb. The Psalmist says this about himself.

For you formed my inmost being. You knit me together in my mother’s womb. I will give thanks to you, for *I am fearfully and wonderfully made*. Your works are wonderful. My soul knows that very well. My frame wasn’t hidden from you, when I was made in secret, woven together in the depths of the earth. *Your eyes saw my body. In your book they were all written, the days that were ordained for me*, when as yet there were none of them. How precious to me are your thoughts, God! How vast is their sum! If I would count them, they are more in number than the sand. *When I wake up, I am still with you*. (Psalm 139:13-18, emphasis added)

We take these verses to heart when we apply them to ourselves. These verses apply to all mankind. The Psalmist is describing the heart of a man. Our hearts are our core. They were possessed first and always by our Creator. God weaves Himself into the baby He creates in a mother’s womb. God by His will determined to create us. Only He can create. We cannot create ourselves. His creation is awesome and wonderful. The Psalmist recognizes in his core that God is his Creator. God knows all there is to know about the Psalmist. The man’s bones, his form, everything about the man is known by Him.

These scriptures declare God has determined the number of our days. All should take these verses personally and literally. We should apply them to ourselves. He knows our innermost thoughts. He knows everything about us. We declare that His thoughts about us are precious. We make His love for us a personal, magnificent, and all-consuming.

His mercies are infinite. Infinite mercies for all. Creation repents and all creation gives glory to Him. The traditionalist theologies restrict scripture by restricting the magnitude of infinite mercies to themselves. Mercy is only for those who believe Christ Jesus is their Messiah in this age alone. To whom did the Psalmist repent?

Have the infinite number of mercies diminished or ceased because Jesus fulfilled the prophecies about Him? Are these infinite mercies rendered moot because God gave His only begotten Son? The answer is a loud “No!” The life, death and resurrection of Christ Jesus magnify God’s infinite mercies.

What greater mercy could the Father bestow on His creation? His Son’s sacrifice for the sins of all is mercy manifest to a fallen, crippled world. God chose to create us. We did not choose to be created. None of His creation is an accident of evolution. He chose each and everyone of us before the creation of the earth. We are hopeless without His forgiving mercies.

We could never do the thing necessary to gain forgiveness. Israel of the Old Testament (OT) exemplifies this condition. God gave them a means to win momentary reconciliation with Him. The Israelites were given the Law that governed the process of atonement. Reconciliation became a process. Restoration to God became ritual. Traditions diminished God’s infinite mercies. Yet, God never stops loving Israel.

God was able to do what needed to be done to forgive the sins of the world. Traditional leaders of the church rebelled against God’s promised Messiah. The Priests had traditions and traditions had rituals. Every aspect of religious life was covered by rules and processes. These traditional administrators managed the process called atonement. They interpreted the Law and they administered it. God showed them the Law’s fulfillment. The traditions are a burden and diminish the magnitude of God’s infinite mercies.

Christians understand God’s saving grace. Each of us has experienced it. We know what it means to be saved. We do not earn momentary reconciliation because we did anything. But, we know intuitively that He has blessed us with infinite mercies.

The doctrine of eternal conscious torment demands we believe God’s infinite mercies are limited to a few. God’s mercies are personally

infinite, but universally finite. The doctrine needs us to believe God's mercies applied to Israel only. The doctrine needs this to be true to satisfy the mandate that only a few will be saved from hell. Does the Law say anything about eternal conscious torment? The Law was given to Israel only. What does that mean for every other nation? They were not given the Law. Are they guilty already?

God did not give an atoning process to any other nation. Scripture teaches that God chose Israel to be His favored nation not because they were the largest and strongest, but because they were small.

For you are a holy people to Yahweh your God: Yahweh your God has chosen you to be a people for his own possession, above all peoples who are on the face of the earth. Yahweh didn't set his love on you, nor choose you, because you were more in number than any people; for you were the fewest of all peoples: but because Yahweh loves you, and because he would keep the oath which he swore to your fathers, has Yahweh brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you out of the house of bondage, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt. Know therefore that Yahweh your God, he is God, the faithful God, who keeps covenant and loving kindness with them who love him and keep his commandments to a thousand generations, and repays those who hate him to their face, to destroy them: he will not be slack to him who hates him, he will repay him to his face. You shall therefore keep the commandment, and the statutes, and the ordinances, which I command you this day, to do them. (Deuteronomy 7:6-11, emphasis added)

God chooses Israel to be a nation after His heart. He gives Israel a means to remove the stain of past sins. No other nation is given the means to absolve sins. Does this mean that the multitudes of people which are not Israel are to suffer eternal punishment? God did not give them a way to make things right with Him.

We should not read these verses and conclude only Israel will be saved. Those who love Him and keep His commandments will be saved.

We have the advantage of hindsight. We know that Israel did not keep His commandments. We know that Israel did not keep their faith in Him. They did not love Him. Those who do not love Him and do not keep his commandments will not be ignored. "He will repay him to his face."

Is this Divine repayment eternal torment? If your answer is yes please consider what this means. God created millions if not billions of human beings with the intent to punish them in a fiery hell forever. It seems ludicrous to me that God will deliberately create any man into eternal torment. It is worse, in my mind, to call this Divine Judgment. Calling eternal conscious torment righteous judgment or calling it Holy diminishes God's love to something sinister.

Verse 10 in the scriptures quoted above speaks of God's destruction of those who hate Him; of those who will not or cannot keep His commandments. These verses cannot be construed to mean God punishes these people forever. At worst these verses speak to the concept of annihilation. Even complete destruction is more loving than eternal punishment.

Calvinism and Arminianism are schools of theology devised by men for themselves. I do not mean that in a bad light. I learned much about the Bible by way of devoted Calvinists and equally devoted Arminians. They disagree on much, but agree on eternal conscious torment. The differences and disagreements between the theologies and traditions cause divisions among believers. Denominations arise. Denominations and congregations are more dissimilar than similar to the church Christ established. I believe pride is the root of division.

Calvinism and Arminianism are not the only causes of the divisions in denominations and congregations. Roman Catholicism strongly influences Protestant believers. Roman Catholic and Protestant denominations have rebels causing dissension within their own circles of influence. There are others who proudly label themselves non-denominational. Non-denominational congregations are influenced by Calvin and Arminius, yet they are proud to be separate. Pride is the root cause of all divisions.

I am traditionalist, but believe in universal reconciliation. That is my theological fork in the road. I have preached Calvinism and now I regret it. I preached against Arminianism, but did not really understand why.

I preached predestination and free will. I stood in pulpits and told good church-going folks that their family members who did not believe in Christ Jesus would never perish, but would be tormented by fire forever.

Let not many of you be teachers, my brothers, knowing that *we will receive heavier judgment*. (James 3:1, emphasis added)

This is an admonition God's Spirit led me to when He first called me to preach. He made it clear that what I preached would have an impact on people. He loves me even though I was wrong to preach eternal conscious torment. I praise God for correcting me at this stage of my life. In as many places as I am able and that He ordains I will preach the love of God. I will preach that His mercy is so great that even those who hate Him will be reconciled to Him.

I am taking the path to universal reconciliation. It is the right path. My direction is belief in God's infinite mercies. It is my prayer you will be persuaded to consider eternal conscious torment is untrue. God's Holy Word proves God's infinite mercies are real. His mercies are felt in real time in real life.

CHAPTER 2

A Doctrine Maligning the Character of God

I admit an inability to create or process an original thought. This is not a cynical observation. I have not had an original thought that I can call my own. Every thought I have ever possessed has already been expressed by someone else. I learned to think what others taught about their thoughts. That is especially true of my theological thoughts. I suspect that is how we all come to have thoughts about things Holy. We are taught to think what others have been taught to think. Certainly God knows our thoughts before we have them.

I ask God to help me learn about His Truth. I ask Him to help me learn His Truth. Ideas, ideologies and theologies are abundant in the world. In such abundance of knowledge the works of men have clouded the truth. Not all doctrine is sound. Highly credentialed doctors of theology from prestigious seminaries have written convincingly proving God intends to reconcile all creation to Himself. A number of esteemed doctors of theology from equally prestigious seminaries have written convincingly God intends endless, unspeakable torture on most people. Both doctrines cannot be true.

I am grateful to be exposed to the words of the advocates of the doctrine of eternal conscious torment. Scholarly works of those advocating the doctrine are voluminous. The descriptions of hell given by its advocates are horrific and unreasonable. I am grateful to be exposed to universal

reconciliation. Scholarly works of those advocating the doctrine are equally voluminous. Universal reconciliation is God's gift to humanity. Eternal conscious torment maligns the character of God.

I am not a professional theologian. I have no credentials to qualify myself. I am blessed with an open mind and a willingness to confess my sin. His Light exposed universal reconciliation to me. Most of what I believed before my conversion I still believe. I am convinced the Lord will have His will, only now I believe the scope of His will is universal. It is His will that all men be saved. By the grace of God I have been saved. By His grace I am led to tell anyone who will take the time to listen for God's still voice that His love for His creation is wholly complete.

The premise of this book is not my own. I depend on His Holy Word. Commentary and editorial narrative are my own, but based in something I learned from somebody else. I readily acknowledge I am biased and advocate universal reconciliation. God is all-encompassing love, mercy and more. Eternal conscious torment maligns the character of God.

Lee Salisbury wrote an article he titled "Eternal Punishment: Is It Really of God?"⁷ He asks penetrating questions deserving answers. He presents five points challenging the precepts of eternal punishment. Eternal punishment is a doctrine codified by most orthodox denominations, congregations and seminaries. Orthodox Pastors, preachers, elders and teachers advocate the doctrine in their congregations and assemblies. The doctrine of eternal conscious torment should be challenged.

David Sprenger produced a "Primary Scripture List Supporting the Teaching of Universal Salvation."⁸ Both men point to a conclusion that is "The Blessed Hope." God is love. It is His will that all be saved.

What supports the doctrine of eternal conscious torment? Is it truth? Is it tradition? How does the traditionalist doctrine of eternal conscious torment continue to stand? Is it a worthy doctrine? Is it worthy of effort to defend? It is a doctrine worthy of examination, discussion and challenge.

⁷ Lee Salisbury. *Eternal Punishment: Is It Really of God?* "Tentmaker website. Publication date: unknown. <http://www.tentmaker.org/articles/EternalPunishment-IsItReallyofGod.html>. Date Accessed: 04/02/2018.

⁸ David R Sprenger. *The Ultimate Redemptive Purposes of God*. Tentmaker website. Publication date: unknown. <http://www.tentmaker.org/lists/ReconciliationScriptures.html>. Date Accessed: 04/02/2018.

Mr. Salisbury writes, “The concept of eternal punishment, though considered by many to be orthodox Christian doctrine, must be challenged and indeed refuted.” Denominations and congregations have codified the doctrine. It thrives in Western Christian assemblies particularly.

Mr. Salisbury uncovers troubling unintended consequences of the doctrine of eternal conscious torment. The doctrine maligns the character of God, exalts the devil making Christ Jesus a failure, and plain statements of scripture are contradicted. It is God’s character to will that all be saved and eternal conscious torment denies that. The doctrine dictates Christ Jesus must be less powerful and less successful than the devil. Jesus cannot save all. The doctrine requires contradiction of scripture.

The doctrine has its root in pride and springs from the minds of men. The seed for such a doctrine was planted not by the Holy Spirit, but by some other power. Only God creates. It is unreasonable to conclude the Creator of us all has surrendered His sovereignty over His creation? Has the victory over sin been watered down to such a degree that only a few will taste the fruit of the victory? The doctrine insists the Devil outsmarted the Creator. It teaches Christ’s death on the cross was not sufficient for the sins of all. God’s character is maligne.

God’s Spirit inspired the writers of His Holy Word. Many popular and knowledgeable men proclaim these inspired writers wrote conclusively of Divine Judgment they call hell. Admirable students of God’s Holy Word are convinced those who do not believe in Christ Jesus are destined to suffer in anguishing eternal conscious torments. The advocates of this doctrine teach punishment for rebellion and for unbelief is administered by God. The punishment has no end. It is not remedial, but vengeful. It maligns the character of God.

Advocates of this tradition declare God would not allow a doctrine as important as this to be developed from His Holy Word if it were not true. However, there is much doctrine in traditional denominations and congregations that is disputable. Denominations and congregations dispute among themselves as to which possesses the best understanding of truth. Congregations divide over disagreements. Whole schools of theology have been founded based in disagreements. It is remarkable despite the divisions between denominations and congregations most claim eternal conscious torment as their doctrine.

God allows false prophets to develop false doctrines from His Word. We are warned these kinds of people are with us and among us. There have always been preachers among us bilking unsuspecting, ignorant believers. There have always been preachers among us claiming to have a Divinely inspired ability to heal for a donation. There have always been preachers among us claiming to know first-hand God's plan for the eons. Some folks have given to a preacher hoping to gain wealth or wanting cures. Many received what they prayed for. As for knowing the future, it will take care of itself.

Christmas and Easter are doctrinal positions of most denominations and congregations. The Birth of Christ, His life, His persecution, His trial, His conviction, His punishment, His death, His resurrection and ascension to heaven are codified doctrines. Christmas and Easter celebrations are major events in traditional denominations and congregations. Christians from every corner of the world come together in their communities for these holidays. Are these Holy days doctrines developed by God or by men?

Christmas and Easter have their respective roots in pagan history. Nimrod was the great-grandson of Noah. He rose to become the ruler of the whole of humanity. Nimrod was a tyrant and merciless. He left the teachings of his grandfather and practiced idolatry. Nimrod is famous for building the "Tower of Babel" and for founding the city of Nineveh. Nimrod died and left a wife whose name was Semiramis. Semiramis had an illegitimate son whose name was Tammuz. Semiramis was able to convince the people that Tammuz was conceived by supernatural means and that Tammuz was actually Nimrod risen from the dead. Tammuz, as legend tells it, was killed by a wild boar. Semiramis cried for her loss. The people were led to believe that her tears resurrected Tammuz. The tears and the resurrection caused new vegetation to come up, hence, this legend becomes a rite of Spring.

Dr. John MacArthur is a renowned Christian teacher and pastor. He does wonderful work exposing pagan rites ⁹that have made their way into traditional denominations and congregations. He believes Satan

⁹ Dr. John MacArthur. *Bible Questions and Answers, Part 4*. Grace To You website. Date Published: June 6, 1976. <https://www.gty.org/library/sermons-library/1301-B/bible-questions-and-answers-part-4?Term=semiramis%20>. Date accessed: 04/02/2018.

had a part in the development of doctrines enforced in denominations and congregations today. There is confusion in the hearts and minds of some Christians. Dr. MacArthur asks the question, “Have you ever tried to figure out the strategy of Satan? It’s impossible to figure out. You know why? Because, unlike God, he is not omnipotent. He doesn’t know everything, and he really does some dumb things, and he contradicts himself.”

Dr. MacArthur’s premise is that Satan cannot remember all of his lies and he will be tripped up by them. Satan has a disorganized plan that “is impossible to figure out.” Satan has introduced outside influences on doctrines and theologies. There is a kind of demonic chaos surrounding and influencing Christian doctrine.

Dr. MacArthur preaches, “This whole confusion goes back, really, to the amalgamation of the Babylonian cultism and the early Christian church.” Dr. MacArthur reminds his audience of Nimrod, who was “the founder of Babylon.” Dr. MacArthur believes “Nimrod was an apostate of the patriarchal age.” He asks us to recall Nimrod’s history as presented in Scripture. Nimrod thought highly of himself. “He persuaded his followers to build a tower to Heaven, and thus began pagan worship.”

Dr. MacArthur provides the historical background of Christmas and Easter. These are not solely Christian holidays, but are “...the beginning of Babylonian idolatry.” He identifies the “Babylonian mystery cult” and reports its spread throughout Christendom. We are reminded by Dr. MacArthur of how these Babylonian practices are incorporated into the doctrines of the Protestant wing. “Rome became the center of the Babylonian cults.” Some doctrines carried through from Babylon, to Rome and now to denominations and congregations everywhere.

Dr. MacArthur stridently preaches his belief “the Babylonian cults” heavily influenced “the Roman church.” His message this day tells us “the cult of Semiramis, the high priestess, was mixed with Christianity and gave birth to modern Mariolatry; and the interesting thing to note is that the worship of Mary today as the mother and the virgin is not really Christianity, but it is an acquiescence to Babylonian cultism. For Semiramis was...was impregnated by a sunbeam and gave virgin birth to a son.”

Dr. MacArthur explains the traditional construct of Christmas. He

answers the question, “Why do so many people miss the real meaning of Christmas?”¹⁰ Dr. MacArthur tells us “most scholars doubt that December 25th is the true date of Christ’s birth.” He teaches “the fathers of the church in Rome decided to celebrate Christ’s birth on the winter solstice. It was their attempt to Christianize the popular pagan celebrations. But they failed to make the people conform. Instead the heathen festivities continued, and we are left with a bizarre marriage of pagan and Christian elements that characterizes our modern celebration of Christmas.”

Dr. MacArthur gives “some idea of how much pagan customs make up what we know as Christmas.” We are reminded that the Festival of Saturnalia is celebrated during the month of December. Dr. MacArthur describes the Festival as a time to give gifts it was “one of their most common customs” to give gifts to one another. Druids hung evergreen and evergreen wreaths were part of the festival experience. Hanging mistletoe and Christmas trees are customs taken from other religious celebrations. Dr. MacArthur suggests Martin Luther introduced Christmas tree candle lighting. Santa Claus was originally a Bishop in Asia Minor during the fourth century. Dr. MacArthur writes, “No wonder so many people miss Christmas. The simplicity of the birth of Christ is drowned in a sea of traditions, many being pagan in origin.”

Dr. MacArthur shows how worldly developed traditions make their way into Christian doctrine. It is a good thing to celebrate the birth of Christ Jesus. It is equally a good thing to celebrate His resurrection from the grave. It is critically important to celebrate those only and not some other pagan ritual even by accident or default. If the “holy days” of Easter and Christmas are centered in “Babylon” is it remotely possible the doctrine of eternal punishment has Satan at its root, too?

Lee Salisbury gives voice to a number of questions that deserve an answer. He is not alone in asking them. His observation is “The doctrine of ‘eternal punishment’ makes hell an eternal monument to the devil’s works of sin and death.” If the doctrine of eternal conscious torment is true, then Jesus fails to destroy the works of the devil (1 John 3:8). If

¹⁰ Dr. John MacArthur. 2. *“Why Do So Many People Miss the Real Meaning of Christmas.”* Adapted from “Six Ways Satan Is Stealing Christmas.” Publication date unknown. <https://www.gty.org/library/questions/QA69/why-do-so-many-people-miss-the-real-meaning-of-christmas>. Date accessed: 04/02/2018.

eternal conscious torment is true, then Adam's Fall condemns more than Christ can save (Romans 5:15). If eternal conscious torment is true, then Christ's Word to "draw all men to Himself" cannot be trusted (John 12:32). If eternal conscious torment is true, then death, the last enemy, is not destroyed (1 Corinthians 15:26). If eternal conscious torment is true, then God is not "all in all" (1 Corinthians 15:28). If eternal conscious torment is true, then Paul's admonition to the Philippians that "every knee will bow and every tongue confess Jesus Christ is Lord" cannot be true (Philippians 2:11). If eternal conscious torment is true, then God is similar to Nebuchadnezzar making a fiery pit to coerce obedience (Daniel 3).

Mr. Salisbury asks questions that should cause us all pause. Eternal conscious torment requires that God does not save all! If eternal conscious torment is true, then God's Word is contradicted and cannot be completely, absolutely true. Mr. Salisbury declares eternal punishment "makes hell an eternal monument to the devil's works of sin and death." The doctrine of eternal conscious torment creates a condition in which the devil is elevated and Christ's power to save is diminished.

We do not live apart from the grace and mercy of God. All denominations say "God is love" and that His mercies are infinite. This is agape love. It is a pure, unconditional love. This is the essence of God. Having a higher revelation of God's "agape" love, can we now accept this doctrine as being consistent with a God of love?

Gerry Beauchemin illustrates this concept in his book "Hope Beyond Hell." He describes a time when a missionary is working with a Muslim man who has a wife and daughter. The man agreed to read and study the Bible with the missionary. A terrible accident takes the lives of the man's wife and child. The man "pleads before Yalla (Wolof for Allah). Why? Why? How could you let this happen." The man cries uncontrollably. His tears falling to the floor. The missionary prays to God for help. He prays to God for the right words to comfort his friend. But, there are no words to share. There is nothing the missionary can say. The young Muslim wants to know if his wife and daughter will be safe in God's loving embrace. What words of solace can the missionary share? There are none because the missionary's belief is in eternal conscious torment.

There is nothing good to share. "Where is the Good News when it is needed most?"

On one hand God is working with a Christian man to persuade an unbeliever of the Gospel of Christ Jesus. Then tragedy strikes and the unbeliever's beloved are lost to an accident. "Oh Father!" my heart cries. "If the missionary only had a little more time he might have led his friend, his wife and their child to believe in Your Son." It is this kind of testimony that challenges eternal punishment. It is striking that we can believe God is so loving that He will reach out to one man to save Him and deliberately ignore another. It is a cruel theology.

Mr. Beauchemin cites a testimony from Gary Amirault. Mr. Amirault is a studied and learned man who has dedicated much time and energy to demonstrate God's unending love and His immeasurable mercy. Mr. Beauchemin introduces his readers to Mr. Amirault. He writes, "I called Gary and stumbled into a very critical and heart wrenching moment in their lives. Michelle and Gary had just received news of their son's death. I was shocked and at a loss for words." Mr. Amirault's testimony is poignant and precious.

Mr. Amirault and his wife lost their 35 year old son, Scott. Scott was not a confessing Christian and probably died not believing Christ Jesus to be his Savior. The traditional church teaches the final outcome of a person dying without Christ is eternal torment. Mr. Amirault asks, "What would life be like if you thought your child was in agony and suffering for all eternity with no possible hope of escape? How would you cope? How many millions have known such anguish? According to many churches Scott would be in hell right now. How could we remain sane if we believed this? His death has given us much more compassion for the billions who have lost loved ones."

Mr. Amirault's testimony is thought provoking and inspiring. There are millions upon millions of mothers and fathers who are believers, yet raised children who have died in unbelief. Mr. Amirault's testimony about the unfailing love of the Father for His creation gives them a blessed hope.

Julie Ferwerda recently published a book entitled "Raising Hell."¹¹

¹¹ Julie Ferwerda. *Raising Hell: Christianity's most controversial doctrine put under fire!*. Vagabond Press, 2016. <http://www.raisinghellbook.com/>. Date accessed: 04/02/2018.

She offers us these words to ponder. In her book (pp. 117-118) she asks, "Does Everyone Really Get A Fair Chance Now?" Ms. Ferwerda asks us to consider the life of an orphan girl living on the streets of India. "This child, one of 80 million like her on the streets, was abandoned on a city sidewalk before she had a chance to learn much of anything about survival, let alone matters of any deity. Every day is a battle to survive by stealing food, figuring out which adults want to help her and which ones want to use her body or sell her for money, and figuring out where she is going to safely sleep next." Making matters worse this orphan is the lowest of the low. She is part of a caste system and those folks who do see her see her not as an innocent child, but a person cursed by the gods. If there was a good soul that would rescue her from the streets that person would likely be Hindu. The orphan girl would probably never hear about Christ Jesus and His saving grace. From what was the girl saved? She may be freed from the torments of life on the streets, but eternal conscious torment awaits.

God is a Father Who loves His creation. He loves all of His creation. He loves the most frail and least of His children. He loves the most autocratic legalistic theologian. God does require every person to be held accountable for the sins of their lives. God's punishment, though, is remedial and disciplining. Unending punishment serves no purpose. It would not be tolerated of an earthly father. Why, then, apply such a characteristic to our heavenly Father?

The Lord has blessed me with a ministry to preach. I have been introduced to hundreds of good people. Almost every person I met believes unbelievers will be eternally tormented. They declare with me that God is love and His mercies are limitless. Sadly, they will also declare that God will torment the majority of His creation in a fiery pit. Some of these good people have family members; fathers, mothers, or children who have died unbelievers. I cannot imagine their sorrow.

God is love. He commands us to love, even and especially, those who hate us. Would He do less than He has commanded of us?

With guidance provided by the Holy Spirit and a prayer for understanding we will examine scripture in context. Expect honest explanations for what we have come to believe. We will examine the

doctrine and measure it against scripture. It's much the same as the Bereans.

The brothers immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Beroea. When they arrived, they went into the Jewish synagogue. Now these were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that *they received the word with all readiness of the mind, examining the Scriptures daily to see whether these things were so.* (Acts 17:10-11, emphasis added)

It is important to understand God's Word as He intends it to be known. The doctrine of eternal conscious torment contradicts scripture. The meaning of scripture is interpreted to mean something other than its plain meaning. The doctrine's prevalence should demand we "see whether these things were so."

I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book, *if anyone adds to them*, may God add to him the plagues which are written in this book. *If anyone takes away from the words of the book* of this prophecy, may God take away his part from the tree of life, and out of the holy city, which are written in this book. (Revelation 22:18-19, emphasis added)

The consequences for misapplying scripture to create doctrines is dire. If only by chance the doctrine of eternal conscious torment is not true, then all those preaching it run the risk of losing their share "in the tree of life and in the holy city...." If the doctrine of eternal punishment is possibly untrue great care should be taken to say so. A person dedicated to presenting the Gospel of Christ Jesus to others should tell only the Truth. Truth is not doubted.

The Truth that is not doubted is this; Jesus Christ is the only begotten Son of God. He is the Savior of all mankind. He came from Heaven and was obedient to His Father's command. He lived. He taught. He was wrongly accused of blasphemy by His own people. He was tried and convicted to death on a cross. He died on that cross after terrible physical

persecution was laid on His Body. His Body was taken from the cross and properly prepared for burial. He was placed in a grave. Three days later He was resurrected from that grave and He made Himself known to His Apostles, then about 500 others and finally to Paul on the “Road to Damascus.” After forty days He ascended to Heaven and now sits at the right hand of the Father. All this done so as to be a sacrifice worthy and appropriate to justify the world in the sight of the Father.

All of this Gospel of Christ Jesus is verifiable in His Holy Word. Men build doctrines based on their interpretations of His Word. Some doctrines bring glory to God. Others do not. The doctrine of eternal conscious torment does not glorify our Father. If there is the slightest doubt of the doctrine’s veracity, then it should not be preached. If scripture is manipulated to fit the doctrine, then the doctrine should not be preached.

Mercy Aiken and Gary Amirault prepared a list of “Honest Questions and Answers About Hell.”¹² This is an essay very much worth the time to read and review. The questions they ask are fair. The assessments they provide are not deceitful. It is unfortunate their understanding of hell and eternal conscious torment are controversial.

There is a fair case to be made against eternal conscious torment. Ms. Aiken and Mr. Amirault believe “an open and unbiased study of the Bible” will lead to an understanding that is universal reconciliation. They present a proposition that “hell is not an Old Testament doctrine.” The word “Sheol” is the word commonly interpreted “hell.” Hell is construed to mean eternal conscious torment. “Sheol” properly understood is the grave or a pit. It does not translate to mean fiery torment. In fact, “the Old Testament does not contain the concept of Hell!”

Ms. Aiken and Mr. Amirault ask several salient questions about the reality of hell. “If Hell is real, why didn’t God make that warning plain right at the beginning of the Bible?... If Hell is real, why wasn’t Cain warned about it, or Sodom and Gomorrah, or any of those who committed the earliest recorded ‘sins?’... If Hell is real why didn’t Moses warn about this fate in the Ten Commandments or the Mosaic Covenant consisting of over 600 laws, ordinances, and warnings?... If Hell is real,

¹² Mercy Aiken and Gary Amirault. *Honest Questions and Answers About Hell*. Tentmaker website. Publication date unknown. <http://www.tentmaker.org/articles/ifhellisreal.htm>. Date accessed: 04/01/2018.

why are its roots in paganism, rather than the Bible? If Hell is real, why was the revelation of it first given to pagan nations, instead of God's covenant people? Did God expect Israel to learn about the afterlife from the Pagan Gentiles? If so, why did He repeatedly warn Israel to not learn of their ways? If Hell is real, why did God tell the Jews that burning their children alive in the fire to the false god Molech, (in the valley of Gehenna) was so detestable to Him? God said that such a thing 'never even entered His mind' (Jer. 32:35). How could God say such a thing to Israel, if He has plans to burn alive a good majority of His own creation in a spiritual and eternal Gehenna of His own making?"

Ms. Aiken's and Mr. Amirault's essay offers questions that have answers. The answers lead to understand His love for His creation. I am grateful that my thinking regarding eternal conscious torment is changed. It is a doctrine that maligns the character of God.

CHAPTER 3

Commentary: Endless Punishment, In the Very Words of Its Advocates

Thomas J. Sawyer wrote this work in 1879. His goal was to expose the doctrine of eternal punishment by using the words of those advocating it. He cited great scholars and recorded their descriptions of hell. The words of the doctrine's advocates speak clearly and loudly. Their words tell us who deserves such judgment and what eternal punishment looks like. Dr. Sawyer's book has within it hundreds of citations and quotes. The descriptions of the torments of hell are horrific. Please read Dr. Sawyer's book. Contemporary Biblical scholars and theologians continue to define hell, who is destined for it and what its torments look like. That is one purpose behind this book.

Dr. Sawyer opens his book with the words of Drexelius. "So fearful a thing it is to fall into the hands of the living God." About sinners Drexelius wrote, "God will always punish them, and he can never torment them enough, though their torments will endure to all eternity." The worst torment devised by man pales in comparison to what God has reserved to those who do not believe Him. Drexelius' declares the worst torment devised by men could only be endured for a short time "...three or four days, or a week at farthest...."

How depraved man can be generally? It is a rhetorical question. Drexelius declares the Creator of those who hate Him will exact on those "haters" a punishment worse than what man can do to man.

Moreover, Drexelius, preached that the worst that man can do to another for only a few days God will do forever. God "...can never torment them enough...." The kind of Supreme justice or punishment Drexelius would find appropriate smacks of vindictiveness not love.

Dr. Sawyer cites Dr. Griffin who wrote about eternal punishment. "... The punishment will be endless.... The smallest soul in hell will contain more misery than Satan now does." Dr. Griffin gave praises to God for the misery God puts on men. "Oh, what a God is that which lives from eternity to eternity."

Those are serious theological statements. What do they mean? There will be a punishment for those who reject God; that is, refuse to believe Christ Jesus is their Savior. An unbeliever will be subjected to such torment that he "...will endure more in one hour than has been endured on earth by all nations since the creation."

This kind of thinking, these kinds of statements regarding what our Father will do to His creation for their failure to believe should make our stomachs wretch. Dr. Griffin declares God will cause unimaginable angst, pain, and torment on His creation. "Oh, what a God is that which lives from eternity to eternity!" I cannot imagine celebrating my Lord because He is the Grand Tormentor. Dr. Griffin is seemingly worshiping God for tormenting souls in hell.

Dr. Sawyer wrote this work in 1879. The "Civil War" has ended. Abraham Lincoln has been assassinated and buried. Andrew Johnson advanced to the highest office in the land. U.S. Grant then Rutherford Hayes are elected. It is Hayes who is the President when Dr. Sawyer's work is published. California amended its Constitution that was first written in 1849 prior to its admission into the United States. The Zulu Nation in Africa waged war against the British. Austria and Germany entered into an alliance that would eventually lead to a great European conflict that engulfed the world in war. Chile declared war on Bolivia and Peru. An Afghan state was formally established by way of the Treaty of Gandamak between Russia and the United Kingdom. Charles Taze Russell of Jehovah's Witness fame published the first "Zion's Watch Tower and Herald of Christ's Presence." That magazine is to this day published and distributed as "The Watchtower." Thomas Edison developed the first incandescent light bulb and patented his work in 1879.

History shows us great change in geopolitical conditions. Not much has changed regarding the doctrine of eternal conscious torment in the nearly 140 years since Dr. Sawyer's work. Almost thirty new Presidents have been elected or elevated to the highest office in the United States. California is still a state and its constitution remains in force. There is a concerted effort in California to leave the Union in 2018. Africa is a hotbed of upheaval. The wars are not between the Zulu Nation and Great Britain. The wars are now theological and ideological between Islam and so much else. The so-called World Wars are rooted in the Austrian-German alliance. Afghanistan did not become a buffer between two nations as was hoped. It has instead become a spark in another even larger war. Reasons for wars have not changed. The ferocity of wars; the destruction of wars; the desolation of wars has worsened. Jehovah's Witnesses probably perform greater outreach through their sect leading people to their set of beliefs in greater numbers than all the so-called evangelical outreach combined. Light from a bulb has changed not in the production of light, but in the process light is delivered. Mr. Edison's patent has expired and has been replaced by other patents for other light emitting devices.

The basic Christian doctrine of "Eternal Punishment" as just punishment for unbelievers continues to stand. The doctrine is being challenged, but still prevails. From an historical point of view to remain the same seems improbable if not impossible, but the doctrine that is eternal conscious torment thrives. The world around us changes, but traditions are hard to break or even to examine.

Dr. Sawyer was one of many who preached the doctrine of universal reconciliation in a sea of evangelicals who preached eternal conscious torment. The number of people preaching the ultimate reconciliation of all are few. I am grateful to be counted among them.

CHAPTER 4

The Controversy: Eternal Conscious Torment and Universal Reconciliation in Opposition

Dr. Sawyer opens the dialogue with a plea. Let the facts in Scripture bring light. His intent was to lay a foundation that will “prepare the earnest inquirer for an intelligent...study of the controversy now going on in Protestant Christendom.” The controversy being brought to light is “upon the question of universal salvation and endless punishment.”

The orthodox doctrine of eternal conscious torment (ECT) is being challenged. The doctrine of eternal conscious torment is the prevailing doctrine in traditionalist denominations and congregations throughout the world. The doctrine is particularly popular in denominations and congregations in the Western world.

The doctrine of universal reconciliation challenges the veracity of eternal conscious torment. Both doctrines cannot be true. Universal reconciliation is God’s gift to humanity. Universal reconciliation transcends eternal conscious torment. Universal reconciliation is highlighted in Scripture. God’s mercies are recorded testimonies to universal reconciliation. His mercies are infinite.

A controversy should not exist. It does. It is fair to address it. God is love.

The doctrine of eternal conscious torment insists unbelievers will be judged guilty of the shame of their unbelief. The doctrine teaches

the guilty are sentenced to eternal conscious torment. The sentence commences at physical death which is when souls separate from bodies. The doctrine teaches that at the point of physical death the body goes to the ground and the soul is tormented in hell. Later, another judgment, the Last Judgment. There will be another guilty verdict. This time the sentence is to reunite body and tormented soul. Eternal tortures are added to eternal torments this time to body and soul.

The doctrine of universal reconciliation does not advocate condemnation on any level. Universal reconciliation builds on the Biblical precept that "God is love." Everything we think, do or say should be cast in that light. The advocates of the doctrine believe God intends to reconcile all people to Himself. The doctrine teaches it is God's will that all be saved. The advocates believe that at death a person's body goes into the grave and the spirit returns to God Who gave it.

The doctrine of eternal conscious torment is symbolized by what the doctrine calls "hell." The doctrine of universal reconciliation does not need symbolism. Challenge the advocates of eternal conscious torment to define "hell." Let their words speak for themselves. Challenge the advocates of universal reconciliation to define "God is Love." Let their words speak for themselves. Both doctrines cannot be simultaneously true.

The controversy challenges the advocates of eternal conscious torment to prove their theological belief. What is the final outcome for mankind (Adam)?

The doctrine of eternal conscious torment is built on misinterpreted or manipulated scripture. The doctrine is supported by scripture twisted. The doctrine is shaped by traditions. Men mean what they intend their doctrine to mean. Men influence theology. Men influence the interpretation of scripture that influences the doctrine. In other words the interpretation of God's Holy Word is made to fit the doctrine.

Universal reconciliation was God's plan for humanity from the beginning. Scripture says that is so. The doctrine is thoroughly derived from the truth of Scripture. No man can taint it. It cannot be a tradition or ritual. Universal reconciliation is simply God' plan, His will, His intent. A truly candid study of God's Holy Word does not conclude there is an eternal separation from God, The Father. Much less is there support

for an eternal burning torment for failing to believe His Son and our Messiah. In fact a study of scriptures that is candid and led by the Holy Spirit concludes "God is love."

That is the controversy. Which is right, endless punishment or ultimate restoration? Traditionalists defend their doctrine by making hellish claims about God's justice. Dr. Sawyer tells us "in every aspect the subject is a momentous one...." Dr. Sawyer could not be more assertive. This controversy impacts nearly every facet of our spiritual and physical lives. He states, "No man who believes in God and immortality can fail to take a profound interest..." in our fellow men. The subject is critical to the believer and critical to the world God created. The need to understand the fate of our souls, of our bodies and of our spirits is critically important to a Christian. We should also have the same kind of need, perhaps a greater need, for others to understand the fate of their souls, their bodies and their spirits. Every believer is convinced God is their Savior. Every believer is convinced of immortality. Every believer has a "profound interest" in the outcome of their lives and the condition of their respective immortality. They should also possess a "profound interest" in the outcome of the immortal state of unbelievers.

Unfortunately faith in Christ is quickly tainted by theological contaminants. A Christian is wise to set himself apart from denominational traditions and look only for knowledge in His Word. It is likely most folks reading this book today are people professing to follow Christ; to be in Christ; and to live as Christ. That being the case we should look for every opportunity to love especially those who hate us and who passionately disagree with us. We have a regard and a desire for the welfare of those like us, but we should possess a higher regard for those not like us. Because we believe we are truly affectionate for one another loving others must include those who hate us. Christians hold the interests of those not believing in greater stead. Or is that "paying lip-service" to a very serious subject?

The controversy involves the kind of end coming to the lives of multitudes of people. The controversy affects the original couple to the most recently born baby. The actual numbers of people and nations affected is not the significant point. If the number of persons lost is only a few, then their fate would be "the suffering of annihilation or of an eternity

of woe..." as Dr. Sawyer writes. Their judgment is God's responsibility. His will will be done and His will will be just. To be sure whatever the judgment is to be it will be reflective of Him. The punishment given demonstrates "...the character of both that (God's) government and its divine author." Whatever the judgment, whatever the penalty, whatever the outcome it is Divine and tells us much about our Father.

Dr. Sawyer asks, "Did God create people only to be eternally tormented?" It doesn't really matter if the sinner knows he is a sinner. He may know and choose to be cast into hell knowing what it is. He may not know that he is a sinner and not know to ask forgiveness. That does not matter. The doctrine of eternal conscious torment declares the outcome to both the sinner who knows and the sinner who does not is already committed.

It is always the right time to have this discussion. Dr. Sawyer believed the time for this discussion was ripe in 1879. He believed "these grave questions can be discussed with a degree of calmness and under an absence of prejudice and passion." I pray the same "degree of calmness" will prevail in this discussion. I pray the discussion sets aside "prejudice and passion" for wisdom and love. Dr. Sawyer wrote, "The most zealous advocate of endless punishment is obliged to confess that there is something to be said in favor of a doctrine for which all good men pray, and which if true, would not only fill the moral universe with joy, but must also redound to the infinite glory of God."

This is as true today as it was in 1879. Universal reconciliation is far sweeter a doctrine than is eternal conscious torment. The advocates of eternal conscious torment are anchored to it. The allegiance to the doctrine is sincere to the point the advocate judges those who disagree with it.

I have learned He is Sovereign. I know that to be true, but now I experience it. I am more patient. He is Sovereign over all things. He is Sovereign over big and little things, over good and bad things over moral and immoral things. He teaches me to be patient and to love as He loves. He shows me in His Word that He is love. He shows me His intended plan for all. It is His plan for all things.

The doctrine of eternal conscious torment requires a vivid imagination. I do not think any person has ever seen hell that is not a

grave or a pit. The advocates of the doctrine believe there are a few people who have seen hell. These witnesses are celebrated. Because of their testimony some are elevated to sainthood. Even if the “zealous advocate of endless punishment” cannot be persuaded differently, he must agree universal reconciliation is sweeter than what he proposes and advocates.

Dr. Sawyer wrote, “The Universalists on one side, and the Orthodox, so called, on the other still hold much, and much that is fundamental, in common and I trust with equal sincerity and affection.” Dr. Sawyer prayed the advocates for each doctrine would remember that both believed the same way about so much.

Setting aside the doctrine was not hard for me. I accepted the Truth. God is love. He gives infinite mercies. There was a change in my fellowship events. My friends and I often discussed theological subjects. We agreed on most doctrinal points and disagreed on some. If a conflict arose my friends and I would agree to disagree. Passion for a particular point of view was seen regularly.

All doctrine is open to examination and re-examination. Doctrines like eternal conscious torment and universal reconciliation deserve scrutiny. Doctrines are helpful, but not necessary. Doctrines and traditions can be idols. I worship the Lord only as far as my Christian values will let me. I was the traditionalist preacher chained to my orthodoxy and to the doctrine of eternal conscious torment. No longer.

My friends are committed to their doctrines no less than any other. They are bound to their beliefs. There are differences of opinion between us, but none is an obstacle to our love for one another. However, it is. The doctrine of universal reconciliation eliminates the need for a doctrine of wrath. Universal reconciliation and eternal conscious torment cannot coexist.

My Men's Bible Study mates are not persuaded to move away from eternal conscious torment. Discussions about universal reconciliation with my friends would quickly become unreasonable. My friends would challenge my understanding of scripture. I could refer them to many scriptures that point to, at least, a potential for the restoration of all, but they would not hear me. My friends are convinced their theology regarding eternal torment is right and in their view they are right to divide with folks who disagree on this doctrine. I've since stepped away

from that Men's Bible Study. The subject of eternal damnation came up often. I found myself arguing for "The Blessed Hope" against deeply entrenched hell-fire knowledge. My friends are really good people and I am grateful for them. I pray for unity with them. This conflict should not divide us. After all is said and done we agree on more than on what we do not.

It is lamentable that good men willingly find ways to divide themselves. God's Word only means what God means. Men, though, have rendered His word to mean what they want it to mean. Doctrines are developed and implemented by the will of men. Men organize themselves around doctrines and traditions. They classify their brand of Christian ideals and seek to draw others into their group. Traditions are from a shallow well of a man's thoughts. The meaning of God's Word is buried by the thoughts of men. Men's thoughts are seldom in agreement among themselves. Traditions often disagree with the Word of God. Denominationalism is rooted in the disagreements of men. Ideas of lesser importance than eternal conscious torment have split congregations.

Dr. Sawyer wrote of the division caused by the doctrine of eternal conscious torment. The division between advocates for eternal punishment and advocates for universal reconciliation may have widened in 140 years. Arguments rage over the cessation of spiritual gifts. Charismatics believe fully in Holy Spirit baptisms, signs, wonders, healing, and much more. Legalistic brothers call charismatic believers heretics for practicing what they believe. Charismatics are concerned the legalists are suppressing the Holy Spirit.

Doctrines such as baptism cause many to build walls around their theology to prevent attacks by other theologies. Immersion baptism, infant baptism, proxy baptism, sprinkling, baptism by the Holy Spirit and more are traditions from the thoughts of men. The traditions cause the divisions. Pride causes the tradition.

Denominations and congregations divide over doctrines of leadership, training, government, men, women and children. Should a woman be a Pastor? Who runs the church? Who sits where and what is worn when? Splits and divisions caused by the thoughts of men.

The divisions between denominations and congregations are sometimes deep and seemingly without resolution. Sometimes the

divisions are shallow and seemingly irreversible. All divisions between denominations and congregations should be resolved easily. It may be the division suits the respective purpose of each tradition. Resolution may not be what is wanted.

Let us resolve that God is Sovereign. God is love. God's mercy is limitless. With that resolution we glorify God, but there remain differences that separate us. Dr. Sawyer expresses the problem. "The points of view we occupy, the principles of exegesis we adopt, or the prejudices of education and habits of thought under which we act, *must obviously be very different* to explain the different results to which we come, and account for the distinct and, in some respects, conflicting systems which we form" (emphasis added).

Dr. Sawyer's observation is profound. What has led all these learned men to different conclusions about the same subjects and with the same Resource? Dr. Sawyer's analysis is that our points of view are made by the way we interpret God's Word. The ways we interpret God's Word are influenced by our educators. Theological things are learned and passed on. Whole schools develop based in a particular understanding of a particular theological thing. Proof of this is obvious. Consider the number of seminaries in America. Consider the different denominations that establish and support seminaries. Even unaffiliated seminaries espouse specific variance with other affiliated and other unaffiliated seminaries. What would their need to exist be if not for division with others? Each seminary ever established was established on the basis of filling a need. That need is based on a difference in understanding or interpretation of God's Holy Word. With all that we profess to know we still disagree. With all that we share we still separate ourselves from each other. Traditions become more prevalent than adherence to God's Word. Traditions supplant the Gospel.

Dr. Sawyer reckons after all is said and done there are really only two schools of theology. The traditionalist which includes all denominations, all seminaries and the like. There are sects, divisions and denominations among the traditionalists, but all are orthodox. The traditionalist believes in endless torment. Some believe in annihilation. Within the traditionalist groups are disciplined men who follow the precepts of Augustine and John Calvin. Other disciplined men follow the precepts set by Jacob Arminius.

The first group believes God has chosen them. The other group believes they have chosen God. It's not a subtle distinction.

Calvinism and Arminianism are divergent theologies. They coexist. Their traditions do not agree, yet the theologies unite around the doctrine of eternal conscious torment. They unite to protect the doctrine. Their theologies are uniform in that men are born into sin. All men are destined to eternal conscious torment. Only a belief in Christ Jesus can save a person from God's wrath. Only a few are saved and they number themselves saved.

Their theologies unite declaring at death the sinful soul cannot be redeemed. The traditionalist doctrine of eternal conscious torment does not allow further hope. Physical death seals eternal fate. Calvinism and Arminianism teach that at death your place in goodness or in evil is absolutely determined. The unsaved will be consigned to eternal punishment.

A belief in God's nature as Unity or Triunity does not matter. The theologies of the Unitarian and of the Trinitarian share the same doctrine of eternal conscious torment. Both theologies teach our Father curses the unrepentant sinner with either eternal torment or annihilation. Their respective disagreements with each other are not a complete split. They share the doctrine of eternal punishment at the end.

Unitarian, Trinitarian, Calvinist or Arminian share the doctrine of eternal conscious torment.

It is a worthwhile effort to consider an alternative. Set aside preconceived notions regarding what is believed will happen at death and after. Ultimate reconciliation is a theology that is demonstrative of God's love for all His creation. Consider the possibility. Consider the freedom that comes with an understanding that God's love is all-consuming fire.

The doctrine of eternal conscious torment is exposed. Jesus saves a few or He saves all. Which is it? If He saves only a part, then the devil wins. God only loves a part of the human race. Most He hates. God created all for eternal fire, but saves some to worship Him. God tortures His creation in a lake of fire. How then can we say God is love if we believe God eternally torments any part of His creation?

There is freedom in our spirits when we learn the doctrine of eternal conscious torment is not true. It is comforting to know God created all

things and will reconcile all things to Himself. The liberty in Christ I experience now is great and a blessing. My first steps on the fork to universal reconciliation were to consider it possible. Deeper into the walk God made it clear universal reconciliation is true. The doctrine of eternal conscious torment is not possible. It is untrue.

Dr. Sawyer asked in 1879, "Are all souls finally to render homage to Christ, and acknowledge him Lord, to the glory of God the Father; or are some made reprobate by the eternal decree of God, as some teach; or will they, as others affirm, resist forever all the attractive forces of the cross and continue in ceaseless rebellion against the divine grace and love?"

Dr. Sawyer's question deserves an answer. Will the answer be true to scripture? Universal reconciliation teaches all will "confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." The advocates of universal reconciliation declare there is nothing separating the Father from His creation. The advocates of universal reconciliation preach "God is love" and God's Judgment died on the Cross for "the sins of the world."

The doctrine of eternal conscious torment does not concur with scripture and disputes the doctrine of universal reconciliation. Eternal conscious torment cannot tolerate a doctrine like universal reconciliation. The doctrine of universal reconciliation may be getting more attention today than it did in 1879. The doctrine of eternal conscious torment is unlikely to surrender. Too many traditions are hinged to it.

Eternal conscious torment is the doctrine of Augustine, Calvin, Arminius, great theologians of the past and of the present, and preachers of God's Word. The doctrine teaches unrepentant sinners will suffer eternal torment as just punishment. Eternal torture is divine and is divinely administered. Advocates of the doctrine preach God is infinite and agree He is Sovereign. They will confess He is love. The doctrine teaches finite sin offends our infinite Father, therefore infinite punishment is required. The doctrine restricts God's love to a few.

Can the doctrines be reconciled? Are they compatible? Can they coexist? The answer to those questions is "No." How is it on one hand God is infinite love, but on the other hand God is eternal wrath? Every person is beautifully knitted together in their mother's womb by a loving Father. There is nothing more beautiful. What can be more gracious than His Spirit breathed into us?

God's gift of life is a gift to every person. God is love. His creation is built in His love. We are His creation. We are built in His love. Every Christian knows he is alive in Christ. Christians worship the King. Most Christians also believe there are many not loved by God, that He never loved them. They believe most of God's creation was built for eternal conscious torment. It seems to me every Christian everywhere should be on his knees in submission to the Lord. We know people who do not know the Lord. We know family, friends and acquaintances who have not surrendered to the liberty of salvation in Christ. These are our friends. These are our family. Some may even be our children. No doubt some are. What is their fate?

The doctrine of eternal conscious torment demands unsaved family and friends be destined to endure torture forever. There is nothing we or they can do about it. Their fate is determined and hell is their punishment. Numerous preachers teach this doctrine. I imagine preachers whose children were not saved agonize frequently over their child's eternal fate.

The doctrine of eternal conscious torment dominates today's denominations and congregations. The doctrine is as controversial today as it was in 1879. It is a controversy pitting Augustine against the Holy Word of God. Great theologians are drawn into the controversy. The words of the advocates of eternal conscious torment strive to compel us to believe the doctrine is true. If the doctrine is true, then what about my mother?

My Mom did not talk much about her spiritual beliefs. Any conversation about Jesus would be diverted to something else. Mom valued her privacy. I do not have first hand knowledge of Mom's salvation. She and I never had a serious conversation about her eternal state. Mom was beautiful. I do not say that only because she is my mother, but because Mom was beautiful. Her heart was beautiful. Mom was always good even when she wasn't. I love my Mom. I do not think of her as often as I used to. Memories of Mom have been edited. The sour stuff fades and the sweetness of good fills in the blanks. Memories of Mom are all good. But, I do not really know if she was saved.

Buddy, my youngest brother, testifies Mom told him she was saved. She was living in a nursing home. Arrangements were made with the nursing home to baptize Mom. Mom was unable to be baptized. Her

body was weak. Her mind was leaving her. Buddy insists Mom told him she believed in Jesus. Donny, another of my brothers, told me recently that Mom was saved. He was told by reliable people caring for her knew that Mom was saved.

Buddy testifies, Donny testifies and some strangers testify that Mom is saved. All that said I do not really know if my Mom is saved. Emotionally it is easy to accept the testimony. I want to believe it is true. What if their testimony is mistaken? What if Mom is not saved?

The doctrine of eternal conscious torment allows only one of two alternatives. The first is Mom is saved. The second is that she is not. If Mom is a believer, then all is well. If Mom died an unbeliever then I have to realize my mother is being tormented by my loving Father as you read this. Perish the thought!

I choose another alternative. Mom's salvation is important. I pray my brothers' testimonies are true. If Mom died an unrepentant unbeliever, then our loving Father will reconcile her to Himself. Whatever God's remedial method will be my Mom will gladly endure it to be drawn to Him by His love. Mom will experience His infinite mercies. So, too, have I.

Denominational-ism exists because of divisions over small things. Many little issues divide believers. Groups of people coming together for one purpose fail to agree on the purpose. We seek fellowship to worship God, but do not agree on Who He is or what He wills. Traditions and doctrines are wedges dividing deeper still. No matter the number of divisions or how deep the wedge traditional denominations and congregations endorse eternal conscious torment. It is ironic.

Eternal conscious torment and universal reconciliation do not complement each other. Only one can be harmonious with scripture. One proves the other false.

Dr. Sawyer suggested at the time he wrote his book that the number of advocates for universal reconciliation was growing. He believed the doctrine was growing in acceptance. He also acknowledged the controversy may never be resolved, but that parties involved would remain at peace. I have not seen any statistics leading me to think the doctrine of universal reconciliation is growing in acceptance. It is not the prevailing theology in churches today.

The traditionalist doctrine of eternal conscious torment may be softening its hold. Some in the traditionalist camp are now teaching that damnation is not so much a burning eternal agony, but is an eternal separation from God. That is hellish enough. The traditionalist understands many in their congregations have mothers such as mine. It sounds beastly to preach, “Your mother will burn in unending torment!” It can be softened to say, “Your mother may never see the face of God nor enjoy His grace.” Either way the outcome is hateful. The theology of eternal conscious torment is cruel.

Advocates of universal reconciliation are probably another denomination among other traditional denominations. Advocates of the doctrine are fully committed to being part of Christ’s Bride. The advocates of universal reconciliation are starting poor and small. During Dr. Sawyer’s time Universal-ism as a denomination became a movement. The movement has stalled for a little while, but is hopefully growing again.

Dr. Sawyer testifies about the need for the Universalist denomination to grow. All the Universalist denomination does will be under the judgmental eye of traditionalists. Universalist congregations demonstrate common beliefs with traditional congregations. The common beliefs are too similar to discount. The only separation that matters is the doctrine of eternal conscious torment.

Universal reconciliation dictates all will be reconciled to the Father. No person will ever suffer eternal punishment. Eternal torment is abusive and counter to God’s character. God is love. Universal reconciliation teaches God reconciles and restores all people to Himself. Ultimate reconciliation is the theology that God is “all in all.”

CHAPTER 5

Universal Reconciliation.

Universal reconciliation is doctrine that first acknowledges the whole world is God's. Dr. Sawyer writes, "...The whole human family are his children...." Universal reconciliation is simple. It is consistent. It is beautifully aligned with Scripture. Universal reconciliation does not compete with Scripture. It is a reliable doctrine.

Nothing is more beautiful than a righteous King ruling over all that His Father gives Him. Nothing could be more glorious to behold. The King on His Throne reigning over all and subjecting all to Himself including the devil, death and the grave. His love so magnificent and so powerful that His blood covers the most vile man. Is it possible to behold anything else more glorious? The most wretched man is reconciled to the Father through the Christ. Heavenly reconciliation is God's gift to us all. The most righteous man is blessed in the same reconciliation given to the least righteous, evil man. Salvation is the claim of the Gospel. The Gospel applies to all men.

Advocates of the doctrine are often called universalists. It is convenient short-hand, but the label is often derisively used. Universalists believe the Gospel. They preach it. Universalists believe Jesus died for the sins of all. They preach that. Universalists preach there is not a soul ever in existence that cannot be reached by Christ. Paul writes that he is chief among sinners. God saved even a sinner as heinous as Paul. He saved even me. His power changed me and everyone like me. His power is not sufficient *only* for those who believe. His power to restore reaches all. That's a

beauty of the doctrine that is universal reconciliation. His power reaches all souls. Every soul will be transformed. Every knee will bow. All will bring glory to God.

Dr. Sawyer contends that in the end “the Gospel of Christ Jesus will eventually be the religion of the world.” God’s Word is replete with the promise “every knee shall bow and acknowledge Him as Lord.” Dr. Sawyer writes, “If there is one human soul in the universe that Christ cannot subdue and bring into willing subjection to his law, he is not ‘the Savior of the world.’”

Ask yourself, “Is ‘...there one human soul in the universe that Christ cannot subdue and bring into willing subjection to His law...?’” To answer there is diminishes Christ’s power to save the world. If there is one soul Christ cannot change then He is not the Savior of the world.

He died for the sins of the world. He did not die to condemn the world, but to save it. The doctrine of universal reconciliation considers all sins of the world are forgiven. There is not a sin that has not already been forgiven. The advocates of universal reconciliation teach it is God’s will that all be saved. We preach God’s character is love and He is infinitely merciful. There is nothing that can separate any person from His love. He is grace upon grace. The advocates of universal reconciliation preach those who do not believe will be remedially punished. Universalists believe God will reconcile all men, all things unto Himself.

Scripture paints a picture of the last hours of Jesus’ earthly ministry. He entered Jerusalem riding a colt. The people had heard of His many miracles. Prior to His victorious entry into Jerusalem Jesus called Lazarus out from a grave. The people heard how Jesus’ dear friend Lazarus had died and was buried for four days. They heard that Lazarus is now alive.

Jesus enters Jerusalem as royalty loved and honored by His people. The people were struggling to get near Him. Two Greek men sought assistance from Phillip who was one of Christ’s Disciples. Phillip told Andrew and together they told Jesus about the Greek men’s request. Jesus responded to Andrew and Phillip. He likens Himself to a grain of wheat. Wheat grains must die if new seed is to be harvested. He must die if the fruit of His love is to grow.

Jesus talked about being truly devoted. He blesses those who bless Him. Those who believe are taken from the darkness and brought into

the light. He blesses those who diligently serve Him. He also says those who are in darkness choose to stay in darkness.

God spoke from heaven. He glorified His Name before a multitude of witnesses. The people were confused. Jesus spoke to them. The Voice they heard was the Father's Voice. He did not raise His Voice for the Christ's benefit. He spoke for the benefit of those there that day. Jesus did not need the Father's testimony. The World needs it! God is glorified.

Jesus describes His death on a cross. He says the most loving thing, "...and I, if I may be lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself" (John 12:32). Christ tells us that His death on a cross is to cause all men, to literally drag all men, to repent and believe in Him. There is no longer a question about the salvation of the world. Jesus died on a cross and saved all men unto Himself. Not one is lost.

Dr. Sawyer tells us, "...this word 'draw' expresses admirably the attractive forces of the Christian religion and Christ's method of accomplishing his work. Men are not driven to goodness and heaven, but are drawn thither." All people are drawn to Christ Jesus. His death on the Cross assures all will be saved which is the will of the Father.

And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, *will draw all people to myself.* (John 12:32, emphasis added)

There is nothing mentioned by Christ regarding the judgment of the unrepentant. He says He "will draw all people to myself." There is not a man who can resist Christ's love. His love will draw the unrepentant man to repentance. His mercy will draw the unrepentant man to confession. His grace will draw the unrepentant man to love. The unrepentant man will release rebellion and pride. He will repent and then be reconciled in Christ's Kingdom.

This is the same process that drew you and drew me to Him. The power of his love draws all men to repentance. The gift of His mercy draws all men to Himself. Grace is the gift, like faith, that draws all men to Jesus. If nothing else is agreed, let's agree that Christ died on the Cross to draw all men to Himself. That's the plain meaning of scripture.

His death on the Cross, as Dr. Sawyer writes, "is sufficient to do all that Christ undertook.... He will not fail nor be discouraged in His work....

There is one God, Who will have all men to be saved.” Christ Jesus gave Himself a ransom for all. God is love. The power “of the divine love” is evident in His Holy Word. Christ Jesus is love. His love is all-powerful. His love is completing all that Christ set out to accomplish. Jesus Christ will not fail to love all and all will be drawn to Him.

He brings all things to Himself and gives them to His Father in Heaven.

I exhort therefore, first of all, that petitions, prayers, intercessions, and givings of thanks, be made for all men: for kings and all who are in high places; that we may lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and reverence. For this is good and acceptable in the sight of *God our Savior; who desires all people to be saved and come to full knowledge of the truth.* For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man *Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all;* the testimony in its own times; to which I was appointed a preacher and an apostle (I am telling the truth in Christ, not lying), a teacher of the Gentiles in faith and truth. I desire therefore that the men in every place pray, lifting up holy hands without anger and doubting. (1 Timothy 2:1-8, emphasis added)

Is God’s will to be ignored or diminished? Scripture states God “desires all people to be saved and come to the full knowledge of the truth.” It is God’s will. Moreover it is God’s will that all men “come to the full knowledge of the truth....”

Scripture says what it says. Shall we preach, then, God wills only a few be saved? Shall we preach God does not intend all men to fully understand Him? That is not the doctrine of universal reconciliation.

Universal reconciliation teaches it is God’s will to save all men. Scripture teaches it is God’s will to save all men. It is clear that Jesus paid the ransom for all men. The ransom was paid in blood shed on the cross. The ransom was paid for all men. We should not strive to make the Gospel mean anything less than that.

The doctrine of eternal conscious torment diminishes the power of the King's sacrifice and diminishes the Truth of the Gospel.

The advocates of universal reconciliation believe God will reconcile all men to Himself. It is the simple statement of scripture. It is consistent with other scripture that teaches "God is love." There is only one sin that cannot be forgiven and that is not forgiving. There is not a sin, including that sin, that Christ does not overcome. To say otherwise is to deny His power, His purpose. There is not a time when His grace is trumped by His wrath. Never is His mercy overcome by His anger. He is all forgiving, all knowing. He is love all the time.

Jesus suffered in life as one of us. The torments he suffered for our sake are immeasurable and impossible to grasp. Dr. Sawyer wrote, "...He embraces in the arms of his redeeming power and love the whole human family in all their possible states of being, whether alive upon earth, or whether they lived before the flood, or are to live in the ages to come. There is nothing that separates us from the love of God. There is nothing that can undo the price He paid on the Cross. He will 'fill all things.'" No matter our state, our position or our family we all will rest in His arms. His redeeming love is superior to the traditions of men.

What then shall we say about these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who didn't spare his own Son, but *delivered him up for us all*, how would he not also with him freely give us all things? Who could bring a charge against God's chosen ones? It is God who justifies. Who is he who condemns? It is Christ who died, yes rather, who was raised from the dead, who is at the right hand of God, *who also makes intercession for us*.

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Could oppression, or anguish, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? Even as it is written, "For your sake we are killed all day long. We were accounted as sheep for the slaughter." No, in all these things, *we are more than conquerors through him who loved us*. For I am persuaded, that *neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come,*

nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, *will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.* (Romans 8:31-39, emphasis added)

Nothing in creation is able to separate us from the Father. No man is ordained to condemn any other or anything. We should all take care when we dare to proclaim God's intent, particularly as it relates to eternal conscious torment. All men, all ever created will be restored to their Father. The good and the evil will experience His love. God's will is that all will be saved. His will be done.

What might the Augustinian (Calvinist) say? "NO! It is not God's will that all be saved. It is God's will that those of us chosen since before time are saved." To the Calvinist, God is less than absolute love. He kinda-sorta loves. Some He loves. Some He doesn't. He condemns some to eternal torment, in fact, He condemns most of humanity to eternal suffering. The Calvinist, however, is chosen.

What might an Arminian say? "NO! It is not God's will that all be saved. It is my free will that matters. I have chosen to believe the Gospel." To the Arminian, God is less than absolute love. He kinda-sorta loves. Some He loves. Some He doesn't. He condemns some to eternal torment, in fact, He condemns most of humanity to eternal pain. The Arminian, though, has chosen.

Christ Jesus tasted death for every man. He is worthy of praise. He is worthy of honor. His Name is greatest of all names. He is over all. In time, as scripture declares, that at hearing His Name every knee will bow. All things on the earth, under the earth, and in the seas will confess with their tongues that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of the Father.

Dr. Sawyer wrote in 1879, "...It needs no argument to show that universal homage to Christ and this confession of him as Lord can be nothing else than a personal and individual act." It is God's Holy Word that says, "Therefore I make known to you that no man speaking by God's Spirit says, 'Jesus is accursed.' *No one can say, 'Jesus is Lord,' but by the Holy Spirit.* (1 Corinthians 12:3, emphasis added).

No man will be coerced to confess his sins and seek forgiveness. No man will be forced to his knees to glorify the Lord. Every knee will bow because all men will realize they are standing before the Truth. Every

knee will bow in submission to the King because they love the King. Every knee will know the King. Lastly, all will confess the Lord is their Savior because it will be by the power of the Holy Spirit. No man can say Jesus is Lord, but by the Holy Spirit. It is the Holy Spirit of God that leads a person to believe. His Holy Spirit will lead all persons. Jesus is Lord.

There is nothing phony in heaven. Rituals of earthly life do not matter in heaven. Hollow confessions have been ignored. Our beliefs, our doctrines, our intellectual prowess will mean nothing in heaven. The only obstacle between us and our Christ is our rebellion. When we abandon rebellion and repent then we will see Christ in Truth. Every knee will bow because the Truth has been seen. The obstacle of rebellion is exposed by the Light. Every tongue will confess Jesus is Lord. There is no deed to be done.

Dr. Sawyer writes Christ Jesus's purpose is "the salvation of the whole human race.... "It is what Christ came into the world to effect, and for the accomplishment of which he was given all needed power in heaven and earth.... God never fails."

Remember the former things of old: for I am God, and there is none else; I am God, and there is none like me; declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times things that are not yet done; saying, *My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure*; calling a ravenous bird from the east, the man of my counsel from a far country; yes, *I have spoken, I will also bring it to pass; I have purposed, I will also do it.* (Isaiah 46:9-11, emphasis added)

The advocate of universal reconciliation preaches God's love is overwhelmingly powerful. Christ's sacrifice is a beautiful gift to humanity. His life, death, resurrection and ascension is the price paid for the sins of the world. The impact of the miracles He performed girds the truth. He teaches universal reconciliation. He is universal reconciliation. Christ knew He is the propitiation for our sins from before the foundation of the world. He draws all men to Himself. He reconciles all.

Dr. Sawyer wrote, "...I submit that such self-sacrificing love cannot suddenly cool, nor readily give over to endless torment souls for which it

thus willingly suffered.” The advocates of eternal conscious torment deny Christ’s power to save all. This is a condition of traditional denominations and congregations. The doctrine equates failure to God. God cannot be considered successful if His love does not extend to all.

If only one soul is lost to Satan, then God is a failure.

God’s hand must be in the final outcome. Universal reconciliation and eternal conscious torment conclude with God establishing His government and administering justice. God has seen the end from the beginning. He gave the breath of life and of wisdom to Adam. He knows every thought. He is Supreme.

Does anyone dare say God is not Sovereign? He is the only Sovereign. His will is the only outcome that matters. It is of no consequence if you are proudly an advocate of eternal conscious torment or if you proudly advocate universal reconciliation. God’s will is done despite our opinions or doctrines. Who are we to question how He should manage His creation? It is God Who declares His Word will stand. His will will be done.

I reviewed a devotional message entitled “Passover of the Most High.”¹³ It is authored by David Grabbe and is posted on The Church of the Great God website. Mr. Grabbe discusses God’s relationship with Abram and subsequently God’s relationship with all nations. Mr. Grabbe cites Genesis 14:28-23 as the basis for the devotional message. These scripture verses speak about “Melchizedek, the King of Salem.” This King is a priest of God. Melchizedek blesses Abram because of God’s great work enabling Abram to defeat his enemies. Abram gave the King of Salem a gift from the spoils of victory acknowledging the blessing given by the King. The king of Sodom saw this transaction. He wanted Abram’s gift, too. The king of Sodom helped in the battle that defeated Abram’s enemies. Abram refused to give the gift saying he promised God he would take nothing for the victory, “not so much as a sandal strap.”

Mr. Grabbe wants his reader to see that “the priest approaches the man on behalf of God and not the other way around.” It is “God Who initiates the relationship” with His creation. Mr. Grabbe writes, “It is

¹³ David C. Grabbe. “Passover Of The Most High God.” Forerunner (Church of the Great God) March-April 2014. <https://www.cgg.org//index.cfm/fuseaction/Library.sr/CT/RA/k/1629/Passover-of-Most-High-God.htm>. Date accessed: 04/01/2018.

impossible for man to worship God properly without His involvement first." God's Holy Word teaches no person can say Jesus is Lord without the Holy Spirit's leading. Mr. Grabbe is right to teach God loves us first. Is there any person He cannot touch? Is there any person He does not want to touch?

CHAPTER 6

Orthodox Tradition: Eternal Conscious Torment

Orthodoxy is a term Dr. Sawyer used to define a group of believing theologians who adhere to doctrines established by denominations and congregations. The advocates of the doctrine of eternal conscious torment are many. The doctrine influences many denominations and congregations. The doctrine is widely taught and has taken a mantle of tradition. Eternal conscious torment is orthodox. The doctrine survives almost all denominational splits.

Dr. John MacArthur is a brilliant man and a devoted theologian. He is an advocate of the doctrine of eternal conscious torment. He preached a sermon entitled, “The Enemy Within.”¹⁴ Dr. MacArthur was transitioning between sermon series. He decided he would next preach on the book of Jude. Dr. MacArthur told the congregation that day that he is “very passionate for the truth, very passionate about divine truth, God’s truth.” He assured the audience of his commitment to preaching “the truth revealed in Scripture.” Dr. MacArthur passionately declares, “I know that Jesus said the truth would set the sinner free from sin and death.” Dr. MacArthur preached about our responsibility “to love the truth.” He preached, “We are responsible to hold up the truth, to wield

¹⁴ Dr. John MacArthur. “*The Enemy Within*.” Grace To You website. January 11, 2004. <https://www.gty.org/library/sermons-library/65-1/the-enemy-within>. Date accessed: 04/02/2018.

the truth against all the speculations raised up against the knowledge of God. The church is to proclaim the truth, to bring deceived souls to the knowledge of the truth that saves and frees.”

Dr. MacArthur is right to admonish every Christian to love the truth. Every Christian scholar, Christian Pastor; every Christian agrees with Dr. MacArthur’s teaching precept. All who profess faith in Christ Jesus want the Truth. Moreover, as Christians we agree with Dr. MacArthur who says, “the church is to proclaim the truth, to bring deceived souls to the knowledge of the truth that saves and frees.”

Dr. Sawyer points out the paths of traditional Christians and Universalists are shared. He writes, “OUR orthodox friends walk with us in our theology only a part of the way. They believe as we do, that God is the Creator of all souls, and that Christ is the Savior of men, – *but not of all men.*”(capitalization in the original, emphasis added)

Traditionalists and Universalists are committed to most of the same theological beliefs. We agree in salvation through Christ alone. Traditionalists and Universalists agree Jesus died for the sins of the world. Traditionalists believe the number of men saved by Christ’s crucifixion is small. They believe Christ’s sacrifice was not for all men. Universalists believes that Christ died for the sins of all men; not a few men, not most men, but all men.

The theologies of traditionalists and of universalists are generally the same path. They branch at the doctrine of eternal conscious torment. The traditional path leads to everlasting torment. The path of universal reconciliation leads to an everlasting Father who loves His whole creation.

There is a debate within denominational traditions regarding the specifics of those who will suffer eternally. Conspicuously their particular group is ordained for salvation. Some traditions believe God’s creatures will choose Him, yet others will be chosen by Him. Some traditions teach they will have worked for their invitation to salvation while others may have accepted His mercy as their portion of grace from God.

The path leading to universal reconciliation leads away from the doctrine of eternal conscious torment. Universal reconciliation teaches all will one day bow to Him. All will one day acknowledge Him as Savior and Lord. Every creature that ever lived; whether in water or on the land

or under the land; every creature will bow to Him. This path is “The Blessed Hope.”

Dr. Sawyer is not the first to engage the controversy. Good men and women hold fast to their respective doctrines. The advocates of the doctrine of eternal conscious torment create conditions in the doctrine to benefit themselves. Dr. Sawyer reports the advocates of the doctrine “agree that finally a portion of mankind, either through the foreordination of God, or through their own fault, will be excluded from the benefits of his grace, and either be annihilated at last, as a few believe, or suffer the torments of hell during the endless ages of eternity, which is the doctrine commonly maintained and preached.” The doctrine preached is eternal conscious torment. That doctrine which is “commonly maintained and preached” is based in traditions of men.

Eternal conscious torment is considered orthodox because so many adhere to it. The doctrine is fundamental in denominations and congregations. It is firmly entrenched as tradition. Traditional denominations and congregations codify the doctrine in their “Belief Statement” or “By-laws.” The doctrine of eternal conscious torment is settled in the majority of denominations and congregations. The conditions for salvation are also listed in the respective governing documents. Conspicuously, their denomination or congregation has met all the requirements of salvation and are not sentenced to eternal conscious torment.

Denominations and congregations hardly agree on what salvation means. They disagree on baptism, membership, worship, prayers, charismatic gifts and all manner of basic Christian doctrines. Yet, they seemingly possess knowledge and inspiration when it comes to God’s judgment of the rebellious. They believe God is going to condemn the unsaved rebel to eternal conscious torment.

Some traditional pastors teach they and those that follow them have been chosen by God. They believe it was predestined. They believe God created some for salvation, but countless others are created for wrathful vengeance. They preach they are among those created for salvation. Other traditional pastors teach their belief that God created some for salvation, but countless others for wrathful vengeance. They teach human will is superior to God’s will. Because God opened their eyes and

because they were blessed to see salvation in Christ Jesus these men chose to believe Jesus is Christ. God did not open the eyes of many and many are not blessed to see salvation. They preach they are saved because of their choice to believe.

Calvinists and Arminians are on the same path. The path ends with an all-knowing God condemning multitudes of His creation. He judges them guilty and sentences them to eternal conscious torment. It is the same end. The path ends when family members die as unbelievers. Their condemnation is beyond human reason. The doctrine of eternal conscious torment dictates the unbeliever will be judged by His loving Father. God, Who is love, will condemn him for his rebellion. A finite sin has eternal consequences. Unbelievers are sentenced to an eternity torture by flame.

Does everyone in your immediate family believe in Christ Jesus? Is there anyone in your sphere of influence not saved by Jesus? Are any of those already deceased? The doctrine of eternal conscious torment dictates our loved ones are created by God specifically for torture. That is a horrible thought, but it must be true if the doctrine of eternal conscious torment is true. Our loved ones infinitely condemned for a finite sin.

The term "Orthodoxy" as used by Dr. Sawyer in 1879 adequately describes the denominational and non-denominational belief in eternal conscious torment today. The doctrine was universally accepted and taught in 1879 and remains so today. Even though eternal conscious torment is widely believed there remain disagreements among theologians that cannot or will not be resolved. Congregations grow and divide. The original church in Acts has split and denominations are formed. Denominations grow and split inside themselves. Some congregations split away from their parent church to become non-denominational. Even non-denominational congregations are a denomination of sorts.

All denominations and congregations agree that God created all persons. They all believe God's will over His creation will be done. At the same time traditionalists believe most of His creation will be rebellious to the degree He is unable to govern them. God, knowing this, also knew that He would have to destroy them. It is the position of the advocates of this doctrine that the vast majority of His creation are condemned to eternal conscious torment.

"Orthodox" and "traditional" are used as synonymous terms. The

terms are used as Dr. Sawyer used them “to designate that form of religious faith, or system of theology...” that is being discussed. Traditions are well established in all denominations and congregations. Traditionalists fill the ranks of Baptists, Methodists, Presbyterians, Pentecostal and almost every other congregational assembly. Traditionalists are not malignant people. They are subject to lessons learned. Men are the impetus behind the formulation of theologies and doctrines. Men are the force behind the doctrine of eternal conscious torment. It is orthodox to believe God created most for eternal conscious torment because that is what men want you to believe. Why else preach it?

Our beliefs characterize our personal walk in life. In the end, when the accounts are cleared and closed, our personal advocacy for this doctrine or that will not matter a wit. God’s perspective of us is from love. Our work, our advocacy will not have saved a soul, but His love saves all.

Universal reconciliation is often rebuked by traditionalists. Traditionalists employ the term “Universalist” with derision. Universalist is used to describe their opposition. Traditionalists often ascribe all kinds of meaning to the term Universalist. The term is used to malign the character of the advocates of universal reconciliation. Traditionalists ridicule Universalists when the traditionalist describes universal reconciliation as an “All Roads Lead to Salvation” theology. Traditionalists know that claim is untrue, yet it is still used today to explain away “The Blessed Hope.”

I refer back to Dr. MacArthur’s sermon message “The Enemy Within.” Recall Dr. MacArthur’s zeal to live, breathe and exude the Truth. Dr. MacArthur’s sermon judges good Christians believing in universal reconciliation as “deceived.” He posits his obligation as a Christian is “... to bring knowledge of the truth that saves and frees.” He explains how the truth is being subverted in denominations and congregations. Dr. MacArthur exclaimed in this sermon that “the truth is always under attack.” He cites the truth when he preaches Christ Jesus would “crush the serpent’s head and provide true salvation from sin, death and hell.” Dr. MacArthur reminds his congregation that Satan is ever lurking and doing all that he can “to obliterate the truth, to cover the truth, to hide the truth, to twist the truth to bring about lies and deceptions.”

Dr. MacArthur spoke to the apostasy of Israel and of the denominations

and congregations in general. People “abandoned the truth, lost heart for the truth, lost interest in the truth and failed to contend or fight for the truth.” The devil as Dr. MacArthur explains “has employed demons and he has employed men and women” to attack the truth. Dr. MacArthur calls this a “long war against God.”

Dr. MacArthur preaches denominations and congregations are being attacked from the inside. He calls the attacks “assaults against the truth.” The assaults are made against traditional doctrines by “defectors.” These are people Dr. MacArthur tells us “who name the name of Christ, or once named the name of Christ.” Dr. MacArthur cites his belief that defectors from tradition stepped away from their first love and “now are the enemies of Christ.” The defectors “once affirmed their trust in God, belief in God, and affirmed the Scripture and have become the enemies of Scripture.” Dr. MacArthur reiterates these men and women assaulting traditions and Scripture are “inside the church.”

In context Dr. MacArthur is right to say deadly “assaults against the truth come from the inside....” These assaults, according to Dr. MacArthur, are perpetrated by liars. At one time the assaulter believed, but now does not. The assaulter is a deceiver following the pattern of Satan.

I believe with all my heart that Jesus Christ is my Savior and Lord. Dr. MacArthur would likely make the same statement about himself. I disagree with Dr. MacArthur’s doctrine of eternal conscious torment. I cannot abide the doctrine. Does my disagreement then make me a defector or worse? There are millions of believers who like me have discarded the doctrine of eternal conscious torment. Are we all infiltrators whose path is now “...the enemy of the Scripture?” We are as Dr. MacArthur preached “...on the inside....”

For with whatever judgment you judge, you will be judged; and with whatever measure you measure, it will be measured to you. (Matthew 7:2)

Dr. MacArthur’s sermon goes on to express the Holy Spirit’s involvement in establishing the order of the Epistles and their respective places in the Bible. Dr. MacArthur rightly declares the Holy Word of God is indeed Holy Spirit inspired. Dr. MacArthur reiterates in this sermon

the need for God's Truth to prevail against the apostates. He said, "John says, 'You've got to be aware of what this truth is. You've got to hold to the true doctrine about Jesus Christ. You've got to hold to the true standard of what a believer really is. You've got to live the truth, love the truth, walk in the truth.'" The Truth is in Christ Jesus; in the Light that comes from the Father. Dr. MacArthur preaches there is a Christian standard, "the true standard of what a believer really is. You've got to live the truth, love the truth, walk in the truth."

Dr. MacArthur is convinced he knows the truth and he knows the standard of truth. Is Dr. MacArthur's truth the true truth? This sermon goes on and Dr. MacArthur exhorts his congregation with Christ's admonition to be aware and wary of false prophets. Dr. MacArthur preaches to warn his flock and the countless thousands who listen to his sermons.

Dr. MacArthur tells who these deceivers are. The deceivers are some who "will fall away from the faith." These are men and women possessed by "deceitful spirits, doctrines of demons." They are hypocrites. The doctrines they profess are "the hypocrisy of liars seared in their own consciences with a branding iron." Dr. MacArthur says, "They are demonic in their doctrine." Dr. MacArthur suggests the apostates inside the church "have all kinds of degrees, they purport to be theologians and teachers, they purport to have the secret true knowledge of God, but these men oppose the truth, they have depraved minds and they reject the faith." Deceivers have rejected the faith.

Dr. MacArthur teaches there is a great deal to fear from inside denominations and congregations. Apostates and hypocrites are overrunning solidly established Christian doctrines. Apostates and hypocrites are challenging the doctrine of eternal conscious torment. Is Dr. MacArthur's truth the true truth?

Dr. MacArthur notes there is a war within denominations and congregations. His sermon message concludes. Dr. MacArthur speaks to overcoming fear. In an actual battle the combatants may give their lives for their cause. He says, "There's always the fear that you engage in war, you may be a casualty." We have nothing to fear in the cause of Christ though. We are of Christ and we cannot lose. Dr. MacArthur proclaims, "We battle and we can't be a casualty to the conflict."

What does Dr. MacArthur think of those who advocate universal reconciliation? That question is answered in an article entitled "Together Against Eternal Compromise."¹⁵ It's a blog post authored by Jeremiah Johnson. The article appears on Dr. MacArthur's official website, Grace To You. Mr. Johnson calls out universal reconciliation as a "common erroneous alternative to hell." He determines universal reconciliation is a "theory." Mr. Johnson defines universal reconciliation. "God's love for mankind is so overwhelming that He can't bear to surrender anyone to the due penalty of his or her sin."

God's love is overwhelming. Who can deny it? God surrenders nothing to anywhere. In fact, God makes all things new. The burden was born on the Cross for all. Nevertheless, universal reconciliation is a "common erroneous alternative to hell."

Mr. Johnson declares universal reconciliation "denies what Christ Himself said about hell." Mr. Johnson then cites several scriptures to support his argument. Jesus Christ, according to Mr. Johnson, preached that unrepentant persons will find themselves in "a realm of outer darkness." That place will be "filled with weeping and gnashing of teeth." Salient in Mr. Johnson's description is that "the heart of Universal-ism is unbelief regarding the gospel. It's a rejection of Christ as the only way of salvation." He writes, "Universal-ism is a repudiation of the gospel and salvation that makes God a weak-willed liar."

Mr. Johnson's words speak volumes to use a cliché. Mr. Johnson is taking the position advocated by Dr. MacArthur. Advocates of universal reconciliation are hypocrites, once believing, but now deceiving. Advocates of the doctrine are apostates and strive to impugn the Word of God.

Mr. Johnson writes, "The heart of Universal-ism is unbelief regarding the gospel. It's a rejection of Christ...." Strong words, frightful judgment. It could not be further from the truth. Advocates of universal reconciliation believe in the gospel. We sing praises for our salvation in Christ. We believe God will reconcile all of His creation to Himself. No one can say "Jesus is Lord" except by the Holy Spirit.

¹⁵ Jeremiah Johnson "Together Against Eternal Compromise." Grace To You website. March 21, 2016. <https://www.gty.org/library/blog/B160321/together-against-eternal-compromise>. Date accessed: 04/02/2018.

Mr. Johnson is judging the advocates of universal reconciliation. Being judged is not uncommon. The advocates of eternal conscious torment do not like their doctrine challenged. They have built walls around it. They defend their belief vigorously. A person who disagrees with the doctrine of eternal conscious torment is often shunned. He might be forgiven and welcomed back into the traditional congregation when he recants.

Peter Hiatt is the Pastor of a church in Denver, Colorado named The Sanctuary Downtown. Mr. Hiatt's testimony is moving and relates to the power of traditionalism Mr. Hiatt was ordained to preach by a major denomination. He served many churches under that denominational umbrella. Prior to leading the The Sanctuary Downtown his last posting was to Lookout Mountain Community Church He served at Lookout for fifteen years until his ordination was withdrawn by the denomination. He writes about the event in an essay entitled, "My Theological Journey, In Part and So Far."¹⁶ Mr. Hiatt had recently completed a thorough study on the doctrine of eternal conscious torment. He learned that God does not intend to annihilate His creation nor does He intend to lock any of His creation into a place the traditional authorities call hell. Mr. Hiatt learned that God intends to reconcile all men to Himself. He preached a sermon regarding God's overwhelming love for His creation. Some in his congregation were alarmed and reported their concerns to the denominational hierarchy. There was a "hearing" and Mr. Hiatt was offered an opportunity to save his ordination. All he had to do was confirm his adherence to the Westminster Confession. He said he could comply with all but two of the points. The board was not impressed and formally withdrew their ordination of Peter Hiatt.

Dr. Sawyer heard the same kinds of derisive remarks about universal reconciliation in 1879. Even so, he writes of his passion for "The Blessed Hope." Dr. Sawyer would rather be called a heretic than teach eternal conscious torment. Dr. Sawyer took a bold step. He laid honor at the feet of the advocates of the traditional doctrine of eternal conscious torment. They are convinced of what they believe. Their beliefs form their values and they proclaim themselves to be right. Dr. Sawyer said, "If the doctrine

¹⁶ Peter Hiatt. "My Theological Journey, In Part and So Far." Relentless Love website. Publication date unknown. <http://relentless-love.org/articles/my-theological-journey-in-part-and-so-far/>. Date accessed: 5/27/2018.

which I am about to exhibit is orthodox, I willingly forego the honor it would confer, and I willingly wear the opprobrious name of heretic.”

His challenge to traditionalists is backed by his conviction to universal reconciliation. Dr. Sawyer lays out the doctrine of eternal conscious torment using the words of those advocating it. By his conviction if what he uncovers about the doctrine is the common and accepted belief (orthodox) then he willingly takes on the mantle of the heretic in his professed disagreement. It is inconceivable to Dr. Sawyer and many others like him that our Father's love for His creation is shown in the doctrine. He will gladly wear the shame of the label of heretic.

The doctrine of eternal conscious torment is prevalent today. The doctrine is preached in the majority of Christian denominations and congregations. The doctrine is preached as a theological fact. Christians are taught to believe eternal conscious torment is God's justice meted to those who die in rebellion. Traditionalists are saved and not subject to God's chastisement. They will not suffer the consequences of displeasing God by rejecting Him. The advocates of the doctrine believe they are chosen ones and they will not suffer the pain of punishment for their sin.

The doctrine of eternal conscious torment is appalling. The descriptions of the torments God puts on His creation are cruel. It is a doctrine that embraces subhuman or inhuman tortures. The descriptions of the torments of hell do not elevate or glorify God. Dr. Sawyer writes it is a doctrine “represented as embracing everything most painful and most terrible in the whole range of human thought, or indeed possible to the omnipotence of God.”

Eternal conscious torment does not have remorse for lost souls. Advocates of the doctrine are convinced eternal conscious torment is justice. Lost souls will receive exactly what they deserve. Eternal conscious torment is final judgment coming from God. It is Divine. Some advocates of the doctrine teach God is glorified in the suffering of the unrepentant in hell and the saved share that glory with Him.

Universal reconciliation preaches all souls will be reconciled to the Father. We rejoice in His love for us all. The advocates of the doctrine believe God wills that all be saved. We preach the Good News of Christ Jesus. We live our lives in liberty in Christ. We believe that the Christ who saved Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego from the fire is the

Power that will save all men. There is no eternal fire in which anyone is tormented. Christ's Body broken and His Blood is shed for the salvation of all mankind.

God's Holy Word teaches us to love everyone, especially, our enemies. We are taught to forgive endlessly. Advocates of the doctrine of eternal conscious torment teach Jesus does not love everyone and does not endlessly forgive His enemies. The doctrine contradicts what Jesus teaches. The doctrine is hypocrisy. Jesus tells us to forgive our enemies endlessly, but the doctrine teaches He does not do what He commands us to do.

Eternal conscious torment and universal reconciliation are doctrines deserving scrutiny. Both cannot be true. The opposition between the doctrines is controversial, but it should not divide. Universal reconciliation unites all creation subject to Christ Who subjects all creation to His Father (1 Corinthians 15:28).

The advocates of universal reconciliation will see Dr. Sawyer's work and their belief will be affirmed in their hearts. The advocates of eternal conscious torment, if not converted, will have been given years of Dr. Sawyer's research for future sermon preparation. He offers his research to the students of the doctrine. Dr. Sawyer compiled resource material. He references the letters and books of Christian scholars.

Dr. Sawyer affirms that President Edwards was an accomplished man and that President Edwards' thoughts had affected the church in New England. Dr. Sawyer points out President Edwards' "...influence is still powerfully felt in all the Calvinistic churches on this side of the Atlantic." That was true in 1879 and is probably true today. President Edwards' doctrine of eternal conscious torment reigns in denominations and congregations throughout the Western World.

The Sugar Land Bible Church is a smaller congregation in an affluent community. They disagree with Dr. Edwards' position on "election and predestination." They are in-line with Arminians and believe "free will." With regard to the doctrine of eternal conscious torment, however, they believe as Dr. Edwards believed. They are unafraid to declare that God's rebellious children will be condemned to hell for eternity.

Sugar Land Bible Church defines the Gospel in their “invitation”¹⁷ to the faith. They write that “mankind was created perfect in the image and likeness of God with free will to obey or disobey God.” They declare Adam’s sin in the Garden put sin into the hearts of all men. “The entire human race became sinful.” As a consequence every human ever created “is, therefore, doomed to be separated from God ultimately in Hell.” Salvation comes from God, but it requires an exercise of will to receive it. “Rejecting His free gift will result in your separation from God for all eternity in conscious torment.”

¹⁷ “*Invitation. What Is the Gospel?*” Sugar Land Bible Church website. Date of publication unknown. <http://slbc.org/about/invitation/>. Date accessed: 04/02/2018.

CHAPTER 7

Descriptions of Hell in the Words of Its Advocates

The basic tenets of Christian faith are foundational for advocates of universal reconciliation and eternal conscious torment. The doctrine of eternal conscious torment sets itself apart. The doctrine requires God to about-face from loving eternally to hating eternally. The doctrine insists an all-loving Father tortures His creation forever.

What is the traditionalist “hell?” What does it look like? How is it described?

Advocates of the doctrine of eternal conscious torment have little difficulty describing the tortures prescribed by the doctrine. They define “hell.” Dr. Sawyer’s research provides us with an abundance of authoritative descriptions. “Professor Stuart calls it ‘the world of woe.’” It is “a universe of death.” The torments of hell have “neither measure nor end.” Hell is “an ever blazing Gehenna.” Hell is the place where God wields His power to brutally punish. Professor Stuart says of the unrepentant that hell “shall swallow them up in living flames; nor shall there be any means whence they can ever obtain relief or end to their torments.” Great scholars and Biblical authorities call hell a barren place of death. Nothing lives there nor can anything ever live there. They declare hell is dark and there is no light and there will never be light.

Nearly 140 years have passed since Dr. Sawyer’s publication. The words Dr. Sawyer exposed are the words of scholarly men of his time

and a time before him. Prominent traditionalist theologians described hell and defined the orthodoxy of Dr. Sawyer's day. It is striking the descriptions provided in 1879 fit seamlessly with the descriptions given by today's advocates of eternal conscious torment. Then as now eternal conscious torment is widely believed in congregations and doctrines. The place called hell is "the world of woe." It is a solitary place of death. "The torments..." in that hellish place are without "measure nor end." Hell is Gehenna's fire where the bodies of the damned will be kept in eternal torment. The fire of hell cannot be quenched. So taught the authorities in 1879. It is what the authorities teach today.

Dr. Sawyer points us to the words of Augustine who said, "No one can speak or think of the miseries of hell as they are, since they are very far worse than can be conceived.... The abyss of hell is full of darkness, discord, and hatred, of burning and thirst and hunger, inextinguishable fire, sadness, perpetual vengeance, and all unspeakable evil, which can neither be expressed nor conceived. As good abounds in heaven, with no evil, so in the prison of the devil all evil abounds, with no good."

Which scripture defines such place? Which scripture defines the consequences and the misery of unrepentant sinners? From which scripture does Augustine discern unspeakable misery administered by "perpetual vengeance?" From where in the Holy Word does Augustine discern "...the abyss of hell is full of darkness, discord, and hatred, of burning and thirst and hunger, inextinguishable fire, sadness, perpetual vengeance, and all unspeakable evil, which can neither be expressed nor conceived."

Is God the God of love and of "perpetual vengeance?" Augustine is world renowned and an honored Bible scholar. His words tell us that is what he believed and that is what he preached. Heaven is a perpetual blessing in God's love, but hell is "perpetual vengeance" in God's justice.

Augustine is often cited as the man responsible for developing the traditional doctrine of eternal conscious torment. Augustine did not invent the doctrine. Its root lies in other worldly religion. His description of eternal conscious torment is the prevailing view of denominations and congregations to this day.

Who is Augustine that his interpretation of God's Holy Word is able to shape the beliefs of countless good folks? Churches and theologies are

based in the works of Augustine. Calvinists often cite Augustine as their role model for their defined set of basic Christian doctrines.

Augustine believed in the doctrine of original sin. Augustine believed Eve would not be able to subdue her free-will and not disobey God's command to not eat of the fruit. Augustine believed that because life in Christ is eternal so, too, death outside of Christ is eternal. God knew Adam and Eve would fail in the Garden. It was "predestined." Augustine believed God creates all persons as it pleases Him. God determines which of His creation would live forever in His presence and those who will not. Those who were predestined to be chosen for salvation would live eternally in His presence. Those who were predestined to be chosen to suffer death eternally would live eternally in a place Augustine called "Hell." Augustine developed and advocated the doctrine of predestination. This doctrine and the doctrine of original sin are key to the doctrine of eternal conscious torment.

Augustine's doctrines of predestination and original sin were expertly advanced by John Calvin, Martin Luther and others. One thousand years after Augustine's death Calvin, Luther and a host of other scholars affirmed Augustine's doctrines. The writings of Calvin are the basic tenets of theology adopted by many denominations and churches today.

The doctrine of eternal conscious torment rises from Augustine and is advanced by Calvin, Luther and other Reformers. In current days Dr. R. C. Sproul was a well known Bible scholar and Preacher. He identifies himself as a Reformed Christian after the principles established by Martin Luther. He categorizes himself as Reformed, but he has adopted the precepts and beliefs espoused by John Calvin.

Dr. Sproul was a committed Calvinist and he espoused the Calvinist set of doctrinal beliefs. He writes extensively about Calvinism which demonstrates his allegiance to Calvin and to Augustine. He wrote about the Reformed mantle he has taken as his. "Reformed theology is evangelical in the historical sense of the word."¹⁸ Dr. Sproul was convinced "Reformed theology so far transcends the mere five points of Calvinism that it is an entire life and world view. It is covenantal. It is sacramental.

¹⁸ Dr. R. C. Sproul. *The Fine Points of Calvinism*. Table Talk Magazine, Ligonier Ministries, The Teaching Fellowship of Dr. R. C. Sproul, November 1, 2005. <http://www.ligonier.org/learn/articles/fine-points-calvinism/>. Date accessed: 04/02/2018.

It is committed to transforming culture. It is subordinate to the operation of God the Holy Spirit, and it has a rich framework for understanding the entirety of the council of God revealed in the Bible.”

Be reminded, please, that Calvinism advocates eternal conscious torment as Holy and Just punishment for those God did not choose. Dr. Sproul’s ministry offers many resources and devotionals for study. His audience is told in a devotional.¹⁹ “Even if we have sinned only once in our lives, we have offended an infinitely holy God, and an offense of that magnitude demands an infinite retribution. Thus, in Scripture we have the doctrine of eternal conscious punishment—there is a hell into which all those who rest in their own works and not in Christ alone will be cast, and in that place they will feel God’s wrath forever and ever.” This devotional concludes, “Jesus Christ – the fullest manifestation of God’s love – spoke more about hell than anyone else.” The authors of this devotional tell their readers “hell is the inevitable result of God’s love for His own glory.” God “will not tolerate those who impenitently attempt to deface this glory by their sin.”

Traditionalists aligned with Dr. Sproul, John Calvin, Martin Luther, John MacArthur and Augustine define the importance of hell and the consequences of eternal punishment that is resident there.

Dr. Sawyer cites prominent advocates of the doctrine of his era. We are taught there are “fourteen sources of torment in hell,” says Anselm. Hugo Victorinus writes in hell “there is misery, there is darkness, there is no order, there is eternal horror, there is no hope of good, no expectation of shunning all evil.” Grand scholars call it “misery,” “eternal horror,” hopeless. It is “the pit of everlasting death.” It is “the burning furnace of burning tares.” “Hell is an eternal prison.”

These are descriptions of hell authored by notable religious scholars. These descriptions are from the minds of learned and respected men esteemed as orthodox. They are traditionalist. These men could be Augustinian (Calvinist) or Arminian (Free Will). They agree hell is immeasurable and eternal torment is its cause. The tortures meted out in hell are far worse than anything any man could devise. Advocates of

¹⁹ “*Eternal Punishment*” (*Devotional*). By Ligonier Ministries, The Teaching Fellowship of Dr. R. C. Sproul, date of publication unknown. <http://www.ligonier.org/learn/devotionals/eternal-punishment/>. Date accessed: 04/02/2018.

the doctrine preach fire and torment, torture and hopelessness for all time as the lot of those who do not believe.

The doctrine of eternal conscious torment rationalizes God's love. God's perpetual attribute is love. Yet, the doctrine teaches God's love is not perpetual and is somehow turned to never ending wrath.

Dr. Sproul, referenced earlier, tells us that the term "reformed" is in the vein of Martin Luther. God's intent is known by way of *sola scriptura* and *sola fida*. His will is known only from what He has written and that by faith only. An article on his website was written as a response to a questioner from the Internet. "Does the Bible tell us what heaven will be like?"²⁰ Dr. Sproul points us to The Revelation of Jesus Christ (The Revelation) chapters 21 and 22. We are reminded that these chapters describe life *with* God. A New Jerusalem comes down from heaven. There is no darkness in it as the City is lit by His presence. There is no need for sorrow. Tears will no longer fall from our cheeks. He closes his answer writing, "There's no more death, no more disease, no more sorrow, no more sickness, no more hatred, and no more evil."

Dr. Sproul advocated the doctrine of eternal conscious torment. We should assume Dr. Sproul's answer describes the believer's heaven.

Dr. Dennis Johnson is a contemporary of Dr. Sproul. Dr. Johnson published an article entitled "The New Heavens and the New Earth."²¹ Dr. Johnson writes about the Revelation of Jesus Christ. He tells his audience, "Those whose names are not in the Lamb's book will be judged by their own actions throughout life." Because their names are not found in the book their souls are forfeit and they are not forgiven. "Without the cover of the Lamb's atoning blood they will stand exposed to God's righteous wrath...." These "souls will be reunited with the bodies in which they acted out their rebellion, and in that fiery lake they will experience not

²⁰ Dr. R. C. Sproul. *Does The Bible Tell Us What Heaven Will Be Like?* (Q&A). 1996 <http://www.ligonier.org/learn/qas/does-bible-tell-us-what-heaven-will-be/>. Date accessed: 04/02/2018.

²¹ Dr. Dennis Johnson, Professor Westminster Seminary, California. *The New Heavens and New Earth*. Tabletalk Magazine (The Teaching Fellowship of Dr. R. C. Sproul), January 1, 2015. <http://www.ligonier.org/learn/articles/new-heavens-and-new-earth/>. Date accessed: 04/02/2018.

only ceaseless physical anguish but also utter deprivation of mental and spiritual relief.”

Dr. Johnson tells all who read this article the “prospect of unremitting woe” should “strike fear” into the hearts of men. If it does not, “It should.” Dr. Sproul described heaven as a place where there is no more sorrow, no more tears, no more evil. Dr. Johnson described hell as a place where there is nothing but sorrow, tears and evil and a place where torment and a worm never die. Dr. Johnson preaches to frighten us into a belief in Christ Jesus. Eternal conscious torment is God’s wrath. Fear His wrath and gain the fruit of heaven.

Dr. Sproul and Dr. Johnson agree hell is a real place. Hell is God’s judgment for unbelievers. Their sentence is eternal conscious torment. God is love just not for everybody.

Matt Slick runs the Christian Apologetics Research Ministry (CARM). He is well known in Christian apologetics circles because of the work he does on the CARM website. He is persuaded by Calvinism. He has written articles and a book espousing the truth as advocated by Calvin. Mr. Slick tells us, “Hell is a real place. It is not mere unconsciousness. It is not temporal. It is eternal torment.”²² Mr. Slick’s modern day description of hell encapsulates neatly the descriptions put to us by theologians hundreds of years ago.

Dr. Adrian Rogers is highly respected in America and perhaps the world. He has passed away, but to our good fortune his articles, sermons and related resources are available to us. He was asked by way of a question and answer page, “What happens to those who die without Jesus?”²³ Dr. Rogers’ response is that the unrepentant “soul goes immediately to hell.” It is in this state “his soul waits for judgment that will certainly be eternal conscious torment.”

Dr. Charles Swindoll is Dr. Rogers’ contemporary. Dr. Swindoll has a different view of what happens to those who die without Christ. Dr.

²² Matthew Slick. *Hell*. Christian Apologetics and Research Ministry (CARM.org), undated publication. <https://carm.org/hell>. Date accessed: 04/02/2018.

²³ Dr. Adrian Rogers. “*What Happens To Those Who Die Without Jesus?*” Love Worth Finding Ministries with Adrian Rogers. Publication date not known. <https://www.lwf.org/questions-and-answers/what-happens-to-those-who-die-without-jesus>. Date accessed: 05/28/2018.

Swindoll provides a graph of the disposition of souls dependent on the time the soul became saved.²⁴ He, too, answers the question “What Happens to a Person After Death?” Dr. Swindoll defines four states of the soul at death. Every person falls into one of these four categories; Christians, Old Testament Believers, Tribulation Believers and Unbelievers.

At death the Christian’s soul is immediately in Christ’s presence. His body is in the grave awaiting resurrection at the rapture. The Christian will stand before the Judgment Seat of Christ in Heaven.

The OT believer’s soul is in Paradise otherwise known as Abraham’s Bosom. The OT believer’s body is in the grave and waits for resurrection at Christ’s Second Coming. The OT believer has received his judgment while on earth.

Dr. Swindoll adds a category of people he labels “Tribulation Believers.” These are ostensibly men and women who are persuaded to believe in Christ Jesus *after* the rapture of Christ’s Bride to meet Him in the air. “Tribulation Believers” are like OT Believers in that they, too, are judged while living on earth.

The last category of people Dr. Swindoll describes are Unbelievers. Like all the other categories of people their bodies go into a grave. Their souls are cast into Hades or Sheol. They await resurrection until after the Thousand Year reign of Christ (The Millennial Kingdom). Their judgment is the Great White Throne judgment. Their eternal condition is torture.

There are three judgment times and places according to Dr. Swindoll. There is a “Judgment on Earth”, a “Judgment Seat of Christ,” and the “Judgment at the Great White Throne.” Only unbelievers suffer eternal conscious torment in Hell; Gehanna; or the Lake of Fire. Old Testament unbelievers are included to suffer the sentence.

If the traditional doctrine is right, then we should be ashamed of ourselves. We live in the comfort of knowing our eternal place. We are secure in our belief we are saved from such a judgment. We must live with the knowledge that those who do not believe in Jesus will be tormented eternally. Is our comfort though affected by what we know?

²⁴ Charles R. Swindoll. “*Judgement Day*.” Insight For Living website. June 15, 2009. <https://www.insight.org/resources/article-library/individual/judgment-day>. Date accessed: 04/02/2018.

Do we add to our comfort by declaring it is God's will those people burn forever? The doctrine insists He created unbelievers for that purpose. Do we convince ourselves we don't need to feel bad because it is not our fault? The doctrine of eternal conscious torment should be repulsive.

The doctrine of eternal conscious torment demands God be wrathful. Dr. Sawyer provides us the words of John Calvin who said, "No description can equal the severity of the divine vengeance on the reprobates.... For there can be no doubt that by such modes of expression the Holy Ghost intended to confound all our faculties with horror." According to Calvin describing hell is impossible. It is more horrific and cannot be measured against "...the severity of the divine vengeance...." Calvin tells us God gives us the images for our mind's sake to better understand "hell." We can see it "...as darkness and gnashing of teeth, inextinguishable fire, a worm incessantly gnawing at the heart."

Calvin's theology requires the Holy Spirit of God intend that all His creation be frightened by His divine wrath. There is no need then to express God is love. To Calvin God is a mixture of love and of hate. The Holy Spirit according to Calvin wants His creation to see and to feel humanly unimaginable torment. According to Calvin the Holy Spirit intends His creation to fear Him even to submission.

The advocates of this doctrine describe the characteristics of "hell." You have read them. Esteemed and learned are these men. They are leaders in their denominations and congregations. Their words are taught in seminaries and from pulpits to this day. These men have probably taken the doctrine of endless conscious torment with them to their graves. They were not by their own estimation of themselves sinners not forgiven. Endless conscious torment would conveniently not be their fate. Others outside the influence of Bible scholars will only know God's wrath. Still others inside their own families remain rebellious to death. To the unrepentant all the advocate's descriptions of hell apply.

The words these learned men used to describe hell should cause us all to shudder. If we take the traditional doctrine of eternal conscious torment as sincere and true, how could any Christian find joy? We, truly loving Christians, should be mortified to our core. But we aren't affected. It is as if we are dead to feeling sorrow or a need to give our lives for our brother. The eternal torment of our family, friends and neighbors is a

dead issue in our hearts. A hellish disservice is done when a Christian does not warn his unbelieving neighbor of God's wrath often and loud.

The doctrine of eternal conscious torment dominates traditional congregations and denominations. In light of all the articles, books and distinguished studies that debunk endless conscious torment the doctrine thrives. The doctrine is codified in church by-laws and denominational statutes. The doctrine, however, has not had an impact on virtuous living. It is unlikely many are frightened by eternal punishment to the point they surrender mortal life for immortal.

Eternal conscious torment does not teach a God Who is love, Who's mercies are fresh every day and Who's grace is given in Christ Jesus for the sins of the world. The doctrine of eternal conscious torment has not had a positive affect on society or personal behavior. The people who ascribe to it are no better off for their effort. It appears that hell is not as frightening as it should be. The fear of hell is not a factor when crimes are committed. Preaching eternal conscious torment does not drive people to their knees seeking the Lord's salvation gift. Yet, this doctrine is firmly entrenched in traditionalist churches. Frightening people to believe or to obey is the work of men not of the Father. The torments of hell are monstrous to say the least.

CHAPTER 8

Various Accounts of Hell

The doctrine of eternal conscious torment is pervasive in Christian theology. It is the dominant doctrine of denominations and congregations. The place of eternal torment is known as “hell.” The doctrine is a tradition of men and men describe the place of eternal torment. The descriptions are not limited by any imagination. Hell is a real place and it is to be feared. The doctrine of eternal conscious torment is basic in the traditionalist church. Adherence to this doctrine is not limited to Reformed, Protestant, Evangelical, Orthodox, or the Roman Catholic Church. Eternal conscious torment is orthodox.

The Roman Catholic church teaches that hell is a fire that is real. There is nothing metaphorical about hell. It is real fire. It is real torment. It is real and it is punishing. The Roman Catholic Catechism regarding hell instructs us to believe “we cannot be united with God unless we freely choose to love him.”²⁵ The Catholic Church teaches “we cannot love God if we sin gravely against him, against our neighbor or against ourselves.” Worse, is that sin conditions us to die in a state of mortal sin. The Catholic Church teaches “to die in mortal sin without repenting and accepting God’s merciful love means remaining separated from him for ever by our own free choice. This state of definitive self-exclusion from communion with God and the blessed is called ‘hell.’”

²⁵ “*Catechism of the Catholic Church: Part One, Chapter Three, Article Twelve.*” Roman Catholic Church. Publication date unknown. http://www.vatican.va/archive/ccc_css/archive/catechism/p123a12.htm. Date Accessed: 04/02/2018.

The Roman Catholic Church and Protestant denominations have much in common. Both advocate eternal conscious torment. Both teach that Jesus taught us about it. Both teach as the Roman Catholic Catechism teaches; Christians should not be “like the wicked and slothful servants....” They will “...be ordered to depart into the eternal fire, into the outer darkness where ‘men will weep and gnash their teeth.’” The Roman Catholic catechism teaches that a person saves himself by choosing to believe in God. There are degrees of sin, but those are atoned for if the belief is not a mortal sin. The wicked, the unrepentant sinner, will be condemned by God’s judgment and their punishment will be “...into the eternal fire....”

There is not much room between the Roman Catholic doctrine and Protestant doctrine. Dr. Sawyer wrote, “But this is no less the doctrine of the Protestant churches than it is of the Catholic. It cannot be denied that the great mass of Protestants have hitherto believed, and do still believe, that the fire of hell is real, as Passaglia says, and not metaphorical.”

The Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) prepares for their member churches a list of 18 attributes and characteristics of their denomination. It is entitled the Baptist Faith and Message. Item 10 on this list defines “Last Things.”²⁶ The SBC teaches “God, in His own time and in His own way, will bring the world to its appropriate end.” It is slightly ironic the SBC then teaches that God’s way is to save some and torture the rest. They teach “the unrighteous will be consigned to Hell, the place of everlasting punishment.” The righteous, of course, will be “resurrected and glorified.” The righteous “will dwell forever in Heaven with the Lord.”

These “Institutions” of SBC churches are seemingly less loving than the Roman Catholic Church. Catholics allow for a hopeful restoration in a place the Catholics call Purgatory. Reputable men and women believe hell is a place ordained by God to exert His wrath against those who choose not to believe Him. They advocate a belief that hell is “a real place existing outside of God – an eternal separation between soul and God.” The doctrine of Purgatory is not one they support. Eternal life or eternal death; eternal heaven or eternal torment are the only alternatives. Baptists, in general, believe a loving God went to supernatural lengths

²⁶ “*The Baptist Faith and Message*.” Southern Baptist Convention, 2000. <http://www.sbc.net/bfm2000/bfm2000.asp>. Date accessed: 04/02/2018.

sending Christ Jesus to provide everyone an opportunity to escape the fires of hell and spend eternity in Heaven. Their theology implies God never intended to send any of His creation to hell, but the sin of Adam caused God to change His plan to accommodate the Fall of Man. Some Baptist scholars conclude that God's original plan had to be changed. It is as if God made a mistake and miscalculated what Adam and Eve would do in the Garden. It is as if Satan was able to hide his thoughts from God. Some Baptists lead others to believe Jesus did not come as an act of Divine love. He came only to provide everyone an opportunity to be saved from hell.

How does the SBC explain away those people who never had the opportunity to hear about Christ Jesus much less come to believe in Him? According to the doctrine advocated by Southern Baptists those who never heard the Gospel of Christ Jesus are consigned to eternal punishment. Their doctrine insists unbelievers are created to suffer endlessly in a place they call hell. The SBC has reduced the Lord's infinite mercies. Their doctrine replaces His love for His creation with a divine intent to eternally torment most of it!

Baptist Universities teach the doctrine of eternal conscious torment. Baptists are in line with the instruction given by their institutes of learning. David Allen is a theology Dean at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. Dr. Allen is cited in an article written for the Baptist Press magazine.²⁷ He remarks that preachers do not want to teach about hell. The subject is painful and teaching about its terrors is difficult. He says that preaching on hell is necessary, however. Paul who said, "knowing therefore the fear of the Lord we persuade men" (2 Corinthians 5:11)" is declared as the rationale for the need. Dr. Allen insists eternal conscious torment "is a Biblical doctrine." He insists and rightly so that preachers are told "to preach the whole counsel of God." Dr. Allen gives us the important reason he teaches on hell. Dr. Allen says, "Jesus lived, died and rose again so people would not have to go to hell. Only Jesus can save someone from his sins and from hell."

It is debatable if eternal conscious torment is sound Biblical doctrine.

²⁷ Norm Miller. "Popular Notions, Bible Clash Over Heaven." Baptist Press News (website). July 7, 2008. <http://www.bpnews.net/28489>. Date accessed: 04/02/2018. Quoting Dr. David Allen describing need to preach on eternal conscious torment.

Christ said many things about potential punishments. God's Holy Word speaks widely of potential punishments. None are eternally imposed. The whole counsel of God includes the doctrine of universal reconciliation not eternal conscious torment. Christ's death on the cross and His subsequent resurrection from the grave assures life after death. The scope of those resurrected is not limited. Jesus died for the sins of all mankind. All sins are already forgiven by His blood shed. Southern Baptist authorities limit the capacity of Christ's sacrifice to only a few of His creation. According to SBC doctrine the overwhelming majority of His creation is created specifically to suffer forever.

Dr. Sawyer provides the Presbyterian Church's Catechism as it read in 1879. "The punishments of sin, in the world to come, are everlasting separation from the comfortable presence of God, and most grievous torments in soul and body, without intermission, in hell-fire, for ever." Much has changed in the Presbyterian Church since Dr. Sawyer authored his book. Dr. G. Aiken Taylor writes explaining the current Presbyterian view of hell ²⁸. "Presbyterians believe in the return of Jesus Christ." They believe Christ returns "to judge men and angels at the end of the world." The Presbyterian Church believes that good folks who believe in Jesus will be with Jesus in heaven upon their respective deaths. Those who know Christ "behold the face of God in light and glory, waiting for the full redemption of their bodies." The people who are saved will be reunited with physical bodies in heaven. The saved people are those chosen by Christ "unto honor... and everlasting life." Dr. Taylor tells us those not chosen for salvation are "but the reprobates 'unto dishonor...and punishment' with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power."

Dr. Taylor sees no issue in describing the end of "...the reprobates...." They will see "everlasting destruction" at the hand of God. Those who never knew Christ Jesus will be forever forbidden into the presence of the Lord. He writes, "We are warned that rejecting God's love and not caring for others whom God loves results in eternal separation from him and them." Yet, His Holy Word teaches God loves the whole world and wills the salvation of all humankind in Christ.

²⁸ G. Aiken Taylor. "What Presbyterians Believe" The Presbyterian Journal, volume 18, number 39, January 27, 1960 (pp. 5-7) <http://www.pcahistory.org/documents/believe.html>. Date accessed: 04/02/2018.

The torments associated with eternal punishment are seemingly removed from the new Presbyterian doctrine. However, eternal separation from God is torment in its own right. Dr. Taylor suggests the reprobates will suffer annihilation or “eternal destruction.”

Dr. Taylor's view of the doctrine of eternal conscious torment may be the softest of all. Even though he is convinced the rebellious will be sentenced “...to eternal separation from Him.” He then seemingly dismisses the concept instead appealing to Christian love and to God. “Judgment belongs to God and not to us.” Dr. Taylor comes even further to the side of universal reconciliation when He says, “We are sure that God's future for every person will be both merciful and just.” That is a Universalist credo: “We are sure that God's future for every person will be both merciful and just.”

Dr. Sawyer quotes Jeremy Taylor who wrote that God is a “God of vengeance.” Punishment by fire is prescribed and God's “zeal shall be inflamed against the wicked.” Dr. Sawyer quotes Jonathan Edwards who tells us that the pain of fire in an oven is a trifle. “Your torment in hell will be immensely greater.” God, according to Dr. Edwards will bring down “a deluge of fire, a mighty deluge of wrath.” This fire is “liquid fire.” He says “the wicked shall be swallowed up by a vast deluge of fire.”

Dr. Sawyer hoped to change the hearts of men by exposing the doctrine of eternal conscious torment by the words of its advocates. His hope was not realized in his life. I am hopeful there is a growing sense in the Christian world that eternal conscious torment is a repugnant and unsupportable doctrine. I am convinced God is love. He shows me that in His Holy Word. His Word changed my mind about many traditions. His Word changed my view and now I believe God will be all in all. I believe all will be reconciled to Him.

Joel Osteen is the Pastor of Lakewood Church in Houston, Texas. He gave an interview to a news organization. The salient question asked of him was if he felt like he was “cheating people by not telling them about the Hell part? Or repentance part?”²⁹ He answered that he did not feel

²⁹ Carrie Kintz. “Joel Osteen Just Explained Why He Refuses to Preach On Hell.” By Carrie Kintz, Church Leader Magazine, April 6, 2016. <https://churchleaders.com/daily-buzz/276763-joel-osteen-wont-preach-about-hell-but-he-should.html>. Date accessed: 04/02/2018.

he was cheating people. His approach to preaching is not the same as other ministers of God's Word. He said, "You know, it's not hellfire and brimstone. But I say most people are beaten down enough by life. They already feel guilty enough. They're not doing what they should, raising their kids – we can all find reasons. So I want them to come to Lakewood or our meetings and be lifted up, to say, 'You know what? I may not be perfect, but I'm moving forward. I'm doing better.' And I think that motivates you to do better."

Mr. Osteen is often ridiculed by traditionalists. There are complaints that he does not preach about hell or consequences for not believing. It seems to me his explanation here is true. He does not feel motivated or compelled to preach about hell. Choosing not to preach eternal conscious torment is superior to preaching for it especially if the doctrine is doubted. Preach one and "The Blessed Hope" is the outcome. Preach the other and open the gates to hell with eternal conscious torment. The lesser of the two approaches seems best to me. I hope to kindle a change in thought. I exhort others to challenge the long held doctrine of eternal conscious torment.

Advocates of the doctrine prefer sermons on hell be preached often. Mr. Osteen is criticized in an article from the Christian Post.³⁰ The authors of the article claim, "As pastors and leaders in the church, we cannot fail to include hell alongside other doctrines...." The authors promote the doctrine of eternal conscious torment and put it as a doctrine on par with other Christian doctrines. They tell us that not preaching sermons on hell is to "do a disservice to those that God has entrusted to us, but to our own calling as well."

Eternal conscious torment is more than a consensus doctrine among Christian churches. It is a doctrine shared by most. The doctrine is key in evangelism and missionary work. Believe or perish. The precept maligns the character of God Who is love.

The descriptions of hell vary widely among theologians and denominations.

³⁰ Stoyan Zaimov. "Joel Osteen Says He Is Not Cheating People By Not Talking About Hell." The Christian Post March 28, 2016.<http://www.christianpost.com/news/joel-osteen-says-hes-not-cheating-people-by-not-preaching-about-hell-160267/>. Date accessed: 04/02/2018.

CHAPTER 9

Peculiar Properties of Hell's Fire

Dr. Sawyer researched the “words of the advocates of eternal punishment” and found many traditional theologians defining the properties of hell. The orthodox believe hell is greater than fire alone. There are peculiar properties of hell. Dr. Sawyer quotes Matthew Henry who said, “There is fire but no light: it is utter darkness: darkness in extremity; the highest degree of darkness without any remainder, or mixture, or hope of light, nor the least gleam of it.” Prosper of Aquitaine is a man who reports having seen hell. Dr. Sawyer quotes him saying there is “no light in that fire.” St. Theresa testifies she witnessed the inner workings of hell. Dr. Sawyer quotes her saying, “There was not the least light there, but only the thickest, blackest darkness.”

The advocates of eternal conscious torment describe hell as a place that is darkness greater than darkness. It is fire in darkness and fire has no light in it. Further, there is no hope of light of any kind. The descriptions of hell by today's advocates of the doctrine are not dissimilar to the descriptions offered its advocates in 1879.

Gene Taylor is an evangelist at Centreville Road Church of Christ in Tallahassee, Florida. Mr. Taylor writes, “Hell is eternal.”³¹ Ostensibly hell's eternal nature is based in Christian doctrine that God and His Holy

³¹ Gene Taylor. “*The Reality of Hell*.” A Sermon presented to Centerville Road Church of Christ, Tallahassee, FL ca. 2015 <http://www.centervilleroad.com/articles/hell.html>. Date accessed: 04/02/2018.

Spirit are eternal. Mr. Taylor says that because God is eternal, “Hell and the punishment meted out there will last as long as God forever.”

Mr. Taylor teaches, “Hell is a place of darkness.” He tells his audience, “Hell is described as darkness because it is the place farthest removed from God.” Mr. Taylor confirms hell is a furnace of everlasting fire and “the fire is never quenched.” Unrepentant souls will find “no rest there.... The wicked will have no rest from their torment day or night.”

Dr. R. C. Sproul has been cited previously. He wrote about hell. “There is no biblical concept more grim or terror-invoking than the idea of hell. It is so unpopular with us that few would give credence to it at all except that it comes to us from the teaching of Christ Himself.”³² Dr. Sproul teaches those who follow him that “the Bible describes hell as a place of outer darkness, a lake of fire, a place of weeping and gnashing of teeth, a place of eternal separation from the blessings of God, a prison, a place of torment where the worm doesn’t turn or die.”

Dr. Sproul admitted a little doubt when he wrote about the characteristics of hell. He asked, “Should we take these descriptions literally or are they merely symbols?” His suspicion is the characteristics are symbolic, but even believing that does not assuage his concerns. He wrote, “If these images are indeed symbols, then we must conclude that the reality is worse than the symbol suggests. The function of symbols is to point beyond themselves to a higher or more intense state of actuality than the symbol itself can contain. That Jesus used the most awful symbols imaginable to describe hell is no comfort to those who see them simply as symbols.”

Dr. Sproul’s assertion is confusing. He preaches the descriptions of hell as he understands hell are referenced in Holy scripture, yet the references in scripture are “symbols.” Dr. Sproul says we should assume the symbols are demonstrative of a suffering far worse than what the symbol denotes. Dr. Sproul is teaching that Christ Jesus’ ministry included sermons describing the outcome of any person who did not believe in Him. Dr. Sproul does not want to be associated with “minimizing hell” for the sake of symbolism. Dr. Sproul is convinced it is better to teach

³² Dr. R. C. Sproul. “What Is Hell?” Ligonier Ministries website, The Teaching Fellowship of Dr. R. C. Sproul, Blog dated June 20, 2014. <http://www.ligonier.org/blog/hell/>. Date accessed: 04/02/2018.

that Jesus teaches eternal conscious torment even if the words of Christ are symbolic. Dr. Sproul preaches we should embrace the doctrine. Never mind the symbolism of Christ's words or the literal value of them, the fate for unbelief will be "...the reality is worse than the symbol suggests."

Not only is darkness a peculiar torment of eternal conscious torment, but the pain of the fire of hell is extreme and unrelenting. Dr. Sawyer quotes Dr. Edwards who wrote, "The destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah in a storm of fire and brimstone was but a shadow of the destruction of ungodly men in hell, and is no more to it than a shadow or picture is to the reality, or than painted fire is to real fire" Dr. Edwards and others seemingly forget that God restores Sodom.

I will turn again their captivity, the captivity of Sodom and her daughters, and the captivity of Samaria and her daughters, and the captivity of your captives in their midst; that you may bear your own shame, and may be ashamed because of all that you have done, in that you are a comfort to them. (Ezekiel 16:53-54, emphasis added)

Sodom is restored. The fire from heaven destroyed them. "...Our God is a consuming fire" (Hebrews 12:29). But, He restores Sodom to be an example to Israel.

Dr. Edwards is not alone describing the intensity of the fire of hell. Dr. Sawyer quotes Jeremy Taylor who tells us, "...If all the trees in the world were put in one heap, and set on fire, I would rather burn there till the day of judgment, than suffer only for the space of one hour that fire of hell."

The precept that hell's fire is intense is not new. The Catholic Church has taught of it for centuries. People have burned at stakes for crossing the doctrine or dictates of the church hierarchy. The temperature in hell is seemingly to be constant, but always hotter. Hell will be the hottest place ever conceived. It's conception can only be the handiwork of God. Only God could perpetually stoke the flames of hell. He is the only eternal God. Satan was created and scripture says he will be cast into the lake of fire. Only God can keep the flame in the lake burning.

A gentleman whose name is Rich Deem provides an interesting

description of hell at the God and Science website.³³ He discusses the possibility of a great party in hell's domain. He writes, "The likes of Adolph Hitler, Joseph Stalin and other unsavory characters will be there." His description suggests a belief that the most evil occupants of hell must be restrained "from tormenting their neighbor's excessively." Punishment is used to rein in the powers of the most evil. The degree of punishment is an "amount increasing with the degree of restraint required." Not only is hell eternal torment, but God will apply greater degrees of torment to keep the really bad rebels from harming or unfairly tormenting the lesser rebels. The most serious sinner will be restrained. Those like him will be restrained. In their restraints they will be unable to terrify and torment others there who are the least of the unrepentant sinners. Who is it managing the restraints? Who is managing the degrees of punishment.

The Catholic Saint Theresa is resourced by Dr. Sawyer. She says, "To be burnt in the fire of this world is a mere nothing, a trifle, compared with being burnt in hell." St. Theresa testified as one having first hand experience in hell. St. Theresa has a contemporary in St. Faustina (Kolwaska). St. Faustina was born in 1905 and died in 1938. She was canonized by Pope John Paul II in 1993. St. Faustina has an interesting history.³⁴ St. Faustina testifies she has seen hell. She wrote of her experience.³⁵ An angel gave her entrance and she was witness "to the chasms of hell." The size of hell impressed her. The tortures she saw were horrifyingly frightful.

St. Faustina described seven levels of torture. First "is the loss of God." That level of torment is followed by "perpetual remorse of conscience. The third is the realization that "one's condition will never change." Fourth is fire. It is a fire that "will penetrate the soul without destroying it." The next level is absolute darkness and "a terrible suffocating smell." The sixth agony of hell "is the constant company of Satan." Lastly, the residents of hell experience "horrible despair, hatred of God, vile words,

³³ Rich Deem. "What Will Hell Be Like?" By Rich Deem. Evidence For God website. Date unknown. <http://www.godandscience.org/doctrine/hell.html>. Date accessed: 04/01/2018.

³⁴ "Faustina Kowalska." Wikipedia History. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Faustina_Kowalska. Date accessed: 05/28/2018.

³⁵ "The Reality of Hell: Stories of Persons Who Visited Hell and Apparitions of the Damned." Our Lady of the Rosary Library. Prospect, KY: These Last Days Ministry. 8/4/2016. <http://www.tldm.org/News8/RealityOfHell.htm>. Date accessed: 04/02/2018.

curses and blasphemies.” But, even these seven levels of hell are not all the tortures put upon unrepentant rebels. St. Faustina says, “There are special tortures destined for particular souls.” She linked these torments to the senses of condemned men and women. St. Faustina warns all, “Let the sinner know that he will be tortured throughout all eternity.” This is her testimony. It is part of the evidence that led the Roman Catholic Church to elevate her to sainthood.

The World Assemblies of God Fellowship is a Christian Church denomination. They are Pentecostal and many are perhaps persuaded to the charismatic. They publish a statement of faith to which the body of member congregations agree. Item 11 discusses “The End of Time.”³⁶ These good people “believe in the bodily resurrection of all humanity.” Those who confess Christ Jesus as their Savior will receive “everlasting conscious bliss.” They will be with Him. Those who do not confess their belief in Jesus are sentenced to “everlasting conscious punishment.”

“Everlasting conscious punishment” is explained by the denomination’s theologians. Eternal conscious torment, according to these learned men, is experienced during “the second death.” They teach, “The second death is a final and eternal separation from God and from the life to be enjoyed in the new creation.” Men and women who do not know Jesus Christ as their Savior “will be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the angels and Christ.” The unrepentant sinner dies the first death which is a physical death, but then he is resurrected in body and soul to be judged. His name will not be found in “The Book of Life” and therefore the unrepentant sinner is condemned to a second death. This second death is eternal.

The denomination’s theologians concludes God then watches His creation in torment from a safe distance. Christ and His Angels look from their place in heaven upon the wretched part of His creation that willfully rejected Him. He is their Lamb and they rebelled against Him. The rebellious will suffer the fate of eternal conscious torment not for remediation, but for punishment.

The World Assemblies of God Fellowship have also disqualified

³⁶ “Statement of Faith.” World Assemblies of God Fellowship. Publication date unknown. <http://www.247ag.com/WAGF/wp-content/uploads/2009/11/Application-Statement-of-Faith.pdf>. Date accessed: 04/02/2018.

universal reconciliation even as a possibility. They write, “None of these passages indicates any promise of rehabilitation or restoration once the final judgment is pronounced.” It is finished. That closes the argument.

I am reminded of two scriptures. The first is James 3:1; “Not many should strive to be teachers, for they will be judged more strictly.” The second is 2 Timothy 2:24-26 (my paraphrase) “A teacher should be patient and kind, able to explain the hope of our salvation. He should teach with gentleness. He knows that he does not change people. He knows that the Holy Spirit of God may grant understanding and release the hearer from Satan’s trap.” The same God will judge the Pentecostal preacher and me. We will be judged more strictly. I pray, Father, Your Spirit leads us to glorify You. We are unable to teach without Your Presence and blessing. Lead us to teach the Truth. Amen.

Dr. Sawyer cites the Reverend Dr. Michael Muller who says of the people in hell, “They are buried under waves of fire.” These waves of fire Dr. Muller describes are those found in Purgatory. These fires are not the fires of hell per se. Purgatory is a penalty paid for retaining sins at the moment of death. Purgatory is a place where a kind of redemption or reconciliation takes place. I always thought Purgatory was a kind of spiritual holding cell without windows. It was a place where folks who once were saved strayed from the straight and narrow and then died without proper absolution. They were in a kind of limbo. I had this idea that a person could be prayed out of Purgatory.

“Got Questions.org” is a popular website that provides answers to scriptural questions. They offer distinctive characteristics of many Christian perspectives. Here they answered the question, “What does the Bible say about Purgatory?”³⁷ They answer that “Purgatory is a place that a Christian’s soul goes to after death to be cleansed of the sins that had not been fully satisfied during life.” The Got Questions writers then go on to discount or discredit the scriptural support for Purgatory. Catholic doctrine does encourage prayers for those supposed to be consigned to Purgatory. The Catholic Church explains the “doctrine of purgatory supposes the fact that some die with smaller faults for which there was

³⁷ “What Does The Bible Say About Purgatory?” GotQuestions.org. Publication date unknown. <https://www.gotquestions.org/purgatory.html>. Date accessed: 04/01/2018.

no true repentance, and also the fact that the temporal penalty due to sin is at times not wholly paid in this life.”³⁸ The Catholic Church finds proof for their doctrine in their tradition. Included in the doctrine of Purgatory is the “practice of praying for the dead.” Saints on earth can pray the sins of a deceased beloved away and their loved one will escape the bindings in Purgatory. He will meet God in heaven. His sins forgiven.

It seems Roman Catholicism is part way to universal reconciliation. What if all the rebellious died with venial sin (mortal sin) and all were sentenced to Purgatory? What if only one man prayed that all in Purgatory be forgiven. Would God not hear that man's prayer? All things are possible with God. His mercies are fresh every day. God is love!

Father Furniss was a Catholic priest who is known for writing books of instruction for children. Dr. Sawyer quotes Father Furniss who while alive advocated the doctrine of eternal conscious torment. Father Furniss wrote, “Take a spark out of the kitchen fire, throw it into the sea, and it will go out. Take a little spark out of hell, less than a pin-head, throw it into the sea, and it will not go out. In one moment it would dry up the waters of the ocean, and set the whole world on a blaze.” God bless the little children; all the little children. How would a human body withstand such dreadful pressures of intense fire and darkness. A sea would dry up and cease to exist, but a human body will not. Who would maintain such a fire? Purgatory or not the description offered for hell should frighten all.

Christian scholars describe hell as a place where God executes His wrath. The consequences for failing to believe is disastrous. The good folks at Got Questions explain what hell looks like. They tell us first that “some interpreters take the Bible's descriptions of hell to be symbolic.”³⁹ This is similar to Dr. R.C. Sproul's opinion. The Got Questions authors write, “Even if the descriptive language is symbolic, the place itself is real—and the reality will no doubt be worse than the symbols.” They tell us, “The scriptural descriptions of hell are meant to emphasize the torment and suffering that will be experienced by those sent there.” The good folks at Got Questions are convinced hell is a real place and eternal

³⁸ Kevin Knight. “[Catholic Encyclopedia: Purgatory.](http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/12575a.htm)” New Advent website. <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/12575a.htm>. Date Accessed: 04/2/2018.

³⁹ “[What Does Hell Look Like?](https://www.gotquestions.org/what-does-hell-look-like.html)” GotQuestions.org. Publication date unknown. <https://www.gotquestions.org/what-does-hell-look-like.html>. Date accessed: 04/01/2018.

conscious torment is a real characteristic of God. They teach, “We can be assured hell is a terrible terrifying place.” The heat of hell is not described as neatly as by Father Furniss, but it must be said that the intention is to motivate others by way of fear. “...The concept of hell should drive us to the Cross of Christ.” To these authors hell is a place we do not know. What it looks like is impossible for any of us to say. However, they believe it “will be a place of unending suffering and torment from which there will be no escape.”

Ron Thomas was the Pastor of Rodgers Baptist Church in 2008. Pastor Thomas prepared sermon notes regarding “You Think It’s Hot Now – The Reality of Hell.”⁴⁰ He cites as fact four things about hell. He describes hell in a way that is consistent with orthodox doctrine of eternal conscious torment today. He declares in “Fact two” that “Hell is a place of torments.” Pastor Thomas is not unlike Dr. Sproul or Dr. MacArthur who preach that Jesus speaks more about eternal conscious torment than any other. Pastor Thomas writes, “Jesus’ words teach us that there is a fate worse than death. There is a fate worst than being murdered.”

Pastor Thomas teaches, “In hell, there is an unquenchable fire. Gehenna was a place of unquenchable fire.” The kind of fire that burnt garbage in the Valley of Hinnom would never stop burning because “the garbage kept coming.” He tells his audience, “Jesus speaks of hell as a place of ‘everlasting fire.’” It is Christ Jesus, according to Pastor Thomas, Who orders the angels of heaven to “gather out of his kingdom all things that offend.” It is upon His order that the offensive persons will be cast into fire that “inflicts the greatest pain!”

According to Pastor Thomas there is a fire that at first burns completely. The fire must also possess the miraculous characteristic of healing what it has burned. The body is burned again, healed and on and on. The Pastor is correct in saying, “...If they could see or hear its torments but a moment, it would keep them up at night!” In my humble opinion those who profess a belief in the doctrine of eternal conscious torment should never feel comfortable in sleep. It is a gruesome thought to allow into our minds the torments to be experienced by our family, our friends

⁴⁰ Ron Thomas, Pastor. “*You Think It’s Hot Now? - The Reality of Hell.*” Rodgers Road Baptist Church, Garland, TX. August 10, 2008. <http://www.gospelweb.net/ronsermons4/YouThinkItsHotNow.htm>. Date accessed: 04/02/2018.

and our neighbors because they were unrepentant. They will suffer or are suffering now torments that should make us cry out, "Abba Father, Please."

"Just think," says Pastor Thomas, "... of living in a burning, stinking garbage dump, where there are creatures that gnaw, bite, sting, and tear, inflicting pain on their victims, yet never consuming them! All of this, and you are surrounded with the sound of continual weeping and anguish."

I wonder aloud if Christian hearts have been hardened. Do we pray diligently for the unsaved? How do we reconcile our hearts with the joy that comes from being a chosen child when looking on a child not chosen? All families probably have someone in their group who remains in spiritual rebellion. Some of our family members have died unrepentant. Should not our Christian hearts cry out in agony for them? Add this thought. From heaven you'll be looking down at those burning in hell. For an eternity believers will look down on the unbelievers, perhaps their own mothers, fathers, brothers and sisters as they are being tortured. Perish the thought.

"Hell fire," as Dr. Sawyer points out, "possesses the remarkable property of burning without destroying, or rather of repairing as fast as it burns." The doctrine demands a belief that the fire of hell cuts and heals. There is the fire of volcanoes and the fire we are familiar with. Volcanoes do not consume the mountain in which it is held and is therefore a special kind of fire. It has a nature that does not end. Lightning is a kind of fire that burns, but does not consume. Dr. Sawyer gives us the words of Tertullian who wrote, "Fire is of one kind which we make use of, and that of another that serveth the judgment of God." The fire Tertullian defines is burning and is healing. "He that is struck with fire from heaven is not to be reduced to ashes by any other fire." This is the kind of fire the "guilty and enemies of God" will face in eternal conscious torment.

The theologians of old preach about a wise and discerning fire. It is a fire that understands its purpose in burning flesh and all the while knows which parts of the flesh to burn for the greatest pain. It is a fire that knows the degree of the sinner's sin and sets the burn to correspond with that degree. Sins are cumulative and the degree of the burn will be set higher for the greater number of sins.

Augustine teaches that fire has an intelligence associated with it. Dr. Sawyer cites Augustine regarding this kind of intelligent fire. Augustine writes that animals might live through a fire and not be consumed by it. The animals would endure pain, but survive. Augustine called that “the miraculous appointment of almighty Creator.” Augustine challenged those who might dispute him. He said, “And he who denieth that this is possible with him knoweth not who it is that doeth everything that is wonderful in all natures.”

That is quite the argument St. Augustine makes. God has given a remarkable power to fire. The fire can burn flesh and the flesh will not die. The flesh will not be consumed by the fire. Augustine says, “If you disagree with me you do not know the power of God.” Dr. Sawyer cites Drexelius who described the fire as being like asbestos, “being once set on fire, burneth continually....” Drexelius states it is man’s problem that “by his wickedness, has made himself such a salamander, who must always live and always die in flames eternal.”

The advocates of the doctrine of eternal conscious torment tell us that bodies when cast into hell are refitted to endure the pains of torment. Dr. Sawyer shows us the words of John Wittaker who wrote, “They find their bodies now fitted for the first time to resist all the consuming powers of fire.” We have the words of great theologians of Dr. Sawyer’s era preaching as Dr. Goodwin, “...In hell their bodies shall be nealed [annealed], as we speak of glass, that they may endure this fire.”

The doctrine of eternal conscious torment requires a body be fitted to withstand the tortures put upon it or the body must be made indestructible for the torments to be executed upon it. The doctrine possesses outside influence so as to create a condition that “prepares for an endless existence and endless tortures in hell-fire.” For the doctrine of eternal conscious torment to be true our bodies either change to being something eternally fire proof or the flame contains a restorative power to heal. The flame that whips the body heals the flesh it tears. Either prospect seems to me frighteningly fanciful thinking. The body is not made flame proof and the flame of so-called hell does not heal.

CHAPTER 10

Other Means of Torture

Dr. Sawyer provides descriptive characteristics of hell as told by the learned men that first developed them and invoked them while they lived. The words of Bible Scholars and their descriptions of hell are not only fire, but frost. Fire is not the only torture in the hell that is eternal conscious torment. Some advocates of the doctrine decree there be extraordinary heat from flame and to that is added extreme torments of cold. They preach a doctrine that God punishes the unrepentant rebel with fire and extreme cold intermittently and eternally.

Dr. Sawyer quotes Jeremy Taylor who tells us, “The sense of touching, so it shall be the most tormented in that burning fire: all the torments, which the Scripture doth exhibit to us as prepared for the reprobate, seem to fall upon this only sense....” His rationale is not clear, but Dr. Taylor seemingly makes the desperation of the unrepentant sinner greater by the changing of extreme heat to extreme cold. Dr. Taylor is not alone in his assessment of the torments of hell. Adam Clarke is quoted by Dr. Sawyer. Dr. Clarke wrote about transitions between torments of extreme burning and freezing. “The punishment of the damned consists in sudden transitions from extreme heat to extreme cold; the extremes of both I have found to produce exactly the same sensation.”

It’s not enough that eternal conscious torment is a burning torment with extraordinary fire that cuts then heals. The orthodoxy add to that torment. A rebellious sinner is consigned to hell to be not only burned forever, but to be burned alternatively by fire and then by extreme cold.

Until I read Dr. Sawyer's expose I never considered ice in hell. In fact, when confronted with an unacceptable choice I sometimes said, "It will be a cold day in hell!" Little did I know I was touching on the doctrine of eternal conscious torment in my exclamation.

I am struck by the certainty of the words spoken by the advocates of eternal conscious torment. To them there is no doubt that extremes will be placed on body and soul in hell. Yet, I do not find in scripture any such description. It is as if the doctrine is somehow manufactured, made up and embellished. Dr. Sawyer introduces us to the words of many of the doctrine's advocates. Father Muller quoted earlier is here quoted describing "that place of divine justice...." It "...was provided with fire on one side, and snow and ice on the other; so that the inmates of Purgatory could be conveniently translated from one to the other." Extreme heat and tongues of fire cutting the rebellious man. His punishment is insufficient though. The advocates of this doctrine insist the rebel must be punished by greater torments still.

This kind of torture in hell is not exclusive to Christians advocating it. The Hindus of India as researched by Dr. Clarke, "have it in their theology." As Dr. Sawyer points out the Christian world may be "indebted to them for its invention...." Dr. Sawyer is right to point out this particular element of eternal conscious torment has roots in other religions as well. I searched the Internet hoping to find current Christian thinking regarding the coupling of ice and fire in hell. I found a great deal, but what I found was not relative to Christian thinking. What I found was primarily Islamic in nature.

Dr. Clarke tells us the institution of hell is taken from Eastern religion. He wrote of a place called "Tamisra" and "Asipatrivana." In Tamisra "the wicked shall have a sensation of agony." Asipatrivana is "the sword leaved forest." The unfortunate persons sent to these hellish places suffer indignities of "binding fast and rending, multifarious tortures await them; they shall be mangled by ravens and owls; and shall swallow cakes boiling hot, and shall walk over inflamed sands, and shall feel the pangs of being baked like the vessels of a potter." Men, women, sons and daughters consigned to tortures unimaginable is the religion of the East. It sounds like the doctrine of eternal conscious torment that comes from the West. Both spring from the minds of men. Dr. Clarke's description does not end.

He writes the condemned "shall assume the forms of beasts continually miserable, and suffer afflictions from extremities of cold and heat...lastly, unconquerable death."

Dr. Clarke is describing the conditions of hell in a theology that is not of Christ, but of other origins. The descriptions of eternal conscious torment in that other worldly theology are remarkably similar to the pangs of torment supposedly rendered by God on His creation. Dr. Clarke has also studied the "Persian-Zend-Avesta." He writes, "Hell is represented as 'the places of darkness.'" It is a bad place. Yet, Dr. Clarke and his ilk are safe from it.

No matter how bad a pagan hell is the Christian hell is worse to the extreme. Great poets and inspired philosophers write about a place that does not exist. Dr. Sawyer points out that the Christian hell is far more punishing than the "hells" of other religions.

Dr. Sawyer points to what should be obvious contradictions in traditional understanding. We have God's Holy Word and all the expressions of love within it. Men, however, have created a hell that is anything but an expression of love. The torments of hell are described in elaborate detail by its advocates. Intense pain, endless punishment, torments of extraordinary bodily insults and sources of torture are defined by esteemed theologians. Every element of human existence is touched by torment in hell.

Let's take a moment to review the Traditionalist doctrine's torments of hell described to this point. It, meaning hell, is a real place. It is a place created by God as a means to exact punishment for people who have refused to believe He is God and that Jesus is His Son. It is an eternal place and is maintained by God. It is a place wherein the saved with Christ will look down to watch the unbelievers suffer unimaginable torments. Hell's fire is greater than any fire any man could produce. The fire is without light, yet its flames cut body and soul. Not only do the flames of hell cut they also heal so as to cause eternal torment to the flesh of the unrepentant sinner. Ice is in hell. The unrepentant sinner will be cast from intense heat to intense cold and back again. The rebel's senses are heightened by pain of fire and of ice. The most hellish people are placed in special restraints so as to not allow them to torment others excessively.

There are special places of torments within hell. The rebel's senses are punished to the degree he abused them.

These comments barely uncover the torturous torments described by the advocates of the doctrine of eternal conscious torment. Burning by fire and by ice is insufficient torment. Tormenting the senses is not enough. Having no hope is not enough. There are still other miseries to suffer according to some advocating this doctrine.

Dr. Sawyer cites the Rev. Christopher Love who says, "There is not one way, but a hundred, a thousand, ten thousand ways to torment you." Not only are there multitudes of pains to be put upon a man, but in hell there is not one kind, but variety to torment you." All these, the number and the variety "hath the Lord made to meet upon one man; and this makes the torments of hell to be dismal indeed." These torments, administered by God "shall universally afflict both body and soul, all the parts of the body, and all the powers of the soul."

Not much has changed since 1879 when Dr. Sawyer put the words of the advocates of eternal punishment to paper. James L. Melton was a church's Pastor when he prepared and published an article entitled "When A Sinner Goes To Hell."⁴¹ Pastor Melton tells us that hell is a real place. "The sphere of Hell is a round, hollowed-out place in the Earth's core." It is a place "under our feet" at this very moment. Hell is now "torturing millions of lost souls forever!" But, Pastor Melton tells his audience the judgment of God has not yet been executed. They are in hell now yet awaiting hell for eternity. According to Pastor Melton at this moment our souls "...may be less than twenty miles from the burning fires of Hell!"

Pastor Melton has softened the degree of the fire of hell by declaring the lake of fire is actually "flaming hot lava." Lava may have some healing powers attached to it because in that "flaming hot lava" a sinner's body and soul will burn in eternity.

Pastor Melton goes on to describe the elements of torment in hell. He preaches there is a physical suffering and "a great deal of mental suffering." He declares while in hell the reprobate will remember every sin. They will remember every family member. He says, "In Hell, you

⁴¹ James L. Melton, Pastor. "When A Sinner Goes To Hell...." Bible Baptist Church, Sharon, TN. Circa 1994. <http://www.biblebelievers.com/jmelton/hell.html>. Date accessed: 04/02/2018.

will always remember the moment that you REJECTED Jesus Christ as your Savior" (capitalization in the original).

Think of what Pastor Melton is writing. Sovereign God causes the rebel to remember his "earthly life." Family and friends will constantly be in the unrepentant sinners thoughts. Pastor Melton uses the parable of the rich man and Lazarus to prove this assertion. The rich man looks across a great divide to see Lazarus in the bosom of Abraham. Lazarus and Abraham look back at the rich man. Pastor Melton believes the rebel in hell will see his family and his children from his place in eternal torment. Moreover, most advocates of eternal conscious torment believe the unrepentant sinner's family will look down on him in his torture. His family, no matter how much they loved him, can do nothing to soften the rebel's torments. The gulf is too wide and cannot be crossed. Worse yet, the man condemned to hell will always know the day and time he rejected Christ as Lord.

These are not all that Pastor Melton describes as torments of hell. Additionally, he teaches the rebel will no longer hear the pleasant sounds of life, but will only hear the screams of misery. The sounds of children playing and laughing will not be heard because as Pastor Melton says, "... There are no children in Hell." Pastor Melton preaches the sight of hell is awful and is terrifying. He preaches that faces will be recognizable and none of them will be smiling. There will be "only the faces of pain, agony and sorrow." The faces of friends and family will be remembered, but all that will be seen is "weeping, wailing and gnashing of teeth forever."

The torments described by Pastor Melton are seemingly limitless. Not only are senses of hearing and sight tormented so, too, is the society of hell a torment to the unrepentant sinner. Pastor Melton asks us to think of who will be in hell with the rebel. The doctrine of eternal conscious torment described by Pastor Melton declares that not only are death and the devil thrown into the lake of fire, but so, too, are reprobates. Pastor Melton teaches "in Hell you will be RULED over by Satan and his evil forces" (capitalization in the original). It should strike all Christians odd that Satan's power in hell is not abated. He remains ruler over those in hell and the newest member of that society in hell will be the least of all.

Everything done in life will be constantly remembered in hell. Sins will be remembered in hell. It is "the shame of hell." Pastor Melton

tells us everyone has a choice. The unrepentant sinner did not have to make the choice to reject God. He says, “YOU DIDN’T HAVE TO GO! Imagine that! Imagine spending ETERNITY with that on your mind!” (Capitalization in the original).

Pastor Melton’s words are in concert with the advocates of eternal conscious torment. The advocates of the doctrine are convinced the human body will suffer great indignities in hell. The senses are to be abused as well. Sight will be tormented. Dr. Sawyer quotes Dr. Jeremy Taylor who wrote, “Their sight shall also be tormented with beholding the punishment of their friends and kindred.” It is unimaginable and unreasonable, but Dr. Taylor preaches in hell “fathers shall see their sons, and their brothers, tormented.” Dr. Taylor is not alone in this assessment of the torture of sight. Dr. Sawyer gives us these words from Christopher Love, “The eye it shall be tormented with the sight of devils.”

Dave Dailey was a Pastor of a Pentecostal Church in Racine, Ohio. He died in 2014. His wife and family are honoring his memory by maintaining a website from which many of Pastor Dailey’s thoughts and sermons can be viewed. It is truly admirable that Pastor Dailey’s family works to advance the Gospel of Christ through the work done by Pastor Dailey. Pastor Dailey prepared a sermon that discusses “The Ten Torments of Hell.”⁴² The torments parallel those described by Pastor Melton and by St. Faustina which are discussed earlier.

Pastor Melton’s church is described as an Independent Fundamental Baptist Church. St. Faustina was Roman Catholic. Pastor Dailey’s church is Pentecostal. The similarities of their views on eternal conscious torment are strikingly similar even though many other doctrines held by their respective denominations are in conflict.

Pastor Dailey defines hell and eternal conscious torment as a place the rebel did not have to go into. A belief in Christ would remove that stain. Terrifying noise, wailing, weeping, and gnashing of teeth are ever present in hell. Screams of pain inflicted incessantly upon the rebellious are never quiet. The fire of hell is unquenchable. It burns the occupants of hell unremittingly. Overpowering despair and hopelessness. Once

⁴² Dave Dailey, Pastor (deceased). “*The Ten Torments Of Hell.*” Pentecostal Assembly Church in Racine, Ohio. ca. 2014. http://www.daileyfamilyministries.com/ten_torments_of_hell.html. Date accessed: 04/01/2018.

committed to hell there is no hope of release. The rebel has a never ending craving to leave, but will never be able.

Pastor Dailey, like Pastor Melton and so many other advocates of the doctrine of eternal conscious torment, appeals to the parable of the rich man and Lazarus to support the doctrine. The rich man wanted only a taste of water, but the gulf was too wide to cross. The unrepentant sinner consigned to hell will possess within his tortured soul a never ending sorrow. He will never again experience joy or comfort of any kind. The rebel will experience eternal death.

Pastor Dailey's words describe this torment, "No second chances. No hope of being saved. Eternal death. A dying that is never finished. Never dead, but eternally dying." Pastor Dailey describes unrelenting and total darkness. This darkness is not only the absence of light, but is also the absence of God. Pastor Dailey suggests that even Satan does not know this level of darkness. The unrepentant sinner will never again know his loved ones. He will suffer eternal separation from his family, his friends and everyone else of importance to him. Pastor Dailey said, "If the Lord comes and you are not ready, you will be forever separated from them." The rebel will be eternally in the company of the worst people ever created by God. Pastor Dailey writes, "Miss Heaven and you are numbered with the ones who hated our Savior."

These are serious consequences to suffer because one does not believe. The torments and sufferings of the unrepentant rebel are far more deleterious than what is imaginable. Yet, they are imagined by good men and preached as fact. Remember hell is described as being darker than dark. There is no light of any kind in hell, yet its inhabitants can see. Dr. Sawyer gives us the words of St. Theresa to disclose how things are seen in hell. It is unfathomable even unreasonable to think that darkness is so dark that nothing can be seen, yet God allows Sister Theresa to "see." Not only did Sister Theresa "see" hell, but she was able to recall "frightful torments for particular sins." Sister Theresa is not alone as others write about hell as if they have seen it and the various levels of torment there.

Terry Watkins provides an analysis of hell at a website called "Dial the Truth Ministries." He prepared an article that describes hell. It is similar to the descriptions provided by Pastors Melton and Dailey. Mr. Watkins

prepared an article entitled “The Truth About Hell.”⁴³ Mr. Watkins presents the testimonies of a physician and of an unbelieving Russian scientist. Mr. Watkins is convinced hell is a physical place and declares hell is the center of the earth. He goes so far as to also declare that scientists report the temperature of the earth at its core is 12,000 degrees Fahrenheit. Brimstone is pure sulfur and when on fire brimstone has a very high temperature. There is also the stench of sulfur that is unpleasing to the senses. In Mr. Watkins words, “Nature magazine recently discovered (July 2002) what the Bible knew over 3,000 years ago. Inside this earth is ‘fire and brimstone.’” No light emitted from the fire, but the damned in hell have a sense of sight that magnifies their torment there.

Dr. R. L. Hymers, Jr. is an advocate for world missions. He appears to be a member of an Independent Fundamental Baptist denomination. His passion for missions is clearly seen in his work for the cause of evangelical ministry. Dr. Hymers is a proponent of and supporter of Louisiana Baptist University and Theological Seminary (LBU). LBU advocates eternal conscious torment for the unbelieving. From the LBU Statement of Faith: (LBU believes) “In the everlasting, conscious reward for the saved and the everlasting, conscious punishment of the lost.” Dr. Hymers advocates the doctrine of eternal conscious torment.

Dr. Hymers provides a website that includes many of his sermons in his effort to lead the world to know Christ. He speaks about “Hell A Pit of Noise.”⁴⁴ First Dr. Hymers declares there “will be the noise of those weeping in hell.” He points to scripture verses supporting his personal theology and advocacy of the doctrine of eternal conscious torment in Matthew 8, 22, 24 and 25. The “wailing and gnashing of teeth” symbolizes and expresses that noise. From this sermon Dr. Hymers teaches “these verses indeed produce a picture of the ‘horrible noise, rushing, and tumult.’” The noise of hell will be “filled with the rushing tumult of those who scream and gnash their teeth loudly.” Second, Dr.

⁴³ Terry Watkins. “*The Truth About Hell.*” Dial The Truth Ministries (aka av1611.org) ca 1995. <http://www.av1611.org/hell.html>. Date accessed: 04/02/2018.

⁴⁴ R. L. Hymers Jr., Pastor. “*Hell, A Pit Of Noise.*” Baptist Tabernacle Church of Los Angeles, CA. May 2, 2004. http://www.rlhymersjr.com/Online_Sermons/2004/050204PM_HellAPitOfNoise.html. Date accessed: 04/02/2018.

Hymers declares “this noise will be produced by the intense physical agony experienced by those who enter hell.” He says, “The intense pain caused by being cast into the Lake of Fire will produce great physical agony and doubtlessly lead many of the doomed to cry out, and scream in the unbearable flames.”

Dr. Hymers teaches in his sermon that our bodies will be resurrected. Some will go to heaven. Most will not. A man consigned to eternal conscious torment will have a “physical body” and “will experience the intense pain of Hell.” Dr. Hymers then tells those listening that “this noise will come from conscious people in Hell.” He, too, cites as proof the Parable of the rich man and Lazarus as if it were more than a parable, but an actual event. Dr. Hymers tells his congregation, “Jesus repeated this word-for-word interview with a fully conscious man who was tormented in the flames of Hell.” Dr. Hymers means the parable is not really a parable, but a “word-for-word interview.” Dr. Hymers wants his audience to understand this interview “is the first proof that lost people are completely conscious in Hell.”

Dr. Hymers further supports this contention by citing Numbers 16. This is the Scriptural reference to Korah. Korah was an ambitious man seeking to supplant Moses. Moses called on God to judge who was right to lead Israel in the desert. Moses and Korah met and Korah was instructed to return the next day. After a day Korah, his band of Levite priests and their families came to Moses. Moses had summoned Aaron to be with him. Korah followed the instructions given to him by Moses the previous day. His priests each brought with them a holy censer. 250 censers total. God opened the earth under Korah's feet. His people were swallowed up in the hole created by God. They were covered. Fire came from heaven destroying the Levite priests. The censers were gathered up because they were holy. Those censers were beaten to fine leaf and were used to cover the mercy seat.

Dr. Hymers preaches this event is “the second proof that people are conscious in Hell...” The term used to describe the pit that opened is Sheol. The term pit in the New Testament is Hades. Both terms mean pit, grave or unseen place. Dr. Hymers reminds us the words Sheol and Hades are translated hell in modern Bible translations. Dr. Hymers quotes Dr. Henry M. Morris who wrote, “Korah and his followers descended quick

(“alive”) deep into the great cavity at the center of the earth where the spirits of the lost - both men and angels - are now confined (Henry M. Morris, Ph.D., *The Defender’s Study Bible*, Word, 1995, note on Numbers 16:30, p. 191).

Citing Jesus’ parable of “The Rich Man and Lazarus” to bolster the contention that the place of eternal conscious torment is hell is unwise. It is difficult to understand how a doctrine as vengeful as eternal conscious torment could be derived from a parable. A parable is a story with a moral conclusion. In Dr. Hymers’ exposition the parable is an actual event. He is not alone doing this.

A. E. Knoch explains that using this parable as an actual event is wrong doctrine.

How can we “remember” that the torment of the rich man was of a “mental and spiritual character” when there is no indication of this in previous scripture and the whole setting of the scene is contrary to it? This is hades. We have shown that the spirits of Abraham and Lazarus and the rich man are with God, not in hades if this is to be taken literally. If not, then the men are there, especially their bodies and their souls, *for the scene is based on their actual presence and sensations.*

Take the whole as a parable of Israel’s sufferings while they are lo ammi, and the comfort of those who believe, which is figured by Abraham’s bosom, and it is filled with prophetic light.

Make it a mixed literal-figurative phantasmagoria, and all is confusion. Are we to understand from this that no punishment is physical? Why, then, resurrect the bodies of the dead for judgment? (emphasis added)

Hades is an unseen place. It is the pit. It is a grave. Dr. Hymers’ view suggests the rich man is currently being punished, but he has yet to be judged. The rich man’s body has yet to be resurrected. And how does Dr. Hymers explain Ecclesiastes 12:7 that reads, “and the dust returns to the earth as it was, and the spirit returns to God who gave it?”

Many advocates of eternal conscious torment insist the bodies of the unrepentant rebels descend immediately at death to the fiery torments of the pit called hell. These are physical bodies without a spirit or a soul. The rich man has been lowered from his "lofty bed of down." He once lacked nothing his heart desired, but in hell "he now lies frying in the flames...." The rich man is tormented by an unquenchable thirst. He has nothing to eat and smells only the stench of sulfur.

Augustine refers to this parable and his words describe another torment put upon unrepentant sinners. Dr. Sawyer quotes him saying, "The beggar purchased blessedness by his poverty, the rich man bought punishment with his wealth. The former was raised by angels to Abraham's bosom, the latter was taken to the depths of hell. The whole body of the rich man was burned in the flames of hell, but his tongue alone beyond doubt was more especially tormented...." Augustine would have us believe the rich man was selfish and a hoarder of wealth. The rich man saw poverty and did nothing to ameliorate it. The rich man lived lavishly all the while knowing others less fortunate were suffering. The poor man, according to Augustine, is blessed because he is impoverished. The poor man's hell is played out in life and therefore will not suffer ongoing anguish in a traditional hell. The rich man physically suffers the pains of torment. The poor man enjoys the riches of a loving Savior. The rich man is continually dying of thirst, but the poor man has Living Water.

There is a level of hypocrisy in Augustine's description. Augustine would not be considered impoverished. I doubt he lacked anything while he was living. I'd further venture that Augustine walked past at least one poor man in his life. I acknowledge I am not remotely a scholar of Augustine's life. I do not know how he gave of himself. History tells us he was **the** hierarchy of the Catholic church in Hippo. I venture to say there were orphans and widows around him that were not served. More importantly Christ was speaking in a parable. It was not a lesson gleaned from an actual event. To make it such is to take away from the parable's instruction and it diminishes Christ.

The torments associated with the doctrine of eternal conscious torment are universal. All parts of the body are affected including the senses. The last sense offended is the sense of smell. Dr. Sawyer quotes

Christopher Love who says, “The nostrils shall be smothered with brimstone to choke you.” Jeremy Taylor says, “The sense of smell shall be tormented with the most pestilential stink.... Each body of the damned is more loathsome and unsavory than a million of dead dogs.... How insufferable the smell of that infernal brimstone mixed with so many corrupted matters!”

The doctrine of eternal conscious torment has no limit of torture. All the punishments are at the command of God Who prepared the place of torments and Who administers the tortures there. St. Theresa was reportedly given entree to hell by God. She tells us “...the entrance to hell seemed like a long narrow passage, or a low dark oven. The floor was very filthy, and the smell which came from it was abominable.”

John MacArthur, cited before, is a very well known Pastor and Preacher. He has written books and preached sermons on Christian subjects for the better part of four or even five decades. Dr. MacArthur is a Pastor’s son. He influences the Christian faith of thousands of men and women. At his website Dr. MacArthur provides hundreds perhaps thousands of reference materials, sermons, articles and resources. It is appropriate to say that Dr. MacArthur is indeed a preeminent modern Christian scholar. He declares he teaches God’s Word “one verse at a time.”

Tommy Clayton provides an article regarding the torments of hell. Mr. Clayton is described as the Content Editor and Broadcast Developer for Dr. MacArthur’s website “Grace To You.” Mr. Clayton believes as Dr. Hymers, Dr. Sproul, Dr. MacArthur and many others that Jesus spoke more about eternal conscious torment than any other. Mr. Clayton writes, “Whenever Jesus described hell, He was never flippant or dismissive. He used vivid, terrifying terms to describe the final destination of sinners, shocking and scaring His audiences with frighteningly graphic metaphors.”⁴⁵ The place of eternal conscious torment is “so bad that you should be willing to cut-off sensitive, irreplaceable parts of your body to avoid it.” Jesus, according to Mr. Clayton’s understanding, “always

⁴⁵ Tommy Clayton, Content Developer and Broadcast Editor, “*The Severity of Hell.*” Grace To You website, May 11, 2011. [https://www.gty.org/library/blog/B110511/the-severity-of-hell?Term=smell hell](https://www.gty.org/library/blog/B110511/the-severity-of-hell?Term=smell%20hell). Date accessed: 04/01/2018.

presented hell as a horrific place of intolerable suffering.” Mr. Clayton declares Christ speaks in “frighteningly graphic metaphors.”

Are metaphors absolute descriptions of reality? Is it real that Christ would declare “hell is a place so bad that you should be willing to cut off sensitive, irreplaceable parts of your body to avoid it?” Did Jesus really want His children to pluck out their eyes because they lusted? Would we not have a world full of blind men with no eyes? Would the world be full of lame men for having cut off their right hands that offended Christ or Christ-like life? Would the sense of smell in hell be so horrendous that one would cut off his nose to avoid it?

The advocates of eternal conscious torment go to great lengths describing the consequences of failing to believe in Christ Jesus. Traditional proponents of eternal punishments seem to revel in the frights they assert as truth. Traditionalists have spent centuries describing a God of love Who is actually a God of great hate. The Traditionalist doctrine of eternal conscious torment argues that God’s justice requires such wrath. I choose to argue He is much more loving than the traditionalist is willing to believe. The doctrine of eternal conscious torment fills a need for a hell in order that some be elevated.

CHAPTER 11

Complementary and Accessory Torments

The most serious tortures administered against God's creation have been discussed. Contemporary theologians and advocates of the doctrine teach there are still greater torments than those already mentioned. These are complementary and accessory torments. The torments described by the doctrine's advocates are brutal and frightful. The degree of torture in hell is not lacking creativity in the minds of great thinkers. There are additions to the pains suffered by the wretched men who are condemned to eternal conscious torment. Great theologians argue that those condemned to it are in the company of the devil and his angels. This is a society of torments. This is a place in which humans have no sway and are subject to the whims of evil. Wicked people, Dr. Sawyer points out, "are called the children of the devil." The devil is an unnatural father, of course, but the devil is the "god" of hell. Mere mortals have no rights in this place. The devil is their ultimate ruin.

It's been mentioned in previous chapters that eternal conscious torment is much more than fire. It is also pain of unimaginable tortures. It is pain of fire and of ice. It is pain of slicing through flesh and then healing the flesh only to be seared again. It is pain of extreme cold that does not freeze, but burns. Eternal conscious torment is not only physical it is emotional. Not only does the unrepentant rebel suffer the burning and the healing only to be burned again he is always reminded that he did not have to make this choice. The damned will know that his kindred are suffering along with him if they continue in their rebellion against God.

Dr. Sawyer quotes Dr. Christopher Love who describes social torments in hell. Dr. Love writes, "All the company you have in hell are only devils and damned spirits." In hell God's wrath will be executed upon the reprobates and "God hath ordained [devils and damned spirits] to be your tormentors." Dr. Love acquiesces to tradition and tells his audience, "The devils are the greater tormentors of souls." The "damned spirits" cannot exercise more authority over torments than devils.

What are "...devils and damned spirits?" Who made them devils? Who made them damned spirits? I suggest their creation is in the minds of men. Traditions create the "devils and damned spirits." If there was no hell one would have to be created. Hell becomes necessary to grow a denomination or to grow a congregation. People are frightened into belief!

Jeremy Taylor is quoted by Dr. Sawyer. Dr. Taylor agrees with Dr. Love in that "a horror shall it be in hell when a damned person shall be shut up with so many millions of devils." Men develop the evils Dr. Taylor uses to describe the tortures put upon the rebellious in hell. Bodies put into pits filled with all kinds of creepy creatures and snakes. Heads wrapped in sacks filled with biting snakes. All of those pale in contrast with the kinds of torments the devil and his minion horde will apply. The words of Dr. Watts are supplied by Dr. Sawyer. Dr. Watts concurs with Dr. Love and Dr. Taylor. Dr. Watts says, "Evil angels, wicked and unclean spirits with all their furious dispositions and active powers, will increase the misery of the damned. They paved the way to hell for man by the first temptation of our parents in Paradise, and they have been ever since busy in tempting the children of men to sin, and they will be hereafter busy in giving them torment."

The devil and his angels tempt us to sin and when they have succeeded in their mission they are given authority to torment. Devils torment in hell ostensibly under the authority of an all-loving Father.

Advocates of the doctrine of eternal conscious torment apply confinement as an accessory torment. There is no escape or even a hint of life away from torture. The movements of the damned are restricted severely. They are bound as the devils are bound. Dr. Sawyer quotes Dr. Taylor in this regard. Dr. Taylor writes, "The Holy Scripture compares them [damned spirits] to grapes in a wine-press, which press one another

till they burst.” Jonathon Edwards is cited by Dr. Sawyer. Dr. Edwards agrees with Dr. Taylor. He says, “They shall be cast into the wine-press of the wrath of God, where they shall be pressed down with wrath as grapes are pressed in a wine-press.” Unrepentant men and women will learn “how much more dreadful the wrath of God is than the wrath of kings or any other creatures.”

The doctrine of eternal conscious torment does not allow an ever merciful God. God is a Father Who hates and in His anger He punishes. Advocates of the doctrine teach hell is the means to segregate what is Holy from what is not. Righteousness is holy and all else is not. Hell is not holy and within hell are more categories and separations. Rebels convicted of lesser sins are labeled such and the degree of punishment is modified to account for their degrees of sin.

Dr. Sawyer quotes Matthew Henry who declares, “Sinners of the same sort will be bundled together.” Degrees of sinfulness and degrees of punishment exist in the doctrine of eternal conscious torment. In this vein Dr. Ambrose is quoted by Dr. Sawyer saying the unrepentant sinners cast into hell will “be packed together like bricks in a kiln.” They will be unable to move in this condition and packed tightly together. Dr. Ambrose says, “The breath of God should blow the fires of hell through and through them.”

The fire will not consume the stacks of people, but torment them for eternity. It is the breath of God that ignites the fire of punishment. There is no probation, no reduction of sentence and no one able to intervene. These are the bindings of torture and torment. We must ask who it is that supplies the lashes of fire and ice that hold the bundles of humanity tight?

Dr. Sawyer rightly observes the descriptions of the torments associated with eternal conscious torment are various and different. They are the same, yet they are unique. There is only one consistency in the descriptions of eternal conscious torment. Extreme pain is inflicted on a human soul by a just and benevolent Father. One man says one thing about torture and another man adds more insult to that. One man describes an effective humiliation by fire and another increases the torment. One righteous author describes a man being bound tightly and another righteous scholar describes a man running free in hell suffering the pangs of the devil’s torments. The inconsistency is consistent.

Dr. Sawyer quotes Dr. Edwards who tells us “every part of the body shall be filled with fire.... In this furnace shall the bodies of the wicked lie to all eternity, and yet live, and have their sense of pain and torment not at all diminished.... How full will every member and every vein and every sinew be of this fire.”

The descriptions of torments offered by one advocate of the doctrine are mild when compared to the descriptions of torments offered by another of its advocates.

A. ASSAULT ON FACULTIES

The torments associated with the doctrine of eternal conscious torment so far described appeal to physical man. The sufferings to be experienced in hell could be borne by any other animal as well as a man. Dr. Sawyer points out the doctrine also assaults the faculties of man. Dr. Sawyer writes like humans, animals will be frightened by noise and fearful of fire. The senses of feeling and taste can be assaulted. Man has within him “faculties of a higher order, which are connected with his spiritual nature.” Man has an ability to reason. He has conscience. Man associates with other men. Man possesses “memory, hope and fear.” A man will grieve “loss of friends, reputation, wealth.” Ordinary life is rife with chaos and order.

Animals, however, do not experience these things. An animal is not likely to feel loss. Cases can be made of humans dying of extreme grief at the loss of a beloved pet. There are few stories of a pet dying in grief over the loss of its human. The pangs of physical torment do not threaten God's animal kingdom. Divine torture does not reach across God's creation into the animal world. The pains of torment and torture affect only a man's soul.

The descriptions of physical tortures are easy to explore. It is not difficult to describe a flame that whips open flesh. It is far more difficult to explain how eternal conscious torment causes emotional stress forever. Dr. Sawyer reasons that this is so because God's Holy Word describes “... fire, furnace of fire, Gehenna of fire, lake of fire and brimstone, darkness, chains of darkness, and the like.” These are physical manifestations of

a dark world of agony ostensibly put upon men by God. Further, the descriptions of physical torture are easier to present to an audience.

Most men understand what it is to be burned by fire. Not all men will understand the pains of emotional loss. Preaching about physical pains of torment is not complex and it is easy to preach pain. It is much more difficult to preach about the torments of a man's psyche. It's easy to preach about "gates of hell." It is far more difficult to preach about a closed mind or to explain the consequences of unbelief to one who is unable to perceive the message.

B. SUFFERINGS OF LOSS

Traditionalists still preach hell is experienced in the loss of God or in the loss of heaven. Learned Bible scholars divide the punishments of hell into two parts. The first is the type of loss being discussed up to this point. This first type is a physical punishment for being damned to hell. The second type is the punishment of loss. Dr. Sawyer describes this punishment as "a form of misery that has no physical element in it." Our conscience is seared with what could have been if only a different path was taken. We would be without sorrow if our walk was more Christ-like. We would have an eternal life with Him if only we had taken a different course. We carry with us to hell the sorrows of our behavior. The doctrine of eternal conscious torment requires the unrepentant rebel always remember those he harmed in life.

Dr. Sawyer provides us the words of Jeremy Taylor who says, "In hell there is the pain of loss, and that so rigorous, that in depriving the damned of one only thing, they take from him all good things; for they deprive him of God." Dr. Taylor writes that to be without God "is the greatest evil to be deprived of Him." The loss of God must, "therefore, cause more grief and resentment in the damned than all the punishments and torments of hell besides."

Dr. Sawyer asks a relevant question. If a reprobate man does not seek God or even eschews anything Holy, is it really a punishment to suffer the loss of God in Whom the rebel does not believe anyway? The threat of an eternal hell or even the loss of God hardly impacts the evil within the "impenitent sinner." These kinds of men do not want to know God in

this life. As Dr. Sawyer writes, "They have little or no perception of the divine character, and find no pleasure in his society or in meditation upon his perfections and government." An evil man does not care for God and there is little that can be done to frighten him to change his ways. Not even the threat of eternal punishment at the hands of a wrathful God.

Traditional Arminians and traditional Calvinists of contemporary times believe as those orthodox traditionalists Dr. Sawyer quotes above. The Arminian view consists of Biblical scholars that are truly convinced God gave to every man a will to do as each man pleased. Each man's will is not to be trifled with. Each man chooses his eternal fate. He accepts God's plan of salvation or he rejects it. God's will cannot overcome the free will of any man. Calvinists believe God created most men to suffer eternal conscious torment because God did not choose those men. He did choose the Augustinian, the Calvinist and even the Arminian. Calvinism teaches certain men are predetermined to the "loss of God." A perfect life led, without sin, could still suffer eternal conscious torment because that remarkable person was predestined for it. All the while a very vile man would be granted heavenly grace while on his deathbed confessing his sins, repenting of them and genuinely seeking Christ Jesus to be his Savior.

There are civilizations today that have yet to hear the Gospel of Christ Jesus. Within those populations there are people who lived every moment of their lives and did not hear the Gospel of Jesus. That was not by way of their ignorance. They did not have a chance to believe. Please ponder that thought. The number of families who have been on the earth and never heard the Gospel of Christ Jesus is extraordinarily great. What might have been their free will? Are any of those predestined to eternal torment or are they all? We should ask who are those who are lost or suffer the loss of God? Are all who never heard the Gospel of Christ Jesus lost to eternal conscious torment?

Bob Wilkin is a Christian author. He is associated with Grace Evangelical Society and writes articles for their magazine "Faith Alone." He presented an answer to the question "Who is the Lost Person According

to Scripture?”⁴⁶ He answers the question by examining scriptures in which the term “lost” is used. He presents a reasoned explanation of the term “lost” as used in Scripture. He explains “The word lost, when used of people in a figurative sense, refers primarily to believers who have strayed away from the Lord.” A lost person is “a believer ... out of fellowship with God.” His salvation is not at risk. He is, however, “lost in terms of his walk with God.”

Mr. Wilkin wants his audience to understand, “Any time we are out of fellowship with God we are lost people.” Mr. Wilkin’s understanding then is that only Christians should be considered lost. Unbelievers are never found, therefore, never lost. I think he is right to point out who the lost are. An unbeliever is not lost, really. To be lost he would once have been found.

Mr. Wilkin defines the outcome for unbelievers in an article entitled, “Clearing Up Confusion About Heaven and Hell”⁴⁷. He teaches “Hell is not the place where Satan, fallen angels, demons and unbelievers will spend eternity.” He believes the actual place “is called the lake of fire.” To summarize, unbelievers will suffer immeasurable sorrow for their loss of God. The lost, that is those who once believed, but have now fallen away, will be saved because of their previous position in Christ. Folks who have never heard the Gospel or those who have heard, but rejected its call are condemned to eternal conscious torment.

Dr. Sawyer asks “Who wakens the souls of the damned?” It is a profound question. The souls of the damned will experience a need to be joined to God. God created all souls. If the soul of an evil man experiences the sense of loss of God, then that soul has changed. God loves all souls especially those souls that turn to him. Dr. Sawyer wrote that he could not persuade himself “the Father of souls will be deaf to its cry.” God commands us to love Him with all our hearts, all our souls and all our minds. Is it possible He would love the unrepentant less than

⁴⁶ Bob Wilkin. “Who Is the Lost Person According to Scripture?” Faith Alone Magazine. Circa 2011. <https://faithalone.org/magazine/y2011/11A1.html>. Date accessed: 04/02/2018.

⁴⁷ Bob Wilkin. “Clearing Up Confusion About Heaven and Hell.” Faith Alone Magazine. March 1, 2017. <https://faithalone.org/grace-in-focus-articles/clearing-up-confusion-about-heaven-and-hell/>. Date accessed: 04/02/2018.

that? Certainly not! "Nothing can be more obvious than the fact that if a soul, upon exchanging worlds, comes to see its relations to God, and feel the need of him, it must have undergone a change." Is it even remotely possible Dr. Sawyer's words ring true? If you say they may be, then any allegiance to the doctrine of eternal conscious torment is stripped away.

Next to the loss of God is the "Loss of Heaven." Suffering the loss of God mandates the loss of heaven. There is nothing good where God does not exist. There is no heaven without God. Heaven is painted as a place of complete joy. The streets are paved in gold. There is Light emanating from every corner. There is Truth and nothing but. There is peace. There is spiritual and Holy understanding. Heaven, as Dr. Sawyer says "is the peace of God that passes all understanding." Heaven is more than what our imaginations can deliver. Heaven is a state of being. It is a place of joy in the Holy Spirit. It is a sense of righteousness. To be excluded from heaven is to have all of these denied. There would be no peace, no righteousness. There would be no glory to see the Father in. But as Dr. Sawyer writes, "...In order to feel this loss, let us consider that the sinner must first know something what it is, and be in an intellectual and moral condition to appreciate it."

An evil man in prison is deprived of much that civilized people take for granted. The evil man is not swayed because of the lack of civilization. He may even relish being in the chaos that is imprisonment. A prisoner can be exposed to all types of rehabilitation, but unless he takes it all in and changes his heart he will always be prisoner to evil. Rehabilitation may be burdensome, but unless the evil man accepts it civilization will not be the better for having given it. The evil man cannot express loss of heaven unless he has within him a knowledge of what it is. In other words the bad man must know what is good in order to want what is good. Heaven is not a natural place for the evil man. It would all be discomfort to him. Therefore, to experience the loss of heaven the evil man must once have been converted.

Dr. Sawyer cites the Rev. Mr. Swindon who tells us the reprobate while living life has no sense of heaven. They do not know "what it is to fall short of heaven." He teaches that once the unrepentant dies his "eye of understanding shall be opened and they shall then clearly discover what it is to be shut out of heaven." The evil man's spirit has been changed!

He understands what he has lost. His understanding is clear. He knows what he is missing.

Dr. Sawyer exclaims under these circumstances the reprobate's soul has changed. It is "a wonderful change in the wicked." Wicked men now understand the love of God. Those men are "removed so far from what they were, are we to suppose that they are to go no farther? May we not safely infer that they will not only increase in their knowledge of heavenly things, but also grow into a temper that will fit them to receive and enjoy them?"

The advocates of the doctrine that is eternal conscious torment are convinced that all men know what heaven is. They likely agree that each man's pursuit of his personal heaven is what drives him. Evil men know what heaven is and their disdain of it is what drives them. Nevertheless, the evil man knows what heaven is and will experience its loss. It is not hard to see how the evil man would enjoy being freed from hell. The stalwarts of the theology describe an absolutely unbearable condition in hell. They know heaven and all the comforts of peace in Him there. Heaven is a place the evil man must want for himself if he is to be tormented by its absence.

Dr. Sawyer asks these salient questions that deserve an answer. "How can two walk together except they be agreed? If sinners ever come to know God and heaven, so as to love them and feel their loss, can we doubt that they must be on the way that leads to them?" The answers should cause us to think carefully before judging any other. If a person's soul is forever tormented because he did not know or because he did not believe, then what is his outcome when he looks to heaven, feels the loss of God and loses his place there? Did that soul express love for God? That soul is "on the way that leads to them," that is to heaven and to God.

C. PAINS OF MEMORY

Dr. Sawyer delivers a precept of the doctrine of eternal conscious torment. It is imperative the rebellious sinner never lose hold of his identity, his personality, or his sins. It is necessary according to the doctrine that the rebel be the same person in hell that he was in earthly life. Dr. Sawyer also points out that the rebellious soul must have willfully

committed sins against God. He uses an illustration to help us see. A man commits a murder by way of a willful act. Later that man loses all of his senses and in the words of Dr. Sawyer "...had become a maniac." It would not be justice if God punished that man eternally and that man did not know for what he is being punished. That is not punishment. That is not discipline. That is hateful.

Let's set aside the billions of people who never heard the Gospel and did not have an opportunity to accept to be chosen or did not know to choose Him. Traditionalists agree their doctrine of eternal torture is Holy justice and fair punishment. Never mind these billions of souls do not know for what they are being tormented. They just know they are. Ask yourself about the numbers of children born without an apparent ability to reason. These are persons with serious and severe disabilities. They are often adjudicated to be not competent. A person appointed by a Court makes legal and life decisions for the disabled person. Is a person who appears unable to reasonably make a life decision likely a person to confess Christ Jesus as Savior? What if that disabled person is born into a family of Hindus, Buddhists or any other religion of the world? Shall we say they are bound to eternal conscious torment? Would they know for what they are being punished?

There is a view within some traditionalist congregations and denominations that babies, subject to the doctrine of original sin, are somehow exempt from judgment. A baby having died is not subject to eternal punishment. This traditionalist view also believes babies cannot have an opportunity to willfully sin and are therefore innocent. This is a kind and loving belief and closely resembles universal reconciliation, at least, for infants.

The advocate for universal reconciliation preaches God considers all and all will be made innocent. Babies, the repentant and the unrepentant will be reconciled to Him by His grace. We are certain as Christians that our eternity is in a future world. God is the Creator. He knows our memories and they are not hidden from Him. Our memories will be with us in our future life. Dr. Sawyer points out that memory must be a part of the soul that burns forever in hell. Further, the memories of those souls are likely improved and clear.

We have within us forgotten events that are remembered on cues.

Some folks believe a whole life can be remembered in a matter of seconds. There are anecdotal stories of people “seeing their lives pass before their eyes” as they lay near death. It would be conjecture on my part to try to explain how a person’s body relaxes when survival is no longer relevant. I have been in the company of dear family as they passed from this part of their lives. When they died they’re bodies relaxed. It is more conjecture to think that in those moments before death a person sees his own memories. Every sin conceived in your mind is in your memory. The advocates of eternal conscious torment insist memories are remembered and relived. There is never a moment the unrepentant sinner will not remember his inhumanity or his foolishness. He will not remember the good things he may have done in his life, but recalls only his sins.

Dr. Sawyer again quotes Dr. Edwards who writes, “At the final judgment shall be brought to light the hidden things of darkness; then shall all the wickedness of their hearts be made known; then shall be declared the actual wickedness they have been guilty of; then shall appear their secret sins that they have kept from the eye of the world; then shall be manifested in their true light those sins that they used to plead for, and to excuse and justify. And then shall all their sins be set forth in all their dreadful aggravations, all their filthiness will be brought to light to their everlasting shame and contempt.”

Nothing is hidden from God. Every man will be exposed by the Light of Christ. The things we try to hide even from ourselves will be exposed to the Light. Believers are not exempt from this exposure. The advocates of eternal conscious torment insist the rebel will relive his miserable memories. Believers leave their bad memories behind at death and retain only the good.

Dr. Sawyer sees a conflict. Our memories remain all together. Our memories go with us to our eternity. Our memories do not die when our bodies do. Dr. Sawyer says, “We shall never forget who we are nor what we have done.” This is a condition that applies to all men...believers or not.

Dr. Sawyer asks us to consider King David. David was the primary actor in the murder of Uriah. David we believe is in Abraham’s Bosom. That memory and so many others like finding his son hanging by his hair in a tree would be revisited even in heaven. What about Uriah? Was

there a sin in his life for which he could not repent? Is Uriah in eternal torment remembering how much he loved Bathsheba? Dr. Sawyer asks us to consider Saul of Tarsus (Paul). Paul held the coats of the men who stoned Stephen. Paul may have been one to have sanctioned that stoning. Paul persecuted the church horrifically. We know Paul was converted on the "Road to Damascus." How long does Paul have to remember how hateful he was before he was loved? Consider Joseph. Eleven brothers remembering their wickedness toward their brother. How long are they to relive this memory? And, where will it be remembered? Dr. Sawyer reminds us that all our memories are recorded for eternity. "What is done is done, and it cannot be undone. Its record is written on high and written in our memory, and neither prayers nor tears can obliterate a single letter. Repentance and reformation do not alter the fact nor do they relieve us of the sin." The only escape from our memories is in the fact that our God remembers them no more.

D. PAINS OF A REBUKING CONSCIENCE

Our conscience is part of our moral fabric and memory. It is an internal morality. It is the element of knowing right and wrong. Our being is able to discern good and evil through our conscience. Our conscience is related to our relationship with God. If our conscience is tuned to evil that is what our hearts will seek. If our conscience is in good that is what we will seek. It is possible to bury our conscience or to rationalize a bad moral choice. We want what we want. We pursue what we want. We are prideful and we silence our conscience. We pursue our passions and indulge ourselves in what we want. We subdue conscience. It is effectively silenced. When we come to Him the believer's conscience is exposed to Light. The Christian's pride begins to abate and goodness is the fruit.

What about the unbeliever? Dr. Sawyer writes, "The dark and hardened sinner...must, directly or indirectly, have been lifted out of his depravity, his indifference to the welfare of his fellow-men, and his disregard of God's moral law."

In the end conscience will manifest itself in all men. The most base man must know a good conscience before he can know his is bad. A man must know God before he knows what it is to be without Him. A

man cannot know he sinned until he knows what sin is. All men will be aware of God and all men will know what sin is. The repentant and the unrepentant will see God in His glory. All will worship Him.

The traditionalist doctrine of eternal conscious torment dictates that the conscience of the unrepentant stays the same in eternity. The advocates of the doctrine insist conscience of the unrepentant is not changed. R. L. Hymers, Jr. has been cited previously. He prepared a sermon message that was delivered by another preacher, Noah Song. The transcript of that sermon is posted at Mr. Hymers' website.⁴⁸ Mr. Hymers first provides us the evangelical prowess of George Whitefield. "Whitefield often said that a person who does not feel guilty over his inherited sin nature, cannot have a true conversion in Christ. ...So corrupt and defiant were they by nature, by birth, that if they did not commit one actual, physical sin, they were still doomed to Hell, because their very natures were sinful." The state of all mankind at birth is a nature of sin according to Mr. Hymers and Mr. Whitefield. All men are born into it even though at birth the baby is innocent of any act of sin, but the baby's nature is sin and therefore is "doomed to hell." The baby's morality and conscience not withstanding.

Mr. Hymers is convinced the Holy Spirit of God convicts the hearts of men regarding their sin nature. This conviction can be subdued and buried. This conviction can be rationalized away. But, if the sin is not properly atoned for the consequences are dire. He says, "If you are not brought under a sense of conviction in this life, you certainly will be in the next life. In Hell, you will say, 'My sin is ever before me'" (Psalm 51:3). Guilt will overwhelm the unrepentant for eternity. There can be no salvation from eternal conscious torment. "You will go on and on under infinite guilt, convinced of your sin – but everlastingly unable to have these sins pardoned and cleansed by Christ Jesus. For you will then be as reprobate as Satan and his angels." The Holy Spirit of God highlights the sins of our respective lives. According to Mr. Hymers we are exposed to our poor moral choices and we either seek forgiveness

⁴⁸ Dr. R. L. Hymers, Jr. "Conviction and Conversion now – or a Tormented Conscience Forever." 11/05.2016. http://www.rlhymersjr.com/Online_Sermons/2016/110516PM_ConvictionAndConversion.html Date accessed: 04/02/2018.

for those or we do not in this temporal life. Ostensibly, if one admits to the sins of his conscience those sins are removed from memory. If not, then the unrepentant sinner relives his sins and his conscience forever torments him.

E. TORMENTS FROM MALIGNANT PASSIONS

The doctrine of eternal conscious torment has within it many manifestations of torture and torment. The worst kind of misery one man can describe is embellished by another. The most painful torture is magnified greater still. The advocates of the doctrine are quick to add misery upon misery to persons they believe will be consigned to hell. Every kind of torment increased beyond human understanding is increased to greater degrees of harm to the unrepentant rebel. The horrors of the doctrine are expressed as violence always increasing in intensity. Even the passions felt in human life will be held against the unrepentant sinner in hell. Dr. Sawyer quotes Jeremy Taylor who said, "If all the disorders of man's life spring from his passions, what disorder must these miserable souls needs feel in that part, what convulsions, what rage, what fury!" Passion becomes a burden in eternal conscious torment. Dr. Taylor tells his audience, "The passion of hatred shall be outrageous in the damned."

The rebellious souls in hell will experience great envy. Matthew Henry, quoted by Dr. Sawyer says, "The sight of the saint's glory will be a great aggravation of the sinner's misery." Dr. Henry gives credence to the precept of eternal conscious torment that sinners in hell can see the saints in heaven. It is also taught that the saints in heaven look down upon the tormented souls in hell. The man consigned to hell will hold hatred for the saved living in the pleasure of the Lord. The passion of sorrow for their miserable existence will only grow and never abate. The torture of eternal conscious torment increases in greater and greater torments. Envy of those not afflicted with tortures adds still to the horrors of being punished in hell. The pains of seeing others living in the "lap of luxury" in heaven leads to hatred and malice. The damned in hell will hate those saved from it. Their hatred will well up in them and they will always be reminded of their error in life.

Everything unrepentant souls ever hated about themselves, about others and especially about our God will be imputed to them in hell. They will suffer their anger upon themselves. Their anger will grow into rage against God. Dr. Sawyer cites Dr. Watts who wrote, "It seems very strange indeed that a creature should design revenge against his Maker...." The advocates of universal reconciliation find the opposite strange that a Creator should design revenge against His creation.

Dr. Sawyer gives us the words of Matthew Henry who writes the rebel will be filled "with an incurable indignation against God, themselves and one another." Dr. Sawyer cites Christopher Love who writes, "They will gnash their teethe out of indignation against Jesus Christ." Eternal conscious torment makes hell a place of personal torments. Those there are forever punishing themselves with their own passions of hatred and malice. Those there are forever ranting and blaspheming God.

What is the example presented by the advocates of this hellish doctrine? It is the parable of the rich man and Lazarus. What is not seen in this parable is any kind of hatred or malice coming from the mouth of the rich man. The parable preaches a message of relief and warning. "Give me water for my tongue," says the rich man. "Go warn my brothers," he begs Abraham.

The advocates for eternal conscious torment use this parable often to prove there is an existence apart from God. But, as Dr. Sawyer writes, "Writers, preachers, and poets are not always in harmony with each other on this subject, and, what is worse, not always self-consistent." One set of theologians "represent the damned in hell as little better than devils, hating and tormenting each other." Another set of theologians claim the condemned are "made to suffer immeasurably more by witnessing the torments of their families and friends!" That is not enough torment. There is yet another set of theologians who teach the condemned look up from eternal conscious torment at their brothers and sisters who are in heaven. It is not enough to be tormented with others in your family and friends in eternal conscious torment.

Some of the condemned will be tormentors. Dr. Sawyer quotes Dr. Watts who writes, "Who knows what the damned in hell will endure from the endless brawls and bitter quarrels among themselves?" He asks, "What new contentions will arise perpetually...for the most part to make

everyone of their fellows as uneasy and as miserable as they can? Oh, what mad and furious pride, and malice, and every hellish passion will be raging almost in every bosom against all those who are near them, and this in that dark prison, where all are intensely tormented!"

The doctrine of eternal conscious torment, if believed, should cause every person believing it to stop anything else they are doing and "Go and make disciples." There should be a heavy sorrow hanging from the shoulders of every believer for the torments their unsaved loved ones and unsaved strangers are to receive.

F. TORMENTING FEAR

The advocates of the doctrine of eternal conscious torment describe overwhelming tortures of body, soul and mind. The body is whipped by flame and burned by ice. It is tortured by rebellious sinners and by fallen angels. The soul is confined to extreme darkness. The mind is made to relive the evil of a life lived. And, the unrepentant sinner will be eternally fearful of what is to come next. Jeremy Taylor, quoted by Dr. Sawyer says, "The imagination shall afflict those miserable offenders, increasing the pains of the senses by the liveliness of its apprehension." In eternal conscious torment the reprobate is constantly and continuously frightened to death. The fear of painful death never ceases. The trepidation of what comes next never leaves the condemned man's thoughts. There is never relief from gripping fear."

Dr. Sawyer points out there are two distinct places of eternal conscious torment, that is, to say there are two hells. In one hell the soul is tormented without a body attached. This hell precedes the resurrection. The second hell is opened after the resurrection and in this second hell the soul and the body are again joined. Torment and torture for the unrepentant sinner begins at death when his soul begins its eternal conclusion. After the last trumpet sounds the bodies of all men will be reunited with their respective souls. Dr. Sawyer provides us the Presbyterian Catechism that teaches, "The souls of the wicked are at their death cast into hell, where they remain in torments and utter darkness, and their bodies kept in their graves, as in their prisons, until the resurrection and judgment of the great day."

From the moment of death the body is imprisoned in the grave and the soul is ghoulishly tormented. At the end of time all bodies will be resurrected and rejoined with their tormented souls. The “just sentence of condemnation will be pronounced against them.” Again, the reprobates are “cast out from the favorable presence of God.” In eternal conscious torment they will “be punished with unspeakable torments, both body and soul, with the devil and his angels forever.” Dr. Sawyer quotes Dr. Edwards who writes, “When a good man dies his soul is conducted by angels to heaven. So we may well suppose that when a wicked man dies, his soul is seized by wicked angels.” These wicked angels torment the soul without mercy. “There is nothing to help it against those cruel spirits that shall lay hold of it to carry it to hell, there to torment it forever.”

This brings to mind a movie I watched years ago. Patrick Swayze played the role of a reasonably good man who is murdered while out on a date with his bride played by the actress Demi Moore. The movie’s name... “Ghost.” Swayze’s character was the victim of a murder. His body and ostensibly his soul was stuck in a kind of limbo. His soul was not good enough for heaven, but not bad enough for hell. He tried frantically to get a message to his still living wife about his friend who was a bad man and who was his murderer. He enlists the aid of a spiritist played by Whoopi Goldberg. Swayze’s character is able to see the dead. Some who die are caught up by white angels seen as bright lights ascending to heaven. The majority of those he comes into contact are gathered by evil angels represented by consuming darkness. He avoids the evil and strives for the good. He is diligent in his effort to persuade the spiritist to talk to his now widowed wife. In the course of events the murderer is discovered and he is killed. The evil angels surround him and consume him.

This was a movie, but it comports well with the descriptions advocates of eternal conscious torment. Like the movie the advocates leave us to our personal imaginations about where the place of eternal conscious torment is. The advocates of eternal conscious torment cannot tell us where this place of torments exists. Dr. Sawyer quotes Jonathan Edwards who believes hell is within the universe. Dr. Edwards says, “Departed spirits of wicked men are doubtless carried to some particular place in the universe, which God has prepared to be the receptacle of his wicked, rebellious, and miserable subjects; a place where God’s avenging justice

shall be glorified; a place built to be the prison, where devils and wicked men are reserved till the day of judgment." It is in this place somewhere in the universe where "the souls of wicked men shall suffer extreme and amazing misery." Dr. Edwards claims the condemned are only in a passing state, "a separate state, until the resurrection. They are reserved in the state they are in; and for what are they reserved but for a greater degree of punishment."

According to Dr. Edwards' theology, "Those wicked men who died many years ago, their souls went to hell, and there they are still." Their judgment has not been pronounced. The true sentence for their resentment of God and their rejection of Him has not yet been executed. "They are kept in being for no other purpose...than to suffer." Dr. Edwards preaches, "The day is coming when God shall come forth out of heaven to sentence them to a far more dreadful degree of misery, and to continue them under it forever!...All hell trembles at the thoughts of the day of judgment."

The doctrine of eternal conscious torment demands the unrepentant rebel's death is the beginning of torture and torments executed against them by God. The souls of the rebels are in a hell somewhere in the universe. This hell becomes their abode and they grow comfortable in that place, but always fearful. These rebels fear the Day of the Lord because they then know their tribulations will be magnified beyond their worst imaginings. Devils fear this day and live in dread of it. God's wrath will be let loose on all who hated Him. The fires of an eternal destructive force called hell will be turned up. The provisions for love and forgiveness removed for the balance of eternity. God will roll up the earth and all the heavens according to the studied Dr. Edwards. Fire will melt it all. After death there is no hope for relief.

G. NO PITY IN HELL

There is no pity in hell. A cynical person might say there is seemingly little pity on earth among the living. Those committed to eternal conscious torment will have no companion or neighbor in whom they can confide. There is not another to hear the confession of the rebel's faith. Dr. Sawyer gives us the studied words of Christopher Love who believed

that even the most heinous man alive finds comfort in a friend. Dr. Love writes, "The worst of men still have some friend who, if no better than themselves, can yet feel for their calamities, and would gladly relieve their pains." However, in hell there is no humanity. There are no feelings aside from fear and loss. All bodies there will experience everything that is harsh and evil, but nothing that is good. They will not find solace in each other in hell. Dr. Sawyer quotes Thomas Boston who taught that in hell "natural affection will be extinguished." Love for children will be forever lost in hell. Fathers and sons who have been committed to eternal conscious torment will have no empathy one for another. "The mother will not pity the daughter in flames.". In hell the only concern will be fear of more hell!

Dr. Edwards is resourced by Dr. Sawyer and his sentiments augment Dr. Love's. "They [the condemned] have so many companions in hell yet they are no comfort to them, for there is no friend, no love, no pity, no quietness, no prospect, no hope.... They will be hated with perfect hatred." Loved ones lost to eternal conscious torment will no longer be regarded. Sorrow for a lost parent, a lost child, or a beloved friend will not matter to those not lost. It is a ludicrous thought to me that I would not appeal to God to save my wretched friend, my unloving family, or even the guy that once fed me. But, that is the doctrine of the traditionalist.

Dr. Sawyer cites Dr. Edwards who teaches, "The torments of the wicked in hell are no occasion of grief to the saints in heaven." It is the teaching of the advocates of eternal conscious torment "...that heaven and hell will be so near each other." The saved in heaven will see the torments put on their brothers and sisters. The rebels in hell will see the glory of God in their brothers and sisters. The hell bound agonize with their kindred, but the saved feel no remorse for their family. The sight of heaven and of its residents will serve to cause greater torments to the unrepentant sinner in hell.

The blessed who are saved and the unrepentant rebels who are not will always have the other in view. This is the doctrine of eternal conscious torment. From hell we will look down on our mothers, fathers, sisters and brothers. Not only are our beloved in view we ostensibly witness the wrath of God being poured out over them. A significant point made by Dr. Edwards is that the saved in heaven will be happy in their state. He

says, "...The saints in glory will see this and be far more sensible of it than now we can possibly be. They will be far more sensible how dreadful the wrath of God is, and will better understand how terrible the sufferings of the damned are.... This will be no occasion of grief to them. They will not be sorry for the damned; it will cause no uneasiness or dissatisfaction to them." Seeing the wrath of God executed upon the damned should cause grief in the saints in glory, But, the doctrine teaches saints are not affected with sorrow. Sorrow is inconsistent with that "state of perfect happiness in which they are. ...Grief is an utter stranger in that world. God hath promised that he will wipe away all tears from their eyes, and there shall be no more sorrow."

The advocates for eternal conscious torment give Dr. Edwards great credibility. Dr. Edwards teaches the blessed in God's glory will see God's anger executed against the condemned. Believers will witness all that God imposes on unrepentant sinners. Dr. Edwards, who is an advocate for the doctrine, is convinced believers will be in a "state of perfect happiness" watching God's wrath put upon others even their mothers, their fathers, their sisters and their brothers. God, Who is love, has what Dr. Edwards calls "eternal hatred." That is frightening. Believers will not be ambivalent. They will be joyful watching the terror of hell. The doctrine teaches as Dr. Edwards teaches that believers "will then be perfectly conformed to God in their wills and affections."

Dr. Edwards is highly regarded as a Biblical scholar and an authority on basic Christian doctrines. His words and direction are often extolled by Christian evangelicals as a proper way to reach out to "lost" sinners. Dr. Sawyer gives us Dr. Edwards' concluding words regarding pity of the lost in hell. Dr. Edwards teaches there will be "none to pity you. ...You will see none to condole your case or to exercise any pity towards you." The people in heaven "will have no pity" for others in hell. "God will exercise no pity" toward anyone in eternal conscious torment. God will give the inhabitants of hell "perfect hatred.... Jesus Christ will have no pity" on people in hell. Compounding this hatred upon hatred is that "the devils will not pity." Worse a person will have no pity for himself in hell. Dr. Edwards' evangelical effort is from a position of fear. It is revivalism of fear.

Eternal conscious torment has many advocates. They describe a

place of their imaginations and call it fact. No pity from any source is a condition of this doctrine. No contact with others except torments applied in various ways and degrees. Not only that, but each unrepentant sinner will deliver torments to others in hell with them. Penalties demanded by God and executed by His creation. Dr. Sawyer remarks that heaven and hell have a “wonderful agreement and harmony existing” between the two. Heaven hates the sinner. Hell hates them more. “Heaven and hell have finally come to think and feel and act alike.” Dr. Sawyer concludes, “God hates the damned in hell, and so does the Devil. Angels and saints hate them, and so do wicked spirits and wicked men! Was there ever anything like this seen before? Or could any mortal have rationally dreamed that in the process of the ages God and the Devil should thus come to agree?”

H. THE SAINTS REJOICE IN THE MISERIES OF THE DAMNED

God hates sinners in hell. Satan hates sinners in hell. The inhabitants of heaven follow the lead of Christ and they hate sinners in hell. Inhabitants of hell hate each other. It has been mentioned previously that Christian hearts should be broken for the lost, unrepentant sinner. All the torments to be put upon them should shake Christian hearts to their foundations. Love is lost in the hatred Christians impose on their unsaved brothers. Christians often pay lip service to the condemned in hell. Being honest, Christian hearts are hard. It's as if we are as pitiless as Dr. Edwards described.

Christ Jesus teaches us something far removed from what Dr. Edwards and the like teach. We have His “Royal Law.” We have in Matthew Chapter 5 an admonition from Christ Jesus to be mindful of what we teach. He tells us that we have an obligation to keep God's commandments. We should never relax our adherence to His Word. If we do, then we “shall be called least in the Kingdom of Heaven.”

Whoever, therefore, shall break one of these least commandments, and teach others to do so, shall be called least in the Kingdom of Heaven; but whoever shall do and teach

them shall be called great in the Kingdom of Heaven. For I tell you that unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, there is no way you will enter into the Kingdom of Heaven.

“You have heard that it was said to the ancient ones, ‘You shall not murder;’ and ‘Whoever shall murder shall be in danger of the judgment.’ But *I tell you, that everyone who is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment;* and whoever shall say to his brother, ‘Raca!’ shall be in danger of the council; and whoever shall say, ‘You fool!’ shall be in danger of the fire of Gehenna.

“If therefore you are offering your gift at the altar, and there remember that your brother has anything against you, leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift. Agree with your adversary quickly, while you are with him on the way; lest perhaps the prosecutor deliver you to the judge, and the judge deliver you to the officer, and you be cast into prison. Most certainly I tell you, you shall by no means get out of there, until you have paid the last penny.

“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery;’ but I tell you that everyone who gazes at a woman to lust after her has committed adultery with her already in his heart. If your right eye causes you to stumble, pluck it out and throw it away from you. For it is more profitable for you that one of your members should perish, than for your whole body to be cast into Gehenna. If your right hand causes you to stumble, cut it off, and throw it away from you. For it is more profitable for you that one of your members should perish, than for your whole body to be cast into Gehenna.

“It was also said, ‘Whoever shall put away his wife, let him give her a writing of divorce,’ but I tell you that whoever puts away his wife, except

for the cause of sexual immorality, makes her an adulteress; and whoever marries her when she is put away commits adultery.

“Again you have heard that it was said to them of old time, ‘You shall not make false vows, but shall perform to the Lord your vows,’ but I tell you, don’t swear at all: neither by heaven, for it is the throne of God; nor by the earth, for it is the footstool of his feet; nor by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. Neither shall you swear by your head, for you can’t make one hair white or black. But let your ‘Yes’ be ‘Yes’ and your ‘No’ be ‘No.’ Whatever is more than these is of the evil one.

You have heard that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth.’ But I tell you, don’t resist him who is evil; but whoever strikes you on your right cheek, turn to him the other also. If anyone sues you to take away your coat, let him have your cloak also. Whoever compels you to go one mile, go with him two. Give to him who asks you, and don’t turn away him who desires to borrow from you.

“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor, and hate your enemy.’ But *I tell you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who mistreat you and persecute you, that you may be children of your Father who is in heaven. For he makes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the just and the unjust.* For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Don’t even the tax collectors do the same? If you only greet your friends, what more do you do than others? Don’t even the tax collectors do the same? Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect. (Matthew 5:19-48, emphasis added)

We are commanded by God through Christ Jesus to love Him with all our heart, mind and soul. We are commanded to love His creation to the

degree we would give our lives for our brothers. We are commanded to forgive the most horrific sins committed against us by evil men. We are commanded to make our way to our brothers and remove all obstacles to our love for them. The doctrine of eternal conscious torment ignores these words from our Savior. The Old Testament teaches God is merciful to all. His mercies are fresh every day. Yet the doctrine teaches God's mercy is limited to a few. Hell is apart from His mercy and we should not expect to see anything like divine mercy there.

God in His wisdom has determined that now, at this time in my life, I am to understand what it is to love. He teaches me what love looks like and how love behaves. Moreover He teaches me that His grace is the face of His love. I am learning what it means to forgive internally not for show. Christ Jesus is "our great Teacher."

But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing back; and your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High; for he is kind toward the unthankful and evil. "Therefore be merciful, even as your Father is also merciful. Don't judge, and you won't be judged. Don't condemn, and you won't be condemned. Set free, and you will be set free. "Give, and it will be given to you: good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over, will be given to you. For with the same measure you measure it will be measured back to you. (Luke 6:35-38, emphasis added)"

There is no one who is Good except Him Who sent us Christ. He teaches do good, yet the advocates of eternal conscious torment preach good is not possible from heaven to hell or within hell. Mercy is limited according to the doctrine. We are told to be loving and the advocates of the doctrine preach that God's hatred is divine and necessary. If hatred is our measure for those in hell, what should we expect the measure to be in our judgment? Great theologians and advocates for eternal conscious torment preach there will be no pity, that the hearts of believers will be hardened to their unrepentant brothers and sisters.

Dr. Sawyer explains a condition that tries Christian faith. "When,

therefore, we are told that God and good angels and saints in heaven have ceased to feel pity for any individual of the human race, it becomes a trial of Christian faith.... Nature is not changed. God is God, and goodness is goodness still; and Christian love is not devilish hate, and the felicities of heaven are not created by beholding the torments of hell! If God commands us to love unconditionally how can it possibly be true that He does not do the same? Does a father discipline his son and cease loving him? No. Neither is it so with God and the sons He created.”

Advocates for this doctrine to not concur with Dr. Sawyer’s view. God does not love all. Dr. Sawyer gives us the sentiments of Christopher Love in this regard. Dr. Love says, “God shall not pity you but shall laugh at your destruction, and mock when your fear comes.” There will be no pity for the unrepentant in hell. “The godly shall not pity you, but they shall rejoice to see God’s power and God’s glory in your damnation....” The sorrows born by the reprobates are compounded. “God shall laugh at thy destruction, and then the saints of God shall sing and rejoice that thou art a vessel of his justice.”

God’s patience, mercy and love are limited. His power to redeem is diminished. It should be unfathomable to all in Christendom, but it is made all too real by the doctrine. Hatred for the damned in hell is taught by recognized theological scholars. Unbelievable! Is this the same God of Hosea?

The advocates of this doctrine have made their mark on the traditions of the church. Saints in heaven will look down on sinners in hell. Those in hell will look up at the good life of the saved. The good will know the pains put on the evil and the evil will see the saved living a good life. The saved will have no pity for the lost. In fact, the saved will rejoice at the torments put upon those they loved in the temporal world. Dr. Sawyer again quotes Dr. Edwards who says, “...The miseries of hell are forever to enhance the happiness of the blessed in heaven.... The saints in heaven will be perfect in their love to God; their hearts will be all aflame of love to God, and therefore they will greatly value the glory of God, and will exceedingly delight in seeing him glorified.... They will therefore greatly rejoice in all that contributes to that glory. The glory of God will, in their esteem, be of greater consequence than the welfare of thousands and millions of souls.”

The doctrine of eternal conscious torment and its advocates do not often preach the sentiments as Dr. Edwards has exposed in the quote above. However, the condition of the saints being in a state of eternal joy in the presence of God gives value to what Dr. Edwards preaches. The doctrine requires the belief that God finds great joy in tormenting his creation. As God receives joy, then the saints in heaven receive joy. Dr. Sawyer uses the words of Dr. Edwards to explain. "God glorifies himself in the eternal damnation of ungodly men. God glorifies himself in all he doth; but he glorifies himself principally in his eternal disposal of his intelligent creatures; some are appointed to everlasting life, and others left to everlasting death." God is glorified when He gathers to Himself the wheat. God glorifies Himself when he torments the chaff.

Dr. Sawyer rightly concludes, "It seems a little remarkable, certainly, that under these circumstances the thought of saving sinners should ever have occurred, since God would have gained all the glory in their damnation that he could promise himself in saving them; so that the great end he had in view – his own glory – would have been equally attained without the humiliation, sufferings, and death to which Christ so unprofitably subjected himself."

Bible scholars and teachers of the doctrine of eternal conscious torment must find more than a passable interest in Dr. Edwards' assertion about God and His glory. According to the doctrine espoused by Dr. Edwards God is glorified equally as the Savior of all men and as the Executioner of His great wrath. Believers "are required to rejoice in the damnation of their fellow men." The saved in heaven with God will have no complaint. They will see divine grace as their right and wrath in hell as divine justice. The saved will worship God for the misery He puts on the backs of the unsaved in hell. The saved will find no fault in their God's rationale for endless torture and torment. God's justice will be heaven. Moreover, the proponents of this doctrine are among those saved in heaven. That is surely fortunate for those advocating it.

A man sentenced to death would be overjoyed if his sentence were overturned and he was set free. How much more a man sentenced to eternal punishment will be overjoyed at escaping the wrath of God. That man would express great joy when he made his way to heaven. Dr. Sawyer provides an anecdote to help us see the enormity of Dr. Edwards'

theological view about the saved in heaven. Dr. Sawyer asks that we consider there are two men both accused, tried and found guilty of the same crime. Their punishment is death. However, the judge determines one will be freed and the other executed. Dr. Edwards would have us believe the pardoned criminal would come to the gallows and watch the execution of his peer. Not only that, but the pardoned criminal will rejoice in God's plan that he is saved and his peer is not.

In 1983 a young woman named Karla Faye Tucker engaged in a murder of two people. Ms. Tucker and another man were actively burglarizing an apartment of an acquaintance. Ms. Tucker killed the man and killed a woman who was trying to hide from her. Ms. Tucker and her accomplice were tried, convicted and sentenced to death. The trial revealed the horror of murder and revealed the deep depravity of Ms. Tucker.

Ms. Tucker was reformed while incarcerated on "death row." She came to believe in Christ Jesus. There were multiple attempts by famous people and foreign leaders appealing to authorities to commute the death sentence to life imprisonment. Those appeals bore no fruit. Ms. Tucker was executed for her crime in February 1998. This is her final statement before lethal drugs were administered.⁴⁹

Yes sir, I would like to say to all of you — the Thornton family and Jerry Dean's family — that I am so sorry. I hope God will give you peace with this. [She looked at her husband.] Baby, I love you. [She looked at Ronald Carlson.] Ron, give Peggy a hug for me. [She looked at all present weeping and smiling.] Everybody has been so good to me. *I love all of you very much. I am going to be face to face with Jesus now.* Warden Baggett, thank all of you so much. You have been so good to me. I love all of you very much. *I will see you all when you get there. I will wait for you.* (emphasis added)

Most Christians want to believe Ms. Tucker had a conversion experience while in prison. Most Christians probably agree she is in

⁴⁹ "Karla Faye Tucker." Wikipedia. Publication date unknown. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Karla_Faye_Tucker. Date accessed: 04/02/2018.

heaven. If what Dr. Edwards says is true, then Ms. Tucker is rejoicing with God as He torments those not saved in hell. Moreover, we do not know the final destination of the two people Ms. Tucker and her accomplice murdered. Were they saved? Did they ever have the chance to be saved before their lives were taken from them? Did God know they would be murdered and not seek him? There are innumerable stories like Ms. Tucker's.

Dr. Sawyer reminds us of the parable of the rich man and Lazarus. The rich man remembers his five brothers and asked Abraham to send Lazarus to warn them not to fall into the same trap that he had fallen. Dr. Edwards advocates a doctrine of eternal conscious torment that does not express the same kind of compassion for the lost as the rich man did for his brothers. If any of the rich man's brothers were by chance chosen to be one of God's children, then that saved brother would rejoice to see the suffering of the rich man and the other brothers. Dr. Sawyer calls this "moral madness" and rightly so.

Dr. Edwards and other advocates of the doctrine believe that saints in heaven will find joy in the torments and tortures administered by a loving, but vengeful Father. These same advocates preach God is glorified in the interminable sufferings of His creation. This kind of doctrine is "perverted and callous." The pains put upon the unrepentant sinner is as Dr. Edwards describes "unspeakably, inconceivably great." God, according to the doctrine advocated by Dr. Edwards and the like, creates a sight of the men tormented so as to bring Him great joy. Consequently, those saved and looking down on the tortured in hell find joy, too.

Courts in America would find this kind of behavior revolting if one man put upon another the torments described by the advocates of eternal conscious torment. Morality is debased to a point any kind of torture is deemed worthy. In real life no man could execute such torments on another without enraging moral judgment upon himself. Dr. Sawyer's observation about the morality of hell being tolerable is not lost on even the casual believer. Hell is a tormenting place. To the believer hell is a real place and its torments are justice. There are many who say that if there is no eternal punishment in hell there is nothing to strive for in heaven. If hell did not exist one would have to be manufactured.

All things happen for the purpose of good especially for those who

believe. Dr. Edwards has preached often that hell is the abode of devils and angels. We have read quotes wherein Dr. Edwards preaches how much the devil hates the sinners cast into hell with him. Dr. Edwards has preached the devil and his minion horde of demons thrive on their hatred and execute their joy in the eternal torment of God's creation. The devil and his minions have no love or pity for the lost. The lost are objects of his hatred. The irony in Dr. Edwards' theology is stark! Dr. Sawyer explains that Dr. Edwards does not see a problem in eternal conscious torment. God hates the sinners. The devil hates the sinners. These are two extremes that intersect in hell. Believers rejoice at the suffering of the unrepentant rebels as do the minion demons rejoice at inflicting it.

Scripture teaches that we are to love all. As Christians we are to consider the least as first. We have a duty to express our love outwardly as well as inwardly. Paul writes that he would give his life willingly for men for the sake of their salvation in Christ. We are taught that the angels rejoice when a sinner repents and is welcomed into the Kingdom. Christ died for all sinners; for the sins of the world. Christ Jesus teaches that we are to love our God with all our heart, mind and soul. He said the second commandment is like that; to love our neighbor as ourselves.

The Sanhedrin consisting of Pharisees, Sadducees and Zealots during the time of Christ were teaching the opposite. They were teaching love others who are like you and hate the rest. Jesus removed doubt from the teaching when he set the record straight and stated clearly the commandment to love one another. Read again Matthew 5:43-48 cited earlier. It is not wise to remove meaning from scripture. Christ's admonition to His audience (us) is not qualified by a sinner's prayer or any outward effort. He says love all, especially those who hate you.

It is unfortunate, but Dr. Edwards is limiting Christ's command and doing so without good reason. Dr. Sawyer rightly speaks this to the condition Dr. Edwards advocates. If we hate those who hate God are we not failing to love all? Are we not reducing His commandment to our whim? Is that a solid foundation of love? Dr. Sawyer writes, "As I read the Scriptures, we are under obligation to love our neighbor because God commands it; and I conclude that God commands it because it is right; or, if one chooses to go further, God requires us to love our fellow-men because He himself, who is the standard of all moral excellence, loves

them.” The advocates of the doctrine teach the unrepentant are unlovable and have always been hated. The advocates teach Christ does not love the reprobates. Christ did not die for their sins or for them.

Universal reconciliation as Dr. Sawyer writes contradicts eternal conscious torment. Universal reconciliation is morally superior. Universal reconciliation teaches “without any reservation or doubt, and as fundamental truths, that God loves all men, and that Christ died for all, and hence that we all ought to love one another and perform the works of a genuine and universal benevolence.”

The conflict and contradiction are clear. Think this through with me. The living on the earth do not know who to hate. The living believers do not know the hearts of any other man aside from their own position in Christ. Living believers would be “blissfully ignorant” of those who are condemned to hell. God does not have the same condition as men. He knows the hearts of all. But, God teaches us to love those He hates? The doctrine requires we believe Jesus teaches us to love and bless those who hate us, but He is not required to love those who hate Him. Eternal conscious torment is a doctrine that is not congruent on its face.

Dr. John MacArthur has been cited in this book many times. He is an equal to Dr. Edwards as equality pertains to Biblical authority. Like Dr. Edwards Dr. MacArthur’s teachings are regarded highly in Christian circles. Dr. MacArthur gave a three part sermon in 1979 regarding Matthew 5:43-48 and, in particular Christ’s command to “love your enemies.”⁵⁰ I thank him for making the audio and transcript available on his website, Grace To You.

Dr. MacArthur’s sermon opens by telling his audience that this portion of scripture “sums the heart and attitude of a Christian.” The highest good of Christian living in Dr. MacArthur’s sermon message is the command of Christ to love our enemies. Dr. MacArthur points out the difficulty the Israelite nation had living up to the standards set out before them. God sets Israel apart and He expects Israel to behave in the world differently than the pagan nations that hate them. He is their God and they should conduct themselves accordingly.

⁵⁰ Dr. John MacArthur. “*Love Your Enemies, Part I.*” Sermon message, Grace To You website, 09/09/1979. <https://www.gty.org/library/sermons-library/2225/love-your-enemies-part-1>. Date accessed: 04/02/2018

Dr. MacArthur points out how the Israelites wanted the gods of their oppressors. God sends them Prophets, but the Israelites kick against the goads. The condition of the hearts of the Israelites is the same condition of the hearts of people in denominations and congregations today. “God wants His people to be different.” The standard to love our enemies “is not an earthly standard.” It is not a moral judgment or simple ethics. “It is a far greater ethic than either you or I could ever keep on our own. It is way beyond us to love our enemies.”

To be clear it is a commandment from Christ. The common understanding of these verses in Dr. MacArthur’s words is that obeying them makes followers of Christ unique from the rest of the world. There’s a term for that in Bible studies. It is “*ecclesia*” or the called out ones. We are also told by Dr. MacArthur that the love of Christ manifested in us is not by our doing, but the work of a Holy God. The commandment to love our enemies is dependent on Christ. Dr. MacArthur tells us in this sermon that there is no one who can live up to the standards set by God, but God has set a standard. We are to follow that standard in our everyday lives.

The Israelites were commanded to walk a different path that was not a path of the world. Dr. MacArthur speaks to our place as Christians. He speaks to our path and being set apart from the world “We are called on to be unique.” We are to live lives in Christ. We live lives not by worldly standards, but by Christ’s. Christians are unique in that each Christian has heard the Word of God and believes the Word is their Savior. As Dr. MacArthur alludes there is a change in the heart of Christians. No longer are we drawn to the flesh that is the way of the world, rather, we are drawn to The Way! Christians have been given the gift of freedom and are freed from the laws of the world. The traditions established by men are worldly laws and those are superseded by a perfect law. Dr. MacArthur’s sermon takes the audience through many conversations Jesus had with Pharisaical traditions. Dr. MacArthur points us to the Royal Law.

One of them, a lawyer, asked him a question, testing him. “Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the law?” Jesus said to him, “*You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your*

mind.' This is the first and great commandment. A second likewise is this, '*You shall love your neighbor as yourself.*' The whole law and the prophets depend on these two commandments." (Matthew 22:35-40, emphasis added)

Dr. MacArthur then links the Royal Law above with Paul's admonition in Romans 13.

Owe no one anything, *except to love one another; for he who loves his neighbor has fulfilled the law.* For the commandments, "You shall not commit adultery," "You shall not murder," "You shall not steal," "You shall not covet," and whatever other commandments there are, are all summed up in this saying, namely, "*You shall love your neighbor as yourself.*" Love doesn't harm a neighbor. Love therefore is the fulfillment of the law. (Romans 13:8-10, emphasis added)

It is impossible to escape the Truth. God is love. Christ Jesus is God. Jesus died in love with His creation in mind. He said, "Do not think that *I have come* to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but *to fulfill them.*" (Matthew 5:17, emphasis added)

Dr. MacArthur describes what "loving a neighbor as yourself" looks like. He points us to ourselves. He points out the extra care we take assuring our daily walk is spiritual and God honoring. We clean ourselves and groom ourselves. We meet our personal needs of hunger and thirst. In short, we love ourselves by caring for ourselves. "You are really working in your own behalf.... You're very concerned about your own welfare." We do not struggle seeking "our own pleasure.... We know of no limits to gaining what we want for ourselves."

About loving others as ourselves Dr. MacArthur says, exactly the way you're to love everybody else. Jesus said even your enemies. Dr. MacArthur preaches a high standard. He says, "Humanly speaking, it is impossible." Dr. MacArthur reiterates that loving others in the same way we love ourselves is not humanly possible. Loving another requires divine inspiration. The Royal Law Jesus preached was a Royal Law for

traditionalists and all others. It is a commandment given by One for all. This commandment is especially applicable to all who claim Christ as their King.

Dr. MacArthur preaches the traditionalist Pharisees had constructed barriers putting “riff-raff” and uneducated outside their group of neighbors to love. Christ Jesus told the Pharisees they were wrong to cast aside any other person, especially the “riff-raff.” The Pharisees thought highly of themselves. They held commitments to themselves and to their religion. They elevated themselves by means of their religion. Traditionalist Pharisees, Sadducees, Zealots and the like established rules for themselves. Dr. MacArthur is not suggesting that is the way of his congregation or the intent of his sermon. However, he goes forward teaching how the Israelite nation hated foreign nations.

Dr. MacArthur takes his audience to Psalm 69 and that section in which the Psalmist asks God to punish the Psalmist’s enemies. The Psalmist asks God “to make their table a snare for them....” He asks God to remove anything good He intended for them and to make that good a trap. He asks God to blind them and to cause his enemies to shake violently. He asks God to pour out His anger and wrath on the Psalmist’s enemies. And, he asks God to block them from ever entering heaven by blotting out their names from the “book of the living.”

Dr. MacArthur preaches there are conditions in which hating your enemies does not run counter to Christ’s admonition to love them. “Did this become a justification for the hatred of the Pharisees? Very possibly.” Justifying hatred for another misses the point of Christ’s commandment to love even your enemies. God commanded Israel to destroy the Canaanites from a judicial perspective. The Canaanites were violating Israel. The Psalmist was calling on God to right the wrong; to oppress the oppressing nation. Dr. MacArthur is making a distinction. He is preaching it is okay to hate nations, but not a person in a hated nation. The laws that God uses to hate Canaan or Samaria are not personal hatreds, but national hatreds. In Dr. MacArthur’s words we are not given license to despise any other. The Jews could not hate Canaan. He says, “What God does in His judicial act, does not change the fact that the same God who judged the Canaanites, loved every one of them with the same love

He loves you." Disciplining our children, even punishing them does not diminish our love for them.

Dr. MacArthur like Dr. Edwards before him advocates the doctrine of eternal conscious torment. God is Judge and Christ Jesus is His Judgment. Dr. MacArthur prays that enemies are touched by God and that he prays "God would save" them. Then, he says, "If God doesn't save him, that God would judge him so that he can bring Christ to be the rightful ruler of this world." Dr. MacArthur reminds us that Adam sinned and he was punished. Cain sinned and he was punished. "God loved the whole world, but He drowned them." He reminds us that God loved Sodom, but He punished them. "He burnt them to ashes." The Father loved His only begotten Son, but He let Him bear sin and die. Dr. MacArthur tells us that God has always and still "loves the world today, but He promises that it's going to go up in a flame some day." Dr. MacArthur closes his thoughts on this subject saying, "God loves you, but you'll spend an eternity in Hell if you don't know His Son."

"God loves, but...." Dr. MacArthur and Dr. Edwards agree God loves them. They agree God loves everyone unconditionally, but with conditions. Dr. Sawyer describes the contradictions and difficulties advocates for the doctrine like Dr. MacArthur and Dr. Edwards face. Why does God command us to love all, especially those who hate us? "Why He should command His saints on earth to love those whom He hates and proposes to damn forever?" is a question deserving an answer. Dr. Sawyer asks the same question another way. "Why Christ should enjoin it upon his disciples to love and bless and pray for and do good to those whom he himself did not love and for whom he did not die?" How is it reasonable that God demands His creation be more loving, forgiving, merciful than He is?

Dr. MacArthur explains away the difficulties by declaring the hatred he feels and the anger he exhibits is righteous, because those emotions are directed at preserving the righteousness of God. Personal hatred is unholy, but righteous indignation is laudable. He teaches it is appropriate to be "righteously indignant when somebody dishonors God." He relates righteous indignation to Christ's anger at the Temple. People were dishonoring God there and "Jesus came to defend the holiness and honor

of God with a whip. It was right.” In Dr. MacArthur’s view “there’s a difference between personal hatred and perfect hatred.”

Dr. MacArthur assumes his understanding is “the right” understanding. He is therefore free to express his righteous indignation at what he believes are slanders against Christ as Dr. MacArthur understands Him. Dr. MacArthur likely finds universal reconciliation to be an abomination. His opinions on the doctrine have been discussed previously. Dr. MacArthur finds universal reconciliation to be part of a great apostasy and those that advocate the doctrine are leading men away from God and from Christ.

Dr. Edwards, Dr. MacArthur and other great Bible scholars believe we are under a commandment to love. Dr. Sawyer quotes Dr. Edwards who writes, “We are commanded to love wicked men, and our enemies and persecutors here.” Here means in this world in our temporal flesh. It is appropriate to hate the unrepentant souls because “God never loved them.... He hates them.... And, they will be forever hated.” Dr. Edwards and Dr. MacArthur disagree only a little. Dr. Edwards teaches that God hated some at the time of their creation; “He never loved them.” Dr. MacArthur, however, believes God loves all, but that His love diminishes after a time. Dr. Edwards teaches the saints who have died before us are in heaven today and hating those who never knew God. In fact, Dr. Edwards teaches the saints in heaven rejoice at the torment being put upon the unrepentant rebels in hell.

Dr. Sawyer asks if it is God’s will that many will not be saved? Is it not a “waste of affection and prayers and good works...” because of our human ignorance of God’s will? We pray and our prayers ascend to heaven. We pray and the Holy Spirit carries our prayers to God. Are our prayers falling on deaf ears? The doctrine of eternal conscious torment negates prayer. Consider that most of God’s creation will never hear of Him and consider, too, that billions of people have already died ignorant of His grace upon grace. As Dr. Sawyer writes, “It is quite certain that far the larger part of all the love, all the prayers, and all the beneficence of the saints has been completely thrown away, and worse; and this, too, at the command of God!” Advocates of the doctrine tell us that God never loved those who He consigns to eternal conscious torment. “It would have saved them an immense amount of affection and kind offices, and

the growing habit of tenderness and good-will, which, when they enter President Edwards's heaven and take their places in glory, they will be obliged to eradicate and lay aside."

I shared my testimony as it relates to my mother's belief in Christ Jesus. The doctrine advocated by traditionalists demands that in heaven where holiness is pure I will rejoice as my mother is tormented by the hand of God Whom I love. Perish the thought. The doctrine requires the saved in heaven "will be obliged to strip them selves of all natural affection and other earthly attachments.... Everything will be strange to them. They will no longer love the greater number of those they loved before; and in God and Christ they will see little of that great love...." From heaven the saints will not love those they loved before. The lost son or daughter will be hated. The mother and the father who never knew Christ will be hated by their saved child. The child who rejects Christ Jesus will be hated by their mother and their father. Dr. Edwards believed saints in heaven would be given a greater love. Within that greater love is the capacity to hate those who hate God. No matter how much love the saints had for a wayward loved one, their hatred of them would be greater still. Those of us saved and living with Christ in His Kingdom will find happiness in the tortures put upon those we formerly loved. God forbid it.

Dr. Edwards claims God never loved those He condemns to hell and that God hates them forever. Some are, as Dr. Sawyer quotes Dr. Edwards, "appointed to everlasting life, and others left to everlasting death." Dr. Edwards' theology is that God created all. Some He created for the bliss of eternal life. Others, most, He created for eternal punishment. Dr. Sawyer cites Dr. Edwards who says, "God never loved them. He did not love them when he made them, and has never loved them since. He has always hated them, and will hate them forever.... God never loved them, and Christ never died for them. They have never had any real offers of mercy, and no genuine calls to repentance and salvation.... No salvation was ever provided or intended for them. God never did, or designed to do, them any good, for he never loved them."

This is the doctrine of eternal conscious torment. This is tradition. Very nearly every denomination calling itself Christian advocates this doctrine. It is Calvinist and it is Arminian. The doctrine demands that God's foreknowledge is incomplete and faulty. If only one person is

consigned to eternal conscious torment, then that torment is by the will of God. God would not be all-powerful as the will of that one man overcame God's will that all be saved. God would not be all knowing as He would not know the man who defies Him. God would not be ever present because His Word did not rest in that man's heart.

Eternal conscious torment is the doctrine of the majority of people claiming Christ is their Savior. It does not matter if a Christian believes He was created for eternal bliss or if the Christian believes he chose eternal bliss. The outcome is that he believes he and others like him are blessed in Christ and all others are condemned. It does not matter; not choosing or not chosen. Dr. Sawyer rightly concludes, "...The final result is equally certain in both cases, and God, who foresaw that result, created that human soul for that terrible destiny!"

The dilemma still exists. "How are the saints in heaven to be happy in the sight or knowledge of the torment of the damned in hell?" Dr. Sawyer offers us these words from the Reverend. Dr. Townsend who wrote, "How can I be happy in heaven if my child is in hell? is the blunt and awful question which the preacher is frequently called upon to answer."

Dr. Townsend does answer the question he posits. We have read how Dr. Edwards believes the question is answered. The theology advanced by Dr. Edwards and others of his theological underpinnings is that humans become inhuman or even un-human. Dr. Edwards' theology requires that saints are changed when entering heaven. They are changed from beings conscious of God's never ending mercy and unlimited grace to something far more ghoulish. "They grow suddenly hard, selfish, cruel, and monstrous, so as to rejoice in the sufferings of their fellow-beings, and even those bound to them by the strongest earthly ties, and claim to gain an accession of happiness from their intolerable torments." Dr. Edwards is sure. Dr. Townsend is not. Dr. Townsend writes, "We do not know exactly how a mother can be perfectly happy in heaven, whose son is in hell." In the minds of both, however, there are saints in heaven witnessing the torture of those they love in a place the good doctors call hell.

Dr. Townsend as Dr. Sawyer points out does not have an answer to the question of how a saintly mother can look down on her condemned child and still feel the epitome of relief in heaven. Rather than answer the question Dr. Townsend sets it aside for another question. His answer

obfuscates the truth. He writes we first have to decide "...whether the doctrine of endless punishment is true. Let that first be settled, then afterwards we will seek an explanation of minor considerations." The doctrine which Drs. Townsend, Edwards, MacArthur and others advocate is as Dr. Sawyer describes it. It is "a doctrine which outrages humanity and tramples underfoot the tenderest and best affections of our being – a doctrine which, in the light of our nature and relations, causes perplexity to settle down upon him like night whenever he honestly confronts it – becomes just in that degree more and more improbable, and hence demands clearer and more abundant evidence."

The evidence for the doctrine of eternal conscious torment is thin, but great preachers give it credibility. It's a doctrine that has so many facets that are plainly wrong. The great scholars cannot agree on the torments adjudicated by God against His creation. The scholars describe conditions of extreme torture to be put upon people by a loving God. Christianity is a religion of love. That is its foremost precept. God loves. Jesus loves. All that is ever created is created in love. It is a religion that teaches a mother to love her children and to love her enemy. The advocates of eternal conscious torment teach that a mother's love can be turned off. The love of Christ that she had for her child is no longer effective. The love that the Christian religion teaches her to have for strangers is greater than the love she held for her child.

The doctrine of eternal conscious torment allows the most heinous man ever created and who ever lived to be loved by his mother for a short while, but not by Christ. The worst men to ever have lived "are very little touched or moved by the doctrine's endless torments," as Dr. Sawyer writes. "It does not distress them.... They are never tortured with the question, 'How am I to be happy in heaven if those I love are in the torments of hell?'"

What is the likelihood God created beautifully obedient people who strive to love as He loves only to be made unhappy in life by the choices of their children? What kind of theology drives good people to cherish their children in life, but hate them in death? Being Christ-like is to be loving in all courses of daily life. Being Christian is to be a person doing the work of God. Being Christian is to be sure of God's love for our self and for all else in His creation. Dr. Sawyer asks, "Is it probable, then, that the

Author of our nature has given us a religion that makes the best among us the most unhappy? Is it reasonable to suppose that Christianity, which immeasurably quickens our sympathies, and invigorates and refines all our benevolent affections, is only fitted to wrench our nature, and torture the very powers it improves and sanctifies?”

The doctrine of eternal conscious torment is filled with contradictions such as these. The doctrine is thoroughly enmeshed in Western congregations and denominations. That doctrine is “orthodox.” That doctrine is a “tradition of men.” Dr. Edwards and learned theologians like him teach that our hatred of our children in hell is a relief given to us by God and that we should rejoice in their suffering. Moreover God is made holy by the torments and mothers rejoice at the pains inflicted on children in hell. Our Christian teachers are exposed. They study bad doctrine and they teach it as if it has always been true. Teachers espouse eternal torments upon people created by God. The doctrine is manufactured from poorly disguised devilish arguments. The doctrine demands God from His Throne in heaven direct exquisite goodness on some and extreme tortures on most. In all that Christians are to be “happy and blessed.”

Has God’s love for His creation been revealed in this doctrine of eternal conscious torment? Will the inhabitants of heaven rejoice in God’s glory and find greater joy watching the tormented in hell suffer more and more? It is hard to say which is the greater punishment.

I. NEVER ENDING TORMENTS UPON TORMENTS, TORTURE ADDED TO TORTURE

The orthodox and traditional view of eternal conscious torment requires the torments being executed by God be increasing in their pain. The pains will come from Satan, his minion horde, others condemned to hell and most significantly from God. The orthodox and traditional denominations and congregations have many disagreements, but on this...eternal conscious torment...they agree. The pains of punishment for rebellion against God are never dull and always increasing.

Dr. Sawyer gives us the words of Dr. Edwards regarding the infinite sorrows of hell. We have “no reason to suspect” that preachers of God’s

Word will soften the consequences of this doctrine. "There is no reason to suspect that ministers describe the misery of the wicked beyond what it is." There is no need to embellish the consequences of the condemned in eternal conscious torment. According to Dr. Edwards, "Scripture teaches that this is one end of ungodly men." It is the responsibility of the preacher of His Word "to show the dreadful power of God's wrath." Dr. Edwards adds, "Scripture teaches that the wrath of God on wicked men is dreadful beyond all that we can conceive." The description of the pains of punishment executed by God against those who hate him is severe enough. But, it is made all the more frightening in the tradition's lack of end. The torment never ends. If the punishment would be only for a time until discipline can take effect, then hell might make sense. The duration of the torment being eternal makes it an impossible doctrine.

Advocates of the doctrine tell us that if the punishment was discipline and lasted only for a time commensurate with the sins committed, few men would seek to avoid sin. The torments of eternal conscious torment could be borne. So many esteemed theologians cannot believe a loving Father would discipline His children and redeem the lost child. The punishment from God must be everlasting otherwise many would take the punishment and change nothing about their lives. There would be nothing to fear if hell is not forever! Are all these good men who profess to believe in the doctrine so good as to be exempt from the torments of hell? In their lives did they show Christ in their love for others? Were their lives so stellar as to be elevated to "idol" status? Dr. Sawyer suggests the advocates of this doctrine "look upon it [eternal conscious torment] as belonging chiefly to their neighbors.... They themselves have nothing to fear."

The traditional doctrine of eternal conscious torment is worthless without the eternity of it. Advocates of the doctrine teach that without eternal hell no one would be fearfully led to believe Christ's act of love first and foremost. The love of God is not sufficient a motivation to seek Him, but the fear of eternal wrath is. God is wrathful, vengeful, angry and deliberate. Believe or suffer His punishment. Before one can be saved by God that person must first believe in hell!

The advocates of universal reconciliation beliefs are contrary to orthodoxy and traditionalism. Because of their advocacy they are set

outside the camp as lepers. They will be let back into good Christian society once they have been cleansed of their doctrine. Because belief in a loving God is not the standard a belief in hell becomes paramount. Disagree with the orthodox traditional doctrine and suffer the consequences of being put out of the evangelical fellowship.

The doctrine of eternal conscious torment is a big deal. It is fundamental to traditional Christian belief. It is as certain as the existence of God. The doctrine of eternal conscious torment cannot be denied without consequences. If it is the denier is no longer welcome as a Christian. He is an apostate. The doctrine is defended vigorously and vehemently.

Dr. Sawyer gives us the words of many noted Bible scholars and scriptural authorities. These good men are convinced that the torments executed against the unsaved are eternal. The entirety of a man's body and soul are subjected to violence that never recedes, but always grows more intense. The unsaved is not pitied in any regard. That is the essence of eternal conscious torment. It is defended to the point there are separations between believers. The depth and breadth of the ocean is large, but even those are limited. There is a maximum. The oceans my regenerate with weather cycles, but there is an end to oceans. The description of the term of eternity is not lost in the language used by the doctrine's advocates. Eternal conscious torment is God's fury. It has no end and has no mercy in it. Nothing, according to the advocates of this doctrine, will end the torments. God will not show mercy on any level on any person confined to eternal punishment. The punishments will be horrendous and they will come and come and come again and again. An age is akin to a million ages. There is no point in time when eternity past can be remembered and nothing that will stop the eternity future. It is all the same point in time; eons before and eons after with nothing to hope for.

The Christian Research Institute (CRI) is an organization that defines their mission as dedicated "to provide Christians worldwide with carefully researched information and well-reasoned answers that encourage them in their faith and equip them to intelligently represent it to people influenced by ideas and teachings that assault or undermine orthodox, biblical Christianity." Robert A. Peterson prepared an article for CRI entitled, "The Dark Side of Eternity: Hell As Eternal Conscious

Punishment.”⁵¹ Mr. Peterson defines “traditionalism” and contrasts it with annihilationism otherwise known as “conditional immortality.” He calls the doctrine of eternal conscious torment “traditionalism.” He defines the doctrine of annihilationism as conditionalism. This is a doctrine that “holds the final punishment of the wicked is the extinction of their being.” The wicked under this doctrine simply cease to exist. Mr. Peterson rejects conditional immortality because “traditionalism is the historic view of the Christian church.”

Mr. Peterson seemingly has little difficulty telling his readers that he is a traditionalist and that the doctrine of eternal conscious torment is the traditional view. He supports his view with the words of other great scholars much in the same manner Dr. Sawyer uses the words of the advocates of eternal conscious torment to define its gravity. Mr. Peterson writes, “Hell is at the end of the day the darkness outside; dense like a black hole, it is the place of cosmic waste.” He writes there is no one with sufficient power or conscience to be excluded from the darkness of hell. “Our sufficiency is to be found in Christ.” He speaks as other traditionalist authorities do. “We must constantly remind ourselves that it is the Savior who spoke clearly of the dark side of eternity.”

The stalwarts of this theology should be pleased. Their teachings on eternal conscious torment prevail hundreds of years after them. Mr. Peterson here tells us that Christ Jesus gives us an ability “to endure the thought of unsaved persons suffering forever.” This is a critical point of Mr. Peterson’s claim concerning the validity of the doctrine he advocates. Where in scripture does a scholar of Mr. Peterson’s ability find a place that teaches Jesus gives an ability to ignore the tormented in hell? Moreover, Mr. Peterson insists Christians are to be witnesses to the reality of eternal conscious torment to prove their faithfulness to Him.

The doctrine of eternal conscious torment has not loosened its grip on Christian denominations and congregations. The advocates of this doctrine are convinced and their minds are difficult to change. The advocates of the doctrine describe torments of all kinds. The torments

⁵¹ Robert A. Peterson. “*The Dark Side of Eternity: Hell as Eternal Conscious Punishment.*” Christian Research Institute website. ca. 2007. <http://www.equip.org/article/the-dark-side-of-eternity-hell-as-eternal-conscious-punishment/>. Date accessed: 04/02/2018.

they describe are horrific and each is to last for eternity. There is seemingly no end to the ways in which eternal torture can be described. A bird's wing would have no effect on a cast iron surface. The number of days would never end if by only adding one to them. A tear a day stored in bottles enough to fill the oceans are not enough tears or days to sway a vengeful God to end the torments. Eternity is forever!

The ability of the damned in hell to comprehend the horrors put upon them by God will be enlarged and strengthened by God so as to cause the damned greater anguish than has already been described. The duration of their torments is hell. The descriptions of the duration of hell by Protestant Bible scholars is not far removed from the description offered by the Catholic branch of believing brothers. There is no respite from the torments put upon the rebel in hell. God will make the flames hotter and hotter. The evil man in hell will only know torment, but never satisfy the wrath of God. Fire upon fire and torture upon torture. Oceans of fire tossing the rebel into and out of waves of torment. No part of the rebel's body is left without being endlessly tortured. The advocates of this doctrine teach there is nothing; not even God, that will intervene. What these learned men describe are what they deem righteous acts of a Righteous Father. The advocates for the doctrine of eternal conscious torment are not slack in their descriptions of the tortures given by the Hand of God upon His creation. Their doctrine insists there is no hope, no relief, but only eternal misery of great proportions. All the pains of hell.... It is a sad doctrine.

J. DESPAIR ADDED TO DESPAIR, NO HOPE IN HELL

Hell's torments are preached as extreme and exhausting. There is not a torture that cannot be conjured in the minds of men that is extreme enough. It is not enough the rebellious unrepentant sinners never experience any kind of relief. All they have to look forward to is despair. The tormented in hell have no hope. There is nothing in the place created for Satan, his angels and death to bring the slightest relief. The hopelessness; this despair, is not only in the heart of the rebel, but it is also a despair God has for His created children. God is the source of

hope, yet he has none for those who reject Him. God is love, except for those He hates.

The advocates of the doctrine of eternal conscious torment teach there is nothing to mitigate the criminal's punishment. The lost man in hell will eternally think clearly on the sins for which he is being tortured. The rebels can never forget they once had the chance to love God, but they squandered their time. Now, all they will ever remember is the torments of a wrathful God. Traditionalist preachers are relieved they personally do have hope. But, the man who does not share their theology is condemned to hopelessness and ever increasing sorrow.

The torments of hell are never to end. The body, the soul, and the mind are forever receiving indignation and insult. Hope dies and dies again. The glimmer of hope compounds more hell upon hell because that glimmer will be made dark by God's wrath. Dr. Sawyer quotes the Reverend Mr. Swinden who teaches the unrepentant "shall be tortured with an absolute and complete despair of any better condition, or of the least relaxation from their pains, so much as a drop of water to cool their tongues tormented in these flames." The tormented in hell will be crushed and crushed again. They can only grieve what they might have had in Christ Jesus.

It is the doctrinal view of the traditionalists that the fires of hell do not destroy or consume life. In hell the fire is the wrath of God and His fire cannot be quenched in any fashion. The tortures of hell include the fire that burns and a fire that heals what it just whipped open. Fighting lightning is easier than subduing the fires of hell.

The advocates of this doctrine do not agree completely. Many of its advocates teach of overwhelming despair. Others teach the mind of the rebellious unrepentant sinner is cast into extreme anger. Some advocate hopelessness to the point of extreme sorrow. Others advocate an anger is whipped up in the rebellious that God is hated and Christ Jesus is rebuked. The advocates of this doctrine agree hell is a tormenting place. They are not in agreement about the emotional state of the damned there. Some are forever sorrowful in hopelessness. Others, cry out against God and continue to hate him. In both cases retribution for their evil ways is at hand.

K. THE DAMNED WISH AND PRAY TO DIE.

The doctrine of eternal conscious torment requires that God abandon much of His creation to a punishment without end. The punishment consists of fire burning, fire healing, body wracked with pain, emotional suffering of inordinate degree. The doctrine teaches eternal pain is superior judgment compared to annihilation. The traditionalists believe it is unreasonable to teach that ceasing to exist in any capacity, in heaven or in hell, is contrary to their orthodoxy.

God has given all of His creation a zeal for life and for living. In each person He creates He puts a desire to survive. It is a kind of survival instinct in a man who is diagnosed with a terminal disease who seeks any and all cures for his condition even if the cure is absurd in the minds of the general population. God has given His creation an innate desire to survive. Conditional immortality or Annihilationism is a doctrine that applies to others, but not to ourselves. We strive to survive in this life and we surrender life only knowing there is eternal life waiting for us. To die is acceptable when we believe this pass through life is temporary. The next phase is eternal.

Cultures all over the world have developed within them an afterlife. The termination of life as we know it is romanticized in many cultures. As Dr. Sawyer writes, "We cling to life with an instinctive tenacity, and, when we relinquish our hold upon it, it is only with the hope of renewing it in another state of being." Annihilation or ceasing to exist in any capacity is not something generally considered by men. It is not a possibility for ourselves, but maybe it is for others. The advocates of the doctrine of eternal conscious torment teach that people punished in hell are always screaming for an end. Conditional immortality would be preferable to the course of torments put on them by God.

There is another doctrine that is opposed to the doctrine of eternal punishment and to the doctrine of universal reconciliation. There are good minded men and women who believe God punishes the unrepentant rebel for a moment, but eventually disintegrates a body to the degree it never existed. Advocates of the doctrine of annihilation have grown as Dr. Sawyer points out. Today the doctrine is labeled Conditional Immortality (CI) and is gaining favor.

The good folks at “Got Questions” offer this answer to the question “What is conditional immortality.”⁵² They answer that “only the saved will live forever.”

Conditional immortality is more humane than the doctrine of eternal conscious torment. Ceasing to exist is a consequence far superior to eternal conscious torment. However, advocates of eternal conscious torment claim and describe conditions in hell that never end. Conditional immortality is not as disturbing to the advocates of eternal conscious torment as much as universal reconciliation upsets them. The article cited above from the folks at Got Questions tells us their ministry “rejects conditional immortality / conditionalism / annihilationism.” The good folks at Got Questions, as a ministry, “truly and fully believe that hell will be eternal conscious punishment for all who die without faith in Jesus Christ.” They do consider “conditional immortality as a valid viewpoint.” People who hold this view should not be considered heretics or “be shunned as not being brothers and sisters in Christ.” It is a good thing that the good men and women contributing to the success of reaching people through the Got Questions website willingly embrace some others who disagree with them regarding the doctrine they support.

Their view on universal reconciliation is not as accepting however. They write, “It becomes clear that Universal-ism and universal salvation are unbiblical beliefs. Universal-ism directly contradicts what Scripture teaches.”⁵³ The scholars at Got Questions are not unlike the other scholars advocating eternal conscious torment. They preach that the doctrine comes from “the words of Christ Himself.” These good minded folks are convinced eternal conscious torment is orthodox doctrine. They find universal reconciliation to be outside the Bible and contrary to what Christ teaches. They find universal reconciliation to be unbiblical, but conditional immortality is an acceptable division.

The teaching associated with eternal conscious torment requires a

⁵² “*What Is Conditional Immortality?*” GotQuestions.org Publication date unknown. <https://www.gotquestions.org/conditional-immortality.html>. Date accessed: 04/01/2018.

⁵³ “*Is Universalism/Universal Salvation Biblical?*” GotQuestions.org. Publication date unknown. <https://www.gotquestions.org/universalism.html>. Date accessed: 04/01/2018.

belief that death is not respite for the unrepentant sinner. A sick and dying man who rejects Christ cannot suffer enough. His body fails him and he is in pain. He is absent all joy. Death appears to be a way to be free of the pains of living. But, relief is not his to possess. The advocates of this doctrine teach that the man passes from pains of this world to perpetual tortures in the next. The pains of living pale to what God has in store for the unrepentant rebel. Men in hell desire annihilation! But, it is theirs only to wish for. The “wish” in itself is another torment put upon them by God. No relief to be expected or deserved. Dr. Edwards is again resourced by Dr. Sawyer as saying of the condemned and damned wishing they “might be turned into nothing.” Being nothing in hell is to be absolutely destroyed and that condition is preferable to eternal conscious torment.

The doctrine of eternal conscious torment indicates the unrepentant rebel will acknowledge his sins as he is being tormented. The evil man condemned to hell begs mercy, but there is no mercy in hell. Mercy is “dead.” There is no mercy from heaven. There is no love from heaven. Hell is dark and void of any Light. The dead in hell beg for annihilation, but there is no mercy. It has been previously written in this book how our benevolent Father in Heaven lets us see the tortures He puts upon our brothers, sisters, mothers and fathers in hell. The doctrine requires that our joy be full in the sights of the tormented beings in hell. There appears to be no mercy in the hearts of those who are saved either.

The advocates of eternal conscious torment preach that no less than Jesus Christ taught the doctrine. The doctrine is actually something developed by men. It is a tradition that is worthy of serious and severe examination. Dr. Sawyer quotes the authoritative Dr. Edwards who insists “the wicked shall not be unpunished.... The debt they owe to justice must be paid.” Christian men and women are to be pleased by this condition. We are to “love to see the wicked suffer.” They deserve punishment and God will justly execute His wrath over them. Punishment has only one end and that is retribution and the advocates of the doctrine call it Divine justice. Dr. Sawyer cites Dr. Edwards frequently and does here again. Dr. Edwards says, “One sin, every sin deserves eternal death and damnation, which, in the least degree of it, is the total destruction of the creature.” Death is never experienced in hell. There is only a wish for it. No matter how insignificant the sin the unrepentant sinner deserves all

that God will heap on him in hell. The rebel can never satisfy the debt. The advocates of this doctrine have to ignore the fact that Jesus died for the sins of the world.

The doctrine of eternal conscious torment teaches there is not a finite price to pay for the sins that have been covered by the Blood of Christ from the cross. The condition of the damned in hell is infinite. A sin committed once and never repented of endures the justice of eternal punishment. The unrepentant rebel is "always dying, but are never dead." Dr. Edwards says the condemned man "would never pay the whole debt." In eternal conscious torment the debt for a short life lived in sin is tortures beyond imagination for an interminable time. "Justice," says Dr. Edwards, "never can be actually satisfied in your damnation." Justice demands reparation, but justice for the condemned in hell is never satisfied. No amount of money could be given to the poor to satisfy God's justice.

CHAPTER 12

Eternal Torment Is the Just Punishment of Sin

Dr. Sawyer made a great effort gathering together the words of the advocates of eternal conscious torment. He reviewed reams of literature, notes, books, articles and sermon messages. He took from them the terms used by those who believe eternal conscious torment is a valid doctrine. All the descriptions mentioned to this point are “horrible beyond conception.” Unfortunately, men have indeed conceived them. It is agreed between universalists and traditionalists that God is Sovereign. He cannot work against Himself for He is morally perfect. Nothing the Lord of Hosts will do is unjust. In all things God is good and His justice is absolute. There are many people who have difficulty reconciling their belief that God is love with a knowledge that His justice is horrific. No matter how opposed God’s love is with His wrath the advocates of eternal conscious torment have rationalized a doctrine that opposes God. The scholars noted in this work are convinced hell is real.

Great men who love their congregations and who truly love their calling to serve the Lord have empty places within themselves. On one hand they preach a God of love, but then balance that with retribution from on high for those who do not believe as they do. The horrors extended to unrepentant men at the hand of God are seemingly simple things to talk about. Dr. Sawyer asks us to honestly reconsider the doctrine. Christians are convinced through and through that Christ

Jesus is the Son of God and that He is the propitiation for the sins of the whole world. We have no doubt that God is our Creator and Champion. We read His Word and believe He created all mankind in His image. He gifts all mankind with free will. He “endowed” us “with reason and the power of self determination.” Christians believe He created us as moral beings. He is our Governor. It is unquestioned that men have sinned since the beginning. Throughout history; from Adam in the Garden to this very moment, mankind sins against God. Dr. Sawyer rightly says, “All are more or less guilty of transgressing the divine laws.” All have sinned and come short of the glory of God.

There are conditions of the human race we agree on. We are men created in His image. He has given us free will and we are encouraged to exercise that will. Some will give God the honor He deserves and live lives they hope will bring joy to them in their eternal relationship with God. All that they try to do is fruitless, however, because none of us is able to execute a perfectly led life. Everyone falls short! The advocates of eternal conscious torment believe much the same as the advocates of universal reconciliation. All men fall short of the glory of God and there is nothing...no work...that can be done to resolve that problem outside the love of God. The paths between the advocates of each doctrine fork at the eternal end.

Traditionalist thought teaches that anything done contrary to the will of God is a sin. That sin, no matter how great or small, is infinite in its nature and requires an infinite resolution. Dr. Sawyer quotes Dr. Edwards who says, “...Every sin deserves eternal death for its punishment” and “...any sin deserves death and damnation, which, in the least degree of it, is the total destruction of the creature.” Dr. Sawyer provides us the affirmation of the Westminster Divines who say, “There is no sin so small but it deserves damnation;....” Moreover, the punishment is to be set apart “...from the comfortable presence of God.”

Human governments from the most dictatorial to the most free and benevolent find ways to punish those who transgress the laws of their respective governments. The institutions are hardly perfect in the development of laws governing the masses led by them. Executing the laws is an unfair and often unjust practice. There is always the problem of preferential treatment to persons or groups over others. But, in each

case there are gradations of violation. The advocates of the doctrine of eternal conscious torment do not allow for grades or levels of violence to God's Law. In their view the slightest sin is a serious, eternal sin against God. Any violation comes with a mandatory separation from God. The separation is eternal. There is not any more to be said or done to change the Administrator's Mind. Human governments allow for reformation of the character it punishes. Some pains of justice may include death, but even that justice has an end.

God creates imperfect children. Eternal conscious torment demands that each of His creation obey all His commands without any deviation. The imperfect child must behave perfectly. Dr. Sawyer asks we consider this proposition. "If God's-children do not obey him perfectly, he sends them to hell forever, which certainly proves decisive. It would seem more reasonable that a good and holy Being, loving holiness, would rather correct and improve his intelligent creatures than to consign them to a state where all moral improvement is impossible, and suffering is at once severe, unintermitted, without object, and without end." The doctrine's advocates do not think God is benevolent in this way. He is not so much a God Who disciplines His children, but a God Who tortures them for their wrongs done or thought. The advocates insist the saved have cause to rejoice as others, some they know, are endlessly tormented for even the mildest of sins. The advocates think it is dishonoring to God to challenge His justice.

The advocates of eternal conscious torment believe as Dr. Edwards. "Sin is heinous enough to deserve such a punishment" as tortures upon tortures without end. God is infinite and mankind has an infinite responsibility to obey Him. A sin, according to Dr. Edwards "is a violation of infinite obligation, and so is an infinite evil." That being the case the doctrine he advocates requires an infinite punishment. Is this a true argument? It is the argument of the traditionalist espousing the doctrine of eternal conscious torment. The argument is often seen in this work. All men sin. Sin is evil. All men are evil. Sin is an eternal object. Sin deserves an eternal judgment by an eternal Judge. All men are judged to deserve eternal torment. There is no escape for any man aside from the benevolent mercy given by the Judge.

Dr. Sawyer and most universalist scholars disagree with the argument

as laid out by the advocates of eternal conscious torment. The reputations of the advocates of this doctrine are stellar. They are widely followed and their works are studied worldwide. Dr. Sawyer, though, believed the advocates have built “the whole argument ... to be a house built upon sand.” The argument advocating eternal conscious torment “is built on a series of infinities.... God is infinite, and infinitely glorious, and infinitely worthy of love, honor, and obedience....” Believers give infinite praise, but unbelievers do not, will not and cannot. The rebellious and unrepentant are not forgiven and consequently their sin is “an infinite sin; and an infinite sin deserves an infinite punishment....”

The argument might be true if all created men were infinite, but obviously we are not. Dr. Sawyer writes, “Man is very clearly not a God of infinite capacities and powers, but a mere creature, of a finite nature, who talks about infinity, but cannot comprehend it, and whose obligations cannot transcend the limits God has assigned him.” Everything a man does or thinks is limited by his finite life. The argument that eternal torment is justice meted out to finite men “is not merely nonsense, but an absurdity.” What could a finite man produce to free himself from the punishment of eternal conscious torment? The advocates of the doctrine insist his sin is eternal and his punishment is justifiably appropriate. Does a loving parent not will to save the soul of the child who does not express love for Him? That is what the doctrine of eternal conscious torment teaches. God does not love those who do not love Him. The doctrine teaches an infinite Father wills that His finite child be tortured in the extreme forever!

Dr. Sawyer cites Jeremy Taylor who writes, “So foul and horrid a thing is mortal sin, in its own nature that though it passed only in thought, and none knew it but God and he who committed it, and which endured no longer than an instant, yet it deserves the torments of hell for all eternity.” A passing thought that opposes the will of God is sufficient to warrant eternal torture. There are two witnesses to the thought; God and the man. Only they heard it. If the man fails to repent of his thinking or simply forgets that he had a bad thought, then that man is justifiably sentenced to eternal conscious torment.

The advocates of eternal conscious torment are the parties establishing the premises for this argument. They are the parties teaching sin is

infinite. It is a premise that suits their wish to have others believe as they believe. Further, it is a premise they use to control their respective flocks. Is sin truly infinite? If it is not, the doctrine of eternal conscious torment is demonstrably false.

Dr. Sawyer offers a salient argument exposing the doctrine's falsity. Assume sin is infinite. That being the case the just punishment for sin is infinite by necessity. Is sin truly infinite? Where does the sin gain the attribute of infinity? Is it a violation of divine law? That cannot be. We cannot keep the law. Christ Jesus came to fulfill the law. Dr. Sawyer asks us to "suppose a human being to commit one sin only and that the least conceivable." Adjust the punishment to that sin; mild sin, mild punishment. The punishment is infinite and would be "least known in the 'world of woe', but endless in its duration." Is it not true that the punishment for the least sin is greater "suffering than has been endured by the whole human race?" Moreover is not the punishment for the mildest sin just beginning?

The traditional doctrine of eternal conscious torment is neatly summed up and its sum is not true. The least sin is suffered for eternity. The punishment far outweighs the crime. The Judge, being Righteous, administers the punishment. The worst sin is not punished greater than the least. Both are eternal and both are torture. Even in human reasoning justice is lost.

In a prison designed and managed by human hands there is some light of hope. In hell there is not any hope. In human prison the sin against society is punished for a time; a reasonable punishment. In hell the same sin not repented of is an infinite sin against God and there will be an infinite justice executed against the guilty man. The doctrine of eternal conscious torment makes humans more hospitable, more loving, more forgiving than God. The unforgiven sinner suffers the torments of hell, primarily the whips of flame from an eternal fire. The advocates of this doctrine teach the fire in hell is greater than any fire on earth. The advocates of this doctrine, as we have read, complement each other's descriptions of the torments of the flames of hell. In fact, they add miseries to the torments described by their contemporaries. In all, though, they are agreed the flame is tormenting and the flame is the judgment of God.

This is the doctrine of eternal conscious torment! Dr. Sawyer

uncovers a serious problem, not as much with the doctrine, but a problem for the advocates. Dr. Sawyer writes, "Men are to be terrified from sin, and frightened into religion and heaven; and the more dreadful the punishments before them, so much the more efficient the doctrine becomes.... The whole rank and file of the advocates of endless punishment... improved and refined the art of cruelty.... God will outdo them all! ... Hell is to be the masterwork of the Almighty."

Is God love? The advocates of this doctrine have to massage an answer to that simple question. God is love as He pertains to them. He is wrath, however, for those disagreeing with their varying theologies, doctrines and traditions. The advocates describe a vengeful ogre waiting to put upon His creation the worst kinds of pains imaginable. His "imagination" is infinite. The terrors of hell are not limited to anything man can devise.

We have a fondness in our hearts for our parents. It is a love kindled by their care for us when we were young. We speak of our earthly parents in terms that are pleasing. We look on our parents lives and we give them honor and we give them our love in return.

What father among you, if his son asks for a fish, will instead of a fish give him a serpent; or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him! (Luke 11:11-13)

These are the words of our Christ. Our Father in Heaven has our best interests in His mind. He will not give us trouble for trying. He will give us what we need. He will discipline us and He will encourage us. These words do not mean that our Father in Heaven will give a recalcitrant son a snake or a scorpion. That doctrine of eternal conscious torment dictates that our Father in Heaven will give much worse than snakes and scorpions to His children. This doctrine diminishes the love of God. God our Father puts upon His finite creation an infinite torture for failing to be a good, honoring child.

Dr. Sawyer explains, "It is not possible for a finite being to perform any infinite action, or any action of infinite desert, good or bad." Only

God is infinite. His infinity is love for God is love. His infinity is mercy for they are fresh every day. Dr. Sawyer properly asks, "In his works of power can we say with confidence that he could not do more than he has done; and in his works of grace is it not possible that he might have transcended all the exhibitions of his love?" In all things God acts "in accordance with his infinite wisdom and sovereign will." His justice is infinite, "but is infinite justice anything but perfect justice everywhere manifested.?" God is Just and all that He wills is justice. Our God's justice is infinite as His mercies are infinite. His justice is as He is, perfect.

The advocates for this doctrine preach that God's perfect justice is to torment a child who rebels. A human father would do nothing of the kind. A human father is not infinite and neither is his child. It is not justice to suffer consequences for sinning that are not proportional to the sin. Is it justice to suffer eternally for a sin as minor as a passing thought? Justice is proportionate to the crime, is it not? Dr. Sawyer reminds us, "The Scriptures uniformly represent the divine justice as proportioning the punishment to the sin punished. It renders to men 'according to their works,' 'he that doeth wrong shall receive for the wrong that he hath done.' 'Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?' If punishment exceeds the measure of guilt, it at once takes on the character of revenge. It loses its venerable aspect, and becomes an object of universal detestation. Every one, except him who is indulging this malignant passion, feels how brutal and base it is."

The doctrine of eternal conscious torment appeals to base passions in men. God gets no gratification from eternal torture. He finds no pleasure in it. There is no Biblical basis on which to hang the idea that God finds pleasure in torment. Eternal conscious torment is a doctrine in which God is "reduced to revenge."

Dr. Sawyer asks us to consider another condition. If we were able to find the worst man whose behavior towards others was the meanest ever known and, if that man lived to be 100 years old sinning without interruption the whole of his life the number of sins committed is finite. If we were able to find the best man who only sinned once by way of a passing thought, that man's sin is finite as well. There is no difference between the two men. One sinned in his thoughts only once. The other sinned much and for a long time. Both of them being unrepentant will

infinitely suffer the tortures of hell. This doctrine is not just. Add this thought to the others. What if the heinous man was saved on his death bed? All of his sins will be forgiven and forgotten. But, the single sinful thought of the other man will be remembered forever. This doctrine is not just.

Needless to say the doctrine of eternal conscious torment requires God maintain the lake of fire. Dr. Sawyer points again to Dr. Edwards who tells us that "God takes this sinner in hand." God then exacts punishment. God gives the worst sinner the worst degree of punishments. God punishes and punishes again. The man cannot be punished enough.

The doctrine of eternal conscious torment demands there be no possibility of repentance in hell. The doctrine's precept is eternal punishment. There is no reason to believe God will do anything to change the heart of the sinner in this doctrine. The advocates of the doctrine of eternal conscious torment teach God has a first hand role in executing justice on the unrepentant in hell. The purpose of eternal conscious torment is not remedial. God "punishes only to make His victim suffer and to show His power in thus making him suffer." The doctrine teaches God is glorified in the exertion of His power and punishments. God will hear no prayers. The doctrine teaches God's judgment is "bitter, unrelenting revenge that will yield not to expostulations, that will hear no prayers, that will show no mercy." The doctrine teaches, too, that the saved in heaven will have "eternal occasion for thanksgiving and joyous praise."

It is impossible to reconcile the doctrines of eternal conscious torment and universal reconciliation. God is love and His mercies are fresh every day. Only one of those doctrines agrees.

A. EVERY MAN DESERVES ENDLESS PUNISHMENT, NO EXCEPTIONS.

It is a basic doctrine in traditional Christian denominations and congregations that sin was introduced by Adam and Eve on the occasion of eating fruit from a specific tree in the Garden. They willfully disobeyed God's command to not eat that specific tree's fruit. By disobeying the command they subjected themselves to God's curse. Their transgression

then made them the first guilty sinners to, at worst, suffer eternal conscious torment or, at best, saved by a Savior. The deceiving serpent was cursed to crawl on his belly. Eve was cursed to suffer pain in childbirth, yet still desire her husband's company. The ground was cursed and Adam had to work the soil for his sustenance.

The doctrine of eternal conscious torment teaches Adam and Eve were the first to be condemned to death. Dr. Sawyer provides us the words of Dr. Edwards who wrote, "This was the death threatened in the law. This is to die, in the highest sense of the word. This is to die sensibly, to die and know it; to be sensible of the gloom of death." The Westminster confession of Dr. Sawyer's era is supportive of Dr. Edwards' view. The violators of that first command were "made subject to death, with all miseries, spiritual, temporal, and eternal." That first transgression formed the eternal outcome for the first Adam and his bride. They are, by the standards of the doctrine of eternal conscious torment, consigned to suffer torments in hell for flaunting their free will in the face of an Almighty Father. Bring back to your mind all the torments that have been described by the advocates of this doctrine. That is the fate of God's first created son. The advocates of this doctrine want us to believe the torments on Adam and on Eve are being executed against them now and forever more.

Dr. Sawyer argues as kindred of the first Adam. We should be on our knees begging for God to forgive their sin. It is not an insignificant matter. One man brought upon the Creator's world death so horrendous it should frighten all. Adam would be "the greatest criminal on earth." For his sin the doctrine demands his soul be consigned to eternal woe. Not Adam's soul only, but the souls of Eve and their children and all their children's children since their creation. At some point enough tormenting punishment is administered. More than that enrages our passions. A modern day father who disciplines his misbehaving son with lashes of hand or belt is looked upon as abusive. That father may suffer the indignities of a State sponsored investigation by an "expert" in family dynamics. That modern day father might be ostracized or worse have his child taken from him.

God did not create us to suffer. It is as Dr. Sawyer writes, "God has kindly ordered that one shall not live long in fire." Severe as the agony

may be, it is soon over. Even the stirred passions for fairness and desiring an end of suffering for our loved ones the doctrine of eternal conscious torment mandates even greater tortures on the unrepentant rebel. The traditional doctrine not only decrees the punishment for the first son of God, but that his transgression is passed on to every son through all creation. Dr. Sawyer writes of the doctrine, "This sin of Adam and Eve is imputed by our wise and gracious Creator to their children and children's children.... We are all born under the same 'wrath of God and curse of the law.'"

From where does a doctrine of eternal conscious torment get its root? The snake is cursed to crawl. Eve is cursed to suffer pain. The ground is cursed causing the man to work it...perhaps a kind of curse on the man. There is an end of physical life attached to the transgression; "...surely you will die." But, where does the doctrine of eternal conscious torment get its start? Is it from God? Let us remember that God commanded Adam and subsequently Eve to avoid a certain act. The consequences for disobeying were clearly stated; "...you will die." Does God ever say the consequences for your disobedience is eternal conscious torment and then describe what that looks like? He does not, at least, in the Genesis account of creation.

Dr. Sawyer writes that the doctrine is made up; it is manufactured by man. It is a doctrine rife with mystery and questionable interpretations. He writes, "Calvin and his school of divines boldly resolve it into the will of God." Calvin believed the Fall was ordained by God. It was not a subtle accident or devious plan of the devil. Dr. Sawyer quoted Calvin who writes, "The loss of salvation by the whole race, through the guilt of one parent, was an event that did not happen by nature.... The Scripture proclaims that all men were, in the person of their father, sentenced to eternal death. This, not being attributable to nature, it is evident must have proceeded from the wonderful counsel of God." Eternal sin, that is the sin originating from the first couple, is not spread as a matter of nature or biology. The doctrine of eternal conscious torment requires sin be transferred from the first couple as a matter of divine edict. Sin is divinely hereditary. The doctrine of eternal conscious torment suggests God is the source of sin.

Universal reconciliation does not make such a claim. Sin against

God is a spiritual issue not an issue of heredity. We do not inherit the sin of our parents. We do not inherit the nature of sin from them either. The doctrine of eternal conscious torment insists God ordained the transgression of Adam and Eve and their sin is put into all our heavenly accounts. The only means to balance the account with God is to have the punishment for sin removed. Dr. Calvin and many who support his theological perspective teach as Dr. Sawyer quotes him, "...that all men were, in the person of their father sentenced to eternal death." The first created son is created without sin, but takes sin into himself. The consequence of that first sin of disobedience in the minds of the advocates of the doctrine is an inherited damnation into eternal punishment. All this is ordained by God.

Dr. Sawyer argues against an inherited sin from the pages of God's Holy Word. It is a common "principle of ethics...that the innocent cannot be punished for the guilty." It was a law codified by Moses, who wrote, "The fathers shall not be put to death for the children, neither shall the children be put to death for the fathers, every man shall be put to death for his own sin." Moreover God says:

Behold, all souls are mine; as the soul of the father, so also the soul of the son is mine: the soul who sins, he shall die.... (Exekiel 18:4)

...The soul who sins, he shall die: the son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son; the righteousness of the righteous shall be on him, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be on him. (Exekiel 18:20)

It is to be clearly understood as Dr. Sawyer writes, "Sin and its punishment are strictly personal affairs." My father's sins are not mine to bear. My sins are mine to bear. My Dad died at age 84 in 2016. He died knowing Christ is his Savior and I am convinced his spirit is with God in heaven. My Dad was not an exemplary man. His history is rife with debris in its wake. He hurt a lot of people. I cannot be held responsible for the sins of my Dad. It is common sense as well as proven by Scripture. The sins of every person are their own sins to bear. Consequently, no man

can be punished for the sins of Adam in the Garden. Dr. Sawyer writes, "No man can sin for another, or be punished for another." The doctrine of eternal conscious torment obliterates this simple precept by insisting we all suffer because Adam did not maintain his station with God.

Scriptures do not teach an inherited sin. Scriptures do not teach that any man will be punished for the sins of another man. In fact, Scriptures teach precisely the opposite.

Therefore you are without excuse, O man, *whoever you are who judge. For in that which you judge another, you condemn yourself. For you who judge practice the same things.* We know that the judgment of God is according to truth against those who practice such things. Do you think this, O man *who judges those who practice such things, and do the same*, that you will escape the judgment of God? Or do you despise the riches of his goodness, forbearance, and patience, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance? *But according to your hardness and unrepentant heart you are treasuring up for yourself wrath in the day of wrath, revelation, and of the righteous judgment of God; who "will pay back to everyone according to their works:"* to those who by patience in well-doing seek for glory, honor, and incorruptibility, eternal life; but to those who are self-seeking, and don't obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, will be wrath and indignation, oppression and anguish, on every soul of man who works evil, to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. But glory, honor, and peace go to every man who works good, to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. *For there is no partiality with God.* (Romans 2:1-11, emphasis added)

Which is true? Is Dr. Calvin and the traditional view that all men inherit sin from Adam true? Is Paul teaching the Truth? Both cannot be right. Both doctrines cannot exist in the same space. Eternal conscious torment demands a belief that we are born with sin and are already

condemned to hell. The Holy Word of God teaches in Romans above that God judges all according to their individual works.

The traditional view of eternal conscious torment develops a new kind of sin. It is a sin not mentioned in Scripture and it is a sin that a human mind should not acknowledge. This new kind of sin is what the traditionalist theologians call “original sin” or “birth sin.” Dr. Sawyer writes, “It is not anything we have done, nor anything we could avoid, but something inflicted upon us by the will of God, and for which we are held responsible, and, as Calvin says, ‘sentenced to eternal death.’” The advocates of the doctrine teach “we are, unfortunately, born sinners, born guilty of offending God, born heirs of damnation!”

The doctrine of original sin necessarily precedes the doctrine of eternal conscious torment. Biblical scholars of the modern era include original sin as the cause of eternal punishment. Matt Slick is a well known Christian apologist. He answers the question, “What Is Original Sin?”⁵⁴ He tells his audience that original sin has two components. The first rests in “the Fall of Adam as the original sin.” The second element Mr. Slick identifies is “the hereditary fallen nature and moral corruptions that is passed down from Adam to his descendants.” Considering the verses cited from Romans above it is hard to square Mr. Slick’s definition with Scripture. Mr. Slick argues, “Adam, the first man, is the one who sinned and thus caused sin to enter the world.” Mr. Slick teaches Adam “is the Federal Head” and as such is “representative of mankind.” Adam’s name means “mankind.” Adam’s transgression, his disobedience, “included or represented all of humanity.” He cites Romans 5:12 that teaches that “through one man sin entered into the world and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned.” It is unfortunate Mr. Slick did not include more of Paul’s letter to the Romans.

*For if by the trespass of the one, death reigned through the one;
so much more will those who receive the abundance
of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life
through the one, Jesus Christ. So then as through one*

⁵⁴ Matt Slick. “What Is Original Sin?” Christian Apologetics Research Ministry (CARM.org). Publication date: 12/10/2008. <https://carm.org/what-is-original-sin>. Date accessed: 04/02/2018.

trespass, all men were condemned; even so *through one act of righteousness, all men were justified to life*. For as through the one man's disobedience many were made sinners, even so through the obedience of the one, many will be made righteous. (Romans 5:17-18, emphasis added)

It seems to me unworthy to preach on one hand that Adam's sin, "Federal Headship" or not, is passed by the will of God onto the whole of His creation, but that the whole of God's creation is not made righteous by the act of One righteous man! Mr. Slick is an ardent supporter of John Calvin. He teaches the precepts Dr. Calvin developed regarding Christian doctrines. Mr. Slick concludes "The idea of original sin has been questioned." His concern is that Christian doctrines, doctrines like eternal conscious torment, have suffered "man centered theology." In some fashion the concept of free will "is elevated to a position it should not hold." He suggests that the governments of men, the liberties of governments, the cultures of societies have found their way into the practices of the churches. He is concerned "the idea that Adam represented us (Federal headship) and we fell because of his sin and inherited a sinful nature and are suffering because of it is not taught as often as it used to be. In fact, it's coming under attack."

The advocates of the doctrine of eternal conscious torment insist it is God Who placed this curse on all mankind because of one man's transgression. Dr. Sawyer cites Dr. Calvin who declares, "...It came to pass that the fall of Adam, independent of any remedy, should involve so many nations and their infant children in eternal death." Dr. Calvin believes it is the will of God. It is Calvin's theology that proclaims, "No one can deny that God foreknew the future final fate of man before He created him." God knows all. Dr. Calvin does not make any qualifications for infants born into the world. They are condemned to hell and by way of his doctrine infants will suffer eternal punishment at the hands of their loving heavenly Father. Ostensibly, God created infants specifically to torment them.

Why can I not see this Holy morality play in my mind? Why does it seem so immoral to my good sense? How can I rationalize my gratitude for His grace toward me, but His grace does not apply to an infant lost

in child birth or even after a short time living? Dr. Sawyer had the same dilemma. He writes that Augustine's position predates Calvin. Augustine insists, "We have lost the perception of that most exalted and purest wisdom by which we could apprehend how great a sin was committed in that first transgression." It challenges our senses. We must be dull. Adam's sin was so severe that it is now passed from father to child. It is Augustine who wrote, "The whole mass of the human race is damned."

B. ALL ARE BORN TOTALLY DEPRAVED, YET ARE REQUIRED TO KEEP A HOLY LAW.

Dr. Sawyer has described well the condition of the human race as seen by the advocates of the doctrine of eternal conscious torment. The world was chaotic in 1879 and it is not any less chaotic in 2018. The condition of all men is the same as the first born of Adam and Eve. The doctrine of eternal conscious torment demands all persons born are guilty of "original sin." The sentence for each person is eternal conscious torment. The doctrine requires all men be born totally depraved. There is no low we can fall to in life as we are born into the lowest station of life. We live in a world where laws are Holy and just. The purpose of the laws is to guide us to live perfectly in obedience to them. There is nothing about us in our birth that removes the fate of eternal punishment. We are bound to it. We are born and eternal conscious torment is our fate. To avoid our fate the doctrine demands perfect submission to the law. The law is what we strive to fulfill until we are led to believe Christ Jesus is The Atonement for our hereditary imperfection. Fail to obey the law and live the fate you were born into.

The doctrine of eternal conscious torment teaches Adam and Eve were righteous as God is righteous, but they lost all righteousness when they disobeyed. Adam and Eve no longer had communion with God. Sin had entered into the Garden and God cursed His creation. The doctrine insists that the sin committed by Adam and Eve became apart of their nature. Consequently, sin was transferred into the nature of every other person created by God. The doctrine of eternal conscious torment teaches that our inheritance from Adam is frightfully encumbered. Dr. Sawyer writes we "come into the world under the wrath and curse of God and

heirs of endless damnation.” To make matters worse “we are utterly incapable of doing anything to help ourselves.” Dr. Sawyer profoundly states, “To sin is as natural to us as to breathe, and as necessary; and we can no more live and avoid one than the other. Yet God demands an obedience to all his laws that shall be at once ready and perfect!”

I cannot be the only Christian shaking my head at this problem. This issue should cause us all to at least doubt the doctrine of eternal conscious torment. God creates every human being. He “knits” us all in our mother’s wombs. The doctrine insists He builds us with sin as a part of our nature. He builds us to be burnt as chaff. God deems we carry Adam’s sin in our nature. We are subject to our passions and yet mandated to obey all the law. We have a moral duty to be good as God is good, but every kind of human obstacle is placed in our path. We are born totally depraved.

Who can keep the law? Not one has been created who can! Will a father whose child is born without legs insist his child “should run and play with other children?” When that child fails as surely he will is it right to expect that child’s father to punish him for his disability? Does the father of a child born blind expect his child to read as other children do? Dr. Sawyer said, “What is beyond our powers is impossible to us, whether in the realm of the physical or the moral, and it is unreasonable to require it.” Yet, the advocates of the doctrine of eternal conscious torment teach the unreasonable.

The condition of a human at birth is terribly disadvantaged. Many advocates of eternal conscious torment teach that God chooses those He will save from eternal punishment. Many other advocates teach that a man exercising his freedom to choose will choose God. All others suffer the fate for which they are created. That is their doctrine.

Dr. Sawyer quotes Dr. Hodge who is famous for his work in systematic theology. Dr. Hodge wrote, “The Bible uniformly represents men in their natural state, since the fall, as blind, deaf, and spiritually dead, from which state they can no more deliver themselves than one born blind can open his own eyes, or one corrupting in the grave can restore himself to life.” Dr. Sawyer disagrees and rightly so. The Bible is full of moral judgments made by men. Good moral character is rewarded and bad moral character is not. Men are able to hear the rules and to choose to

live by them. They see the consequences of actions and determine right from wrong. Mankind has within him a blessing to worship or not. Men are not created with the ability to live according to moral law.

God's Word is replete with Scriptures speaking directly to man as moral. Men, obviously, have within them the ability to recognize right and wrong. Dr. Sawyer asks, "Are we, indeed, to believe that God is so unreasonable a master as to demand of a blind man that he shall see, or of a dead man that he shall live? And especially are we to believe that for not doing what we acknowledge is simply impossible, God is so unjust as to threaten and inflict endless torments?"

We circle back to the doctrine of original sin. The Bible teaches that men have the ability to choose right and wrong. They have the ability to measure what is in their best interests over the interests of others. Preachers do it. Doctors do it. Laymen do it. God created us with these characteristics. We, in fact, are 'disabled' children. We are the blind, the deaf, the infirm. Shall we conclude God expects us to live a perfect life and when we do not we suffer what He intended all along; eternal conscious torment?

Dr. Edwards is cited as teaching, "We may learn how dismal are the effects which the fall of man has brought upon the world. It has brought all mankind into this dreadful condition of which we have heard.... This world lies under a curse." The world is corrupt and therefore all things, all persons, ever created are tainted by this corruption. Dr. Edwards believes the world "which has been infused into and spread over the man. He has been bitten by fiery serpent, whose bite issues in a most tormenting death." The poison of Satan in Adam and from Adam all sin flows.

The doctrine of eternal conscious torment demands Adam's kinship with God is lost and now Adam is as much a reprobate as any other. Dr. Sawyer writes that the doctrine defines Adam. "He is a child of the Devil; he has no God, at least no friend in God: God is his constant enemy. He is in danger of destruction at any moment." The doctrine of eternal conscious torment insists this is the natural condition of men created by God. All of us from Adam forward possess this nature. Dr. Edwards gives an analogy that we as "natural men hang over the pit of hell, as it were, by a thread that has a moth continually gnawing it. They know not when it will snap in twain and let them drop.... A natural man never goes to

sleep but he is in danger of waking up in hell." That would be sufficient enough danger in life always knowing that one mistake; one sin at the wrong time will result in eternal conscious torment. Who holds the other end of the string?

The doctrine teaches a man is born totally depraved and does not have the capacity to change his character. The sins of each day are multiplied and the punishment that is eternal already is compounded to more eternal tortures. Dr. Sawyer invites us to consider the ramifications of this doctrine. Man "is born totally depraved, and, according to the theory, is as unable to obey God, to repent, to do a good act, or think a good thought, as a man born blind is to open his own eyes, or a dead man to raise himself to life!" He then asks, "Is it possible to conceive of a moral government more unreasonable or more unjust?" If a man remains outside the camp and is not converted to Christianity then that man suffers what God created for him suffer.

Calvinists tell us that it is God Who converts and has already. But, not all are converted. Arminians tell us that we choose conversion or not. Still, not all are converted. Calvinists teach man has no choice. The unconverted are unable to save themselves. They do not have the required moral character to see God as Almighty Judge. Only God can help them, but by their doctrine He will not. The unconverted, people who do not know God or His purpose, created by Him suffer a fate He demands of them; eternal conscious torment. The same conclusion rests in the theology of the Arminians. The only difference is in where the choice lies.

Who has the ability to reason why God does not save the unrepentant sinner? None do! God's purpose will be done. His will will be done. The doctrine demands that God's love be absolute for some and conditional for others. The advocates of the doctrine must conclude God's government is punishing and dark. But, God is light and in Him there is no darkness at all.

Calvinism and Arminianism agree that God has the power to save all. They teach that He will not. They preach God's moral judgment is too severe and prevents Him from doing so. It is as if God desires that all be saved, but He cannot claim His desire. The real difficulty is in the minds of men. It is in their traditions that excuses are made. They have

to conclude God is not ultimately benevolent to all. He must be a fearful, vengeful God if His government is to work in the world to come. The advocates of this doctrine have to limit God's power and His purpose. It is important to note that God saves the Calvinist and the Arminian. All others are a different story.

Our souls are gifts from God. He added them to us as He created us. Dr. Sawyer writes, "God made that soul to mirror his own perfections, and reflect his glory; and do you think he will finally be disappointed? He has in his possession all the resources of the universe, and before him all time, and all eternity, if need be, for doing his work and accomplishing his pleasure."

C. THE DESTINY OF ALL SOULS IRREVOCABLY FIXED AT DEATH.

The doctrine of eternal conscious torment insists there is no other opportunity after death to change the course of eternity. Every person at death is either destined for an eternal life with Christ in heaven or destined to eternal conscious torment at the hand of God. There is nothing that can save the unsaved. There is not any form of repentance allowable or considered. Death, our last breath was our last opportunity. Dr. Sawyer quotes Clement of Rome who says, "After we depart from this life we can no longer make confession or repent." Then there is this citation from Augustine. "God has given men only the time of this life for obtaining eternal life." One short span of time, a vapor, to live in our natural bodies determines our eternal fate. The doctrines of probation and Purgatory accept this precept as true. Purgatory is a Roman Catholic tradition. Purgatory applies only to men and women who are numbered in the Roman church. Purgatory requires a person be Catholic.

The traditions of the Roman church and the traditions of the Protestant churches agree that a person cannot be saved from hell. Dr. Sawyer explains both traditions believe "the grace of God is confined to this present life." The doctrine of eternal conscious torment teaches Christ's power to save is limited only to people alive in the world. The advocates of this doctrine insist that once a person dies his lot is cast and

his future is “iron clad.” No amount of prayer or wishful thinking will change God’s mind.

The Reverend Ken Jones is a contributor to the Ligonier Ministries website and is Senior Pastor at Glendale Missionary Baptist Church in Miami, Florida. Mr. Jones prepared an article for the Ligonier website entitled “The Final Exile.”⁵⁵ He writes about eternal conscious torment and calls it hell. He says there are “two things about hell. First, it is the final exile for those who remain in rebellion against God and refuse to repent. Second, what will be consummated in hell has its origins in time.” Rev. Jones’ belief about eternal conscious torment is aligned with other advocates of the doctrine. Mr. Jones believes unbelieving rebels will be sentenced to hell as their “final exile.” Mr. Jones believes and advocates a doctrine that insists there are not any other chances for redemption once a person is condemned to hell. He is dead to life and to opportunity.

Rev. Jones makes a case that being exiled to hell is to be banished from God’s presence. He says there are two distinct outcomes for mankind. “Heaven as the place for God and the saints, and hell as the place for Satan and sinners.” Rev. Jones discounts what other advocates say about the devil being the primary agent of torment in hell. He suggests, rightly so, it is not supported by scripture. He writes, “God is omnipresent, which means there is no place where He is not. God’s presence is inescapable.” On that we agree. We learn from Rev. Jones that Satan is not the administrator of justice in hell. That is God’s role and it is under His authority that men are punished there. For Satan to be the primary god in hell would be to reward him. Satan would be rewarded “because he delights in making men miserable.” Hell is a place for those banished to it. They are exiled from heaven and consigned to eternal conscious torment.

Rev. Jones asks us to review the opening chapters of Genesis. The record of God’s creation is in the first two chapters. Days one through six are described and each day is good. The Fall of Man is recorded in chapter three. Eve is tempted by Satan to eat the fruit of the tree she and Adam were commanded by God to not eat. She did. Adam did. Rev. Jones explains Adam and Eve “were plunged into a state of sin.” Like others

⁵⁵ Ken Jones, Pastor. “*The Final Exile.*” *Tabletalk Magazine* (Ligonier Ministries website). December 1, 2010. <https://www.ligonier.org/learn/articles/final-exile/>. Date accessed: 04/02/2018.

advocating the doctrine Rev. Jones writes, “We see the manifold effects of their rebellion, which is now shared by all of their progeny.”

Rev. Jones defines two positive aspects of this event in Scripture. We learn of the coming of a Messiah. With that coming of Christ is the gift of salvation. The conditions of mankind will be forever changed when the Messiah comes. That is the first positive from the Fall. The second positive aspect is that God sacrifices an animal to cover the first couple’s naked shame. He calls it “the concept of substitutionary sacrifice.” Christ Jesus died for the sins of the world. Christ Jesus is the “substitute” in place of man. He is the Lamb sacrificed. His is the Blood shed. The sacrifice provided by God in The Garden for the sins of mankind is a picture of the Sacrifice provided by God for the sins of the whole world nearly 4000 years later. Blood shed for the forgiveness of sin. Rev. Jones writes of the disposition of Adam (mankind) after the sacrifice of the beast. Adam and Eve are put out of the Garden. He equates this banishment with hell. He calls that “man’s initial exile” and tells us the exile “is culminated and consummated in hell.”

God created Adam (mankind) knowing his inability to obey the Creator’s command, especially the command to not eat a specific fruit from a specific tree. Mankind (Adam) is given proof of God’s love for him by the sacrifice of the beast and the blood shed. Adam (mankind) now knows God will set all things right and His order will be restored. It is Rev. Jones’ doctrine that teaches Adam and mankind will always be “alienated from intimate continual fellowship with Him,” but also that “... he will be returned to the garden.” There is nothing in this accounting of Scripture that points to eternal punishment. God covered mankind and punishes the first man and his wife by removing them from the Garden. The Garden still exists and is protected by angels. Rev. Jones advocates a doctrine that teaches “intimate continual fellowship” with God is no longer available to mankind. Is that true? If so, how is it Adam’s sons know to give sacrificial offerings to the Lord?

We know Abel gave the best of his flock, but Cain gave the worst of his harvest to God. We know from Scripture Cain was deeply offended to the degree he murdered his brother Abel. We know Cain had a conversation with God and that God banished him to wander, but with a

seal of protection. God does not tell Cain to repent or be cast into eternal fire and torments.

Rev. Jones relates the banishment from the Garden and ostensibly from the "intimate continual fellowship" with God to the New Testament world. He writes that mankind is in a fallen state "separated from Christ" hopeless and without God. This condition continues to this moment of this day. He tells us, "All unbelievers are presently exiled from the place of proper fellowship with God.... Unbelievers are in exile and are therefore under condemnation.... Hell is the consummation of the wrath they are presently under; it is the culmination of the rebel status that made them exiles in the first place.... They have no desire to live for Him, and in hell they will live without His peace, joy, and love."

Unbelievers are already suffering God's wrath by Rev. Jones' reckoning. They have no joy in spiritual things because they do not express a need or want of spiritual things. Other great scholars, as we have seen, describe God's wrath as tormenting and torturous in hell, but according to Rev. Jones, the rebellious unrepentant person is already living in hell. It is, according to Rev. Jones, important to teach the ramifications of eternal exile out of fellowship with God. That "terror of God" serves to persuade men to love Him and to seek Him. If the unbeliever cannot be frightened enough to believe, then his eternal lot is cast and his punishment is permanently fixed. There is no other chance to regain what Adam lost.

The doctrine of eternal conscious torment insists that at death all opportunities for repentance and forgiveness are closed. God's mercy ends at death. The unrepentant rebellious sinner is forever damned. Death closes the book. It is torment to die never knowing when the blade will fall.

The doctrine of eternal conscious torment starts with the events at the Fall of Mankind in the Garden. Every creature born from Eve is born with a sin nature. If a human dies unrepentant he is confined to hell. That condemned man cannot express any kind of love toward God or any other because hell is without any kind of love. The condemned man cannot pray for any other unlike the rich man was able to pray Abraham would send Lazarus to warn the rich man's brothers. In hell there is no law. Without law there cannot be transgression. Without transgression

there can be no sin. Without sin there is not a punishing place like hell. A fellow steeped in the horror of torture in hell does not know why and that is another hellish torment put upon him.

If God causes the words “every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that He is Lord” can we add “unless you are in hell?” This concept or doctrine is known as Probation. We are created and are put on a very short timetable. We are being judged as we live and hopefully we will have scored well enough to satisfy God’s Holy probation and the sentence of eternal punishment is dismissed.

Dr. Sawyer points out the inequality of the doctrine of probation. Consider that one man is born of Christian parents and receives Christ-like instruction. A second man is born in a land that has never heard the Gospel and therefore cannot be Christian. Consider also the number of years any man lives. It could be a life of 100 years, 50, 10, 100 days or one day. Dr. Sawyer writes, “Each human being has his lifetime here to form his character and prepare for the final judgment and its everlasting awards! And as he is found at the moment of death, so his destiny is determined for eternity.”

Early on in this work we discussed three circumstances of life in disadvantaged lands. Of those three Julie Ferwerda gave us the poignant picture of an abandoned Hindu girl. Nothing in her life would prepare her for Christ-like living. It is highly improbable the young girl would ever be given the Gospel of Christ Jesus. Her probation would be a failure and the consequences are eternal torture. The doctrine of eternal conscious torment could never torment her enough.

The longest life ever lived is subjected to the probation of living. The longest life in human terms is vapor when compared to the eternity of eternal conscious torment. The doctrine of eternal conscious torment declares that when time for a man expires there is not another chance to appeal to God. There is no time left to repent. There is no time left to worship. There is no time left to learn of God’s grace and of Christ Jesus’ love given on the Cross. At the end of the rebel’s time is only hell and eternal conscious torment.

Dr. Sawyer asks if it is “possible that men who entertain this opinion have ever seriously thought upon it, and so contemplated its character and consequences as to enable them in any degree to apprehend its enormity?”

The outcome for the unrepentant rebel is swift judgment and conviction. The numbers of unrepentant persons is too great to comprehend, but each is immediately confined to the torments of hell. Most people are never exposed to the truth that is Christ Jesus and the doctrine of eternal conscious torment insures they will only know Him as tormentor. They will never know Him as love.

In 1879 Dr. Sawyer completed and published his work which has been followed closely in this effort. He exposes the doctrine of eternal conscious torment using the words of those who advocate it. Light is shed on the doctrine and its falsity is exposed by the words of those who advocate it. Dr. Sawyer asks a serious question and he provides a reasonable answer. What are the consequences of the doctrine of eternal conscious torment? Is there a reasonable way to count those who are saved for heaven? The balance are consigned to hell by a loving God. What is that number? Dr. Sawyer cites Dr. Hodge who said, "It is more congenial with the nature of God to bless than to curse, to save than to destroy." In light of the principle given by Dr. Hodge, Dr Sawyer asks, "How large a portion of the human race must be hopelessly lost, if God's grace is, as they generally maintain, confined exclusively to this world."

God's loving grace and eternal mercy are limited by the advocates of the doctrine of eternal conscious torment. Only persons who hear the Gospel of salvation and properly respond to it are assured eternal life in the presence of the Lord. Not a single soul can be saved outside its lifetime. Unrepentant rebellious men and all the others like them are sentenced to eternal tortures. The advocates of this doctrine are not stirred in their hearts when considering the magnitude of the number of persons their doctrine commits to hell. Dr. Sawyer quotes Neander who called this "the Christian conscience." The people condemned by a loving Father to an eternal hell are simply lost and lost of their own accord.

Before Christ Jesus was given to the world the whole of that world was unwashed and unsaved. All those who lived before Christ Jesus are under the curse without hope. Exclude the Israelites from this number and "this wide-spread and continuous damnation becomes somewhat startling." Israel was the smallest nation on the world and that was the criteria used by God to choose that nation as the means to show Himself to the world. God did not choose them because of their great power or

prowess. He did choose them because they were small. All things done for them that came from heaven's throne are seen for the magnificent acts they are. Even "divorcing" Israel is seen in its glory when God reclaims His Bride.

Condemning people to hell is not the thought of good Christian people. It is not God's thought. He is infinite in wisdom and goodness. He is love. As Christians we have to force our minds to believe God on one hand will save a wretched man like Paul, but condemn whole nations to eternal torment on the other. It is unreasonable for human thinking to prove God died for the sins of the world, but to then preach that He did not really. The traditional doctrine of eternal conscious torment is supposed to be universally believed as fact even though it fails to make human sense. Unrepentant, rebellious men, women and children are condemned by their Creator to eternal tortures. Unbelievers are damned to hell. Christian denominations and congregations of the world hold fast to the doctrine and are seemingly unwilling to address problems with it. Dr. Sawyer writes, "Protestant churches have, for the greater part, followed, apparently without thought or inquiry, in the footsteps of that venerable mother the Roman Catholic Church."

Dr. Sawyer provides information regarding the success of missions to the lost in 1879. A missions board determined 500,000,000 persons did not respond to the Gospel of Christ and are now in eternal conscious torment. Things have not gotten better in the nearly 140 years since Dr. Sawyer cited these numbers. The Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) sponsors a missionary program named for its greatest woman missionary; perhaps that denomination's greatest missionary, Lottie Moon. The missionary effort is under the administrative umbrella of the SBC's International Missions Board (IMB). Erich Bridges posted an article in the Baptist Press website discussing SBC's efforts to reach the lost in the world.⁵⁶

The SBC is a large denomination of believers primarily in the southern portions of the United States. The denomination makes it a primary goal of their member congregations to raise money for the IMB to evangelize the lost people of the world. Sending missionaries to the far corners of the

⁵⁶ Erich Bridges. "Lottie Moon mission gifts grow to \$149.3M, third-largest ever." Baptist Press. June 10, 2013. <http://www.bpnews.net/40461/lottie-moon-mission-gifts-grow-to-1493m-thirdlargest-ever>. Date accessed: 04/01/2018.

world is a primary activity inside SBC affiliated churches. This is probably true of almost all denominational churches. In the case of the SBC they report their effort to address the need “to go and make disciples.” They provide this statistic in their appeal for support. “There are over 7 billion people on this globe, and unless something changes drastically, radically, it is estimated that fewer than half will ever have the slightest connection with evangelical Christianity in their lifetime.”

Fewer than half of 7,000,000,000 people currently living will be exposed to the Gospel of Christ Jesus. Many of those will hear the Gospel only slightly, let alone be counseled to a faith in Christ Jesus. When this data was presented the concern was that more than 3.5 billion souls will be lost to eternal conscious torment. The SBC IMB believes their denomination has been entrusted with the monumental task of evangelizing all of them. He asks, “Why would God entrust us...?” What does God expect the product to be?

Nearly every denomination has an evangelism plank in their platforms of service to God. Each takes the effort seriously and much money is donated to the cause of sharing the Gospel of Christ Jesus. The number of people reached and converted is few compared to those who never hear His Word and never repent from their sins. It is the position of these church denominations that they tried to do God's will and make disciples for Christ, but most of the world remains untouched. It is the tradition of most of these denominations that these unreachable are condemned by God Who did not make a path for the evangelist to teach them. Eternal conscious torment is their fate. No mercy. No grace.

In 1879 a well known and successful missionary declared the majority of people in China have no relationship with God and they will never have a relationship with God. None of these people created in the image of God “can rise to heaven.” Dr. Sawyer cites the Reverend Dr. Cheever who writes to advance “the truth that hundreds of millions of our fellow-beings are, generation after generation, sinking into endless ruin and that God has placed in our hands the means of their salvation.” The good Dr. Cheever hits home a fundamental truth in that Christians should be energized to limitless acts of evangelism because Christians supposedly know the course of the unrepentant sinner's eternity. “God has placed in our hands the means of their salvation...!”

Dr. Sawyer quotes a scholar who specifies the number of people condemned by God for their rebellion. "Fifty thousand a day; so fast the heathen die! They have sinned and not repented, and are unprepared for heaven.... Fifty thousand every day go down to 'the fire that is not quenched;' and should we not think of it as often as once every day? Six hundred millions more are going the same road.... Think of them, I pray you. All can do that. Think for at least one minute, each day, of the fifty thousand who that day sink to the doom of the lost, and the six hundred millions more who are hastening to the same ruin of the soul!"

These numbers are staggering, but these numbers pale in comparison to statistics provided by contemporary evangelists. A website, Soul Winning, posts an article by David J. Stewart entitled "Billions of People Are Going to Hell."⁵⁷ This website appears to be dedicated to winning the lost to Christ and it appeals to Christians to carry the Gospel into the world. Mr. Stewart applies math to help us see the magnitude of the number of people God cannot reach. "Let's suppose that the average person lives to be 70 years old. 6,000,000,000 divided by 70 equals 85,714,285. This means that 85,000,000 people, on average, die every year. If we divide 85,000,000 by 365 days in a year, this means that an average of 232,876 people are dying every day in this world. Are you shocked?" Over 200,000 souls die every day of every year. With increases in population it is reasonable to adjust that number upward each year. With advances in medical technologies it is equally reasonable to adjust life expectancy number upward as well. Mr. Stewart, I think, is working to put the focus on the numbers of persons being consigned to hell. He asks us to make another assumption. "Let's say that one in ten people are genuine born-again Believers.... Honestly, I would be very surprised if more than one out of every hundred people are truly saved and on their way to Heaven!"

Mr. Stewart asks us to consider all the peoples from nations where Christ is not preached. Muslim nations, Asian nations, India, Pakistan. He even asks us to "consider the billion Catholics around the world that worship Mary and are trying to earn their way into Heaven through the keeping of the Seven-Sacraments and good work." He tells us the numbers

⁵⁷ David J. Stewart. "Billions of People Are Going to Hell!" Soul Winning website. Publication date unknown. http://soulwinning.info/hell/billions_dying.htm. Date accessed: 04/02/2018.

of unrepentant persons “are trusting in their religion to save them instead of the Lord Jesus Christ.” He says he has “no doubt whatsoever that 99% of the people in this world are going to hell.”

Mr. Stewart probably does not have the same kind of name recognition as others mentioned by Dr. Sawyer or in this work. His position, however, is uniform in Christian denominations and congregations. A small percentage of the world will hear the message of grace and will not be subject to God's wrath. An overwhelming majority will be condemned by God to eternal punishment.

Landover Baptist Church is a Fundamentalist Baptist Church. They are conservative in their doctrines. They, too, advocate the doctrine of eternal conscious torment. Harry Hardwick is an authority at this church. He answers a question asked of him, “Will heaven be over crowded?”⁵⁸ He preaches, “Absolutely not.” He advocates the doctrine of eternal conscious torment and he is convinced “there will be far fewer people in Heaven than you might think. In fact, the vast majority of people you know will roast in Hell instead.”

As few as 50,000 people per day or as many as 210,000 people per day are thought to be condemned by a loving Father to the tortures of eternal punishment. These are people Christians know. These are people who are fathers, mothers, brothers and sisters. Believers are asked to pray for these sorrowful souls that the Lord would somehow reach them. Simultaneously, we are to believe God will rejoice in exercising His wrath and subsequently the saved in heaven will rejoice with Him. Think this through. Dr. Sawyer points out an unnatural conclusion. Because we know the number of the condemned is great we should be inclined by Christian nature to appeal to God to save them. At least, we should appeal that He would stop creating them. That is not the case, however. We pray for ourselves and for our families, but how seriously does a modern Christian pray for those who do not know Him?

Dr. Sawyer cites Dr. Hodge regarding the Christian prayers for the unsaved. Dr. Hodge's view is in line with the others quoted previously. Dr. Hodge tells us the problem is not from a lack of God's wisdom or

⁵⁸ Harry Hardwick, Pastor. “*Chance Are, You and Your Family Will Wind Up in Hell!*” A Sermon message given to Landover Baptist Church. Publication date unknown. <http://www.landoverbaptist.org/sermons/hell.html>. Date accessed: 04/01/2018.

goodness. There is nothing about God's power or His Sovereign place that causes men to be punished eternally. Dr. Hodge tells us it is the problem of the Church; that is believers. He says, "God has made abundant provision for the salvation of the world.... We have kept to ourselves the bread of life, and allowed the nations to perish." The unsaved are unsaved because the Word was not given to them. On a smaller scale the Word was given, but rejected. If the opinion of Dr. Hodge and others is true, then we are to be ashamed. "We are left to conclude that the heathen are all damned everlastingly because they are ignorant and wicked, and that the Church deserves to be damned for allowing the heathen to be so."

The second conclusion Dr. Sawyer points us to is that some who call themselves believers are not really. Many who advocate the doctrine of eternal conscious torment do not recognize some people who call themselves believers as believers. Advocates of the doctrine suggest roughly two-thirds of all God's human creation are consigned to hell. Of the one-third remaining they assume all are believers and heirs of salvation. A basic Christian doctrine is to love as He loves. As believers we are encouraged by our relationship with God and led by figures of authority. We profess to try to walk the straight and narrow path leading to righteousness. Our walk is personal, but has an overarching impact on our small part of society. Sadly denominational-ism and the traditions of men cloud what it means to be truly saved from eternal conscious torment. Dr. Sawyer points us to divisions in the believing world and that denominational-ism teaches one brand of Christian doctrine superior to all others. Denominations force denial or doubt the salvation of others. The Roman Catholic Church is convinced they are right with God, but if a person is not of their denomination they are not saved. "All other churches are, in its sight, heretical...." In this work we have read the intimations that Roman Catholics are not believers really and will not experience heaven. There are traditionalist authorities who declare many denominations to be cults and are not really Christian.

People in island nations and remote parts of the world have cultures and rituals that are opposed to orthodox traditional values. Many people have heard the Word and have accepted Him as Truth. But, these people groups do not adhere to all the doctrines dictated by their missionary agents. Are these good people truly saved? There are many thousands of

people who cannot support Christian living or Christian thought. They seek to end the giving of the Gospel to any more people. They reject everything about Christ. Dr. Sawyer suggests we could never know the actual number of people who hate the Gospel. The number is not small, though.

Dr. Sawyer points out that in places like America where there are freedoms to speak and to write the advocacy to destroy Christianity is great. Where they have unconvincing arguments to dissuade others from belief in Christ, they have the powers of government to shut down evangelical efforts. The goal as Dr. Sawyer says is "to lessen the influence of it." The people striving to lessen the influence of Christ in their communities have little "prospect for salvation." Some may find their way in The Way late in life, but what does that mean for all they persuaded to ignore Christ-like life. Many of these people are community leaders and influence the social systems of their towns. Some sponsor great churches and build magnificent edifices to their honor. Their goal is to set themselves apart and higher. Are these people truly saved or just characters in a game of charades? So many people have been visited by missionaries. They receive the most basic lessons about Christ's Gospel. They receive minimal exposure to Christ. These are people who have been compelled to say they love Christ and want Christ, but have no concept of Christian life. They are peoples of the world who thrive in their cultures, but their cultural authorities fight against change. Dr. Sawyer asks, "What shall become of them? Are they to be saved on the ground of 'invincible ignorance,' as our Catholic neighbors sometimes talk, or be damned everlastingly for lack of repentance and faith?"

There are groups of people who profess a love for Christ in their lives, yet these are violent people. They believe Christ is their Savior, but still these Christians commit crimes against others. They are saved, but the people they harm may be doubly punished by eternal conscious torment. Dr. Sawyer asks us to consider all the nations that have industry, that are intelligent, that have pleasing and inclusive cultures. These nations have art and integrity. They have reputations of honor and responsibility. Many of these cultures have religious practice that is not in concert with Christianity. Asian nations, African nations, Hindu, Muslim and other nations have religion, but not Christian religion. America is well known

for receiving people from these nations. They are good people and support the traditions of our nation except they do not share religion. These are good people, but they do not have Christ. The doctrine of eternal conscious torment demands these people be consigned to never ending tortures.

The doctrine of eternal conscious torment concludes all the goodness done for the sake of improving a community is nothing if Christ is not known. There is no salvation for good works. There is only salvation for knowing Christ and He is not impressed with good works. Dr. Sawyer cites Dr. Hodge who says, "Salvation must be confined to very narrow limits." The traditional view is that all persons are born into total depravity. It is a key element of the doctrine of eternal conscious torment. These doctrines exclude any person, even a person living a giving life. They "are as far from heaven and in as manifest danger of hell as the darkest pagan or the most flagrant transgressor." The doctrine condemns fully two-thirds of God's creation as heathens. The remaining one-third has within it doubters of Christ's Gospel and they, too, are to suffer the fate of the heathens. These people had greater opportunities to do good, but did not seek Him. The good done on earth while living was done selfishly and will incur greater wrath.

All of these conditions are applied to adults. There is another class of God's creation that is subject to the torments of hell. This group are the babies who die in infancy. In this modern age this group includes the babies who did not survive birth. What is their eternal outcome? This is an issue in traditional congregations and denominations. The doctrine does not qualify those consigned to hell to specific ages. The doctrine does not teach an "age of accountability." Traditionalist authorities are of many minds on this subject. If they remain truthful to the doctrine they advocate, then they will have a tightly limited expression of God's love.

Infant mortality is a real problem. A Global Health Observatory study reveals "annual infant deaths have declined from 8.8 million in 1990 to 4.2 million in 2016."⁵⁹ Let us assume the lower number of 2016 in which there are 4.2 million infant deaths. In the ten years from 2007 to 2016, at

⁵⁹ "Infant Mortality: Situation and Trends." Global Health Observatory (World Health Organization), ca. 2016. http://www.who.int/gho/child_health/mortality/neonatal_infant_text/en/. Date accessed: 4/2/2018.

least 42,000,000 babies created by God in the wombs of their mothers died before the age of five. What is the fate of this small sample of children?

Every culture has a special place for children. Children were the example used by Christ when He taught what it is to be like Him. Children uniquely bond the hearts of people. Yet, the doctrine of eternal conscious torment teaches most children not surviving to see their fifth birthday are born totally depraved. Those of God's creation who die totally depraved reap eternal punishment. We look at children and almost universally we love them. We tell their mothers and fathers about the blessing of life God has given them. We see the babies as innocent. They are helpless and without their parents they will achieve little. We see our own children in the light of overwhelming goodness. We give them all we are able. Yet the doctrine of eternal conscious torment insists each baby is totally depraved.

Consider the sorrow of a mother who lost a child. Consider the loss experienced by that baby's father. The emptiness is touchable. The pain is deep. Children dying or dead before they could experience life in their parents' care is truly sad. The doctrine of eternal conscious torment should make our hearts break. It is unnatural for a child to die before his mother or his father. Yet, in death the child never could speak the name of Jesus and is condemned to eternal punishment by the Father who created him. This is an element of the doctrine that is eternal conscious torment and that the most religious man cannot stomach. Provisions are made, qualifications are added and adjustments to the doctrine are made. The offense of total depravity on children is removed by religious men. It is their doctrine and they are able to massage it in any way that does not offend themselves and their adherents.

Dr. Hodge modified the doctrine of eternal conscious torment he preached. Dr. Sawyer quotes Dr. Hodge who said, "...All who die in infancy will be saved.... The Scriptures nowhere exclude any class of infants, baptized or unbaptized, born in Christian or heathen lands, of believing or unbelieving parents, from the benefits of the redemption of Christ." On that conclusion advocates of universal reconciliation completely agree. However, this change to the doctrine of total depravity changes the doctrine of eternal conscious torment. Making an exception such as this opposes eternal conscious torment. The elements are not mutually

exclusive. It is impossible to say all men are born totally depraved, but infants are innocent. By what measure, what act of contrition, what repentance does an infant express to assure his salvation? How are infants saved?

Sinners are saved because of a belief in Christ Jesus and a repentance from sins committed. Salvation is a gift from God in the faith He gives. His mercy is fresh and new every day. That is the method as spelled out in His Holy Word. Dr. Sawyer writes, "Infants are incapable of exercising either of these graces. They are burdened with damnable sin, for which they have no power of repentance, and of which indeed they are wholly unconscious." The gift of salvation is certainly offered, but there is no way they can accept it. How would they "even know that a Savior has come?" They are alive, but "unrepentant and unsaved." It is clear the traditional doctrine of eternal conscious torment has "no means...to rescue a single infant from the damnation they all so richly deserve for being born the accursed heirs of Adam."

The Center for Reformed Theology and Apologetics offers an exception to the doctrine of total depravity in an article entitled "Infant Salvation."⁶⁰ They cite Lorraine Boettner's book detailing Presbyterian doctrine and in particular the doctrine of predestination. Ms. Boettner writes, "Most Calvinistic theologians have held that those who die in infancy are saved. The Scriptures seem to teach plainly enough that the children of believers are saved; but they are silent or practically so in regard to those of the heathens." It is said first that scriptures are silent on the matter. However, there are exemptions to be gleaned from some other unknown source. A period of accountability for children is found in the doctrine of the Presbyterian's predestination. It is hoped "since these infants have never committed any actual sin themselves, their inherited sin_would be pardoned and they would be saved on wholly evangelical principles." These good Biblical scholars are quick to save their children because theirs are children of believers. The sin nature born into their

⁶⁰ Lorraine Boettner. "Infant Salvation." An excerpt from The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination; Section 11 of Chapter 11; pp. 143-148. Center for Reformed Theology and Apologetics. Date of publication not known. http://www.reformed.org/calvinism/index.html?mainframe=/calvinism/boettner/infants_boettner.html/ Date accessed: 04/02/2018.

children is excused. The sin nature of unbelievers children are not as readily excused. Those unfortunate children are likely subject to the doctrines of total depravity and eternal conscious torment.

The Calvinist view is to declare God through Christ Jesus is magnificent in His Love for the infants of Calvinist parents. All others, however, are not subjected to God's benevolence. In fact, those good people should be aware that by excusing their children they make the torments of hell a small thing. The apologists for the Calvinist doctrine of infant salvation find fault with their brothers who are Arminian by theological persuasion. Arminian authorities have concluded that an infant cannot express free will and is therefore excluded from heaven unless that infant was predestined at birth. Calvinists are not ashamed to exclude others from salvation. The author makes the argument that "the doctrine of infant salvation finds a logical place in the Calvinistic system; for the redemption of the soul is thus infallibly determined irrespective of any faith, repentance, or good works, whether actual or foreseen. It does not, however, find a logical place in Arminianism or any other system."

It is not enough that parents lose the comfort of their children to death. Their misery is compounded by religious Christians who declare their deceased infant child is already suffering the torments of eternal punishment. Dr. Sawyer remarks that the Roman Catholic church has within its purview an authority to pray for a regenerative baptism. He writes, "The Roman Church, which believes in the divine power of sacraments, makes provision to save its infants by regenerating baptism.... The Roman Church attaches such importance to infant baptism that it will not allow the burial of an unbaptized child, though of Catholic parents, in consecrated ground!" Baptism becomes the rite that saves an infant for God in heaven. Infant baptism is magnified and the ritual is performed giving that child's parents peace of mind. The baptism is only effective in specific denominations and congregations. The practice is eschewed and often ridiculed in other congregations and denominations. However, many Protestant churches have taken the lead of the Catholic Church and incorporated the same kinds of doctrines that relieve the pressure of a doctrine like eternal conscious torment that demands babies be tormented in hell.

Dr. Sawyer's remarks demonstrate this subtle change to the doctrine.

He writes, “The Augsburg Confession affirms that ‘baptism is necessary to salvation,’ and that children are to be baptized, who, ‘being offered to God, are received into God’s favor.’ Baptism is part of the gift of faith that comes from God. Therefore baptism is ‘a sign of God’s good will.’ Churches adhering to the Confession have ‘followed essentially the doctrine of the Roman Church from which they sprang, and ascribed regenerating power to the rite of baptism.’” In this alteration to the doctrine of eternal conscious torment baptism is the mode to save an infant. The baptism is required to be under the authority of specific churches and is therefore not available to all infants. It is highly improbable an infant’s parents who are steeped in Eastern theology would consider baptizing their child in such a church. If that couple’s child died that child’s fate would be eternal tortures.

Calvinism and Reformed churches are opposed to much that comes from Roman Catholicism. Calvinists have explained infant salvation as a matter of predestination. God in His judgment determines which of His creation He chooses for eternal life with Him. Calvinists and Reformed denominations and congregations believe some infants are predestined for heaven, but the majority are created for torment. Dr. Sawyer cites the Westminster Confession that was in effect at the time he prepared this work. It stated then, “Elect infants, dying in infancy, are regenerated and saved by Christ through the Spirit, who worketh when and where and how he pleaseth. So also are all other elect persons who are incapable of being outwardly called by the ministry of the word.” The Confession has not changed. It reads and dictates today as it did since 1646 when it was put to paper. Modern scholars work to soften the edicts declared in the Confession, but its hardened stance remains. Only children of parents holding fast to the Westminster Confession are saved through infancy because their parents were chosen for eternal heaven.

Joel Beeke wrote an article for “The Alliance of Confessing Evangelicals” ⁶¹ He writes, “God has wrapped some things in a cloud of mystery. We dare not venture into the darkness of such mysteries with the feeble light of our speculations, but must rest content in the beams of

⁶¹ Joel Beeke. “*Through The Westminster Confession: 10.3.*” Alliance of Confessing Evangelicals Reform21 website. March 21, 2013. <http://www.reformation21.org/confession/2013/03/chapter-103.php>. Date accessed: 04/01/2018.

light shining from the Word. One such mystery is God's purpose in the death of those mentally incapable of understanding the gospel, whether infants or adults." The Alliance advances their contention "that based on God's character and on His covenant commitments to His own, that it is His normal way to save children of believers..." They teach the mentally unstable, the mentally disabled, the intellectually disabled are called "to life eternal in Christ placing the seed of regeneration in their souls."

Let us recall the traditional doctrine of total depravity. It is concretely an orthodox doctrine that all persons ever created are created with a sin nature and are therefore totally depraved. All persons are born consigned to eternal punishment. However, modifications are made to the Westminster Confession, Roman Catholic doctrines and the Augsburg Confession to accommodate infants salvation. Ordinarily, the doctrine insists the only way to leave the state of total depravity is to accept in faith Christ Jesus. Salvation is contingent on knowing He is the Son of God. It is necessary to believe all that comes with hearing and believing His Gospel. This acceptance can only be made in the minds and hearts of each person. Infants and many severely disabled adults cannot be held to make the kind of decision necessary to be allowed into the Kingdom. They lack ability, desire and knowledge.

Baptism or the lack of it does not unlock the gates to heaven. The Westminster Confession is not dogmatic to the degree it does not allow for the possibility of God's work to save infants and the mentally disabled. God does what God does as it pleases God! Dr. Sawyer asks, "Why might not good Christians trust God so far as to permit the Holy Spirit to work in the same free manner with other sinners? Why is it necessary to limit the Savior of men to this little world and the present life in the accomplishment of his divine pleasure?"

There are two methods developed by men to answer the very serious question about the eternal state of infants and disabled adults. In one regenerative baptism is necessary. An infant or disabled adult baptized in the name of the Father is saved. The other is to manipulate the tradition of men known as total depravity to make their salvation fit the doctrine. In both cases only a few infants and only some disabled adults are truly saved. Millions upon millions of infants have died and the traditional doctrine of eternal conscious torment demands they be punished forever.

For those children it is too late for there is no hope in hell. There is no mercy. There is no help.

What do we say about Dr. Hodge's comment that "all who die in infancy are saved?" Dr. Hodge had to set aside much of what he professed about election to make that case. Dr. Sawyer writes, "Dr. Hodge not only avows his own conviction on this subject, but evidently wishes to give the impression that this has been the current thought of the orthodox world through the ages, or at least with that portion of the Church – the Calvinistic or Augustinian – with which he was personally associated." Dr. Hodge's doctrine is the minority view. Others still insist not all infants are afforded God's grace. Many will suffer His wrath in eternal conscious torment.

This problem and others like it are shared often between traditionalist denominations and within church congregations. It is the common understanding and a principle of the doctrine of eternal conscious torment that millions upon millions of infants are already suffering in hell. Accommodations are made for them by their respective theologies. The doctrine of total depravity works in concert with the doctrine of eternal conscious torment. Dr. Sawyer points out the Catholic church revised their doctrine in the twelfth century. The Catholic view now is that "infants are saved from being eternally burned, but are deprived of all Christian grace." A new outcome, but still eternal conscious torment. Infant salvation and the salvation of the disabled undergoes revision often. Thomas Aquinas is quoted as saying about children dying in infancy. They "are united to God by a participation of natural goods, and are able to rejoice in a natural knowledge of love of him."

There is a softening of the consequences of eternal punishment for babies dying before they can be committed to Christ or able to make a commitment to Christ. The Council of Trent suggests "these children dying without baptism amuse themselves in philosophizing, and employ themselves in the knowledge of natural things, tasting that great pleasure and contentment of mind which is found in gratifying one's curiosity in the invention of beautiful things; and one surpassed all others by declaring that they were visited and consoled by the angels and the blessed saints." Infants are either "in limbo" or in a kind of pre-heaven state. Theologians seemingly recognized a contradiction in the doctrine they advocate. On

one hand all are born totally depraved, but accommodations for infants and the disabled are penciled into it. Some vaunted theologians argued for these adjustments to the doctrine, but other theologians are unwilling.

Dr. Sawyer discusses another issue. For a long period of time few authorities within denominations or congregations would consider any doctrines less than total depravity and eternal conscious torment as valid. Few, if any, advocated for a change in doctrine to soften the teaching that unwashed babies are tormented in hell by a loving Father. The doctrine, as offensive as it is, has not changed. Dr. Sawyer points out that Augustine “taught it plainly without offending orthodox people of his time; and it continued to be taught and believed for long centuries after his day; and in the Reformation, as Augustine became the great teacher of both Luther and Calvin, so this doctrine took its place in the Protestant churches.”

The doctrine of total depravity teaches we are born to go to eternal conscious torment. Dr. Sawyer cites Dr. Calvin who seemingly did not like the doctrine that torments unsaved infants. According to Dr. Calvin “all men were...sentenced to eternal death....” This condition is not natural and “must have proceeded from the wonderful council of God.” He calls the Fall of Adam the cause of eternal conscious torment and that “so many nations with their infant children in eternal death, but because such was the will of God.” Dr. Calvin goes on to declare the doctrine of predestination in which “God foreknew the future final fate of men before he created them.” The irony is thick and the argument is weak. God is love. We know that from scripture. God creates all men. We know that from scripture. We can safely conclude God loves His creation...all of His creation. Did God decree a judgment on infants that is either eternal bliss or eternal wrath? Did God create an infirm disabled man for eternal torture? In the minds of the traditional theologian He did. Dr. Sawyer asks, “In this almost universal damnation are we to be surprised if infants suffer with others?”

Worthy men, extraordinary scholars, advocate a doctrine that demands every person ever created by God has instilled in him a sin nature. From Whom is that sin nature derived? Did God make that a part of His creation? Does the ludicrousness of the doctrine of eternal conscious torment and of total depravity stir you? That is the traditional view of the doctrine today. No person can be changed after he has died.

His age in moments or in a hundred years does not matter. The person who dies without Christ, infants or adults, firm or infirm, are committed to eternal punishment by a God Who loves them. All the heathen of the world are lost forever to eternal conscious torment. Many men and women calling themselves Christian are more carnal than Christ-like. Traditionalists sometimes say these kinds of Christians are not really Christian and they, too, are condemned to suffer. No infants are saved.

The advocates of this doctrine should have many proof texts and scriptural references to support their passionate belief that all are born reprobates. The advocates claim the doctrine is from the Word of God. Where is their evidence? This doctrine is singularly profound in its outcomes. Its proof should be unassailable. There should be no doubt about it. However, there is doubt! God loves us all. He creates us all. There is nothing in scripture that teaches His love ends.

For he who has died has been freed from sin. (Romans 6:7)

God's Word does much for the saved who have put off the ways of the world. It also means much to the unsaved. The unrepentant rebel will be exposed to God's love and that sinner's knee will be among "every knee" bowing. His tongue will be among "every tongue" declaring "Jesus is Lord...." This position is surely much more in line with God's nature and mercy. However, those holding the doctrine of universal reconciliation are grossly maligned by the advocates of eternal conscious torment. The doctrines cannot coexist! Both doctrines demand a change in every person at death. The traditional view demands a loving, merciful Father change to something terribly sinister and wrathful. The traditional doctrine does not permit change once a person dies. Universal reconciliation teaches God will reconcile all men to Himself. The doctrine of universal reconciliation teaches all men will see God's glory and be drawn to Him. Both views are opposites and both cannot be simultaneously true! In both there is a moral change in the soul. In one death is a blessing because it exposes the rebel to love. In the other death is a curse because it exposes the rebel to wrath.

Death does not change souls. Dr. Sawyer explains, "God is still their Creator, and they his creatures; he is their Father and they his children;

he is their Governor, and they his subjects.... They are bound to love him with all the heart, and to love their neighbor as themselves.... Supreme love is what we owe him, and nothing short of this – no duration or amount of suffering – will pay the debt. Nor will he accept hatred for love or blasphemy for the praises that are so justly his due.” God’s Word teaches us that His mercies are fresh every day. His Word teaches He is love. If any man refuses to obey today a new day dawns with another opportunity to change his ways. If a man lives all his days and never seeks the moral ground of Christ-like life, his soul will be quickened in death to see what he did not live.

I have sworn by myself, the word has gone out of my mouth in righteousness, and will not return, that to me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall take an oath.
(Isaiah 45:23)

Therefore God also highly exalted him, and gave to him the name which is above every name; that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, those on earth, and those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. (Philippians 2:9-11)

Dr. Sawyer closes this section succinctly. A man can refuse to see, hear and obey God’s command in his natural lifetime. With each passing day of his life he can refuse to believe. “The happy hour will come when without any violence done to human volition the soul will confess itself conquered by divine grace and sweetly submit to Christ and God.” A man’s time, even time after this temporal time, “ends only in willing obedience to the royal, the imperial law.”

D. MOST OF MANKIND IS CONDEMNED AND DAMNED

The advocates of the doctrine of eternal conscious torment dictate by necessity of their doctrine that the majority of mankind will suffer the torments of hell. The doctrine demands it. More people will be lost than there are souls saved. Dr. Sawyer points us to Augustine who wrote,

“There is more chaff than wheat, more to be damned than saved.” It is a remarkable statement. Within the doctrine rests the idea that Satan is far more successful winning souls to his end than Christ Jesus is to winning souls for the Father. Roman Catholicism adds the need to be part of that great church before salvation can be given. Dr. Sawyer cites the Athanasius creed that directs Catholics. “Whosoever will be saved, before all things it is necessary that he hold the Catholic faith.”

Catholics and Protestants are not dissimilar in this regard. Both believe in the doctrine of total depravity and ending in eternal conscious torment. Even so, congregations and denominations today, Protestant or Catholic, define God’s grace as something held for them and denied others. Catholics believe “none can be saved who are outside of its communion, there are multitudes to be damned who are within it.” Protestant and Catholic Church authorities teach that there is more than sufficient room to hold the rebellious in eternal conscious torment. The size of hell is breath taking. Dr. Sawyer quotes Cornelius à Lapide who describes the magnitude of the area of hell. Mssr. à Lapide says, “The multitude of the damned may be determined from the magnitude of hell, which is sixteen hundred stadia, that is two hundred Italian miles and this in all directions.” He tells us the size of hell “is a space capable of holding many thousand millions of the damned.” Thousands of millions is billions upon billions. Hell is a prison of woe. Hell is where God’s wrath is confined by a space “two hundred miles on a side.” Even hell is finite in its scope and size, but eternal conscious torment there is not.

Dr. Sawyer points out that some Jewish authorities taught hell was so vast in area “it would take a man three hundred years to pass through it.” Three hundred years is a finite period of time. Modern Jewish teachers believe punishment of the dead is limited to a year. Rabbi Or N. Rose writes for the My Jewish Learning website. Rabbi Rose writes on “Heaven and Hell in Jewish Tradition.”⁶² He teaches, “Only truly righteous souls ascend directly to the Garden of Eden, say the sages. The average person descends to a place of punishment and/or purification, generally referred to as Gehinnom.” The types of punishment in this place range from

⁶² Rabbi Or N. Rose “Heaven and Hell in Jewish Tradition.” My Jewish Learning website. Publication date not known. <https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/heaven-and-hell-in-jewish-tradition/>. Date accessed: 4/2/2018.

torture to forced introspection. The period of discipline or punishment "is usually limited to a 12 month period of purgation." It is time for mourning.

The origins of Christian faith start in the Old Testament. Mankind is removed from the Garden of Eden and Jewish understanding is that mankind strives to return to it. However, traditionalist authorities alter the teachings of Jewish traditions and severely limit the number of people who might have a chance at Eden. The advocates of the doctrine of eternal conscious torment have little difficulty declaring the number of saved will be few. It is telling that they are among that number saved. God is not powerful enough or not loving enough to save all that He created. The Catholic Church limits the power of God, but not as dramatically as do Protestants. Protestants share the Catholic view that salvation depends a bit on being a part of their established traditions. As revealed earlier the Catholics insist all the saved are Catholic. Calvinists believe only folks chosen before the foundations of the world are saved. That's what they believe and all others are not saved. There is little room between the closed Catholic system and the closed Calvinist system. Arminians are no different than Catholics or Calvinists in this regard. Arminians believe only those with the foresight to choose to believe are saved and they number themselves in that group.

Dr. Sawyer points out the consistency in the doctrine of eternal conscious torment held between Catholics and Calvin. He writes, "Calvin drank so largely at the well of Augustine that one would expect to meet no essential difference here." Dr. Sawyer quotes Dr. Calvin who writes, "The whole world does not belong to the Creator; only that grace delivers from the curse and wrath of God, and from eternal death, a few who would otherwise perish, but leaves the world in the destruction to which it has been destined;... the rejection of all mankind, and the election of the small number of the faithful." Augustine, Calvin and acolytes for several hundreds of years have preached this.

Dr. Sawyer points out Dr. Christopher Love who answers his own question, "Whether shall most men be tormented in hell, yea or no?" Dr. Love confirms, "The most men and women that God hath made, it shall be their portion and misery to be tormented in hell forevermore." Dr. Love is a well known historical figure and is quoted often by Dr.

Sawyer. He was ranked among the elite religious thinkers in England. In his theology it is foolishness to disagree with him because it would be to disagree with God. Dr. Love teaches God's mercy toward the few is His love for all. God's justice is to torment those who do not repent. The number saved is very few.

The precept that few are saved is preached by Biblical scholars to this day. The good men and women at the Got Questions website answer the question "Will More People Go to Heaven or Hell?" ⁶³ They answer by first quoting Matthew 7:13-14. I have added verse 12 to their citation.

Therefore whatever you desire for men to do to you, *you shall also do to them*; for this is the law and the prophets. Enter in by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and many are those who enter in by it. How narrow is the gate, and restricted is the way that leads to life! Few are those who find it (Matthew 7:12-14, emphasis added)

Access to God is a task. One must do things to assure passage through a narrow gate. These good people string a number of scriptures together to help make their point, but do not pay heed to Matthew 7:12 which is a form of deed, action, behavior or work. Do good to others and you can enter the narrow gate. Christ teaches the measure you use to judge will be the measure used to judge you. Got Questions folks answer the question saying, "This passage tells us that only those who receive Jesus Christ and who believe in Him are given the right to become children of God (John 1:12). As such, the gift of eternal life comes only through Jesus Christ to all those who believe. He said, 'I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me; (John 14:6). It's not through Mohammed, Buddha, or other false gods of man's making. It's not for those wanting a cheap and easy way to heaven while continuing to live their own selfish and worldly lives on earth. Jesus only saves those who fully trust in Him as Savior (Acts 4:12)."

⁶³ "Will More People Go to Heaven or Hell?" GotQuestions.org Publication date unknown. <https://www.gotquestions.org/more-people-heaven-hell.html>. Date accessed: 04/01/2018.

The assertion that only through a belief in Christ is salvation. That is fair. People will not find their way to Christ and to Heaven through any other means aside from Him. There is an implication that the “false prophets” cited by the folks at Got Questions are unable to pass through the narrow gate and that they will not pass through any gate leading to reconciliation with the Father that created them.

These writers apply a measure to those of us preaching the doctrine of universal reconciliation. They say, “Those who preach a gospel of inclusiveness where ‘all ways lead to heaven’ preach an utterly different gospel than the one Jesus preached.” The writers complain that universal reconciliation is an “all roads lead to Christ” theology. That could not be further from the truth. The writers teach that universal reconciliation is akin to “following the masses who are the broad road, doing what every one else does and believing what everyone else believes.”

Universal reconciliation teaches the Gospel of Christ Jesus. It is the same Gospel preached by the traditionalists writing at Got Questions. The primary difference in what the advocates of eternal conscious torment preach and what the advocates of universal reconciliation preach is the final destiny of all mankind. The traditional view as is held by Got Questions writers is that they and a few others are saved for eternal life and the majority of folks disagreeing with them are committed by a loving God to eternal conscious torment. I have met many avowed Christian men and women. Many of them “are self-centered, self-absorbed, proud, holier-than-thou and worse.” I have been all of those things myself. Together we have read the words of outstanding theologians that condemn parts of God’s creation because of disagreements in basic Christian doctrine. Here, though, the good people at Got Questions feel it appropriate to point out these characteristics and traits in others. They are measuring and by the measure they use they will be measured.

The way of salvation according to the Got Questions authors is a way of works. It takes effort to earn passage through the narrow gate. It is “the hard way, the demanding way. It is the way of recognizing that you cannot save yourself and must depend on Jesus Christ alone to save you. It’s the way of self-denial and the cross. The fact that few find God’s way implies that it is to be sought diligently.” What are the demands on the demanding way? It is Christ Jesus and it is His command to love one

another. It is His command that teaches us the least will be first. The folks at Got Questions are seemingly unafraid to pass judgment on huge numbers of people who are created in the same fashion God created every other man. Are the folks making these judgments living up to the “law” they are writing? Have they paid the price that Christ Jesus paid? Did they pay the price He demanded they pay? Have they left their baggage of sin and given up the material things of the world? I dare not answer for them lest I judge them.

Lastly, the good men and women at Got Questions are convinced they know the mind of Christ. They write “Jesus knows that many will choose the wide gate and the broad way that leads to destruction and hell.... Correspondingly, He said that only a few will choose the narrow gate. According to Matthew 7:13-14, there is no doubt that more will go to hell than to heaven. The question for you is, then, on which road are you?”

Prayerfully Dr. Sawyer’s book, the works of others, and this work might cause them even a moment’s doubt about their advocacy of the doctrine of eternal conscious torment. The teaching that few enter heaven and that far more enter hell is the teaching of the orthodox traditionalist. Dr. Sawyer cites Dr. Edwards who preached scripture is a warning to those who do not believe. Dr. Edwards says, “Neither the working of miracles, nor the hearing of God speak with an audible voice from heaven, nor anything else.... There are but few, comparatively, who are ever converted. But few of those, who have been natural persons in time past, have been converted. Most of them have died unconverted.”

Few in heaven and most in hell is the doctrine of eternal conscious torment. It is preached and preached again. This concept must conclude God is not all-powerful for He is unable to “speak with an audible voice” and convince the wayward sons. Matthew Henry is resourced by Dr. Sawyer. Dr. Henry writes, “They that are going to heaven are but few compared to those that are going to hell; a remnant, a little flock, like the grape-gleanings of the vintage, as the eight that were saved by water.” Agreeing with Drs. Edwards and Henry is Dr. Adam Clarke. Dr. Sawyer cites him as writing, “There are few who find the way to heaven; fewer yet who abide any time in it; fewer still who walk in it; and fewest of all who persevere unto the end.” Some are exposed to the Gospel of Christ

and are introduced to the Way. Only some of those learn enough to live a life in Christ. Of those only some truly live in Christ. As the number is whittled down only the “fewest of all” make it to heaven.

Dr. Clarke is world renowned for a commentary on the Bible he wrote over the course of decades. He is a Methodist and is closely associated with Wesleyan theology. Wikipedia provides this as part of its introduction to Dr. Clarke.⁶⁴ He joined John Wesley “in opposing a Calvinistic scheme of salvation.” Dr. Clarke advocated for “the Wesleyan-Arminian positions.” The theologies of Dr. Clarke and Dr. Edwards hold opposing views in their basic Christian doctrines of salvation. They differ even on many elements of the doctrine of eternal conscious torment. Yet they find agreement in that respectively they are saved and most are not. In Dr. Clarke’s case he was blessed with a will to choose God’s grace. In Dr. Edwards’ view God chose him for salvation. It is convenient in their disagreement that neither will suffer the judgment put on the vast majority of unbelieving people.

The United Methodist Church in America has changed since its beginning with John Wesley and his family in 1751. Dr. Wesley’s teaching is contrary to Dr. Calvin and Augustine. That the advocates of eternal conscious torment would split over predestination or the preeminence of Christ Jesus is unfortunate. Both positions cannot be correct, yet both are traditionalist and embrace each other gladly.

Dan Benedict writes for The Center for Worship Resourcing. The Center is associated with the the United Methodist Church. Mr. Benedict writes about God’s gift of salvation.⁶⁵ From their “2008 Book of Resolutions” it is learned the UMC “can never presume to know the full extent of God’s work in the world, and we recognize the reality of God’s activity outside the Christian church.” The UMC is resolved that only God judges men, only He saves and that no man is able to save himself. “We know that judgment as to the ultimate salvation of persons from

⁶⁴ “Adam Clarke.” Wikipedia. Publication date unknown. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Adam_Clarke. Date accessed 04/02/2018.

⁶⁵ Dan Benedict. “Do United Methodists believe that faith in Jesus Christ is necessary to go to heaven?” Center for Worship Resourcing. United Methodist Church. Publication date unknown. <http://www.umc.org/what-we-believe/do-united-methodists-believe-that-faith-in-jesus-christ-is-necessary>. Date accessed: 04/01/2018.

any faith community, including Christianity and Judaism, belongs to God alone.”

There is disagreement between traditional congregations and denominations on who might be saved. Some denominations take an active role expressing they know how God will judge and there are denominations like the UMC which take a step back and declare they do not know how God will judge. In both instances they believe God’s will will be done. The orthodox traditionalist doctrine of eternal conscious torment has a tremendous effect on the extent of salvation. The branches of orthodoxy take many different approaches to many values and traditions. In this singular doctrine the traditions unite and have adopted the doctrine of eternal conscious torment as fact. The majority of humankind is to be tormented at the hand of God forever.

Each congregation and every denomination has room in heaven for each of its members. Dr. Sawyer writes, “Fortunately, most of our orthodox neighbors entertain a comfortable hope, first, with respect to their own future, and then as to all whom they love and in whose welfare they are more deeply interested.” Eternal conscious torment is the force behind the doctrine. Advocates for it have made arrangements in it that they and their loved ones will surely not experience anything less than bliss with God in heaven. Dr. Sawyer writes, “‘We are all Universalists,’ said an eminent orthodox lady, the wife of a Doctor of Divinity, ‘when we bury our friends!’”

CHAPTER 13

The General / Final Judgment

Dr. Sawyer identifies a theological “Four Last Things” The last things “are Death, The Judgment, Heaven and Hell.” The doctrine of eternal conscious torment teaches death is the end of a probation period every man lives through on earth. The doctrine of eternal conscious torment demands those not saved; those who are unrepentant rebels to their dying breath suffer divine judgment of extreme tortures. God ceases being a God of patience, kindness and mercy. Death for the sinner “converts the love of God into hatred, and his mercy into revenge.” The doctrine of eternal conscious torment demands that at death each of his children graduate from life to death and into judgment. At death our fates are fixed and each soul is judged. The rebel who cannot or will not believe Christ’s act of love has no further hope of bliss. The rebels will face nothing but the darkest gloom as their judgment awaits pronouncement. Their acts, good and bad, are recorded and there is nothing to be done to blot out their crimes against an all-loving Father.

The doctrine declares there is no salvation available after death. In life the fate of all is cast and in death the fate is cemented. Dr. Watts is cited and he writes, “It is only in the present state of trial and under the present proposals of grace that sleeping sinners can be awakened into spiritual and divine life.” This is a common understanding among the traditionalist advocates for the doctrine of eternal conscious torment. In this life we are on probation. At the end of it probation ends and the

sentence is pronounced. At death one is a believer or he is not. Eternal life starts for both. One in bliss and the other in tortures.

The good folks at Bible.org answer the question, “What happens to unbelievers between death and being cast into hell?”⁶⁶ They answer, “When people die they either go to be with the Lord or they go to a place of conscious torment.” The unrepentant rebel’s “soul is separated from his body.” The audience is told there is Biblical evidence that “believers go to a place of joy with the Lord and unbelievers go to a place of torment.” There is a final judgment some time in the future, “at the end of Christ’s Millennial reign on earth,” when the souls of all unbelievers “will be united with their bodies.” The reunited bodies and souls are then “sent to the lake of fire for all eternity.”

There simply stated is the orthodox and traditional doctrine of eternal conscious torment in its basic form. Believers get God’s love. Unbelievers get eternal torment. The souls of the blessed are joyful. The souls of those not blessed are tormented from the moment death overcomes them. The consequences for living are not arguable. The sinner’s soul is tormented until his body is reunited with his soul and the wrath of God is administered to body and soul. Lives are finite. Torment is everlasting!

Dr. Sawyer cites Dr. Pond who tells us, “Men are on probation for judgment, and for the retributions of eternity... They will be rewarded or punished beyond the grave.” This is the doctrine commonly held in denominations, congregations and the hearts of men across the world. However, there is nothing in God’s Holy Word that proves men are born into probation and sentenced at the end to be judged in a distant time. Man’s life is but a vapor. We plan to go to this place or that. We plan to run a business here or somewhere else. We are convinced our path is the best for us. The orthodox doctrine demands every person be judged and sentenced to everlasting reward. All are judged for only a vapor’s moment and punished for eternity.

The eternal destinies of all are determined in the life led during probation. Think this through with me. Recall the testimony by Julie Ferwerda explaining the life of an abandoned girl in Delhi, India. That

⁶⁶ “What Happens to Unbelievers Between Death and Being Cast Into Hell.” [Bible.org website](https://bible.org/question/what-happens-unbelievers-between-death-and-being-cast-hell). Publication date not known. <https://bible.org/question/what-happens-unbelievers-between-death-and-being-cast-hell>. Date accessed: 04/02/2018.

little girl is born into probation. She lives a life trying to live from day to day without being assaulted. Even if she were to be saved from her abandonment by Indian parents the girl is hardly likely to hear the Gospel of Christ Jesus. When that little girl dies, the doctrine advocated by the traditionalist demands punishment for her soul is to commence immediately and continue when her body is reunited with her soul at the end of time.

Dr. Sawyer presents a serious flaw in the doctrine of probation which is part of the doctrine of eternal conscious torment. He writes, "To urge that all the conditions of this very brief probation are as various and as unequal as it is possible to conceive, so that the destinies of immortal souls seem to be settled by accident or caprice rather than by any recognized principles of equity.... Our fate, according to the orthodox theory, is already determined." The doctrine of "total depravity" as espoused by Calvinists insists all are born "under God's wrath and curse." There is no hope for any of His creation unless He intercedes "by His irresistible grace." The unrepentant soul never had the blessing of God's "grace upon grace!" The doctrine of eternal conscious torment demands our eternal fate be committed before we are born. God, our Father, knits into us a sin nature handed down from Adam. God delivers us into a part of the world He wants us to be. For some it is into a Christian home. For countless more God delivers them to earthly parents who have never been exposed to society much less Christianity. At death God judges all the children He created. This orthodox doctrine teaches God only loves a few and the others will be damned to eternal tortures.

The advocates for the doctrine of eternal conscious torment have to set aside their emotions as they advocate the eternal torture of innocent children of God who never heard of Him. Their hearts have hardened and they lay claim to this excuse; "God's ways are mysterious to us." Probation and final judgment are doctrines that are connected. Life is probation. Men are called to live life worthy of the Judge. At death the logs of a man's life are reviewed and the probation ends. Dr. Sawyer asks, "If I buy a horse on condition that the animal upon trial proves satisfactory to me, – and this is the popular notion of probation, – it is evident that I am not to use the horse indefinitely; the probation must have a limit, and then I either pay the price or return the animal, according to contract." I

update his analogy. I want to buy a car at the local dealership. The dealer allows me a period of time to use the car to determine if it is the car that will suit my needs. I do not get to keep the car indefinitely. I must return it or buy it. I have the car for a probation period.

The advocates of the doctrine of eternal conscious torment have determined the death of every man is the end of probation. That is as far as the rebel can go. There is no consideration for the culture he was born into or the circumstances of his life. God created that man as a reprobate and placed that man into his condition and God judges that man guilty when he fails to see God as His Savior. Dr. Sawyer writes probation ends “upon the moment of death as the extreme limit of this period of human trial,... without the slightest regard to its duration.” In the case of infants born alive and who die moments or days after birth the limit of their probation has been reached. “If one is born under the light of the gospel or in pagan darkness; if he dies unrepentant and without faith in Jesus Christ, he is inevitably lost.” Think again of the example of the Hindu baby girl born in India. She did nothing but be born. If she lives for only a moment she dies unrepentant of her sin and is committed by this Christian doctrine to eternal torments at the hands of the Father Who created her.

Many men commit violent crimes. They are caught and convicted. Some who murder are convicted and sentenced to death. On “Death Row” some of these men are converted and are by the doctrine of eternal conscious torment saved for eternal life with Christ. What of their victims?

The doctrine requires a belief that life is probation and that probation has an end date. The doctrine insists that your status at death is based in whether or not you believe Christ Jesus. There are no more opportunities to see Christ or to worship Him. Dr. Sawyer cites Dr. Dwight who explains how this doctrine is played out. “The soul after death returns immediately to God to give an account of its conduct in the present life.” The soul “will be furnished with a power of recollection.” There will be nothing the soul will be able to hide from God. The soul will stand to receive “the sentence of God.” Those who worked well in their temporal lives and “have done the will of God” will be rewarded. The unrepentant souls will be cast “into outer darkness.”

What then is the point behind further judgment? Recall the souls of

the dead are either in heaven or in hell. Both are receiving their justice and reward. The rebel's soul is tortured until the Judgment when his body has been reunited with his soul. The punishments delivered upon him are not dampened by this reunification of body and soul. What changes from the end of probation that requires further Judgment? The doctrine of eternal conscious torment declares God has condemned the unrepentant soul to suffer. Why is there another hearing, another judgment after the first? Dr. Sawyer asks, "Can any one suggest a reason for a rehearing or a new trial? The facts remain unchanged, the Judge is the same, the law the same; and can the sentence be different"?

The General or Final Judgment is as important in traditional denominations and congregations today as it was in Dr. Sawyer's day. In a nutshell the doctrine of eternal conscious torment declares all persons who have died will be resurrected together. All will stand before Christ Jesus who will separate believers from unbelievers. Believers will be moved to eternal peace and unbelievers to continue eternal torment. Dr. Sawyer describes the Final Judgment beautifully. He concludes, "It changes the destiny of no one, – it determines nothing, except with the few who chance to be living at this dread moment, – but merely calls the saints and sinners from their respective awards to be united with their long-lost bodies and return to their happiness or their misery again."

The Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) posts their belief system in a document entitled *The Baptist Faith and Message* which is referenced earlier. The last update to this position and doctrinal guide was in 2000 and is often referred to as BFM(2000). About "Last Things" the authorities in the SBC write, "God...will bring the world to its appropriate end.... The dead will be raised.... The unrighteous will be consigned to hell.... The righteous... will receive their reward and will dwell forever in heaven with the Lord."

William F. Cook is an Associate Professor of New Testament Interpretation who writes for a Southern Baptist aligned online magazine, *Baptist 2 Baptist*. Mr. Cook provides his understanding of the Last Things in an article he titled "Last Things - Baptist Faith & Message, Article

10.”⁶⁷ Mr. Cook writes, “While Christians differ in their understanding of the nature and chronology of Christ’s Second Coming, there is much agreement on the events following his return. All agree that his return will be followed by the resurrection of the dead, the final judgment and the eternal state.” The disagreements are reportedly in the timing of Christ’s return to reign. “The righteous and the wicked will be raised,” says Mr. Cook. “The resurrection of the dead is followed by the theme of final judgment.” It is Christ Who judges all. “The judgment of believers is for the purpose of bestowing degrees of reward.... Those who do not know God through His Son will enter into eternal punishment...where the unsaved will experience eternal conscious torment.” Mr. Cook closes his commentary on Article 10 of the Baptist Faith and Message (2000) by closing the door to any thought of universal reconciliation. He writes, “In recent years some evangelical theologians have denied that there will be eternal conscious punishment of unbelievers; however, the scriptural evidence for eternal punishment is overwhelming.”

Evidence for the doctrine of eternal conscious torment is *not* overwhelming. It is as Mr. Cook describes it; “an incentive to aggressive evangelism....” These are elements of the doctrine of eternal conscious torment the advocates frequently advance. Hell is a place no one wants to be. Heaven is blessed recompense for believing the Gospel. Hell is just recompense for not believing it. Heaven is the most happy of places. Hell is the greatest misery.

Dr. Sawyer asks us to consider the duration of bliss or the duration of hell. Both are directly related to the length of life which is a short time in the scheme of an eternal Father. Our eternal destiny boils down to how we lived our lives in this temporal world. Everything we ever did has been recorded in heaven. The books will be opened and all our evils will be exposed to the Light. Our life becomes superfluous to our heart’s attitude toward God. Dr. Sawyer rightfully suggests, “It matters little what one’s life as been or what character he has formed.” A man on his deathbed before he takes his last breath could confess sin and repent.

⁶⁷ William F. Cook, Associate Professor of New Testament Interpretation. “*Last Things - Baptist Faith & Message, Article 10.*” Baptist2Baptist.net. Publication date unknown. <http://www.baptist2baptist.net/b2barticle.asp?ID=253>. Date accessed: 04/01/2018.

“A moment’s action of the soul but an instant before death may annul or reverse it all.” That man could have led a life worse than the worst “and yet sincerely repent the moment before he dies, and believe on Christ, and is there any one who doubts his salvation?” Let a person live a life as good as Mother Theresa’s “and yet commit one sin, even in thought, the moment before he expires” will certainly die without forgiveness. That is the doctrine of probation!

The doctrine of eternal conscious torment demands a loving Father accept the death-bed confession of a heinous human being and reward him with eternal love. Yet, the good deeds in the life of an unwashed man are ignored and he is sent to eternal torment. Dr. Sawyer tells us, “The only question that really has any significance – is, not how a man has lived, but how he died. Under this theory of religion, “all is well that ends well.”

The traditionalist advocates of the doctrine of eternal conscious torment have nothing to fear however. They have been trained to not die in their sins. Their last thoughts will have already been forgiven. In his dying breath the traditional orthodox believer will be saved.

CHAPTER 14

Conclusion

At the opening of this effort and throughout I say honestly none of the work was my own. The theme provided by Dr. Sawyer in his book is followed closely. I reiterated the words of Dr. Sawyer and the quotes he provided. I augmented Dr. Sawyer's thesis with quotes from contemporary sources and my personal beliefs regarding the doctrine of eternal conscious torment. In this I concur with Dr. Sawyer when he writes that his work exhibits "somewhat at length, and in the very words of its friends and advocates, the formidable doctrine of endless punishment. The reader has seen, without disguise or modification, what it is, and how through many centuries it has been preached and believed."

The volume of words attributed to the advocates of this doctrine has grown dramatically since 1879 when Dr. Sawyer wrote his book. The doctrine is still prevalent and primary in Christian congregations and denominations today. The vitriol expressed at others for challenging the doctrine is probably no less severe today than it was in Dr. Sawyer's day.

The doctrine of eternal conscious torment when examined closely brings us to terrible conclusions. Dr. Sawyer provides us with several. Primary is the sheer number of persons lost and not saved. He writes, "The great majority of the human race will finally be damned." This outcome, this theological doctrine is common among traditionalist congregations and denominations. The second conclusion is that there is no end to the imagination and descriptions of torments and tortures. Physical and emotional tortures applied to a degree only God could administer.

Third, "these various torments...are to continue without intermission or mitigation through all eternity." The Fourth conclusion gleaned from the words of the doctrine's advocates is that death closes all opportunity for reconciliation. The die is cast and "the destiny of every human soul is irrevocably determined by its condition at the time of death. The soul's condition is not tempered in age or by lack of it. At death no man can be redeemed. Fifth, there is not any kind of punishment that is remedial. There is no torture or torment applied that disciplines.

The doctrines of total depravity, probation and eternal conscious torment result in an ugly conclusion. Dr. Sawyer gave the words of the doctrine's advocates and I have supplemented those with the very words of contemporary advocates. The more people learn about the doctrine the more horrific it becomes. But the zeal to advance the doctrine does not shrink. It is terror meant to align the thoughts of men to comport with traditions established by other men. The doctrine of eternal conscious torment stands by itself and is apart from all else that is Christian doctrine. There is nothing like it in all of scripture or "in the universe." Dr. Sawyer says, "In the whole realm of human thought it stands alone and unapproachable in its solitary ugliness, its sublime horror." Dr. Sawyer rightly determines this doctrine is huge in its implications for all God created. He asks for proof of the doctrine and until proof is seen it should not be taught or shared among God's children. "It is clearly not a matter to be taken for granted. It is too awful, too shocking, for that."

To believe in eternal conscious torment without proof simply because it is what is taught is offensive. It is offensive to ourselves. It is offensive to God. Dr. Sawyer writes, "No proof should be admissible upon a doctrine so exceptional and astounding that is not direct and clear, conclusive and irrefragable." We should stand and demand concrete evidence. This doctrine is so profound the proof should be incontrovertible. Dr. Sawyer asks, "Can such evidence be produced?"

We have seen the explanations given to support the doctrine. Theologian after theologian provide horrific descriptions of the torments given at the hand of God. It is as if each is trying to outdo the other in the level of each horror's description. Great men who love Christ teach that Christ does not love all. Dr. Sawyer is concerned the doctrine is advocated with a sense of uncaring attitude. He says, "Next to the

doctrine itself, the most amazing thing, it seems to me, is the ease, the flippancy, the nonchalance with which grave divines, men of learning and logic, men of human sympathies and Christian charity, profess to prove it to their own satisfaction, and, as they would have us think, to the rational conviction of all others.” Dr. Sawyer asks if the Biblical authorities have seriously “considered the subject in such a manner as to understand and appreciate what it is they are attempting to prove?” They are convinced and convicted. Dr. Sawyer rightly asks, “Have they formed any conception ... of what the doctrine of endless punishment is in itself, and the various implications it necessarily carries along with it?”

This doctrine dictates the majority of all the human race will see their final destiny to be eternal punishment. Millions, even billions, of men, women, children set ablaze by a fire that tears and heals. This subject is a big deal. Do we preach “the majority of the human race” will be consigned by an all-loving Father to eternal tortures? It is a big deal! The magnitude of the hatred that comes through this doctrine seemingly is lost. The men who profess and advocate this doctrine are untouched by its consequences. There is no concern written by them to demonstrate their fear of being damned to eternal punishment. There are few words left out to describe torments other people will endure, but none for themselves. The doctrine is preached and often labeled “fire and brimstone” for the zeal the preacher possesses for the doctrine. These great theologians do not preach they are affected by the doctrine’s consequences. They deliver powerful messages that preach the torments God will mete out on those who reject Him, but they are not affected themselves. They are confident they satisfy the good and eternal life is assured to them.

We have read the words of preachers insisting the doctrine of eternal conscious torment must be preached. We are told that not preaching about God’s wrath is to be a disservice to our audience and disloyal to God’s Word. Dr. Sawyer cites the sentiments of Dr. Dwight who said, “Were such preachers to remember that at this very time they may be pronouncing the final doom of their own parents, brothers, sisters, wives, children, and even of themselves, I cannot but believe that their mode of address would be essentially changed, would lose all its violence and exaggeration, and would become deeply humble, solemn, and affectionate.” The sermons given that highlight the torments of hell

and the wrath of God being executed against His creation must certainly impact the preacher's life. Sorrow for the lost and an overwhelming desire to preach the Gospel should overcome them. Advocating this doctrine should cause the preacher sleepless nights. His words could condemn himself. His words could condemn his own family. Dr. Sawyer says, "It seems very easy to preach endless punishment to the world at large, but when it comes to our own household and our own souls, it must be a very different thing; and if I do not mistake, this is what our orthodox friends need more than almost anything else to understand and feel. It would bring the doctrine home to them as they seldom permit it to be brought, and give it a profound personal interest."

Dr. Sawyer believed in 1879 that it was necessary to expose the words of the advocates of this doctrine. He suggests that if the proponents of eternal conscious torment would ponder their words and apply them to their families the doctrine would necessarily be changed. The doctrine of eternal conscious torment makes our Father a God of endless wrath. The doctrine mandates God punish people eternally for sins committed in a very short time of life. There is no end to the type or degree of torments put upon the souls and then the bodies of unrepentant men, women and children. Somehow in this doctrine God's vengeance is satisfied by His wrath.

A question needs to be asked. A Christ-like walk requires we strive to please our Father in His Son. When we hold fast to the doctrine of eternal conscious torment are we striving to please Him? God teaches us that He is love. We learn His mercies are fresh every day. His mercies are never exhausted. Yet, the advocates of this doctrine preach God is wrathful, vindictive, vengeful, unloving and without mercy.

God's power and sovereignty are never surrendered and always conquer evil. He will overcome this doctrine's influence with His Truth. Men and traditions will work to advance their separate causes, but God's Truth will always prevail. The doctrine is so frightful men ignore its horrific torments. The truth of the doctrine is not questioned when it should be. The effects, the consequences of the doctrine are ignored. The traditions of men are to be challenged. This doctrine is one that deserves great scrutiny.

Those opposed to the doctrine do not start the difficulties. In Dr.

Sawyer's estimation "the doctrine is incredible." The authorities that believe it are unconcerned it is implausible. "It is only by appealing to one's fears that he can be brought to believe the doctrine of endless punishment that few believe it for themselves, while many accept it quite too readily for others."

Dr. Sawyer brought focus to the doctrine of eternal conscious torment to expose it. He used the words of its advocates to point to the serious flaws in it. Dr. Sawyer's intent was to show what the doctrine is. He leaves it to the reader to discern the truth of the doctrine. He closes with a prayer. "Trusting that this volume may lead the candid reader to a more earnest consideration of the subject to which it is devoted, and so serve the interests of truth, promote the welfare of mankind, and contribute to the glory of God, I cheerfully submit it to the hands of my fellow-men and to the Divine providence." Let that be my prayer. I pray those who read this will see that Dr. Sawyer is not condemning persons, but is exposing a faulty and false doctrine by using the words of its advocates. I pray God is glorified in this work.

CHAPTER 15

Universal Reconciliation Found in the Old Testament

The following chapters of this book are my attempt, however feeble, to show universal reconciliation is a worthy doctrine. David Sprenger provides a list of scriptures that support a theological understanding known as universal reconciliation⁶⁸. He makes comments on some scriptures in the list he provides. I include his comments where appropriate. It is important to note that Mr. Sprenger's list is not complete.

"In the beginning..." God created the heavens and the earth. He created all the living creatures on the earth, under it and in the seas of it. Every form of life imaginable is created by God Who is Sovereign over all He creates. If the doctrine of eternal conscious torment is true, then we should find proof in God's Holy Word. There should be something within God's Holy Word that teaches God's punishment for sins not forgiven is eternal conscious torment. If universal reconciliation is true we should find proof of it in God's Holy Word. These doctrines cannot coexist.

What was the atonement for the "original sin?" Can we state with confidence that the blood of the animal God killed to make covering for Adam and for Eve was an atoning sacrifice? Is that the redemptive price

⁶⁸ David Sprenger. *"The Ultimate Redemptive Purposes of God: Scriptures Concerning the Reconciliation of All Things."* Tentmaker website. Publication date unknown. <http://www.tentmaker.org/lists/ReconciliationScriptures.html>. Date accessed: 06/02/2018.

required of Adam? Adam and Eve sinned against God. God knew they would. He knew their punishment before they reached out to take the fruit from the tree and eat it. Their punishment is death. It is a physical death certainly. There are many traditionalists who claim it is a spiritual death as well.

Traditionalist camps find common ground in their belief in eternal conscious torment. The doctrine of eternal conscious torment requires that God created Adam and Eve knowing they would sin. He knew their sin would be passed on to all generations after them. The traditional doctrine requires all men be born deserving a judgment of death. Death is hell. All men are bound for hell until they see the Light, confess sin, repent and believe Jesus is the Christ.

Universal reconciliation does teach that all men are bound for physical death. Advocates for universal reconciliation agree God created Adam and Eve knowing they would sin and knowing their sin would affect every generation. We agree the just punishment is physical death and that physical death is passed on to every person created by God. We agree that a confession of faith in Christ Jesus is paramount in salvation. The proponents of universal reconciliation believe there is a “lake of fire” that is reserved for Satan and his minion horde. We believe hell is the product of traditions, Advocates of universal reconciliation believe God will reconcile all men to Himself because it is His will that none should perish.

...UR IN GENESIS

I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who curses you. *All of the families of the earth will be blessed in you.* (Genesis 12:3, emphasis added)

Mr. Sprenger explains, “This is the original and foundational promise made by God, revealing His redemptive purpose and plan for all of mankind.” Think this through. God is making a profound statement to Abraham. “In you, Abraham, all the families of the earth will be blessed.” God is not designating only Abraham’s people. God is clearly saying “all the families of the earth.” No person from any nation is excluded from

this promise. Who are “all the families of the earth?” There can only be one conclusion. “All the families of the earth” are “ALL THE FAMILIES OF THE EARTH.”

Understanding these scriptures to mean precisely what is written should be foundations of our Christian faith. Learned men sometimes change the plain meaning of scripture. Dr. John MacArthur is highly regarded as a Biblical Scholar, Pastor and Teacher. He is a man worthy of much respect. Dr. MacArthur gave a sermon message entitled “Inward, Upward or Outward” ⁶⁹ in which he explains this verse. Dr. MacArthur states, “Nothing so much glorifies God as His gracious redemption of damned, hell-bound sinners. It was for that ultimate purpose that God called Abraham, that in him ‘all the families of the earth shall be blessed.’”

The idea as Dr. MacArthur teaches is that Israel is chosen by God “to use that specially chosen and blessed nation to reach all other nations of the world for Himself.” Israel is a light to all nations in the same manner Christ Jesus is the Light. He says, “Like her Messiah, Israel was to be ‘a light to the nations so that [the Lord’s] salvation may reach to ends of the earth.’” Ostensibly the mission given to Israel, that is to be a light in the world, is now the purpose of the traditional denominations and congregations. “The great mission of the church is to so love, learn and live as to call men and women to Jesus Christ.”

Dr. MacArthur’s commentary on this verse is wonderfully suited to support the doctrine of universal reconciliation. I know Dr. MacArthur believes in eternal conscious torment, but the words he provides here could put the lie to eternal conscious torment. He provides spiritual motivation to be the evangelical church proclaiming “The Blessed Hope.”

God made the way to reconciliation through His Son, Christ Jesus. Our reconciliation to Him brings glory. All of mankind is reconciled to Him. The glory given God cannot be mistaken because of the magnitude of His mercy and of His love. The worst, most heinous man ever to have lived will be reconciled to God. God, Almighty, will “fulfill” His will and win the lost. He will drag all men unto Himself. Abram was not Jewish nor Hebrew. This is not a promise to any one nation, but a promise

⁶⁹ Dr. John MacArthur. “*Inward, Upward or Outward?*” Publication date unknown. <https://www.gty.org/library/articles/A187/inward-upward-or-outward>. Date accessed: 04/02/2018.

to all nations. This promise is fulfilled in the Life, Death, Burial and Resurrection of Christ Jesus.

Dr. MacArthur is right to suggest God would draw believers to heaven immediately if all He wanted was fellowship with them, or to teach them His Holy Word, or even to hear their praises. Dr. MacArthur believes God wants more from His believers and that is to answer the true call of “winning the lost.” Dr. MacArthur admonishes believers to examine their level of Christian living and to get into the game of “winning the lost.”

Dr. MacArthur points to two distinct groups in this commentary. The first group is “lost.” The second group is “lost, but found.” Dr. MacArthur provides the distinction where none is necessary. It is God’s Holy Word that says, “In you Abram all the families of the world will be blessed.” That would include the families of the “lost” and of the “lost, but found.” The plain meaning of these scriptures is superior to adding meaning and intent to them. To declare there are some who are “lost” and others who are “lost, but found” adds discrimination that is not found in the simple reading of these scriptures. Is the impact of God’s Word diminished by adding this distinction? Perhaps, so. These are verses supporting universal reconciliation. They do not support the doctrine of eternal conscious torment.

The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, *the son of Abraham*. (Matthew 1:1, emphasis added)

God’s Holy Word tells us Christ Jesus is the promised blessing. The blessing promised to Abram is alive in Christ Jesus. “All the families of the earth” are the benefactors of the blessing given to Abram. Jesus is that blessing to “all the families of the earth.”

For this cause it is of faith, that it may be according to grace, to the end that the promise may be sure *to all the seed*, not to that only which is of the law, but to that also which is of the faith of Abraham, *who is the father of us all*. As it is written, “I have made you a father of many nations.” This is in the presence of him whom he believed: God, who gives life to the dead, and calls the

things that are not, as though they were. Who in hope believed against hope, to the end that he might become a father of many nations, according to that which had been spoken, "So will your seed be." (Romans 4:16-18, emphasis added)

The religious scholars; the Levites, the Pharisees and Sadducees, the zealots, Pastors, teachers and church authorities agree the promise was made to Abram. The promise is fulfilled in Christ Jesus. Unfortunately we disagree on whom the blessing is bestowed. We disagree on the meaning of "all nations" and "father of us all."

The adherent to universal reconciliation determines that Abram believed with all his heart that he would have a child despite his old age. Religious scholars agree that the Seed is Christ Jesus. Because of his belief Abram is counted among the truly faithful. He is described as righteous. Abram, now Abraham, is "father of many nations" just as his Seed is over many nations. Abraham is the father of all nations just as Jesus is over all nations. Scriptures regarding "all" men and those regarding "every" man support God's will and is universal reconciliation. God is love and all men, every man will be reconciled to Him. Even the dead for "their spirits have returned to the One Who gave it."

Questions to ask, "Is the man who dishonors Abraham's family part of 'all the families of the earth...?'" Did this man, who is opposed to Abraham, somehow lose his birthright? Is he to be considered as no longer one in a family of the earth? I don't think so. The man will be judged for sinning. The traditionalist believes the corresponding judgment for the rebellious unrepentant person is eternal conscious torment. The advocate of universal reconciliation believes God will judge, punish and reconcile that rebellious man to Himself.

The plain meaning of scripture is that all families on the earth are blessed because of Abraham's faithfulness. That's all families. Hindu families, Communist families, dysfunctional families, Baptist families, Methodist families, Catholic, Buddhist and on and on. All families are blessed. Blessed with what? Their promise is the Promised Land. The family of Abraham is blessed for having set out to the Promised Land. Every family is blessed by God because Abraham sought God's promise.

What is our promise? What is our blessing? We are blessed because God promised to bless all the families of all the nations.

That's not complicated. These scriptures stand without contradiction. There is not a place of eternal conscious torment. The traditionalist doctrine requires a belief that not all in every family will be saved. Fathers, mothers, brothers and sisters consigned to eternal conscious torment because their family was not a part of "all the families of the earth."

All the nations of the earth *will be blessed by your seed*,
because you have obeyed my voice."(Genesis 22:18,
emphasis added)

Mr. Sprenger reminds us, "This promise is repeated over and over throughout scripture." It is fundamentally clear that from Abram/ Abraham the promised Seed has come. That Seed brings blessings to "...all the nations of the earth." That Seed is Christ Jesus. Please note, "...all the nations of the earth *will be* blessed." There is a blessing in Christ Jesus already received or to be received. All the nations, all the families, all the people of every religion and even those without religion "will be blessed."

Abraham was preparing to sacrifice his son, Isaac. An altar was built and Isaac was put upon it. Isaac, the son, is obedient to his father. Abraham raises the sacrificial blade and then he is stopped. God provided a ram and a sacrifice is given to God that day. This kind of sacrifice happens again at Calvary, but God does not intervene to stop His sacrifice. He has provided The Lamb. The promised Seed has come. Because Abraham had sufficient, great faith and willingly obeyed God we have been blessed by God. Because of Abraham "...all the nations of the earth shall be blessed." That blessing is Christ Jesus.

The advocate for universal reconciliation sees these verses literally. "All nations shall be blessed...." There is nothing that causes us to read anything less than "all nations shall be blessed...."

...UR IN NUMBERS

Yahweh said, "I have pardoned according to your word: but in very deed, as I live, and as *all the earth shall be filled with Yahweh's glory*; (Numbers 14:20-21, emphasis added)

Moses is facing a serious problem. The people were lamenting their plight. They were complaining about everything and especially about God. The people witnessed God's signs and wonders. They experienced the hand of God and received a great salvation through water. They rebelled and they blamed God for their situation. They demanded a leader be selected from their group and that they return to Egypt. They perceived life to be better in Egypt. God speaks with Moses and asks, "How long shall I put up with this?" The people, God's chosen people, are in rebellion. Their hatred for God's providence is stunning. God says, "I shall smite them with the plague and evict them, and I shall make you into a greater and more substantial nation than they (v. 12)."

Moses asks God to forgive His people. God hears Moses and God pardons them because of Moses' word. God says something remarkable and proves the limitless depths of His mercy and of His love, "...all the earth will be filled with the glory of the Lord." Literally, "...all the earth will be filled with the glory of the Lord."

The Israelites were being drawn back to Egypt. They were sinning against God. They were fighting against His direction and determined to walk in their own will. He is willing to kill them for their disobedience and for their complaining. Moses becomes their intercessor, their advocate, and God hears Moses' plea for his people. And, God forgives them because of Moses' plea. Jesus nearing death on the cross at Calvary said to the Father, "Forgive them for they do not know what they are doing." Christ Jesus is our Intercessor; our Advocate. God forgives us because of Christ's plea and because of Christ's obedience.

God does punish His chosen people by allowing none of that generation of Israelites to enjoy or set foot on the promised land except two. Not even their intercessor, Moses, would touch the promised land. God pardons "all" the Israelites. "All the earth will be filled with the glory of the Lord." God closed up the promised land to rebellious Israelites, but

His promise to Abraham is still in force. “In his seed all the nations of the world shall be blessed.” God opens heaven to all His creation when Christ sacrifices His Life for our sins. Every knee will bow and every tongue confess that Christ Jesus is Lord and brings glory to the Father.

The advocate of universal reconciliation extols these verses as direct evidence; The Holy Word of God clearly states, “...all the earth will be filled with the glory of the Lord.” Not a portion here and a portion there, but “all the earth.” Universal reconciliation teaches “all the earth” is being overwhelmed by His glory. There is not a reason to conclude that only a part of the earth will be filled, but “all the earth will be filled with His glory.”

...UR IN 2 SAMUEL

For we must die, and are like water spilt on the ground,
which can't be gathered up again; *neither does God take
away life, but devises means, that he who is banished not be an
outcast from him.* (2 Samuel 14:14, emphasis added)

David is ruling Israel and there is great upheaval in the Kingdom and in his own family. David's son, Absalom, had committed a murder by taking revenge on his brother, Amnon. Amnon had sexually assaulted Absalom's sister, Tamar. Absalom left town and was hiding. Joab, looking to trap David, sent a woman to him seeking counsel. The woman told David a story similar to what he was currently living through with Absalom. When the woman finished her testimony she asked David's pardon of her son for the sin of killing his brother. David tried to put off giving an answer, but the woman insisted. David agreed that the woman's son should be pardoned. Immediately, the woman wants to know why Absalom should not be considered for a pardon in the fashion David pardoned her son. The woman argues that God does not destroy a rebellious spirit right away. God waits. Perhaps the sinner will come to his senses. More likely, God “...devises means, that he who is banished may not be cast out from him.”

What's David to do? He realizes Joab is behind the woman's testimony, but that fact does not change the moral dilemma he faces. He decides

in favor of his son and allows Absalom to return to Jerusalem and to live in peace. God "...devises means..." to keep His rebellious children from being separated from Him. Eventually, He gives The Way "so the banished may not be cast out from Him."

The advocate for universal reconciliation applies these verses as proof that God is love and that He wills that all be saved. Consider how awful a man Absalom was, moreover, consider how terrible Amnon was. Consider David's sin. People died because of these men. People were scarred because of these men. Yet, God "...plans ways so the banished one may not be cast out of him." God is not willing that even one of His creation perish.

...UR IN 1 KINGS

...hear in heaven, your dwelling place, and do according to all that the foreigner calls to you for; that *all the peoples of the earth may know your name, to fear you, as do your people Israel*, and that they may know that this house which I have built is called by your name. (I Kings 8:43, emphasis added)

that *all the peoples of the earth may know that Yahweh, he is God. There is no one else.*(I Kings 8:60, emphasis added)

Solomon was at the Temple of the Lord in Jerusalem. God's power and preeminence are known because of the Temple. Solomon was praising God and leading the worship. He was praying on behalf of Israel. Solomon asks God to tell the world, all the peoples of the earth, His Name. Solomon asks that the many requests be answered so as to give great proof that He is Lord. He is God. "There is no one else."

The advocate for universal reconciliation points to these verses to confirm there is only one God and that He is sovereign over all things. The people of the world, the nations, all know there is only one God. The doctrine of universal reconciliation is bolstered by this good news. God has made it known and will always make it known that He is the Lord our God. The people know it and rejoice. The kingdoms of the earth know it, too.

Now therefore, Yahweh our God, save us, I beg you, out of his hand, *that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that you, Yahweh, are God alone.*” (2 Kings 19:19, emphasis added)

Hezekiah is the King of Judah. His kingdom is being threatened by foreign enemies. He paid a ransom to the Assyrian Ruler Sennacherib. Hezekiah fortified Jerusalem during this time of purchased peace, but news about Hezekiah’s defiance made its way to Sennacherib. Envoys from the Assyrian commander went to meet with Hezekiah. They mocked him and they mocked Judah. Hezekiah was anxious about his situation and he reached out to Isaiah for guidance. Isaiah told Hezekiah not to fear the Assyrian commander. Isaiah told Hezekiah that God would “put fear into” Sennacherib. Sennacherib became concerned about being attacked by Egypt and wanted to end this battle for Jerusalem quickly. He penned a letter and had it delivered to Hezekiah. The letter was taken by Hezekiah to the Temple and there Hezekiah laid it out before God.

Hezekiah’s faithful prayer received God’s answer. Jerusalem would not be taken by this foreign enemy. Sennacherib and the Assyrian army will return to their homeland defeated and humiliated. Sennacherib will suffer the consequences for his blasphemous letter. It will also be known “that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that you, Yahweh, are God alone.”

The advocate for universal reconciliation gives thanks to God for the wisdom of this verse. There is only one God and He already knows our way. He is the King over all. We have every reason to believe that His interest in “all the kingdoms” includes all the people created over all time as we know time.

..UR IN 1 and 2 CHRONICLES

David prays:

Sing to Yahweh, all the earth! Display his salvation from day to day. Declare his glory among the nations, and his marvelous works among *all the peoples*. For great is

Yahweh, and greatly to be praised. *He also is to be feared above all gods.* For all the gods of the peoples are idols, but Yahweh made the heavens. Honor and majesty are before him. Strength and gladness are in his place.

Ascribe to Yahweh, you relatives of the peoples, ascribe to Yahweh glory and strength! Ascribe to Yahweh the glory due to his name. Bring an offering, and come before him. Worship Yahweh in holy array. *Tremble before him, all the earth. The world also is established* that it can't be moved. Let the heavens be glad, and let the earth rejoice!

Let them say among the nations, "Yahweh reigns!" Let the sea roar, and its fullness! Let the field exult, and all that is therein! Then the trees of the forest will sing for joy before Yahweh, for he comes to judge the earth. Oh give thanks to Yahweh, for he is good, for *his loving kindness endures forever.* (1 Chronicles 16:23-34, emphasis added)

These are verses recording David's praise and prayer to God. God is good! His love is ever strong for His creation. His mercy toward us never fails and never ends. The advocate of universal reconciliation preaches all who believe in Christ Jesus rejoice in God's Holy Word. These words were recorded hundreds of years prior to the Life of Christ. These verses constitute proof that God is Sovereign before the beginning of the ages to beyond the end of the ages. He is Sovereign over "all the earth." The heavens are glad and everything in or upon the earth rejoices. The heavens and the earth and all they contain are established. God is Sovereign and He will judge everything on the earth, under the earth, in the sea or under the sea. All will bow to Him and declare with their mouths that He is Lord. "His loving kindness endures forever." Universal reconciliation recognizes these verses for what they convey. His love is true; His love is for all; and, His love is eternal.

When he had taken counsel with the people, he appointed those who should sing to Yahweh, and give praise in holy array, as they went out before the army, and say, *Give*

thanks to Yahweh; for his loving kindness endures forever. (2
Chronicles 20:21, emphasis added)

An immense army assembled near Jerusalem. They are readied for battle. War was declared against Judah. Jehoshaphat went into the Temple of God and prayed. He spoke to God and reminded Him of His promise to Israel. God answered Jehoshaphat's prayer through Jahaziel. God will fight this battle and the people have nothing to fear. The people, having faith in the Word of God, started worshiping and paraded to the battle site. The enemy was confounded and confused. They began fighting each other. God's battle is won. The people of Judah gather the spoils of the battle. God's mercy was upon them. His mercy is not withheld.

Historically there were 20 Kings of Judah. Of those only eight were good and honorable leaders who brought revival on their people during their respective reigns. Some kings had lives centered in God in the Temple. Most other Kings, though, had their hearts in their kingdoms. Jim George has written a book entitled "The Bare Bones Bible Handbook." ⁷⁰ He provides summaries of the 66 books of the Bible. About 2 Chronicles chapters 10-36 Mr. George writes, "When the reigning king serves God, the kingdom is blessed, but if or when he forsakes the temple and the worship of God, the nation is torn by warfare and unrest." The lesson to learn, according to Mr. George and others, is that like the reigning kings when we are in God's service we are blessed and when we are not then our blessings are diminished. As Mr. Sprenger points out, "This theme is repeated over and over throughout scripture." That message is this; "God's mercy endures forever."

...UR IN PSALMS

But Yahweh reigns forever. He has prepared his throne for judgment. He will judge the world in righteousness. He will administer judgment to the peoples in uprightness.
(Psalm 9:7-8, emphasis added.)

⁷⁰ Jim George. "The Bare Bones Bible Handbook." . Harvest House Publishers, Eugene, OR. 2006.

The Psalmist is comforting himself and comforting us with a reassuring voice. The Lord “reigns forever.” The Lord alone lives forever. He sees all forever. He knows all forever. He is Sovereign over all forever. Nothing on earth “reigns forever.” There is nothing man can construct that will be built forever. Everything rusts or rots. “But, Yahweh reigns forever.” He is God. God is love. He does not change. He is the loving creator and Father of Adam. He knitted Eve together starting with Adam’s rib. He loves them unconditionally. He loved them when He created them and He loved them when He cursed the earth because of their disobedience. Nothing can stand against the power of God. His will will be done. Of that there cannot be any doubt. All the evil forces aligned against heaven will not be capable of overturning His will.

It is the Father who will administer justice. No matter what the heavenly judgment will be it will be a judgment made in love. His judgment will be for us, that is, in favor of us. And His justice will be commensurate with His love. God is love and His judgment is in love. The advocate of universal reconciliation prays to heaven giving thanks for making the truth so clear. God forgives. He forgives all. He will reconcile all. His mercy will not end. His grace will not cease. He will not change from a loving Father to a punishing tyrant.

All the ends of the earth shall remember and turn to Yahweh. All the relatives of the nations shall worship before you. For the kingdom is Yahweh’s. He is the ruler over the nations. All the rich ones of the earth shall eat and worship. All those who go down to the dust shall bow before him, even he who can’t keep his soul alive. Posterity shall serve him. Future generations shall be told about the Lord. (Psalm 22:27-30, emphasis added)

Christ’s work on the Cross will be remembered by every person in every nation. Christ is enthroned He is King. His dominion over all is certain. There is not a person over whom the King of Kings does not rule. “Every knee will bow and every tongue confess that He is Lord.”

Can there be any doubt? Everyone out to “all the ends of the earth...” will turn to the Lord. Their thoughts about the Lord, no matter how

small, narrow or fleeting, will be brought to focus on Him. All people will remember. They will repent and turn to the Lord. All nations. All people. Worship! Every family in every nation will worship the King. He rules over every person in every family from every nation on earth. He is King of Kings. All creation is subjected to Him. Those who rebel will be caught up in His mercy. This is our blessed hope! Because we believe Jesus is our Savior we have the confidence that this day of reconciliation with Him will one day come. All evil will be abolished. Satan and his evil horde of demons will be held at bay waiting for their final judgment. For a thousand years Jesus will be King over all!

Those who do not believe can only wait for death to overcome them. They are without hope in this life because they could not or would not believe. Many unbelievers will never have been given the opportunity to know Jesus as Savior. We all know someone who is hopeless in this life. Bless them today and everyday with your testimony. Tell them how the story ends for you in Heaven. Tell them how His story ends and point out how God reconciles all to Himself. No effort required. We have family and friends who have not heard Christ's testimony or they find it too difficult to heed. Bless them today and every day with the confidence you have in Him. Tell them how you believe you will bow before your Savior; with praise and with a grateful heart.

Everyone will be subject to the Lord. He is King of Kings and Lord of Lords. Every person will kneel before Him. We realize we cannot maintain our lives under our own power. We live because He does. The testimony of Christ came to us from people before us and from people before them. For two thousand years plus His testimony has been handed down; person to person to person. His Word will live forever. As long as there are humans on the earth there will be witnesses to the Gospel of Christ.

I raise my hands to Heaven and praise the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. God's plan for my salvation is righteous. There is no other way. We are all blessed to have been subject to His mercy. He gives grace upon grace. The advocate of universal reconciliation rejoices in the knowledge that even the worst human ever created will be shown overwhelming love. We believe that man will be reconciled to the Lord because the Lord rules over all the nations. The worst man is welcomed

into God's Kingdom and is loved by God unconditionally. All shall bow and worship Him. There is a time to come when there is no one left that has not worshiped Him. The simple reading of scripture demonstrates God's love for His creation. All that He creates will be reconciled to Him. Even in death, "...the spirit returns to the Father Who gave it...."

For his anger is but for a moment. His favor is for a lifetime.
Weeping may stay for the night, but joy comes in the morning. (Psalm 30:5, emphasis added)

David's prayer is not only for himself. He is calling out others to share his joy in the Lord. He is calling out others to sing praises. He is calling out others to join him in worship. "our light affliction, which is for the moment, works for us more and more exceedingly an eternal weight of glory;..." (2 Corinthians 4:17). God strengthens us; He disciplines those he loves through His anger. The time God spends in anger is short. His lessons add His discipline to our lives and bring us closer to Him. This is a Holy relationship that lasts the balance of our lives.

We may be painfully sorrowful through the night, but in the morning God relieves us of our pain. I do not think it is unsafe to say each of us has been through a deep valley of sorrow. I know I have. I was hopeless and tearful. My despair was so complete there was no one who could console me. No one except God. In one night I cried with wrenching sobs. The next morning it was over. The sorrow had left me. And to this day I praise God for His love through that night. There have been other nights like that one. In each God's "grace upon grace" took me from the darkness of sorrow to the Light that is my Blessed Hope.

None of us are free of trials or tribulations. We will have to stand against the devil who strives to steal our joy. But, we do not have to stand alone; "His favor lasts a lifetime." The universal reconciliation advocate will sing praises for this message given in God's Holy Word. God is eternally a loving Father. His anger against us does not last, but His love for us is forever. Even the worst man will eventually experience God's love. It is God Who is not angry for long. It will be God Who reconciles all men to Himself.

By Yahweh's word, the heavens were made; all their army by the breath of his mouth. He gathers the waters of the sea together as a heap. He lays up the deeps in storehouses. Let all the earth fear Yahweh. Let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of him. For he spoke, and it was done. He commanded, and it stood firm. Yahweh brings the counsel of the nations to nothing. He makes the thoughts of the peoples to be of no effect. The counsel of Yahweh stands fast forever, the thoughts of his heart to all generations. Blessed is the nation whose God is Yahweh, the people whom he has chosen for his own inheritance. Yahweh looks from heaven. He sees all the sons of men. From the place of his habitation he looks out on all the inhabitants of the earth, he who fashions all of their hearts; and he considers all of their works. (Psalm 33:6-15, emphasis added)

Our God is Sovereign. He created the earth and the heavens. He spoke and the heavens were made. He breathed His Spirit onto all in the heavens He made. He created us. He knitted us together in our mothers' wombs. He breathed and His Spirit is in us and is upon us from the moment we are conceived. His place is Sovereign. His rule is all-powerful. His will is His command. His command is righteous and pure. His will stands forever. It is His will that all be saved. It is His will that all generations will know His will. "Every knee will bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord."

The nation the Lord has chosen is blessed. Israel is blessed and believers are grafted into Israel and are therefore blessed. He "...fashions the hearts of them all." God thwarts the plans of men, particularly those plans that are contrary to His. He makes the unrighteous plan of governments foolish in His sight. God sees everything. Scripture teaches, "Wash your hands you sinners." Get all the dirt from your life and wash it away. He sees it all from His throne. There is nothing we can hide from Him. God knows our hearts. After all, He created them. He knows our innermost thoughts. He knows what scares us. He knows what entices us. Simply put, He knows it all.

There is not a man alive nor a person to be born that can save himself.

Salvation is not a matter of physical strength. God has promised to deliver us from death. His Son has told us that He has prepared a place for us in His Father's house. We have nothing to fear on this earth. It is our calling to revere our Lord. The preacher committed to universal reconciliation delightfully exposes these verses to mean God is love. God is merciful. God is Sovereign. It is His will that all be saved. The advocate of universal reconciliation teaches God's redemption is intended for all.

There are many of us who have family or friends who are committed to the "gods" of the world. They are committed to wealth and to other people, but not to God. They have chosen the wide gate that leads to destruction. We lack the power to convince them that faith in Christ is critical. "The Blessed Hope" is this; Christ Jesus was sacrificed on a cross to atone for the sins of the world. His death saves all. "...He who fashions all of their hearts;and he considers all of their works" created all men in love. His creation will stand in awe of Him. That's glorious news. In Christ the Father will be all in all, even those who hate Him.

Yahweh of Armies is with us. The God of Jacob is our refuge. Selah.

Come, see Yahweh's works, what desolations he has made in the earth. He makes wars cease to the end of the earth. He breaks the bow, and shatters the spear. He burns the chariots in the fire. *"Be still, and know that I am God. I will be exalted among the nations. I will be exalted in the earth."* Yahweh of Armies is with us. The God of Jacob is our refuge. Selah. (Psalm 46:7-11, emphasis added)

We are living in a time when the nations on the earth are in chaos. Nations are warring with other nations and even warring within themselves inside their own borders. The only true and real help for this condition is by way of Divine intervention. God will set all things right. All the warring kingdoms will be crushed. All the instruments of war will be burned up. He will make places desolate. He leads the peoples of the world to judgment and ultimately brings peace to His earth.

God speaks to us directly in this Psalm. "Be still...," He says. Be patient and quiet. Listen closely for His Word; for His direction. "...And,

know that I am God..." There is no other. Let the Spirit of God; the Holy Spirit show you that He is God. "...I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted on the earth." He is our God and He will be exalted. All nations will bow to Him. All the earth will be possessed and ruled by Him. Every tongue will confess Jesus Christ is Lord!

The preacher advocating universal reconciliation stands to pray against our warring ways and practice our faith. The advocate for universal reconciliation sees an opportunity in every personal contact to demonstrate the kind of love shown them from heaven. It is good for our hearts to know that the people we encounter will be reconciled to God in the same way we will be reconciled to Him. His love is pure; as pure for those who hate Him as it is pure for those who truly love Him. That is indeed glorious Gospel.

You who hear prayer, *to you all men will come.* Sins overwhelmed me, *but you atoned for our transgressions.*
(Psalm 65:2-3, emphasis added)

The Psalmist reaches out to our heavenly Father. The Psalmist gives praise, honor and glory to God in this opening verse of this prayer. He declares "...to You all men will come." The Psalmist does not discriminate between nations or families. The word "will" here is an imperative. It shall happen. The word is a promise. All flesh will come to Him. Greater still in these words we hear the promise that God will place all our sins in a state of forgiveness. God atones not only for the sins of the Psalmist, but for the sins of "all men" that will come to Him.

Traditional doctrines teach us to believe that Christ's atoning sacrifice is sufficient only for those whom He chose or only for those who choose Him. Christ's atoning sacrifice was sufficient only for a few who chose or who were chosen. The doctrine of eternal conscious torment limits God's grace. It is traditionalist teaching that God's mercies are not for all.

God's Holy and Precious Son was obedient to His Father. His life was given. He suffered horrendous tortures for the sins of all flesh, for all families and for all nations. God's love is greater than the doctrine of eternal conscious torment.

By awesome deeds of righteousness, you answer us, *God of our salvation. You who are the hope of all the ends of the earth, of those who are far away on the sea*; Who by his power forms the mountains, having armed yourself with strength; who stills the roaring of the seas, the roaring of their waves, and *the turmoil of the nations*. They also who dwell in faraway places are afraid at your wonders. (Psalm 65:5-8, emphasis added)

The Psalmist is quick to sing praises and to encourage others to sing praises to the Lord. God answers the prayers of the nation and the answer is just. The Psalmist knows God is the nation's only path to salvation. The Psalmist goes further. God is "...the hope..." of all creation. His power calms seas. His power calms men.

Universal reconciliation embraces these verses. The breadth, depth and width of God's love is all-consuming. There is not a soul who is not loved by God. Universal reconciliation teaches that God is all-powerful. We preach that His power reaches into the hearts of men. Hardened hearts can withstand His love for only a short while before He "creates all things new." God's Word does promise He will set all things right. He will set all people right. His justice will be exercised. "You who are the hope of all the ends of the earth, of those who are far away on the sea." They are in awe of His power. Those who dwell at the ends of the earth "will bow their knees and confess with their tongues that Jesus Christ is Lord."

Make a joyful shout to God, all the earth! Sing to the glory of his name! Offer glory and praise! Tell God, "How awesome are your deeds! Through the greatness of your power, *your enemies submit themselves to you*. All the earth will worship you, and will sing to you; they will sing to your name." Selah.

Come, and *see God's deeds—awesome work on behalf of the children of men*. (Psalm 66:1-5, emphasis added)

A SHOUT! The Word of God commands us to "shout for joy." Not just believers, but "all the earth." His Name is worthy of great worship.

We are to sing praises to Him and to glorify Him. Not just believers, but “all the earth.” Even those who hate Him will be drawn to Him; to His mercy; to His love and into reconciliation with Him. His awesome power demands He be glorified. His grace demands our love in Him. He is our “all in all.” The heart sings these verses in praise. All mankind, every nation, every person from all the ends of the earth...all mankind will know He is Lord. His is “awesome work on behalf of the children of men.” His awesome work is grace upon grace. The advocate for universal reconciliation reaches to heaven and teaches, “Come and see what God has done!”

May God be merciful to us, bless us, and cause his face to shine on us. Selah.

That your way may be known on earth, and *your salvation among all nations*, let the peoples praise you, God. Let all the peoples praise you. Oh let the nations be glad and sing for joy, for *you will judge the peoples with equity, and govern the nations on earth*. Selah.

Let the peoples praise you, God. Let all the peoples praise you. The earth has yielded its increase. God, even our own God, will bless us. God will bless us. *All the ends of the earth shall fear him*. (Psalm 67, emphasis added)

The Psalmist reaches out to God on behalf of “the peoples.” He asks that God’s favor would shine on the nations. Let the world know that God is Sovereign and God alone has saving power. His power to save is over all nations. The standard by which God judges will apply equally to all the peoples of all the nations. Justice is equitable and judgment is mercy. God is behind all that happens. He guides all peoples; all nations. He establishes kingdoms and rulers. He puts persons in positions of authority. The outcome is clear. “All the ends of the earth shall fear Him.” God will be revered, honored, glorified, exalted and loved to all the ends of the earth. The Gospel is blessed hope. There is confidence in the people that God wills that all be saved and that Christ gave His life for the sins of the world. No one is excluded from the all-consuming love of God. None are lost.

You have ascended on high. You have led away captives.
You have received gifts among men, yes, *among the rebellious also*, that Yah God might dwell there. (Psalm 68:18, emphasis added)

All of Christendom is convinced that Christ Jesus ascended to heaven and sits now at the right hand of the Father. Christ Jesus leads a host of captives in a long procession. Christ Jesus receives the gifts of praise and worship. We are captivated by the scope of the procession; the captives in the Lord's train. Even "among the rebellious" Christ did go. Even the rebellious are part of God's eternal Kingdom. That "God might dwell there." Profound. Where is "there?" The Lord dwells in heaven and it is the rebellious who are drawn to Him there.

For Yahweh hears the needy, and doesn't despise his captive people. *Let heaven and earth praise him; the seas, and everything that moves therein!* (Psalm 69:33-34, emphasis added)

David is complaining and seeking God's resolution to a myriad of problems. Disquieting thoughts overwhelm his day. He is discouraged. His problems are long-suffered and his mistakes often repeated. He is burdened by his responsibility and by knowing his worthlessness. David confesses his sins to the Lord. He examines all his folly and puts his sin before God. This song turns to praise. The Lord is the Maker of all that is the earth and are the heavens. God created all the creatures in the sea. The Lord's love will reach to all of His creation. Praise God for His unwavering affection and care for His children. The Lord meets the needs of all, especially those who have the greatest need. The least will become the greatest. All creation will rejoice. All creation will be reconciled to the Lord.

He shall have dominion also from sea to sea, from the River *to the ends of the earth...*(Psalm 72:8, emphasis added).

Blessed be his glorious name forever! *Let the whole earth be filled with his glory!* Amen and amen (Psalm 72:19, emphasis added).

This Psalm is a beautiful prayer. It is a prayer asking for the Lord's wisdom. It is a prayer giving honor and glory to Him. Solomon is seeking God's direction. He is seeking strength and righteous judgment. Solomon describes a kind of government that protects the innocent and the needy. This is the kind of government that punishes the oppressors of the humble and poor. This kind of righteous government will become known throughout the world. The Lord will meet the needs of the people and He will raise them up new from old roots. Solomon describes grass growing after having been mowed. The cut away blades of grass will wither, but the grass will grow with God's nourishing rains.

Solomon is inspired to write that every king will bow to Him and every nation will serve Him. Then will "the whole earth be filled with his glory! Amen and amen."

This Psalm preaches God's awesome love for His creation. It is Christ Jesus Who will reign. It is He Who rules all kings and all kingdoms. This is the government of a righteous King. He provides for those in need. The least in His Kingdom are great. His is an Administration of love. There will be no oppressors for the King will have judged them. "Every knee will bow and every tongue confess Jesus Christ is Lord."

In the day of my trouble I will call on you, for you will answer me. There is no one like you among the gods, Lord, nor any deeds like your deeds. *All nations you have made will come and worship before you, Lord.* (Psalm 86:7-9, emphasis added)

The Psalmist lays bare his soul before God. "Hear my prayer, Father," he cries. There is certainty that God knows our hearts and He knows our prayers before we ever utter a word toward Him. Yet, there is an efficiency in seeking His favor, His guidance, His supplication, His mercy, His grace. It is to His honor, to His glory, that we deliberately seek Him in prayer.

The Psalmist is in a time of severe persecution. His appeal to the Lord is for relief from enemies without and within. There is no authority greater than God. There is nothing holy about any other god. In fact, the Psalmist declares, "All nations You have made will come and worship before You." All earthly idols are for nothing. All graven images offer nothing. God's overwhelming love will capture the hearts of all the nations; of all people ever created. The kings and kingdoms will be subject to Him and He will be King of Kings. God will overcome everything not holy, not righteous. As a result, "every knee will bow and every tongue will confess Jesus Christ is Lord."

Sing to Yahweh a new song! Sing to Yahweh, *all the earth*. Sing to Yahweh! Bless his name! Proclaim his salvation from day to day! *Declare his glory among the nations, his marvelous works among all the peoples*. For great is Yahweh, and greatly to be praised! He is to be feared above all gods. For all the gods of the peoples are idols, but *Yahweh made the heavens*. Honor and majesty are before him. Strength and beauty are in his sanctuary.

Ascribe to Yahweh, you families of nations, ascribe to Yahweh glory and strength. Ascribe to Yahweh the glory due to his name. Bring an offering, and come into his courts.

Worship Yahweh in holy array. Tremble before him, all the earth. Say among the nations, "Yahweh reigns." The world is also established. It can't be moved. *He will judge the peoples with equity*. Let the heavens be glad, and let the earth rejoice. Let the sea roar, and its fullness! Let the field and all that is in it exult! Then all the trees of the woods shall sing for joy before Yahweh; for he comes, for he comes to judge the earth. He will judge the world with righteousness, the peoples with his truth. (Psalm 96, emphasis added)

This is a Psalm of holy praise given by a contrite heart. The Psalmist preaches God is Almighty and there is no other god to whom any person

can appeal. All the earth, the Psalmist declares, will worship and tremble. Mr. Sprenger suggests the phrase “all the trees of the forest” is figurative speech meaning “all the people.” Even if not it remains clear that even the earth rejoices.

Every nation will be equal in His sight. Every person will be judged with equity. He is not an unjust Father. He is love. This Psalm preaches the awesome power and love of God. It praises Him for His never ending mercy. It acknowledges God will judge all. In the end He will reconcile “all the trees of forest” to Himself. “He will judge the world with righteousness, the peoples with his truth.”

This wondrous promise should not be lost in the “traditions of men.” The Father is faithful and just. He is our Protector and our Source. He is our life. In His Son we have a King that will “judge the peoples with equity.”

Yahweh has made known his salvation. *He has openly shown his righteousness in the sight of the nations.* He has remembered his loving kindness and his faithfulness toward the house of Israel. *All the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God.* Make a joyful noise to Yahweh, all the earth! Burst out and sing for joy, yes, sing praises! (Psalm 98:2-4, emphasis added)

From East to West and from North to South every creature and all the earth knows God is King. It is evident to all the nations. No nation, no person is excluded from this revelation of God’s saving grace and His overwhelming love. He has the power to save and it is known. It is His will that all be saved. His righteousness is unquestionable and truly Sovereign. The Psalmist preaches God’s promise to save. He will reconcile all to Himself. That is a cause for giving praise, honor and glory to our Father and to His Son. There is great joy in knowing that an all-loving Father embraces all that He creates.

I will exalt you, my God, the King. I will praise your name forever and ever. Every day I will praise you. I will extol your name forever and ever. Great is Yahweh, and

greatly to be praised! *His greatness is unsearchable.* One generation will commend your works to another, and will declare your mighty acts.

Of the glorious majesty of your honor, of your wondrous works, I will meditate. Men will speak of the might of your awesome acts. I will declare your greatness. They will utter the memory of your great goodness, and will sing of your righteousness.

Yahweh is gracious, merciful, slow to anger, and of great loving kindness. Yahweh is good to all. His tender mercies are over all his works. All your works will give thanks to you, Yahweh. Your saints will extol you. They will speak of the glory of your kingdom, and talk about your power; to make known to the sons of men his mighty acts, the glory of the majesty of his kingdom.

Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom. Your dominion endures throughout all generations.

Yahweh is faithful in all his words, and loving in all his deeds. Yahweh upholds all who fall, and raises up all those who are bowed down. The eyes of all wait for you. You give them their food in due season. You open your hand, and satisfy the desire of every living thing.

Yahweh is righteous in all his ways, and gracious in all his works.

Yahweh is near to all those who call on him, to all who call on him in truth. He will fulfill the desire of those who fear him. He also will hear their cry, and will save them.

Yahweh preserves all those who love him, but all the wicked he will destroy. My mouth will speak the praise of Yahweh. Let all flesh bless his holy name forever and ever. (Psalm 145, emphasis added)

We can only imagine the depth and breadth of God's Holiness. No matter what we might imagine Him to be He is greater still. No one can know how great is our God. It is unfathomable greatness. God is steadfast

in His love. Steadfast meaning resolute and absolute. God is love and the depth and measure of His love is unsearchable. He is good to all. His mercy is over all. All His creation are in His Kingdom and His Kingdom does not end. Those who are falling He lifts up. His love is patient. His love is long-suffering. His love is all-powerful and all-consuming. God created all and He loves all that He created. His mercy is over all that He has created. We praise our Father and we bless Him and honor Him. His unsearchable love is awesome and overwhelming.

Mr. Sprenger comments, "The LORD is faithful in all His words and kind in all His works." We cannot ignore the Word of God, "His mercy is over all that he has made." These kinds of verses build faith. Our God is good; so very, very good. He is love; so very, very loving. It is His will that all will be saved and it is worthy of repetition, "...His mercy is over all he has made." His grace is compounded in His grace. He is "grace upon grace." His mercy has no limits. "His mercy is over all that He has made."

What does it mean that God will destroy all the wicked? The Psalmist speaks to joy, revelation, worship, praise because God is merciful and because the magnitude of His love is unsearchable. But, then we read in verse 21 that He will destroy the wicked. The Concordant Literal Version translates this verse as "all the wicked He will exterminate." Will an all-loving merciful Father destroy rebellious people? Or, might it be better understood in context to mean that the wicked will end their wickedness. All wickedness will be exterminated...not people. Rebellious sin will end. Otherwise this Psalm opens with universal reconciliation and ends in annihilation. The two are not congruent in this context.

God sets all matters straight. His purpose will be complete and His purpose will be Holy. The outcome is this, "It is God's will that all be saved." Through His Son's obedience to death on a cross all will be reconciled to Him.

Praise Yah! Praise God in his sanctuary! Praise him in his heavens for his acts of power! Praise him for his mighty acts! Praise him according to his excellent greatness! Praise him with the sounding of the trumpet! Praise him with harp and lyre! Praise him with tambourine and dancing! Praise him with stringed instruments and

flute! Praise him with loud cymbals! Praise him with resounding cymbals! *Let everything that has breath praise Yah! Praise Yah!* (Psalm 150, emphasis added)

This is a remarkable display of praise and worship. The Psalmist is leading a mighty song to praise God. He sits on His Throne; praise Him. He rules over all the universe; praise Him. He is mighty to be praised.

The Pulpit Commentary discusses these verses from this Psalm. Christians should not “need to be reminded of the duty of praise.”⁷¹ Our daily walk should show praise for our Father. The things we say and the acts we commit should bring glory to our God. Everything we do and all things that happen to us are by His design and He is worthy of our thankfulness. “Let the entirety of animate creation praise Jehovah.” There is nothing on earth, under the earth, in the sea or under it that will not praise Him. His mercies are over all things. “The eyes of all wait upon him and He provides them all their needs.”

These verses affirm “The Blessed Hope.” God will hear the praises of all His creation. “Every knee will bow and every tongue confess that Jesus is Lord.” No creature under the earth or under the sea will be exempt. All creation will praise Him.

...UR IN ISAIAH

Yahweh will be known to Egypt, and the Egyptians will know Yahweh in that day. Yes, they will worship with sacrifice and offering, and will vow a vow to Yahweh, and will perform it. Yahweh will strike Egypt, striking and healing. *They will return to Yahweh, and he will be entreated by them, and will heal them.* In that day there will be a highway out of Egypt to Assyria, and the Assyrian shall come into Egypt, and the Egyptian into Assyria; and the Egyptians will worship with the Assyrians. In that day, Israel will be the third with Egypt and with

⁷¹ “*The Pulpit Commentary: Psalm 150.*” By Anglican Church. Study Light website. Publication date unknown. <https://www.studylight.org/commentaries/tpc/psalms-150.html>. Date accessed: 04/01/2018.

Assyria, a blessing in the midst of the earth; because Yahweh of Armies has blessed them, saying, “*Blessed be Egypt my people, Assyria the work of my hands, and Israel my inheritance.*” (Isaiah 19:21-25, emphasis added)

God’s Prophet Isaiah is relaying God’s Holy Word to the people. Egypt’s Pharaoh is a harsh ruler. God intends to correct the nation of Egypt. God intends to cause Egypt to turn from its evil ways and find peace in the Lord. Egypt will make sacrifices and they will make offerings. God will reconcile Egypt by striking them with the intent to heal them. He will strike them and they will see His power. He will heal them and they will see His unending mercy and they will experience His Divine love.

Israel will be God’s instrument. Israel will be an intermediary and will bring two enemies together. Israel, the smallest of all nations, is the means in which peace comes to the land. God provides discipline. He does punish to correct. He does what is necessary to complete His plan. Time and again in scripture we read how the Father intervenes in human life. Time and again in scripture we read how His love is prevalent in all of His interventions. In every Holy intervention all things work together for good. There is not a person God will not reach. No person will be able to resist His love, patience, or His will that all be saved. That is glorious news. It is good news. It is truly Gospel! It is “The Blessed Hope.”

In this mountain, Yahweh of Armies *will make all peoples a feast of fat things, a feast of choice wines, of fat things full of marrow, of well refined choice wines.* He will destroy in this mountain the surface of *the covering that covers all peoples*, and the veil that is spread over all nations. He has swallowed up death forever! The Lord Yahweh will wipe away tears from off all faces. *He will take the reproach of his people away from off all the earth, for Yahweh has spoken it.* (Isaiah 25:6-8, emphasis added)

Isaiah extols the virtues of God the Father. He breaks into a song of praise and worship. The Lord gives Isaiah these words. These words apply

to all peoples of all nations. The words apply to all faces on the earth. God will take away the blame that is on all people and remove that reproach from all the earth. He'll remember sins no more.

God the Father loves so completely, so thoroughly, He prepares a banquet beyond any other. There is a covering over the people. It is a covering that keeps them from the meal. God removes that covering, sin. With the removal of sin God ends death. Our loving Father wipes away the tears of sorrow and even tears of shame from all the faces.

These verses mean what they are intended to say. God wants us to know that He is Sovereign over all things, even the veil of sin that covers us. The covering has been lifted because of Christ Jesus and His obedience to death on a cross. The banquet is prepared and we are free to dine with Him. All people from every nation will eventually dine with Him. He will give them a place at His table. He will reconcile them to Himself. He will reconcile all of us to Himself. It is important to know that we love Him because He loves us first.

With my soul have I desired you in the night. Yes, with my spirit within me will I seek you earnestly; *for when your judgments are in the earth, the inhabitants of the world learn righteousness.* (Isaiah 26:9, emphasis added)

God's people have been under constant and brutal persecution by malignant governments. The oppression is severe. "In the night" for the decades of their persecution Isaiah prays. Isaiah knows that God's plan will be executed on the earth. When God exercises His authority over the earth the living will know His authority. Not only is Isaiah praying for his nation's people he asks God to be merciful with the oppressors.

These verses demonstrate God's mercy and justice. They represent reconciliation of all to Himself. People opposed to God will be exposed to righteousness and realize their rebellion is sin. All will repent. All will declare Christ Jesus is Lord. God is love.

"Comfort, comfort my people," says your God. "Speak comfortably to Jerusalem; and call out to her that her warfare is accomplished, that *her iniquity is pardoned,*

that she has received of Yahweh's hand double for all her sins." The voice of one who calls out, "Prepare the way of Yahweh in the wilderness! Make a level highway in the desert for our God. Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low. The uneven shall be made level, and the rough places a plain. Yahweh's glory shall be revealed, *and all flesh shall see it together; for the mouth of Yahweh has spoken it.*" (Isaiah 40:1-5, emphasis added)

There are few words more potent than these. God will make His way to His people. He will make a way for us to be His people. He will make our paths straight. He will level the ground to make our walk without obstacle. His glory will be revealed.

God's people have been in captivity for a long time. They will no longer be the captives of Assyria, but of Babylon. Israel will "pay double for all her sins." Her sins will be paid when the Messiah comes. There will be no obstacle in His path to hinder His walk. The path will be smooth. He will be seen. He will be known. "All flesh will see it together."

The authority for this promise is the Lord. "All flesh shall see..." His glory. We will all be "together" when He reveals Himself to all flesh. No person will be exempted. The most loving and the most hateful will be together when He reveals His glory. This is God's promise. The promise of the Messiah has been fulfilled. All flesh will see the glory of God. We will seek God's Holy Spirit to help us spread that Word. Jesus saves all men!

That's offensive to traditional orthodoxy. The doctrine of eternal conscious torment is central to their theologies. The idea that Jesus saves all is heresy to the advocates of that doctrine. Eternal conscious torment teaches only some are saved. The doctrine requires God be willing that not all be saved. Satan wins as most of the creation of God will be eternally and consciously tormented forever, never seeing God's glory, but only suffering His wrath. What might the reaction of all people be? I say, "every knee shall bow and every tongue confess Jesus is Lord to the glory of the Father."

“Look to me, and be saved, all the ends of the earth; for I am God, and there is no other. I have sworn by myself, the word has gone out of my mouth in righteousness, and will not return, that to me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall take an oath. They will say of me, ‘There is righteousness and strength only in Yahweh.’” Even to him shall men come; and all those who were incensed against him shall be disappointed. In Yahweh shall all the seed of Israel be justified, and shall glory. (Isaiah 45:22-25, emphasis added)

Isaiah is the primary prophet of God's chosen people while they remain in oppressive captivity. They are subjects to the ruler of Babylon, King Cyrus. Cyrus has a heart for God's people. God has given favor to the Babylonian king and his sons because of his kindness. Cyrus was given victory over Egypt. Vines describes the gift of victory was a “kopher” or payment to cover Israel. God declares “all the ends of the earth” can be saved when they turn to God. God then causes Isaiah to write, “Every knee will bow and every tongue will swear allegiance” to Him. That being the case every knee and every tongue will demonstrate a universal “turning to” God.” It is God's will that all be saved.

God speaks with absolute certainty and with absolute authority. It is His Word that goes out. It is His Promise of salvation that is spread to all the universe that He creates. It is God Who says, “In Yahweh shall all the seed of Israel be justified, and shall glory.”

All the peoples of the world are Gentiles except for the smallest nation God chose. All the people of the world will be grafted into Israel and become Israel. Unproductive branches will be cut away from the vine and be cast into the fire. Those unproductive branches do not burn forever, but only until they are consumed. A reasonable person might conclude from these verses that God's judgment of the unrepentant is annihilation. Even so, that judgment is superior to eternal conscious torment.

God's Word goes out in righteousness and does not return empty. God created each and every person with a specific purpose that He directs. No person is created for eternal torment. William MacDonald

provides his insight in the “Believer’s Bible Commentary.”⁷² He writes, “Israel’s former enemies will one day come to her with gifts and tribute, acknowledging that the God of the Jews is the true God and that there is no other.”

There is a “saved remnant” that sings praises to God according to Dr. MacDonald’s understanding. He writes, “Makers of and worshipers of false gods will be ashamed.” When Christ comes again Israel will have no reason to be ashamed. Gentiles on the other hand are ashamed. According to Dr. MacDonald’s theology not all will be saved. God “invites the Gentiles to come to Him for salvation, and decrees that every knee shall bow to Him and every tongue confess Him. This will find its fulfillment in the Millennium. Then men will acknowledge the Lord Jesus as the only source of righteousness and strength. All His enemies will come to Him in contrition, and Israel shall be justified and shall glory in Him, not in idols.”

It is not difficult to believe what Dr. MacDonald writes, “...that all His enemies will come to Him in contrition.” The Lord loves a contrite heart. “Turn to me and be saved, all the ends of the earth!” Then God reinforces who His audience is when He declares, “To me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear allegiance.” Every knee, all the ends of the earth indicate a universal group. No denominations to argue over what this word or that authority says.

Every man’s tongue will swear allegiance to the Lord. That is more than just confession. To swear allegiance is to swear your life for the cause. In this case the Cause is allegiance to God. Those of us who have repented will repent again. Those of us who have never repented will repent. Each of us will be judged. None will be judged to an eternal conscious torment. That’s good news. That is “The Blessed Hope.”

Is it possible to conclude these verses apply only to believers? God says clearly He will send out a Word. That Word will not return. That Word will cause “...every knee...” to bow and “...every tongue...” to confess God is Sovereign. All persons will commit to Him their being and all persons will be His. Who are the offspring of Israel? All persons ever created are Israel. We are a people created in His image and made righteous through

⁷² William MacDonald. “Believer’s Bible Commentary.” Commentary on Isaiah 45 (pp. 972-973), Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1995.

the sacrifice of Christ Jesus. There is a blessing for believing Christ is Savior. But, there is not an eternal conscious torment for those who die in rebellion. I must take you, dear reader, to Ecclesiastes 12:7.

...And the spirit, it returns to the One, Elohim, Who gave it. (Concordant Literal Version)

All spirits return to God, Who gave them. These verses teach all men will turn to God. All men will be reconciled to God. No less than God, Himself, said so.

All we like sheep have gone astray. Everyone has turned to his own way; and *Yahweh has laid on him the iniquity of us all.* (Isaiah 53:6, emphasis added)

Isaiah 53 is a love letter addressed to us from God. It is the letter that defines His intimate and all-consuming love for His creation. This is a letter that foretells of the Son of God. It is a letter that describes what God's love for His creation looks like. His love for us is alive in us and we are alive in Him. Not just a few, but all. His life in us never dies and it comes with a love that never fails. The worst man is included in the Son's salvation. The worst man's iniquities were put upon Christ.

The advocate for universal reconciliation sees the dramatic truth that the Savior died for the sins of all men over the course of all human existence. This is God's message to us through His Word. Christ Jesus is the Gospel. Every person falls far short of the glory of God. No person can do enough, in fact, no person can do anything sufficient to remove the pain of his iniquities. Only Christ Jesus. It is He Who said, "Father, forgive them for they do not know what they do." Only Christ Jesus could say, "It is finished." Scripture teaches the "Lord has laid on Christ Jesus the iniquity of us all." We believe God.

For I know their works and their thoughts: *the time comes, that I will gather all nations and languages; and they shall come, and shall see my glory...*(Isaiah 66:18, emphasis added).

It shall happen, that from one new moon to another, and from one Sabbath to another, *shall all flesh come to worship before me,*” says Yahweh. (Isaiah 66:23, emphasis added)

God caused these scriptures to be written. His chosen people were freed from captivity. There was a movement among the people to rebuild the Temple and start Temple worship anew. God warns them that their worship is empty and meaningless if it is done purely for show. It is an affront to Him when we are only going through the motions. God tells us that it is His plan to restore Zion’s City to greatness. Jerusalem will be beaten down, but it will rise again to great stature. Believers are called to rejoice in this good news. The City will prosper and grow. It will be evident that Zion’s good fortune is a blessing from God. Everyone will know that He is Sovereign over all. God will exercise His judgment on those who are His enemies. His fire will come over them. He has seen the works of all men. He knows the thoughts of all men. “I know their works,” says the Lord. There will come a time in which He will say, “Enough.” He will then gather together all the nations. His glory will be known to them. “They shall see My glory.”

Christians look to God and say, “Amen.” Let it be precisely as it is written. God knows the heart of every man and the heart of every man is evil. He knows our works. There is none that can stand before Him fully righteous. All nations will come together. His presence will command the attention of every person ever created. Every person will see His glory. That’s the gospel is it not? We will see God’s glory? He’ll see to it! God’s enemies will be judged by God and their punishment will be meted out fairly. God’s punishment has a finite end and a glorious purpose. God says, “All mankind will come bow down before me.” That is “The Blessed Hope.”

...UR IN LAMENTATIONS

For the Lord will not cast off forever. For though he cause grief, yet he will have compassion according to the multitude of his loving kindnesses. For he does not afflict willingly, nor

grieve the children of men. To crush under foot all the prisoners of the earth, To turn aside the right of a man before the face of the Most High, To subvert a man in his cause, *the Lord doesn't approve*. (Lamentations 3:31-36, emphasis added).

These are words of a man who is caught up in the government of a nation. These words apply to nations. God purposely caused the suffering of Israel. God decreed Assyria and then Babylon to seize, enslave and oppress Israel. Every kind of hardship was a yoke to the man and to the nation. God even caused barriers to prayer between them and Himself. The man and the nation have fallen away from their first love and have taken on the lusts of the world around them. God leaves them to their folly.

This man and this nation then stops their lament and reaches out to God. The nation recognizes their arrogance and the people humble themselves. God, Who is love, then gathers His creation back to Himself. "The Lord will not cast off forever." His love is never ending and is unconditional. God's justice is not crushing. God does not approve of crushing prisoners and we are all prisoners of a fallen world. God's justice is applied to all. God does not approve of any plan in which any of His creation is denied an audience with Him. God's justice will be exercised on every man. God does not approve of outside interference that is an obstacle to His justice being exercised. Every man will get a just hearing.

God's justice is Divine. His justice is by way of His Sovereign will. It is His will that all be saved. The plain meaning of scripture is probably the best understanding of scripture. God "will not cast us off forever." The doctrine of eternal conscious torment violates the plain meaning of His written Word. Eternal conscious torment demands the rebellious sinner be cast off from God forever in a fiery punishment. The Gospel of Christ Jesus is that He died for the sins of the world.

...UR IN DANIEL

The kingdom and the dominion, and the greatness of the kingdoms under the whole sky, shall be given to the

people of the saints of the Most High: *his kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey him.* (Daniel 7:27, emphasis added)

These are verses that many in Christendom associate with the end of days. Daniel is given this vision by God and God uses Daniel to reveal His Kingdom's future glory. There will be many nations thriving and many more struggling. There will be conflicts among nations to possess the resources of the other. Power and pride will bring the world to violence. In the end His is the Kingdom that brings all other kingdoms under His Dominion. "His Kingdom is an everlasting Kingdom." Our eventual place in the plan He has for all of us is "...all dominions shall serve and obey Him."

God shows us through His Word the kinds of governments our world will suffer before He establishes His Holy government. He also shows His purpose is realized. "All dominions shall serve and obey Him." God's Sovereignty in our lives and in our world is already established. Christ Jesus died for the sins of the whole world. God's Kingdom is all dominions united in Him.

... UR IN JOEL

You will know that I am in the midst of Israel, and that I am Yahweh, your God, and there is no one else; and my people will never again be disappointed. *"It will happen afterward, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh;* and your sons and your daughters will prophesy. Your old men will dream dreams. Your young men will see visions. And also on the servants and on the handmaids in those days, I will pour out my Spirit. (Joel 2:27-29, emphasis added)

These are Old Testament promises that apply to the New Testament world. God is speaking through His prophet Joel. Israel will suffer. He lets His chosen nation know that He will always be with them. He will always hold them. He will end their oppression and He will end their shame. God tells Joel to tell the people that He will "pour out my Spirit

on all flesh....” No person will be exempted from this great display of His Sovereign grace, His limitless mercy, or His overwhelming love. His Spirit will be poured out on all flesh.

Israel is who we are. As believers in Christ Jesus we have been grafted into the vine. The unproductive branches have been cut away. The fruit we become is His fruit. The sons and daughters of Israel will experience His unmatched love; His unconditional love. His Spirit will not be poured out on us only. His Spirit will be poured out on all flesh. He will pour out His Spirit on “...male and handmaids in those days....” These people are not Israel, that is to say, they are not necessarily believers in Christ. These are people who are “the least of these.” These are people who serve Israel. They are captives.

The orthodox doctrine of eternal conscious torment discounts that “all flesh” is truly “all flesh.” John MacArthur is a gifted preacher. He is a prolific writer and is an expositor of God’s Holy Word. Dr. MacArthur is a leading authority in orthodox traditionalist doctrines. Dr. MacArthur preaches this about these scriptures in general and the book of Joel specifically.⁷³ He says, “It is a day when judgment is poured out on sinners that subsequently leads to blessings on the penitent, and reaffirmation of God’s covenant with His people.” Dr. MacArthur tells his audience “clearly Joel is referring to the final terrible Day of the Lord.” He tells us the account of Pentecost in Acts “was not a fulfillment, but a preview and a sample of the Spirit’s power.” The Spirit’s power will be poured completely during Christ’s reign. Dr. MacArthur teaches “...the pouring of God’s Spirit onto all flesh....” is better thought as a pouring of judgment on all flesh. But that is not what we are being told in these verses. These scriptures mean God “...will pour out His Spirit on all flesh.” There is no person who will be untouched by God’s Holy Spirit. God is “...all in all.”

...UR IN MICAH

“In that day,” says Yahweh, “*I will assemble* that which is lame, and *I will gather* that which is driven away, and that

⁷³ Dr. John MacArthur. “Joel” Grace To You, Bible Introductions. July 26, 2010. <https://www.gty.org/library/bible-introductions/MSB29/joel?term=Joel 2>. Date accessed: 04/02/2018.

which I have afflicted; and *I will make* that which was lame a remnant, and that which was cast far off a strong nation: *and Yahweh will reign over them on Mount Zion from then on, even forever.*" (Micah 4:6-7, emphasis added)

Micah has already offered God's Word regarding God's wrath against Israel and Judah. Wealthy oppressors are doomed and Micah's prophecy points to Divine restoration. Micah has taken aim at oppressive rulers and false teachers. Micah warns and then shows the world the promise God has made. In these verses Micah is pointing to God's glory and a Millennial Reign of Christ Jesus. The Word of God will be compelling. All nations will gather in Zion to hear Him. Jerusalem will be a place of honor among all the people.

Micah exposes idolatry as evil and offensive to God. All idols will be forgotten in Christ's reign. He "...will reign over them on Mount Zion." We long for the Millennial reign. We want to see Christ's return. All Christians look forward to the Day of the Lord. Those whom God created with afflictions and those He burdened with disability will be a "strong nation." People He "cast out" and were "driven away" He restores and makes a great nation. God is love and His Holy Word is evidence of that.

Who is a God like you, who pardons iniquity, and passes over the disobedience of the remnant of his heritage? *He doesn't retain his anger forever*, because he delights in loving kindness. He will again have compassion on us. He will tread our iniquities under foot; and *you will cast all their sins into the depths of the sea.* You will give truth to Jacob, and mercy to Abraham, *as you have sworn to our fathers from the days of old.* (Micah 7:18-20, emphasis added)

This is Israel's confession. They are responsible. They fell away from their first love and the consequences were dire. But, now the heart of His people is turning back to Him. The world around Israel is harsh and demanding. It is a world of pain and imprisonment. Theirs is a life of chaos and tribulation. Even so, Israel sees the glory of their Savior and turns to Him. Israel repents.

It is the Lord Who makes the remnant. Earlier in Micah 4 God makes it clear that He makes the remnant of all those He afflicted. He heals them and He lifts them up. God's anger is not eternal. That is the lesson here. "He doesn't retain His anger forever...."

Give glory to God for the clear teaching and intent of His Holy Word. He is not angry into eternity. He says, "He delights in loving kindness." His love overwhelms any anger He may hold. He is not angry forever because He'd rather love us into Himself. Not only does His anger fade away He will not hold repetitive sins against us. His love is steadfast and by His Word we know He prefers to glory in His love. The sins we commit are abolished from His memory. He blots them out. He forgets them. He buries them under His feet so far as into the deepest sea.

God's love is affirmed in these verses. There is not a sin that God will not remove, put under His feet and bury in the deepest sea. It's His promise fulfilled. It's the promise He gave to Abraham.

...UR IN HABAKKUK

For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of Yahweh's glory, as the waters cover the sea.(Habakkuk 2:14, emphasis added)

The Lord instructs Habakkuk to hear the prophecy and to record it in plain language. God wants us all to understand the degree of His authority. Judah is in captivity. The Babylonians were particularly harsh to the people of God who were enslaved. God speaks about the arrogance of the oppressive ruler. Judah had brought this on themselves. They had again fallen away from their first love. They forgot Him and remembered themselves. They left worshiping Him to worship false gods Baal and Ashtaroth. They were worshiping false doctrine.

It is God Who establishes kingdoms and governments. It is God Who set the Babylonians over Judah. God gave power and authority over Judah and gave over Israel to Assyrian, Babylonian, Chaldean, Greek and Roman kings. God's purpose is to discipline His children. The power and authority used by the cruel rulers will be taken from them by God. The people persecuted will be given the power and authority and will use it

against the oppressor. All the spoils taken by the cruel ruler will become the spoils of those he oppressed. God, however, is going to set the world straight. His glory will be known to the whole world. Nothing will escape its notice. This is not an experience only, but "...knowledge of Yahweh's." Imagine the magnitude of His mercy and of His grace because we truly know Him in His glory. Not just a few, but "the earth will be filled..." with that knowledge. God's creation restored to Him. All have knowledge of His glory. His promise is fulfilled. It is true; God is love. That is the Gospel. That is "The Blessed Hope."

... UR IN ZEPHANIAH

Yahweh will be awesome to them, for he will famish all the gods of the land. *Men will worship him, everyone from his place*, even all the shores of the nations....(Zephaniah 2:11, emphasis added)

"Therefore wait for me", says Yahweh, "until the day that I rise up to the prey, *for my determination is to gather the nations*, that I may assemble the kingdoms, to pour on them my indignation, even all my fierce anger, *for all the earth will be devoured with the fire of my jealousy*. For then I will purify the lips of the peoples, that they may all call on Yahweh's name, to serve him shoulder to shoulder. (Zephaniah 3:8-9, emphasis added)

My Life Application Study Bible (p.1893, NIV) describes the "Blueprint"⁷⁴ and underlying message of Zephaniah's prophesy. This is a warning to "the people of Judah that if they refused to repent, the entire nation, including the beloved city of Jerusalem, would be lost." Israel would lose the cherished city. It is not "merely punishment for sin, but also a process of purifying the people." Our lives are lived in a fallen world. The chaos and confusion, the violence and distrust among the people will come to an end. "We can hope in the perfect kingdom

⁷⁴ "Zephaniah's Prophecy Blueprint." Life Application Study Bible (p. 1893, NIV). Zondervan Press. 2005.

of God to come.” It is good to be disciplined by God now so that we are purified from sin.

This “Blueprint” leans into universal reconciliation and I do not think the authors intended to. Bible scholars who prepared this statement believe the people of Judah knew they “would eventually” be blessed. It’s as if their blessing is an expected, yet unmerited favor. The people of Judah have to do nothing, but wait. God will eventually bless Judah.

Zephaniah’s prophecy warns the people of Judah that before the blessing from God there must be punishment from God. The authors of this commentary suggest these verses have a two fold purpose. The first to satisfy the need to atone for sins. The second purpose is to burnish, purify, strengthen, and discipline the people of Judah.

Is this two part formula a part of God’s overall plan? As “Believers” in Christ Jesus we are confident of the first step. God will indeed discipline us, after all the Father disciplines those He loves. Does that mean all the others, the “Not Believers,” are not patiently waiting for the expected, but unmerited favor in the same manner as the apostate nation of Judah? Can we say the “Not Believers” are not afforded this opportunity to be blessed? I do not think we can from these scriptures.

These scriptures reveal God as loving and just. He will gather all the nations. All the kingdoms will come together at His command. All will bow to Him and worship Him. In the same way the fire purifies the “Believers” it will purify the “Not Believers.” God does not offer a distinction here that the whole world does not mean the whole world. God is telling us that His authority and His sovereignty cannot be supplanted. Satan cannot defeat Christ, in fact, Satan has already been defeated. Satan cannot usurp God’s authority. All of them will call on the Name of the Lord!

...UR IN HAGGAI

For this is what Yahweh of Armies says: ‘Yet once, it is a little while, and I will shake the heavens, the earth, the sea, and the dry land; and *I will shake all nations. The precious things of all nations will come*, and I will fill this house with glory, says Yahweh of Armies. The silver is

mine, and the gold is mine,' says Yahweh of Armies. 'The latter glory of this house will be greater than the former,' says Yahweh of Armies; *'and in this place will I give peace,' says Yahweh of Armies.*" (Haggai 2:6-9, emphasis added)

These are prophetic words of chastising. Haggai is speaking as a prophet of God and extolling the Jews to get their priorities straight. They had been released from captivity and had been in Jerusalem for about 15 years. Their primary command from God was to rebuild the Temple in Jerusalem. But, the people were more motivated to prepare homes for themselves. God is assuring His people that He is Sovereign over all nations. All nations will gladly gather all their wealth and place it into the Hands of God Almighty. God will fill the new Temple with unimaginable glory. The glory in this Temple will be greater than the glory that filled the first.

There is not a distinction given in this prophecy to any person being excluded from witnessing God's glory. There is affirmation that all persons will know true peace. God says, "...In this place I will give peace." He shakes the world. He calls the nations and kingdoms together and in His glory He gives Divine peace. That is a Gospel message that resonates in the world.

..UR IN ZECHARIAH

Sing and rejoice, daughter of Zion; *for, behold, I come, and I will dwell in your midst,'* says Yahweh. *Many nations shall join themselves to Yahweh in that day, and shall be my people; and I will dwell in your midst, and you shall know that Yahweh of Armies has sent me to you* (Zechariah 2:10-11, emphasis added)

Zechariah is a prophet of God. He is an encouraging force for God's chosen nation and pushes them to complete the building of the Temple. God gives Zechariah visions of what will soon take place. Israel's enemies will be defeated. God will draw them to Himself and they will know He is

Lord of all. Zechariah preaches for clean living worthy of God. He pushes the people to maintain purity.

These verses affirm God's Sovereignty and Power. "Many nations will join themselves to the Lord." This is not an alliance between nations. These are nations allying with Him. There will be many nations that will see God's glory and make a determined return to Him. His grace, His mercy is new everyday.

Which nation will not turn from the world and to God? There is not a power greater than God. There is not a glory greater than God. There is not a love greater than God. There is not a person unaffected by His power, glory and love. It is God's will that all be saved. He works everything out according to His Divine purpose and counsel. That is a Gospel message that rings truer and is "The Blessed Hope."

I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim, and the horse
from Jerusalem; and the battle bow will be cut off; and
*he will speak peace to the nations: and his dominion will be
from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth.*
(Zechariah 9:10, emphasis added)

These are beautiful verses of prophecy. Zechariah preaches the Word given to Him by God. He preaches about a King of a different kind. He proclaims God's Word and describes the King that comes into Jerusalem on the back of a colt. The King "will speak peace to the nations." What a day to come! What a day that is already come! He speaks peace into the hearts of those who believe. He is working peace in His Bride today.

There will come a time, indeed has already come, when "His dominion will be from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth." This is not a dominion of a few nations, but a dominion of every nation "from sea to sea." His Dominion will be absolute. It is absolute. He is the River. He is Living Water. He is the giver of life. He is Jesus, God saves, and His Water will flow "...to the ends of the earth." No one will turn away from Him. He is love. He is mercy. He is God.

...UR IN MALACHI

For from the rising of the sun even to the going down of the same, *my name is great among the nations, and in every place incense will be offered to my name, and a pure offering: for my name is great among the nations,*” says Yahweh of Armies. (Malachi 1:11, emphasis added)

Malachi is reaching out to men in the priesthood. Matthew Henry provides this insight. “⁷⁵The prophet is here, by a special commission, calling the priests to account, though they were themselves appointed judges, to call the people to an account.” It is necessary that God’s ordained priests stand for what is right in God’s sight. It is necessary to remind God’s priests to Whom they are accountable.

The Priests were taking their position and authority for granted. They had an obligation to teach the people of Israel. The Priests rose in stature. They did not pay proper respect to God’s Word. They used His Word and their commission as Priest to advance themselves. God speaks through Malachi to the Priests. He chastises them for their failures to worship Him. God points out the love these men have for themselves. He also tells them they are unable to save themselves much less save those under their charge.

The hearts of the Priests were involved in their own gain. They were disrespectful of God. It was He Who appointed them to be Priests and Judges of the people. It is God Who sets the matter straight. There is no place in the world where the Name of the Lord will not be known. There is no place in the world where the Name of the Lord will not be revered. There is no place in the world where an unrepentant rebel can flee and avoid God’s reach. “For My Name is great among the nations,” says God.

These verses show the beauty of God’s unending and immeasurable capacity to love even the most wicked. He chose Israel as His favored nation not because they were great, but because they were small. He did not choose Edom, that is to say Esau’s family. That nation of people were

⁷⁵ Matthew Henry. “Matthew Henry Complete Commentary on the Bible; Malachi 1.” Publication date unknown <https://www.studylight.org/commentaries/mhm/malachi-1.html>. Date accessed: 04/01/2018.

swallowed up in conquest. God did not favor Esau, but He did favor Jacob. Our Father reaches down to the least and makes them great. He humbles the great and subdues evil. He protects His people from harm. Edom is no more, but Israel is alive. To where did all the peoples of Edom go in death? Their bodies went into the grave and their spirits returned to God Who gave them. That's Gospel!

Don't *we all have one father?* Hasn't *one God created us?*
Why do we deal treacherously every man against his
brother, profaning the covenant of our fathers? (Malachi
2:10, emphasis added)

Malachi is led to speak these heaven sent words. The Levite priests lost their first love and were pursuing worldly passions. They were using their authority to make rules for themselves that were against the Word of God. There was marrying and divorcing. The Levites were taking foreign brides. Malachi is warning them of a punishment to come and that the people must turn away from the ways of the world.

God is the Father and Creator of all. His love for us is part of His creative purpose. He loves us before we love Him. The beauty and the peace in these words leads us to confidence that the Lord's will is being done and that He wills all to be saved.

What are we to conclude from these scriptural references from the Old Testament? Can we say with confidence or surety that there is a place of eternal torment? Can we say that God will sentence any person to that place? It is impossible to conclude God will do any less than reconcile all that He has created to Himself. He says so in theses verses from the OT. That is "The Blessed Hope."

CHAPTER 16

Universal Reconciliation Found in the New Testament

...UR in MATTHEW

What do you think? If a man has one hundred sheep, and one of them goes astray, doesn't he leave the ninety-nine, go to the mountains, and seek that which has gone astray? If he finds it, most certainly I tell you, he rejoices over it more than over the ninety-nine which have not gone astray. Even so *it is not the will of your Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish.* (Matthew 18:12-14, emphasis added)

We find the same account of Christ's words in Luke 15. The shepherd seeks the lost until he finds them. The shepherd puts the lost one on his shoulders and rejoices. The account in Luke states, "I have found my sheep which was lost."

The Twelve Disciples were concerned about the status of people in the Kingdom. Their motivation was self serving. They ask Jesus, "Who is the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven?" Our Lord draws a child close to Himself and speaks of the child's place in the Kingdom. The child is innocent and has not yet been corrupted by the ways of the flesh. The child is loved unconditionally by the Father Who created him. Then

Jesus speaks to the love of the Father and of the Shepherd. Jesus gives us insight to the measure of God's love for His people. Jesus declares the Shepherd will leave 99 of His flock unprotected, but safe to seek out the one member of His flock which is lost.

In our Heavenly Father's eyes, are any of His creation ever not loved by Him? Is God's love given to some and not all? The answer to both is an emphatic "No!" Is God's love overwhelmed by His wrath? Could not His infinite love remove His wrath? Was not His wrath satisfied when Christ was crucified for the sins of the world?

The Shepherd does not stop searching for the "lost one." Mr. Sprenger points out in his editorial comments that Jesus does find the lost one as Scripture says. "When" the Shepherd finds the lost one He carries him home. The lost one is the subject of great rejoicing at the Shepherd's home. "There will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance."

His mercy is fresh every day. He loves us and then we love Him. He created us in His image and He loves His creation. His love for His creation does not change because His creation hates its Creator. He loves the rebellious and His patience is immeasurable. "Every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus is the Christ to the glory of God the Father." We are all His "little ones" and "...it is not His will that any of these little ones perish." It is good to give glory to God Who gives life abundantly. We are all His sheep and He will lose none of His flock. This is "The Blessed Hope."

...UR IN MARK

For everyone will be salted with fire, and every sacrifice will be seasoned with salt. (Mark 9:49, emphasis added)

These words from Christ Jesus. When He says everyone will be salted with fire He means to say "everyone will be salted with fire." No one can escape this Holy Judgment. "Everyone will be salted with fire." The good, the evil, everyone. The baptized, the heathens, the God fearing and the atheist; all will be salted with fire. To be salted is to be preserved. God is fire; an all-consuming fire. His is a fire of renewal. His is the fire that

cuts away sin. His is the fire that circumcises the hearts of all men. His is the fire that burns away dross.

I rather think it an honor to be called so as to be salted by fire. Holy fire. Preserved for a holy ministry. The doctrine of eternal conscious torment requires that only a few are “salted with fire.” The doctrine requires that most will be tormented in a different kind of fire. The fire that cleans and heals is a holy fire. The fire that burns away sin is a holy fire. “Everyone will be salted with fire.” That is Good News. It is “The Blessed Hope.”

He said to them, “Go into all the world, and *preach the Good News to the whole creation.*” (Mark 16:15, emphasis added)

“Go into all the world.” Gather yourselves and prepare to carry the gospel “into all the world.” Jesus commands the gospel be presented to the “whole creation.” Jesus intends the “whole creation” hear His Gospel. There are many who have died and did not hear the Gospel. Missionaries have worked diligently since the time of Paul’s journeys spreading the Gospel. Not everyone in Jerusalem heard the gospel. There are places on the earth that have not yet been given the Word of God or His Gospel. There are some alive today that will not hear the Gospel of Christ before they die. Jesus intends the “whole creation” to hear the Gospel, even those who died before hearing it.

The doctrine of eternal conscious torment denies the gospel will go out to the “whole creation.” Calvinists preach the Gospel will be given to some because God ordained they would be chosen to hear it and believe it. Arminians preach the Gospel will be given to some because they possessed a will to choose to hear it and believe it.

The commandment to “...proclaim the Gospel to the whole creation...” is a Christian work in progress. God is love and He will reconcile all to Himself. This is a Gospel that is “The Blessed Hope.” This is a Gospel that teaches God will make all things new.

...UR IN LUKE

There were shepherds in the same country staying in the field, and keeping watch by night over their flock. Behold, an angel of the Lord stood by them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. The angel said to them, "Don't be afraid, for behold, I bring you good news of *great joy which will be to all the people*. For there is born to you, this day, in the city of David, a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. (Luke 2:8-11, emphasis added)

Shepherds in a field are blessed by an up close and personal birth announcement. It's a beautiful story and it is Truth. It is Truth revealed to us. Shepherds were in a field tending their flock. An angel appeared and the glory of the Lord was all around them. The shepherds were frightened, not just shaken, but "filled with great fear." The angel spoke to the shepherds saying, "a Savior, Who is Christ the Lord" is born. The Truth is the "good news of great joy will be for all the people." This great news of a savior born is not for just a few who choose Him or even for only those chosen by Him. This great news of a savior born is "for all the people." Our free will does not trump the "good news of great joy that will be for all people." What is the "good news?" It is that a Savior is born? What is the great joy? It is that a Savior is born. "Good news" and "great joy" are for "all the people." Who is excluded from this "great joy?" Who is excluded from the "good news?" No one.

Adam Clarke is a 19th Century theologian. He took forty years to complete a commentary on the Bible. He was Methodist and was opposed to Calvinism. He did not believe in predestination, but in the free will of a man to choose to believe. He also advocated the doctrine of eternal punishment. Dr. Clarke writes these verses are applied "to the Jews first and then to the human race."⁷⁶ It is a blessing to the whole world. He says, "The good news is to you, – and not to yourselves exclusively, for it is to

⁷⁶ Adam Clarke. "Adam Clarke Commentary (Luke 2)." Study Light website. Publication date unknown. <https://www.studylight.org/commentaries/acc/luke-2.html>. Date accessed: 04/01/2018.

all people, to all the inhabitants of this land, and to the inhabitants of the whole earth.”

John Calvin preaches predestination. God has determined before the foundations of the earth who will and who will not be saved. Those not saved are not chosen and, consequently, will endure torment in eternal punishment. Dr. Calvin describes this verse “which will be to all people.”⁷⁷ The angel is speaking directly to the shepherds in the field. “The message of salvation he brings is of wider extent.” Dr. Calvin assures his audience the blessing given by the angel is joy “common to all people, because it was indiscriminately offered to all.” He then goes on to explain, “God invites all indiscriminately to salvation through the Gospel, but the ingratitude of the world is the reason why this grace, which is equally offered to all, is enjoyed by few.”

It is unfortunate Dr. Calvin adds, “When the angel says that this joy shall be to all the people, he speaks of the chosen people only.” Dr. Calvin is adding to the scriptural text. The offer of joy is “common” to all. He declares the Jews deprived themselves of the joy of knowing Christ because of “their unbelief.” Dr. Calvin also states that Gentiles are not grateful for the gift of saving grace and therefore God’s gift of grace will be “...enjoyed by few.” Dr. Calvin writes, “When the angel says that this joy shall be to all the people, he speaks of the chosen people only.”

First, Dr. Calvin writes the joy is “indiscriminately offered to all,” then in the same paragraph he says the joy is speaking only of chosen people. The Jews that did not believe in Christ as Savior are subject to torment in a place called hell for eternity. Are Gentiles who do not accept the gift of grace to be eternally tormented for their unbelief? Certainly not! But, Dr. Calvin’s doctrine of eternal conscious torment prevails to this day. That doctrine declares unbelieving Gentiles are subjected to it.

Albert Barnes is a Presbyterian Pastor, Preacher, Author and Scholar. He is widely held in high regard. He prepared a commentary entitled

⁷⁷ John Calvin. “*Calvin’s Commentary on the Bible, Luke 2.*” Study Light web site. Publication date unknown. <https://www.studylight.org/commentaries/cal/luke-2.html>. Date accessed: 04/01/2018.

“Albert Barnes Notes On The New Testament.”⁷⁸ His sermons have been published and many can be read online. In one sermon he spoke to the serious condition of the world. He says, “When I look on a world of sinners and sufferers-upon death-beds and graveyards – upon the world of woe filled with hosts to suffer for ever: when I see my friends, my family, my people, my fellow citizens when I look upon a whole race, all involved in this sin and danger-and when I see the great mass of them wholly unconcerned, and when I feel that God only can save them, and yet he does not do so, I am struck dumb. It is all dark, dark, dark to my soul, and I cannot disguise it.”

Dr. Barnes may have been conflicted and thoroughly sorrowful for what he believed was to be the fate of many people he loved. About these verses he tells us “the gospel will bring peace.” All of the chaos and confusion, strife and violence will be brought to end. “Jesus came to make peace.” Dr. Barnes tells us Christ accomplished His work. He brings peace “by reconciling the world to God by His atonement.” Second, Christ gives the mind of the sinner peace in the freedom and comfort of knowing his place in Christ is secure. Third, Christ brings peace “by diffusing the principles of universal peace among nations.” Christ causes mankind to see each other not as enemies, but as brothers. He leads us to see our neighbors in need and striving to help them. There is an absence of self. Lastly, Christ brings peace as “all nations will be brought under the influence of the gospel...and the world will be filled with peace.”

Dr. Barnes is seemingly advocating universal reconciliation in this commentary. He is, however, a proponent of the doctrine of eternal conscious torment.

Take only the plain meaning of the text, “I bring you good news of great joy which will be to all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David *a Savior*, who is Christ the Lord.” Take nothing from these words and add nothing to them. Drs. Clarke, Calvin and Barnes are notable men. They are strong and eminently educated. Their knowledge is grand compared to my own and many others in the world. However, their interpretations and commentaries do not seem to be in agreement.

⁷⁸ Albert Barnes. “Albert Barnes Notes on the Whole Bible.” Study Light website. Publication date unknown. <https://www.studylight.org/commentaries/bnb.html>. Date accessed: 04/01/2018.

Allow this reiteration of these verses. This is the testimony of the birth of Christ Jesus. Shepherds tending their flocks at night are overtaken by the glory and light of the Angel of the Lord. The shepherds, I think naturally so, are deeply frightened. The Angel of the Lord calms their fear and declares the Gospel to the lowly shepherds. The Gospel is “for all people.” The whole world, all of creation, is impacted by the Good News. “For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.” A Savior of the whole world is born. The Christ is born. His Name is Jesus which means “God Saves.” There are no distinctions in this Gospel between those who believe He is the Christ and those who do not. There are no distinctions in these verses about the Gospel between those who heard the Good News and those who have not. It is the will of God that none be lost that all are saved.

These verses build a sermon leading to hope for all who have ever been created or who will be created. The doctrine of universal reconciliation teaches we have a King. He is Christ. The most heinous man will be reconciled to Him Who created him.

Jesus said, “Father, forgive them, for *they don’t know what they are doing.*” (Luke 23:34, emphasis added)

Mr. Sprenger reminds us, “This incredible request by Jesus, together with His suffering and death on the cross for the sins of the world, becomes the ultimate picture and the eternal symbol of the heart and intention of God toward lost humanity.” Let us also be reminded Christ’s obedience to death on a cross was determined before the foundation of the world.

Christ Jesus suffered humiliating and torturous punishment at the hands of His people and of the government. A few days earlier a crowd greeted Him as He entered into Jerusalem on the back of a donkey’s colt. The crowd cheered and sang “Hosanna” to Him and made His path into the city a path of victory on palm fronds. The Temple leaders; that is the Sanhedrin; the Pharisees, the Sadducees, the Zealots and other factions, turned away from their Messiah and whipped the crowd into hating their King. Trickery and false testimony were used to persuade the people to convict Him of blasphemy. Pontius Pilate was a weak Governor over Israel and of Jerusalem. His interests were self serving. He wanted to keep

his position and status. He judged the King and found no crime to punish, but he listened instead to the voices of the Sanhedrin and those voices of the people chanting, "Crucify Him, Crucify Him!" Christ stood convicted and sentenced. Christ Jesus carried a cross to Calvary. The people He loved spit at Him and cursed Him. He was mercilessly mocked. All of this abuse laid on Him over a few hours time. "Father, forgive them. They don't know what they are doing."

Sing praise to heaven and give honor to Christ the King. He forgives those who hate Him. He forgives those who follow corrupted men. He forgives corrupted men. He forgives all men. Jesus came into the world to forgive the sins of the world, all of the sins of the world. The men and women who championed His betrayal and those who exercised their hatred of Him upon His body are forgiven. Can we say the Father of the Son refused to give to His Son what His Son seeks? "Father forgive them...!"

...UR IN JOHN

All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. (John 1:3, emphasis added)

The Son is The Father's grace. Grace made us and grace saves us. Christ Jesus is Grace. God is merciful to all. The doctrine of eternal conscious torment diminishes God's capacity for mercy. This doctrine demands we believe God's mercy is not really "over all." We are all wonderfully made. We are all His creation. We will be reconciled to Him. This is "The Blessed Hope."

The true light that enlightens everyone was coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world was made through him, and the world didn't recognize him. (John 1:9-10, emphasis added)

Jesus Christ is the Light. He "...gives light to everyone...." His Light isn't given only to this group or that; this nation or that; this man or that

man. His light is in everyone. Everything created is created by Him. His Spirit is given to everyone. When we die our spirit returns to Him Who gave it. "The true light that enlightens everyone was coming into the world." God's love is for everyone and He puts His Spirit into everyone. It is God's will that all be saved. God is Sovereign!

Pride has led us to this place. We have denied God's power when we say He is unable to reconcile and to restore a man's (mankind, Adam) spirit. We have denied God's promise when we say He is unable or unwilling to keep His promise. Lord help me to shed my pride. Help us all to see You in a Light that is all-consuming fire, love, and mercy. Lead us to preach. Amen.

The next day he [John the Baptist] saw Jesus coming to him, and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God *who takes away the sin of the world!*" (John 1:29, emphasis added)

Mr. Sprenger tells us, "'The 'sin' is in the singular, indicating the complete removal of the 'sin principle', or sin itself with all of its consequences, not just the individual acts of sin." Sin is removed from the world. All sin over all time over the whole of His creation is taken away from the world. There is not a sin that is not forgiven except one and that is to withhold forgiveness from another. The unforgiving will not be forgiven. Who when standing before Him will be able to withhold forgiveness? I dare say no one.

John describes Him as the Lamb of God. It will be this Lamb that will shed blood to take away the sins of the world. The blood of this Lamb is God's plan for the salvation of the world. It is His will that all be saved. Is there any other way to understand this scripture? Jesus is the Lamb of God. He "takes away the sin of the world!" He does not take away sin because a prayer was said. He does not take away sin because of any ritual. He came to take away the sin of the world.

These verses simply understood declare that all sin is a matter of the past. All sin of the world is taken away. The blood shed is saving grace. The blood shed is mercy without limits. The blood shed is love. The blood shed is God's blood. His Son's blood shed for the forgiveness of sins. All sins are forgiven. God is love in this Light. Jesus died for the sins of all. It

was ordained before the foundations of the earth. His love is infinite and completely merciful. Not one of His sheep will be lost.

John the Baptist fulfills the prophecy regarding Christ Jesus by this declaration. "Behold! THE LAMB OF GOD takes away the sin of the world." No confession, no conditions, nothing other than the Lamb of God takes away the sin of the world.

And, according as Moses exalts the serpent in the wilderness, thus must the Son of Mankind be exalted, that everyone believing on Him should not be perishing, but may be having life eonian. For thus God loves the world, so that He gives His only-begotten Son, that everyone who is believing in Him should not be perishing, but may be having life eonian. For God *does not dispatch His Son into the world that He should be judging the world, but that the world may be saved through Him.* He who is believing in Him is not being judged, yet he who is not believing has been judged already, for he has not believed in the name of the only-begotten Son of God.

Now *this is the judging:* that the light has come into the world, and men love the darkness rather than the light, for their acts were wicked. For everyone who is committing bad things is hating the light and is not coming to the light, lest his acts may be exposed. *Now he who is doing the truth is coming to the light that his acts may be made manifest, for they have been wrought in God.* (John 3:14-21 (Concordant Literal Version), emphasis added)

All of the world is loved. He creates all the world and He loves His creation. The short hand version of these verses is that Jesus is the Light and men who believe in the Light are drawn to Him. Those men who choose to remain in darkness avoid the Light and are not drawn to Him. These verses are not judgment on anyone. Believers believe and their reward is age enduring life even while in this temporal world. A man who believes is living with the Lord even as the Lord sits at the right hand of

the Father. A man who does not believe does not have the desire to come out of the darkness.

God did not send His Son to condemn the world. His Son came to save it. He was not sent to save some as the traditional doctrine of eternal conscious torment professes. God saves all. Who is the judgment?

The world loves to live in the darkness. The world wants the darkness so as to keep secrets hidden from the light. The Light exposes the darkness of the world. The evil of men is seen clearly because the Light of Christ shines on all men. The Light of the world is the Judgment!

Christ Jesus is given by the Father to suffer a horrendous death by crucifixion. Christ Jesus is obedient to His Father. It is God Who gives salvation to the world through the gift of His Son's shed blood. Christ did not come to judge, but to save. Believers and unbelievers, all men, fall short of the glory of God. An act of true unfettered, unconditional love is necessary for the reconciliation of all to the Father. That act is in the life, the ministry, the death, the burial, and ultimately the resurrection of Christ Jesus.

All that we do is known by the Father and is worked out in us through His Son. Good is exposed in the Light. Evil seeks to stay in the darkness so as not to be exposed. That is the judging. Is there even one person who in all creation has not hidden in darkness a sin they consider vile and perhaps unforgivable? Who in all creation is without sin?

This is the Good News; Christ Jesus sacrifices Himself for the sin of the world; even sin hidden in darkness. Christ Jesus is God's Judgment!

The doctrine of eternal conscious torment requires these verses to mean something other than what is plainly and simply intended. The men who choose to stay in the darkness are condemned. To what? Jesus does not say any man is ever condemned to eternal conscious torment. In fact, the Holy Word of God leads us to believe that every tongue will confess Jesus is Lord to the Glory of the Father. The doctrine of eternal conscious torment is anathema to the Gospel of Christ Jesus. Eternal conscious torment is indicative of a God Who hates.

They said to the woman, "Now we believe, not because of your speaking; for we have heard for ourselves, and

know that this is indeed the Christ, *the Savior of the world.*"
(John 4:42, emphasis added)

These words from the mouths of Samaritans. The Samaritans are a people group particularly disdained by the Jews. After a few days with Christ they realize He is the Savior of the Jews and the Savior of the Samaritans. He is "the Savior of the world."

The Pharisees during the time of Christ cannot see Christ as their Savior *AND* as the Savior of the world. The Pharisees hated Jesus. They did all they could to convince others that Jesus is a criminal and a blasphemer. Their belief is God is their Savior and only they are saved by God. It is an unpleasant analogy to make, but the advocates of eternal conscious torment have this in common with the Pharisees. They do not see Christ as their Savior *AND* as the Savior of the world. The doctrine of eternal conscious torment requires the majority of mankind be tormented in a place called hell forever. Those living with this doctrine find a way in scripture to reserve the Savior for themselves, but find eternal conscious torment in the scriptures to be the outcome for everybody else.

Again, therefore, Jesus spoke to them, saying, "*I am the light of the world.* He who follows me will not walk in the darkness, but will have the light of life."

The Pharisees therefore said to him, "You testify about yourself. Your testimony is not valid."

Jesus answered them, "Even if I testify about myself, my testimony is true, for I know where I came from, and where I am going; but you don't know where I came from, or where I am going. You judge according to the flesh. *I judge no one.* Even if I do judge, my judgment is true, for I am not alone, but I am with the Father who sent me. It's also written in your law that the testimony of two people is valid. I am one who testifies about myself, and the Father who sent me testifies about me."

They said therefore to him, "Where is your Father?"

Jesus answered, "You know neither me, nor my Father. If you knew me, you would know my Father

also.” Jesus spoke these words in the treasury, as he taught in the temple. Yet no one arrested him, because his hour had not yet come. Jesus said therefore again to them, I am going away, and you will seek me, and you will die in your sins. Where I go, you can’t come.”

The Jews therefore said, “Will he kill himself, that he says, ‘Where I am going, you can’t come’?”

He said to them, “You are from beneath. I am from above. You are of this world. I am not of this world. I said therefore to you that you will die in your sins; for unless you believe that I am he, you will die in your sins.”

They said therefore to him, “Who are you?”

Jesus said to them, “Just what I have been saying to you from the beginning. I have many things to speak and to judge concerning you. However he who sent me is true; and the things which I heard from him, *these I say to the world.*” (John 8:12-26, emphasis added)

Jesus declares in terms certain that He “...is the light of the world.” His light is not a light for Jews only. His is a light of the world. Christ Jesus is speaking to the leadership of the Jewish people. The Pharisees are a learned fellowship. They fancy themselves above the masses of Jews living at the time. In this exchange with the Pharisees Christ Jesus tells them they do not see the Light. The Pharisees are of the world. They rest in their flesh. They find comfort in what they believe they know. Christ Jesus tells them they will die in their sins.

The Pharisees, at least those who are attending this exchange, will die and be placed in their graves. They will die and the doctrine of eternal conscious torment demands the Pharisees will forever suffer in a place the doctrine calls hell. Christ Jesus is the authority preaching to these Pharisees on this day. He says nothing to them about eternal conscious torment. He says only that they will die in their sins.

Lee Salisbury and many others ask, “Did Jesus tell a lie when He said, ‘*And I, if I be lifted up from the earth will draw all men unto me.*’?”

Jesus answered them, "The time has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Most certainly I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains by itself alone. But if it dies, it bears much fruit. He who loves his life will lose it. He who hates his life in this world will keep it to eternal life. If anyone serves me, let him follow me. Where I am, there will my servant also be. If anyone serves me, the Father will honor him. Now my soul is troubled. What shall I say? 'Father, save me from this time?' But for this cause I came to this time. Father, glorify your name!"

Then there came a voice out of the sky, saying, "I have both glorified it, and will glorify it again." The multitude therefore, who stood by and heard it, said that it had thundered. Others said, "An angel has spoken to him."

Jesus answered, "This voice hasn't come for my sake, but for your sakes. Now is the judgment of this world. Now the prince of this world will be cast out. *And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.*" (John 12:23-32, emphasis added)

Our Christ uses an analogy to describe how He will die and bring all men into reconciliation with God. Through Christ's death and His resurrection God makes the way to reconciliation with Him complete. Christ's obedience to death on the Cross saves all. He said He came to absolve the sins of the world. We read in these verses Christ's admonition to set aside personal desires for the sake of meeting the needs of others. By our selfless service to others we bring glory to the Son. Serving others with a selfless heart brings heavenly blessings.

Jesus tells us His "soul is troubled." He knows that soon He will be taken captive, persecuted, mocked, humiliated, beaten and convicted of crimes based in false testimonies from those He loves. Our Christ calls out to the Father. The Son acknowledges His purpose. Christ asks that the Father's Name be glorified; not His own, but His Father's Name be glorified. The Father audibly answers that indeed He has honored His Name and will do so again. Others with Jesus heard God's response.

Some tried to rationalize the voice of God as thunder or as the voice of an angel. Jesus sets them straight telling them that the Father spoke aloud for their benefit.

Christ goes on to declare that the Father's judgment on the world is at hand. The Ruler of this world is not Satan as some suggest. The Ruler of this world is Christ Jesus and it is Christ Jesus being cast out. Men are rejecting Him and He is soon to be crucified and placed in a grave.

It is important to allow yourself to be a critical thinker. Do not be quick to follow the traditions of current and predominant theologies. Jesus says, "...if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to Myself." Does He say anything more than that? He was lifted up from the earth when He was hung on the cross to die. That part is satisfied. The second part of the promise is that He "*will draw all men to Myself.*" He does not say He will draw only a few. He does not say, "I will draw Augustinians / Calvinists to Myself." He does not say, "I will draw Arminians to Myself." He does not say, "I will draw only believers to Myself."

Charles Spurgeon is known as a great preacher and his sermons are highly respected. A sermon message entitled "Christ Lifted Up" ⁷⁹ can be viewed in its entirety at the Blue Letter Bible website. Dr. Spurgeon opens this sermon remarking, "It was an extraordinary occasion upon which the Saviour uttered these words." Dr. Spurgeon's words are an understatement considering what is soon to transpire. Jesus is soon to be falsely accused. He is soon to be ridiculed and mocked. He is soon to suffer unimaginable indignities. Those who profess to love Him on one day will express their disgust of Him on another. Some will heap "Hosanna upon Hosanna" and in a few days will shout "Crucify Him!"

Dr. Spurgeon points us to verse 31 (John 12:31). "Now is the judgment of the world." He points out that the Greek word for "judgment" here is better translated "crisis." Jesus is declaring, "Now is the crisis of the world." Dr. Spurgeon declares this to be the "great turning point of all the world's history." The sermon offered by Dr. Spurgeon exposes the truth of scripture and he teaches about Christ's crucifixion. Christ is glorified in the crucifixion. The Father is glorified in the crucifixion. "Christ looked

⁷⁹ Charles H. Spurgeon. "A Sermon (No. 139)." Delivered on Sabbath Morning, July 5, 1857 Blue Letter Bible Web site. https://www.blueletterbible.org/Comm/spurgeon_charles/sermons/0139.cfm?a=1009032. Date accessed: 04/01/2018.

upon His crucifixion as the completion of all His work, and therefore looked upon it as an exaltation." We are reminded that Jesus took the vinegar and said, "It is finished." Dr. Spurgeon says, "And, then it was finished." His work is accomplished. It is finished. It is complete.

Dr. Spurgeon seems to be adding something to the verse in which Jesus says, "If I am lifted up from the earth will draw all men to myself" (John 12:32.)" Dr. Spurgeon pleads, "Christ should be most prominent, not hell and damnation." He then insists that preachers of God's word must teach about "God's terrors as well as God's mercies."

Christ Jesus is not teaching about God's wrath, but about God's Judgment! Dr. Spurgeon preaches that men of God are "unfaithful to the solemn charge which God has given us if we were wickedly to stifle all the threatenings of God's word." He preaches, "The wicked will be cast into hell." Every person, every nation forgetting God will cast into everlasting tortures. He says, "It is our business to say so." Dr. Spurgeon tells his audience that preachers are to teach of condemnation. But it is Christ Who preaches He "will draw all men unto Himself!"

Dr. Spurgeon acknowledges the futility of preaching God's wrath upon the unrepentant rebels. He says, "Some souls are awakened and terrified by such preaching; they however, are but few." It is to be supposed that one person frightened into a love of Christ and of God is worth the effort. Dr. Spurgeon, though, shows a more true side to his virtuous desire to serve God. "...Let us preach the wondrous love of God. There are more souls won by wooing than by threatening. It is not hell, but Christ, we desire to preach."

Dr. Spurgeon believes unbelievers are to be eternally consciously tormented for their failure to believe. He preaches Christ's love for all, but cannot bring himself to accept that Christ does indeed love all. It is folly to try to discern Dr. Spurgeon's heart. There is conflict. On one side is the need to preach God's all-consuming love. On the other is the need to preach the price to be paid for rejecting His Gospel.

Dr. Spurgeon teaches Christ will draw men to Himself as a trumpet call. A call to alert. A call to come to hear the proclamation to be read aloud. "Now, my brethren, part of the attractive power of the gospel lies in the attracting people to hear it. You cannot expect people to be blessed by the preaching of the gospel if they do not hear it."

Dr. Spurgeon takes much time in this sermon to extol the virtues of Christ-like unity in the several denominations of his day. His sermon closes, but without a significant distinction between what he labels “the people of the Lord” and those people who are not “the people of the Lord.” He preaches to believers and encourages them to step away from backsliding ways. Dr. Spurgeon does not preach that “all men will be drawn to” Him. He preaches only those who believe will be drawn by Christ to the Father. Dr. Spurgeon, the man of God that he was, limits the power of Christ to only a few.

This sermon by Dr. Spurgeon captures the essence of current denominations and their doctrines of eternal conscious torment. “All” does not mean all persons created. “All” means only those that meet a standard developed by preachers or certain standard bearers of what they conceive truth to be. Their truth and the truth they teach is that “all” are only those agreeing with them. In their view Christ’s crucifixion does not apply to “all,” but to only some.

It is Christ Jesus Who says, “And I...will draw all men to Myself.” Mr. Sprenger adds, “This is as clear a statement on the subject as any in scripture, a promise made by Christ Himself! These are the words of the Savior! He is describing the kind of death He will bear for the sake of the world. He is to be crucified. His blood is to be shed. This to ‘draw all men to...’ Himself.”

There are countless commentaries defining God’s Holy Word. Many men and institutions honorably strive to honestly treat interpretations of language and history. The “Pulpit Commentary” was produced in the late nineteenth century by renowned leaders of the Anglican Church. Their commentary describes this verse eloquently and passionately. They write, “He is ‘the greatest Person’ and influences the lives of all. He is the Son of God. He is the eternal Word. He is fully human and fully God.”⁸⁰ The Pulpit Commentary teaches that it is Christ Jesus Who is our means to the Father. It is Christ Jesus Who “makes the greatest sacrifice for all.” It is Christ Jesus Who “is the Incarnate Word Who lays down His life for our salvation.” Christ Jesus is proof that God is love. His “sacrifice is

⁸⁰ “*The Pulpit Commentary: John 12.*” By Anglican Church, Study Light website. Publication date unknown. <https://www.studylight.org/commentaries/tpc/john-12.html>. Date accessed: 04/01/2018.

the greatest act of love by the greatest Person to have ever lived.... His sacrifice is the only sufficient way to reconciliation and it is the only efficient means to accomplish God's plan for all."

The drawing is complete. Its glory is overwhelming. The authors of this commentary conclude Christ's sacrifice is "glorious triumph." "The greatest sinners sunk in the deepest sin" are touched by Christ. These great sinners hold within them "the deadliest enmity against God and virtue." These are sinners who are "backed up by the mightiest spiritual opponents of God...." Even so, Jesus says, "...I will draw all men...."

The Pulpit Commentary tells us that Christ's act of love that draws all men to Himself is complete and whole. Men, the most vile of men, are drawn "...unto faith in Him, unto his character and likeness, unto his position and society. The drawing will be most complete; hence the glory of the influence – his triumph."

The commentary provided by these noble men is contradicted by their commentary on other verses. Here the Lord draws all men to Himself. However, in a commentary on Matthew 5:22 these learned Anglicans advocate a doctrine of eternal conscious torment. They write, "The damnation of hell; literally, the judgment of Gehenna...the sentence that condemns to eternal death."

The commentary given by the Pulpit Commentary's authors regarding John 12:32 is correct. It preaches all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. It preaches that the Christ's sacrifice is perfect and in complete harmony with God's infinite love. He is love. It is God's will that no man perish. There is a judgment of fire, a refining fire. That fire is restorative not punitive. Christ's sacrifice purposely draws all men to Himself. God, through Christ's obedience, provides the Way to be saved and ultimately to be reconciled to Himself. This is God's promise. His Son, Jesus, Whose Name means "God is salvation" will not lose even one of those given to Him by the Father.

Jesus was speaking to a crowd when God spoke for all to hear. Some heard God's voice commending Jesus. Others heard thunder. Jesus explains that what the people heard was for their benefit. Then Jesus describes the manner of His death. He tells the people why. "And I, if I should be exalted out of the earth, shall be drawing all to Myself. (CLV)" There were no denominations then. No cries for reformation of

the church are known to exist at the time Jesus said these words. There is nothing to contradict. When Jesus was lifted up on the Cross at Calvary He then drew all mankind to Himself. He didn't draw just a few men who believed they were chosen. He didn't draw just a few men who believed they had the foresight to choose to believe the Gospel. He "...will be drawing all to..." Himself. All men!

I have come as a light into the world, that whoever believes in me may not remain in the darkness. *If anyone listens to my sayings, and doesn't believe, I don't judge him.* For I came not to judge the world, but *to save the world.* He who rejects me, and doesn't receive my sayings, has one who judges him. The word that I spoke, the same will judge him in the last day. For I spoke not from myself, but the Father who sent me, he gave me a commandment, what I should say, and what I should speak. *I know that his commandment is eternal life.* The things therefore which I speak, even as the Father has said to me, so I speak."
(John 12:46-50, emphasis added)

Jesus is not the Judge. He says He is not. He tells us He came to save the world. He saves those who do not say a prayer or take communion. He saves those who do not live in the western world only. He came "...to save the world."

Jesus addresses those who refuse to believe. Those folks will be judged "in the last day" by the Word that is spoken. What will that word be? God caused these words to be written. "Every tongue will confess that Jesus is Lord to the glory of the Father." The Word of God is our Judgment!. These verses do not include a caveat that says those who reject His words or continue in rebellion of Him will be not be saved and consequently condemned to eternal conscious torment. Jesus says, "And I know that His commandment is eternal life." We should all reach out to God and in His Spirit sing praises. "His commandment is eternal life."

The doctrine of eternal conscious torment demands there be two branches of eternal life. One leads to an eternal fellowship with God in heaven. The other leads to eternal torture at the hand of God in hell. The

first path is really the only path. God does not will that any be lost. He wills that all be saved. He says He will reconcile all men to Himself. The doctrine of eternal conscious torment forces a second path to a mythical place called hell.

Jesus answered them, "Do you now believe? Behold, the time is coming, yes, and has now come, that you will be scattered, everyone to his own place, and you will leave me alone. Yet I am not alone, because the Father is with me. I have told you these things, that in me you may have peace. In the world you have oppression; but cheer up! *I have overcome the world.*" (John 16:31-33, emphasis added)

Jesus is explaining to His Disciples and by His Word in scripture explaining to us what He is to take upon Himself for the sake of the world. His friends, His chosen Disciples will abandon Him. Judas betrays Him and all the others run from Him when confronted by the Temple guard. He is never alone for the Father is always with Him. In death the Father will be with Him. In life and in His ascension the Father is with Him. It is going to be a terribly frightening thing to see Him persecuted, prosecuted, convicted and hung on a cross. But, He says, "...take heart...." Do not be afraid. Be of courage. Hold on to this: "...I have overcome the world."

Jesus said these things, and lifting up his eyes to heaven, he said, "Father, the time has come. Glorify your Son, that your Son may also glorify you; even as you gave him authority over all flesh, *he will give eternal life to all whom you have given him.* This is eternal life, that they should know you, the only true God, and him whom you sent, Jesus Christ. (John 17:1-3, emphasis added)

Jesus Christ is preparing for His upcoming trial, conviction and execution. He tells His Father that He is prepared for the time of His tribulation. Jesus knows His Father's sacrifice is great and that only glory will come from it. The Father has given to His Son authority over all

flesh. His Son is given the authority to give eternal life to all He now has authority over. This scripture fits seamlessly with other scriptures that declare “every knee shall bow” and “every tongue confess” that He is Lord. His Kingship brings glory to the Father Who then shares that glory with His Son.

Not for these only do I pray, but for those also who believe in me through their word, that they may all be one; even as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be one in us; *that the world may believe that you sent me.*
(John 17:20-21, emphasis added)

These verses are remarkably simple to understand. Jesus speaks these words. He is praying first for the Disciples and then for the world. He prays in submission to the Father. Christ Jesus asks the Father to cause unity with Him in those people who believe because of the testimonies given by the Disciples. He asks of the Father to let all who believe to find ourselves in Him. A common purpose in our hearts is to tell the world about Christ being the First Born Son of God. “That the world may believe that you sent me. ” Believers only? No, the world will believe Christ is Savior. That is as His Father wills it. That is the Gospel.

The doctrine of eternal conscious torment insists Christ’s atonement is insufficient for all the world. His atoning work on the cross is sufficient only for those who believe. The doctrine contradicts the plain meaning of scripture.

When Jesus therefore had received the vinegar, he said, “*It is finished.*” He bowed his head, and gave up his spirit.
(John 19:30, emphasis added)

It is as simple as that. In Christ Jesus... “It is finished.”

...UR IN ACTS

Repent therefore, and turn again, that your sins may be blotted out, so that there may come times of refreshing from the presence of the Lord, and that he may send

Christ Jesus, who was ordained for you before, *whom heaven must receive until the times of restoration of all things, which God spoke long ago by the mouth of his holy prophets.*
(Acts 3:19-21, emphasis added)

Peter and John are at the Temple preparing to enter for worship. At the gate is a lame man. He is placed there every day seeking alms. Peter approaches the lame man who reaches out as if expecting a coin or some other gift. Peter tells the man that he has no money to give, but that the gift of the Holy Spirit will be his. "Repent therefore, and turn again, that your sins may be blotted out...." Peter reached out with his right hand and lifted the man from his mat to his feet. The man did repent and he danced with joy always praising the Lord.

Peter, by way of the Holy Spirit of God, healed a man. Peter was being confronted by a number of Jews. He was challenged by the Pharisees. Peter points out their role in the sacrifice of the Lamb. The Pharisees turned over the "Author of life" and chose to pardon a murderer. Peter preaches to the crowd that has gathered to see the miracle in the formerly lame man. He lays out how Jesus is their Messiah. He tells them of their blame for demanding the life of Barabbas be spared and violently demanding the Life of Jesus be taken. The accusation is clear, "...You killed Him...."

Peter declared the lame man's healing was by the power of Christ Jesus; the same Messiah they demanded be hung on a cross. Then Peter says something remarkable, benevolent and demonstrative of God's love. "Now, brothers, I know that you did this in ignorance, as did also your rulers. But the things which God announced by the mouth of all his prophets, that Christ should suffer, he thus fulfilled" (verses 17 and 18.) The people are forgiven. They are not forever lost. They cannot be held accountable for their horrendously violent hearts. They did not know what they were doing. Jesus said, "It is finished!"

The doctrine of eternal conscious torment contradicts God's love. The Lord Christ Jesus obediently gave His precious Life "to draw all men to Himself." Heaven does not hold Him. He is alive and lives in the hearts of men. There will come a moment when He causes "the restoration of

all things.” He reigns now. He is the King of Kings. His subjects will be all the men He restores to Himself. He will draw all men to Himself.

“Repent!,” Peter says. “Repent.” Why? So “that your sins may be blotted out....” Whose sins? The sins of mankind generally, but certainly the sins of the Sanhedrin specifically.

Belief in Christ Jesus is a “time of refreshing.” It is a time for a life of peace. Repent and be at peace. Christ is in heaven, but a time will come when He returns “...for the restoring of all things which God spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets long ago.” What was spoken by the prophets that speaks to the restoration of all things? There would be One Who comes to restore all things to the Father. He comes to restore all things not a few, but all things.

...UR IN ROMANS

Lee Salisbury asks us to consider how the doctrine of eternal conscious torment exalts Satan. “Did the first Adam’s offense unto condemnation and death for all accomplish ‘much more’ than the last Adam’s free gift of grace unto justification for all (Romans 5:15)?”

Therefore as sin entered into the world through one man, and death through sin; and so death passed to all men, because all sinned. For until the law, sin was in the world; but sin is not charged when there is no law. Nevertheless death reigned from Adam until Moses, even over those whose sins weren’t like Adam’s disobedience, who is a foreshadowing of him who was to come. But the free gift isn’t like the trespass. *For if by the trespass of the one the many died, much more did the grace of God, and the gift by the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, abound to the many.* The gift is not as through one who sinned: for the judgment came by one to condemnation, but the free gift came of many trespasses to justification. For if by the trespass of the one, death reigned through the one; so much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one, Jesus Christ.

So then as through one trespass, all men were condemned; even so through one act of righteousness, all men were justified to life. For as through the one man's disobedience many were made sinners, even so through the obedience of the one, many will be made righteous. The law came in besides, that the trespass might abound; but where sin abounded, grace abounded more exceedingly; that as sin reigned in death, even so grace might reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.
(Romans 5:12-21, emphasis added)

Satan is the cause of sin in the world. He deceived Eve and then Adam with a lie and Adam sinned. The penalty for Adam's transgression against his Father falls on every human. The penalty is physical death. God creates each and every one of us in the wombs of our mothers. At birth, though, we are born into a sinful world.

Review verses 15 and 18 closely. We are given a comparison. One man's sin causes the death of "many" men. The grace of our Almighty God, by way of His Judgment, Christ Jesus, overwhelms "many" men. The comparison is that Adam's offense, his transgression, causes the physical death for "all mankind" and that through God's Judgment, Christ Jesus, "all mankind" is justified. Adam brought sin into the world affecting "all men." Jesus' act of obedience to His Father's command brings salvation to "all men."

It is not good to declare "the many" in verse 15 means every human created and that the "many" later in that verse means a number far fewer. If we do make that determination it is clear Satan's sway over mankind is more consuming than Christ's death for our reconciliation. If the "all" who are condemned by Adam's transgression is different or greater than the "all" justified and brought to righteousness, then Satan is the victor. He will have a "super-abounding" affect on God's creation. Satan will have the upper hand. Christ's power to save "all" is diminished to something less than Satan's power to deceive "all."

Adam Clarke is a well known Bible scholar. He took 40 years to complete a commentary on the Bible. His work is widely accepted and is

often used to explain God's Word. Here he says of Romans 5:18⁸¹ "Through the disobedience of Adam, a sentence of condemnation to death, without any promise or hope of a resurrection, passed upon all men; so, by the obedience of Christ unto death, this one grand righteous act, the sentence was so far reversed, that death shall not finally triumph, for all shall again be restored to life". Everyone dies eventually. Dr. Clarke says, "The mercy of God, in Christ Jesus, shall have its due also.... The whole human race shall be raised to life at the great day. Thus both justice and mercy are magnified; and neither is exalted at the expense of the other."

I cannot emphasize enough how "all" in one place must mean "all" in the second place. "The many" meaning all in one place means all in the second place. Do we dare alter that meaning to satisfy a theology? Are we willing to step on God's mercy and justice to benefit a doctrine of eternal conscious torment? Shall I declare that I am chosen for eternal bliss and another is chosen for eternal punishment, especially in light of these Biblical verses? I cannot say that I am chosen above another. I cannot say my will is stronger than God's. I can say with clear conscience that God is love. His mercy will be shown to all. "Every knee will bow..." one day. All will acknowledge Him and Satan will suffer his fate. We should not lift up the evil one. Adam sinned and by his act of disobedience all mankind was cursed to work the ground and to physically die. Adam disobeyed God's commandment. Since, Adam, death reigned.

John MacArthur is renowned as a Biblical scholar, teacher of Holy Scripture, Pastor of a well established church. Dr. MacArthur, however, does not agree that "all" means "all" in the context of these verses. According to Dr. MacArthur and most other traditional orthodox scholars the first "many" in verse 15 means "all mankind," but the "many" that Christ's sacrifice impacted is not "all mankind." In verse 18 the condemnation is to "all men," but the reconciliation to Himself is not to "all men."

Dr. MacArthur preached a sermon, "Death Through Adam Life

⁸¹ Adam Clarke. "Adam Clarke Commentary (Romans 5:18)." Study Light website. Publication date unknown. <https://www.studylight.org/commentaries/acc/romans-5.html>. Date accessed: 04/01/2018.

Through Christ.”⁸² on this subject particularly. He preaches Adam and Christ Jesus “made the most monumental impact on human life.” These men “affected the whole of the human race for time and eternity.” Each man performed separate, but single acts that impacted the whole of humanity. Dr. MacArthur teaches, “Adam brought death and Christ brought life.”

Dr. MacArthur is convincing that Adam’s transgression in the Garden is the cause of sin in the world and that sin is a part of every human God creates. Dr. MacArthur’s point of view is that “...sin entered the world, the cosmos of man’s existence, the system of creation, as we know it, through one man.” That one man, Adam, “...introduced sin to mankind.” Dr. MacArthur preaches, “...Sin entered into the human realm through Adam. By one man, sin entered the world.”

Dr. MacArthur expounds on death being imputed to all mankind from the moment of Adam’s transgression. He elaborates how sin was transferred from our mothers and we were conceived with sin. Babies are born with sin. Dr. MacArthur is consistent in this point. Because of Adam’s transgression sin entered the world as we know it and death reigns.

Dr. MacArthur describes Paul’s intent in these verses. Dr. MacArthur says, “What he’s talking about here is the impact of one man, Adam, on everybody. And he says the fact that that one man, Adam, by one act affected everybody is a type or a picture of Christ by one act affecting everybody.” Christ’s life, death on the cross, His burial, His resurrection and His ascension into heaven to sit at the right hand of the Father does indeed affect “everybody.”

Dr. MacArthur preaches that “many” does not really mean “many” and that “all” does not really mean “all.” Dr. MacArthur tells more about Paul’s intended meaning. “He has just presented the fact that Jesus Christ, by his one work of death and resurrection on the cross and through the open tomb has impacted all who believe.” A qualifier has been added. “All who believe,” is added and that addition takes away from the true impact of Christ’s sacrifice “...for the sins of the many.”

⁸² John MacArthur. “*Death Through Adam; Life Through Christ.*” Grace To You website. August 18, 1991. <https://www.gty.org/library/sermons-library/80-85/death-through-adam-life-through-christ>. Date accessed: 04/02/2018.

Dr. MacArthur's message to his audience that day is "precisely what Paul wants you to understand. That while you no more are responsible for that act which produced your death; you are no more responsible for that act which produces your salvation and your life. That's a gift. That's a gift. In verse 15 he says, a free gift. Isn't like the transgressions." The sin of Adam and salvation gift of Christ are certainly not the same, but their application to mankind is. At least, they should be.

Dr. MacArthur says Paul is "making an analogy here." He says Paul "uses 'many' and 'all' ...throughout this text for literary contrast purposes and sometimes 'many' means 'all' and sometimes 'all' means 'many.'"

Is Dr. MacArthur speaking for Paul? Was Paul using a literary device as Dr. MacArthur preaches? Did Paul want us to believe that sin came to the many (meaning everyone) by one man's act of disobedience, but that Christ's salvation does not come to the same many by the One's act of obedience? Why would Paul not write precisely that in this letter to the Romans?

I love Dr. MacArthur and I am especially fond of his preaching style. I appreciate that he values preaching by exposition "one verse at a time." I am highly appreciative of his scholarly position. He is in my view a Scholar's Scholar. However, I cannot accept the distinctions he derives here.

The Blue Letter Bible Institute provides a website with multiple Bible translations and Bible commentaries. They provide the King James Bible with Strong's Numbers.⁸³ Many theological scholars use Strong's notes to aid their understanding of words translated from Greek to English. Strong's Notes are trusted far and wide as authoritative and true. In Romans 5:15 the word "many" carries the Strong's Number G4183 in both places the word is used. Strong's defines this word "many" as "Including the forms from the alternate *pollos*; (singular) much (in any respect) or (plural) many; neuter (singular) as adverb largely; neuter (plural) as adverb or noun often, mostly, largely: - abundant, + altogether, common, + far (passed, spent), (+ be of a) great (age, deal, -ly, while), long, many, much, oft (-en [-times]), plenteous, sore, straitly. Compare G4118, G4119."

⁸³ "KJV with Strong's Numbers: Romans 5:18." Blue Letter Bible Institute. Date of publication not known. https://www.blueletterbible.org/kjv/rom/5/18/ss1/s_1051018. Date accessed: 04/02/2018.

Please note the Greek word used here to signify “many” as translated into English is the same in both instances. Shall we say Paul was using a literal device as Dr. MacArthur suggests?

In Romans 5:18 the word “all” carries the Strong’s Number G3956. Strong’s defines these occurrences of “all” as “Including all the forms of declension; apparently a primary word; all, any, every, the whole: - all (manner of, means) always (-s), any (one), X daily, + ever, every (one, way), as many as, + no (-thing), X thoroughly, whatsoever, whole, whosoever.”

Please note the Greek word used here to mean “all” as translated into English is the same in both instances. Shall we say Paul was using a literary device here?

Mr. Salisbury asks a question, “Did the first Adam’s offense unto condemnation and death for all accomplish ‘much more’ than the last Adam’s free gift of grace unto justification for all (Ro.5:15)?”

Knowing what you now know, how will you answer the question? Did Adam’s act of disobedience condemn more to eternal torment than Christ, The Last Adam, will save? Is Adam, a created man, of greater consequence than our Lord, Christ Jesus? Did Satan defeat Christ?

Mr Sprenger notes, “As J.B. Phillips so succinctly puts it, ‘Grace is the ruling factor!’”

Adam sinned. He was disobedient and his disobedience had a terrible effect on all men. The “Second Adam” Who is Christ Jesus has “...the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness....” He gives the gift of salvation “...and life for all men.” Christ Jesus makes all men righteous. Adam, which means mankind, sinned and all men are born and subsequently die. All men live in the world and possess a propensity to sin. Christ Jesus died and His Father forgives the sins of mankind. “Every knee will bow and every tongue confess that Jesus is Lord.” All men will be drawn to Him. Not one will be lost.

The sins of the world are inferior to the grace upon grace given by our Father. Sin abounds and grace abounds greater still. Is there any person grace cannot conquer? Is there even one person who will deny the love of God? “Every knee will bow and every tongue will confess Jesus is Lord....” It is to His glory. “God is salvation.” That is the meaning of His Name. His Word is true. The Good News is that Jesus Christ gives an “...abundance

of grace.” The Good News does not discriminate. Jesus gives to all. He gives us all “...the free gift of righteousness...”

The doctrine of eternal conscious torment excludes billions of people from His grace. The doctrine declares Christ being Sovereign can be all-consuming love and simultaneously create a man to be destined to eternal conscious punishment. Only Jesus is able to resolve the “one trespass that led to the condemnation for all men.” Condemnation for sin is removed and is replaced by “one act of righteousness.” God is Love. He is just. His justice is in His love. The Christ’s “one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men.” This is “The Blessed Hope.”

For the creation waits with eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed. For *the creation was subjected to vanity, not of its own will, but because of him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of decay into the liberty of the glory of the children of God.* (Romans 8:19-21, emphasis added)

Creation waits. The earth and all that God created on it waits. The universe and the angels wait. Their expectation is to see “...the sons of God.” Mankind waits “with eager longing” for the plan of God to manifest itself. God’s creation is “...subjected to futility.” In their own counsel and under their own power the “...sons of God...” are unable to comprehend the unveiling. God purposely made mankind unable to comprehend the “...revealing the sons of God.”

Who are the sons of God whom He subjected to futility? What is the revealing of the sons of God? The Anglican Pulpit commentary suggests those waiting in expectation for the revealing includes “all mankind. These are men who have professed faith in Christ Jesus and it includes all other men who have not. Believers are not set apart.”⁸⁴ The sons of God are men. They are mankind! They are a part of the whole of creation. When the sons of God reject vain glory and quit kicking against the goads, God will remove futility from their hearts. All creation waits with

⁸⁴ “*The Pulpit Commentaries: Romans 8.*” The Anglican Church. Publication date unknown. <https://www.studylight.org/commentaries/tpc/romans-8.html>. Date accessed: 06/05/2018.

hope for the revealing of the sons of God! "...In hope that the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of decay into the liberty of the glory of the children of God"

We are "the creation." Each and every person ever created or to ever be created will be placed into lives of futility. No person ever wanted to be put in such a state of hopelessness. Creation does not choose to be placed in life to be hopeless. God's love for His creation is never ending and all-consuming. Mankind is held in a state of futility until God reveals His purpose to them.

Matthew Henry is a noted scholar of the 18th Century. He concluded only believers are part of the creation waiting in hopeful expectation. Dr. Henry writes about "the happiness of believers" ⁸⁵ in future glory. Dr. Henry declares our "adoption of sons entitles us to that glory." The esteemed Dr. Henry goes on to explain that "creation" is included, but then makes inferences that are hard to support. He writes that because Adam (Mankind) sinned and God cursed the ground the animals and the earth itself were stained. The ground and the animals, however included in God's creation, are expectantly hopeful for "...the revealing of the sons of God." Dr. Henry explains, though, that only believers are welcomed by God to claim the relationship with God as one of the "sons of God." All others are less in God's sight.

God consigned all to sin. He placed in all of His creation a desire to find its way to Him. In creation's efforts to control their existence they experience futility. In their desire to create for themselves a humanly sovereign way they experience greater futility. Why? So that all the earth, all creation, will see, recognize and realize His infinite mercy. He subjected all to sin so He could bless all with salvation. God places us in this position of futility. He allows us to flail in stormy waters and to swim against the current. He lets us make choices that are contrary to Him. He lets us live lives of futility. God wants us to see Him as our Lord, Savior, King. He wants us to see the key to living that sets "creation free." It is my prayer that every element of creation would "free itself from its

⁸⁵ Matthew Henry. "Matthew Henry's Complete Commentary on the Bible: Romans 8." Study Light website. Publication date not known. <https://www.studylight.org/commentaries/mhm/romans-8.html>. Date accessed: 04/01/2018.

bondage to corruption....” God’s creation is subjected to futility. God’s desires creation free itself in Him.

*For if the rejection of them is the reconciling of the world,
what would their acceptance be, but life from the dead?
(Romans 11:15, emphasis added)*

It is the Jewish nation that rejected Christ Jesus. He came as their Messiah and they did not see it. Paul tells us that in this rejection there is “...the reconciling of the world....” Reconciliation to Whom? The world is reconciled to God. Scripture says it is so! Read Colossians chapter one. The promise of God’s Holy Word: “...all things are reconciled to Him.” The leadership of the Israelites rejected their Messiah. They taught those they led to oppose the Son of God. They plotted against Him. They contrived to accuse Him. All that they did in their conspiracy to silence the Word of God was known by God and manifested by God. Because His chosen people rejected their Messiah, God has reconciled to the world to Himself.

Let us never forget “...every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord....” It is glorious beyond anything we could ever dream for ourselves. “...Their acceptance...will mean...life from the dead....” These verses preach redemption and give glory to God Who planned it before the beginning of what we construe as time. In the same way God planned that Jesus would be betrayed and rejected by His chosen people. He also has planned that all will be made new; that He planned “...life from the dead.”

*For I don’t desire you to be ignorant, brothers, of this
mystery, so that you won’t be wise in your own conceits,
that a partial hardening has happened to Israel, until the
fullness of the Gentiles has come in,.... (Romans 11:25,
emphasis added)*

The hearts of God’s chosen nation were inclined to themselves. Their “god” was within themselves. The people of Israel had rejected their Savior. That “hardening” of their hearts is a long term spiritual

problem. Their “hardening” hearts will find relief when “the fullness of the Gentiles has come in.”

Israel rejects the Son of God and God is leaving Israel to its own. Israel will truly see peace only when the King is revealed from Heaven. When all have been reconciled to Him the hardness of all hearts will be relieved. All will be Israel. All will have been grafted in. The hearts of His children are never fully hardened against Him. There is only “...partial hardening...” The glory of God will be fully known. We know what to look for. It is not a mystery to us. All of God’s creation will be made new. Gentile and Jew; one in Christ our King.

For God has shut up all to disobedience, that he might have mercy on all. Oh the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and the knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past tracing out! “For who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor? “Or who has first given to him, and it will be repaid to him again? (Romans 11:32-36, emphasis added)

Israelite, Assyrian, Babylonian, Greek, Roman, Christian and all other religious acolytes are “...consigned to disobedience....” No person has been exempted from God’s judgment. Why? Precisely as scripture declares; “...that He might have mercy on all.” God purposely leaves us to sin. He ordains it. He takes an active role in consigning each of His creation to disobedience; that is, to sin. He does not passively let us meander into sin. He delivered us to sin. Why? “That He might have mercy on all.” Every person, beginning with Adam, has been “shut up to disobedience.” Is there any one person ever created in the wombs of their mothers who has not been disobedient? Not one!

We can argue if God is active or passive in our being consigned to disobedience. We have to agree, though that all persons ever created have been consigned to sin. What is it to be consigned? It is to be formally handed over. It is to be committed by another. In this case God formally gave every created being over to disobedience; that is, to sin. Every person

has been committed to sin by God. Why? "...That He might have mercy on all."

One man will declare that God chose him for salvation. Another man will declare that he had the foresight to choose God and salvation. These are common theological doctrines in Christian denominations and congregations today. These theological ideas are opposed to scripture and to one another. "All" men are judged to be guilty. Chosen or choosing does not matter a wit. God already judged the chosen one and the choosing one. "For He has shut up all men to disobedience...." God's mercy on all will be known by all.

Let us focus on this, "God is love." We "love because He loved us first." We preach God's mercy is beyond measure. That is the Gospel that saves. That is the Gospel preached. This is "The Blessed Hope."

The doctrine of eternal conscious torment insists God will not "have mercy on all." Theologians debate the meanings of texts and find proofs for their theology. Eternal conscious torment as a theological doctrine requires that God is not merciful to all. The doctrine requires God created some for eternal conscious torment and that God is glorified by that. The doctrine of eternal conscious torment contradicts the simple meaning of scripture.

God creates all things. There is nothing that is created that was not created by Him. He is in all things. All to His glory.

For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things.
To him be the glory for ever! Amen. (Romans 11:36, emphasis added)

"All things" means precisely that. There are no divisions. There is nothing that can be excluded in "all things." "All things" is absolute. It is "all things." All things are from Him. There is not a creature that does not have its origin in Him. All things are created through His command and by His power. Greatest of all that can be said is that all things are His. All things are committed to Him by His power. He is sovereign over all things and He is love. Who is created to challenge His Creator's love? That is the Gospel preached.

The doctrine of eternal conscious torment requires we believe

God is glorified by billions and billions of His creation in hell. We are demanded to believe a place of eternal conscious torment exists and that God maintains it specifically to contain and to punish the rebellious.

God is love. He is indeed the Creator of “all things.” All things come from Him. All things exist only because of His will. All things are His. The most vile man will be reconciled to God. That is the message that is the Gospel. God is love. Is the number of “all” consigned a different number of all receiving His mercy? The Concordant Literal Version interprets this first verse thus:

For God *locks up* all together in stubbornness, that *He should be merciful to all*. (emphasis added)

Does this mean God will be merciful to only a few or to all? It's a serious question. We should be serious when contemplating it. “For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things.” Is this number of “all” the same number as all committed to disobedience? It is. It must be true then that He will be merciful to the same number of “all.” That is He “should be merciful to all.”

The doctrine of eternal conscious torment contradicts the plain meaning of scripture. Every person is disobedient and God is sovereign over every thing. The doctrine teaches not every person will experience His mercy. The doctrine diminishes God's mercy by claiming only a few are saved from eternal conscious torment.

Who are you who judge another's servant? To his own lord he stands or falls. Yes, *he will be made to stand, for God has power to make him stand*. (Romans 14:4, emphasis added)

This is not a rhetorical question. It deserves an answer. Christian friends agree that no Christian should judge anyone anywhere at any time. Believers are convinced that God's Word is true and that none of us are capable of giving reasonable, favorable judgment about others. I confess that I have judged others. Generally, I judged them according to a standard I built. That is hardly reasonable and surely not fair. I was

ignorant. Worse I was arrogant. I have been forgiven and God remembers those sins no more. Amen. It is difficult enough living my own life and to glorify God. I have to stand before God and give account for my life. That's enough! God will hold me up. He will give me the strength to weather all that my life is subjected to. His plan is to be my plan. His will to be my will.

There should be no allowance made on my part to judge the behavior of any other person. That is what this scripture is admonishing. Further, it is incumbent on me to know that God will hold all men up. He has the power. He has the intent. It is His will that none should perish. This is the Gospel preached. Do not judge. It is a simple as that. Know that God will lift you up and that He will lift up even your enemy. It is a Gospel that preaches God is love.

But you, why do you judge your brother? Or you again, why do you despise your brother? For *we will all stand before the judgment seat of Christ*. For it is written, “*‘As I live,’ says the Lord, ‘to me every knee will bow. Every tongue will confess to God.’*” (Romans 14:10-11, emphasis added)

First we are asked why we assume the authority we take for ourselves. “Who are you to judge...?” We are asked to explain the cause of our judgment on our brother or the cause of our hatred for him. The questions apply guilt to us. These are questions causing introspection. If I pass judgment on others, then I am condemning them to a fate of my creation. If I pass judgment on others, then I am hateful of them. Neither of these are characteristics I want to possess. Christ Jesus teaches, “You will be judged by the measure you use to judge others.”

The Lord our God will judge all men. As a consequence of His judgment “...every knee shall bow...” and “...every tongue shall confess to God.” Confess what? Their sin! All men will confess. All men will repent. All men will be reconciled to Him. This is the message of “The Blessed Hope.”

...UR IN 1 CORINTHIANS

Our lives and the ways we live them are our work. These verses teach that the foundation of all life is in Christ Jesus. A man's work is demonstrated by the strength of his structure.

But if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay, or stubble; each man's work will be revealed. For the Day will declare it, because it is revealed in fire; and the fire itself will test what sort of work each man's work is. If any man's work remains which he built on it, he will receive a reward. *If any man's work is burned, he will suffer loss, but he himself will be saved, but as through fire.* (1 Corinthians 3:12-15, emphasis added)

The stronger and more precious structures will be known by what remains after they have been subjected to fire. What fire? That would be the glorious fire of God. That would be the sanctifying fire of His love. God is a consuming fire. The remnant after the fire earns rewards for their builders. Every work will be subjected to the fire. The dross will be burned away and what remains brings glory to God. God's Word accounts for those of us whose works will be subjected to fire and there is no remnant. Those builders will have lost almost everything, if not everything. Those builders are not lost. They are saved. There is a fire to endure, but it is not a fire of eternal torture or punishment. It is a fire of restoration.

A. T. Robertson's describes the condition of a man whose house is built of stubble and hay. He calls it a "tragedy of a fruitless life." ⁸⁶ Everything the good Christian preacher taught was not built on a solid foundation and was built with substandard material. "His sermons were empty." His audience did not grow in Christ or in God's Holy Word. "It is a picture of a wasted life." No man came forward. No man gave testimony. No man was saved. "There are no souls in heaven as the

⁸⁶ A. T. Robertson. "Robertson's Word Pictures of the New Testament." Bible Study Tools website. <http://www.biblestudytools.com/commentaries/robertsons-word-pictures/1-corinthians/1-corinthians-3-15.html>. Date accessed: 04/02/2018.

result of his toil for Christ.” The one whose work left no impression on any other is reconciled to our Father by our Father’s grace just the same. It is mercy upon mercy, grace upon grace, that the one who did nothing is counted as the Father’s.

I pray my life has not been empty and that my work will leave a remnant; that God is glorified in some way. I know the sins of my life have been forgiven and that He remembers them no more. I pray that my life is not “...the picture of a wasted life.” All men are builders and our work has value in God’s sight. It is God Who subjects the work of all men to fire. No man’s work is excused and no man’s work will be overlooked. This is “The Blessed Hope.”

The doctrine of eternal conscious torment teaches only a few men are builders. Any person not choosing to be a builder or any person not chosen to be a builder does not have a work to be judged by God’s fire. The doctrine insists the non-builders have been condemned already. Their judgment has been given.

The doctrine of universal reconciliation does not exclude any man from God’s judgment. Rather, all men will be judged by God. We believe the most wretched man “...he himself shall be saved, yet so as through fire.” All men are builders and all men will experience God’s fire.

In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, you being gathered together, and my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, are to deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, *that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.* (1 Corinthians 5:4-5, emphasis added)

Paul is pointing out a wicked man and his wicked behavior. He is declaring to the good people in the Corinthian church that this wicked man must be put out of their assembly. The “banishing” is lovingly ordered. It is loving on two levels. First, the church in Corinth has become arrogant and lax. They have tolerated the abhorrent behavior of this man and have done nothing to stop it. By acting to remove the bad actor the church itself will be better. Second, the man’s behavior, being exposed, will be no longer tolerated and he will repent. Paul writes that the church in Corinth is to cut this man loose; to hand him over to Satan. Cutting

the wicked man loose the church will improve and the man's spirit will be saved. The church will not prosper as long as he remains. That's true in every local congregation. As long as evil is present the local assembly will not prosper fully. Even wicked men in wicked churches may lose their flesh to Satan, but their spirits are not lost. Ecclesiastes 12:7 states, "And the soil returns onto the earth just as it was, And the spirit, it returns to the One, Elohim, Who gave it." The wicked man, removed from the church or not, will not see his spirit tormented forever.

God is love and God does not condemn any of His creation to eternal conscious torment. That does not mean there will not be a purifying fire as we discussed earlier. Ask yourself this, "If that wicked man in the Corinthian congregation knew Jesus, had confessed his sins including the inappropriate relationship he was having with his step-mother, repented for a time, but continued in that sin anyway, has he lost God's grace?" Will he experience God's wrath forever because he failed?" Care should be taken when answering that question. There is no one who can testify that he has not sinned. Can anyone say he has not sinned since his day of grace? I have sinned before my day of grace. I have sinned after. As an aside, that "pride" thing can be a serious flaw in Christian character.

The doctrine of universal reconciliation praises God because of His mercy and because of the intensity of His love for His creation. He loves even those who hate Him. It is because God's love is complete and because He is our Father we strive to better our relationship with Him. The worst son is the "prodigal son." The "last becomes first...."

But I would have you know that the head of every man is Christ, and the head of the woman is the man, *and the head of Christ is God.* (1 Corinthians 11:3, emphasis added)

But *let a man examine himself*, and so let him eat of the bread, and drink of the cup. For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy way eats and drinks judgment to himself, if he doesn't discern the Lord's body. (1 Corinthians 11:28-29, emphasis added)

The salient point to be taken in this is that the "...head of every man is Christ...." Scripture does not segregate Jews from Samaritans, Assyrians

from Babylonians, the Catholic Church from the Reformed church. Scripture simply says “the head of every man is Christ....” The chapter closes with an admonition to make sure all conflicts are resolved before taking communion. Examine yourself. Repent. When the examination is done and all conflicts are resolved, take the bread and take the wine. Christ is the head of every man.

Eternal conscious torment is a doctrine concluding Christ died for the sins of a few, not all. The doctrine declares some people remain reprobates and continue their rebellion even after death. The doctrine teaches His death on the Cross is not sufficient for all men. Eternal conscious torment is a judgment ostensibly given by God to those who continue in their rebellion against Him. Prominent traditionalist theologians have claimed that others who do not believe as they do about Christ’s Gospel are destined to eternal conscious torment. These prominent men and many that follow them judge those who disagree with them. The doctrine of eternal conscious torment condemns the unrepentant rebel. It is a judgment of men by men. We should all take care not to bring judgment on ourselves.

Love is patient and is kind; love doesn’t envy. Love doesn’t brag, is not proud, doesn’t behave itself inappropriately, doesn’t seek its own way, is not provoked, takes no account of evil; doesn’t rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth; *bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails.* But where there are prophecies, they will be done away with. Where there are various languages, they will cease. Where there is knowledge, it will be done away with. (1 Corinthians 13:4-8, emphasis added)

Mr. Sprenger reiterates, “Love never fails. God is love. His love cannot fail.” He rightfully states that losing “even one would mean that love failed to find and save that one.” Consider that thought. Remember the advocates of the doctrine of eternal conscious torment insist millions if not billions of people are consigned to hell by our heavenly Father. It is

not congruent. "His plan, His purpose, His desire, and His nature has always been and always will be love for His creation!"

The Concordant Literal Version translates this phrase as "Love is never lapsing." The King James Version tells us "charity never faileth." The English Standard Version translates God's Word, "Love never ends." There is not a moment love does not exist. Love is over all else and like God never ends. God is love. Moreover, love accomplishes what it sets out to. It never fails.

Examine Mr. Sprenger's proposition and assess its truth. If even one of God's creation is condemned to eternal conscious torment it means God was unable to persuade that one man. God, Who is love, failed to save just that one man. Compound that failure and apply billions and billions of mankind to this assessment. Many, perhaps most, of these tortured souls were never introduced to the Gospel. These are men blindly led. The doctrine of eternal conscious torment requires these people be condemned. It does not matter that they never heard the Gospel. They never had a chance to confess their belief much less know to Whom they were confessing.

God is love and love never fails. That is the Gospel preached. All will be reconciled to Him. It is a promise. He declares that it is "His will that all men be saved." Love prevails over sin. Mercy and grace are abundant, death is eventually put to death. God is going to be "All in all."

Paul, by the hand of God's Spirit, provides us the definition of love. Is this definition of love for mankind alone? Does God put upon His creation expectations that He does not fulfill? I believe these verses describe and define the nature of God's love for His creation. God knew when He created each of us that we would fail His expectation. He knew before He blew His breath into the first created man. He knew Adam's Fall and the consequences of the Fall before He gave Adam life. "...Love endures all." "God is love." "He will be all in all."

To think we can will our eternal situation is to make ourselves to be greater than we really are. It is the character of God to love all. It is He Who committed all to sin. His character is diminished terribly by the doctrine of eternal conscious torment. The character of God is to reconcile all to Himself. God is the Father and Creator of all. God will make all things new. He loves all and He will be our "all in all." It is

“The Blessed Hope.” It is clear. Christ Jesus says, “I will draw all men to Myself.” He does not qualify “all.” Neither should we!

Lee Salisbury asks, “Is the last enemy, death, not destroyed? Are those to whom God becomes ‘All in all’ (1Cor.15:28) only those who managed to escape the devil’s clutches?”

Then they also who are fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If we have only hoped in Christ in this life, we are of all men most pitiable. But now Christ has been raised from the dead. He became the first fruits of those who are asleep. *For since death came by man, the resurrection of the dead also came by man. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive.* But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, then those who are Christ’s, at his coming. Then the end comes, when he will deliver up the Kingdom to God, even the Father; when he will have abolished all rule and all authority and power. *For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet.* The last enemy that will be abolished is death. For, “He put all things in subjection under his feet.” But when he says, “All things are put in subjection”, it is evident that he is excepted who subjected all things to him. When all things have been subjected to him, then the Son will also himself be subjected to him who subjected all things to him, *that God may be all in all.* (1 Corinthians 15:18 – 28, emphasis added)

The doctrine of eternal conscious torment teaches that men who fail to believe in Christ Jesus are condemned to eternal punishment. Read and read again the verses above. Eternal punishment is firmly and concretely disproved.

Christ Jesus is the first fruits. His resurrection from the dead is proof that all will be resurrected. Adam’s sin caused a universal physical death. Christ’s resurrection universally restores life. Jesus is the only Man ever resurrected from the grave and remains alive. He is seated at the right hand of the Father at this moment. Those of us in Christ at the time of

our respective deaths will be raised to life when the trumpet sounds His return. Those who fail to believe will be raised in life before the judgment seat. During this judgment “every knee will bow” and proclaim Jesus as their Lord. Further, Jesus will eventually give over His Kingdom to His Father. Each and every of His enemies will be defeated. The last enemy being death itself. Death is defeated, therefore life reigns. It must be so. Everything is subjected to Him; EVERYTHING. Christ then surrenders His position to the Father. Christ, however, is not subjected to the Father as He, too, is God.

Why? Is the answer so that a most merciful all-loving Father wills that the strong majority of His creation be tormented eternally? Or is the answer the the most merciful all-loving Father will reconcile His creation to Himself? What does it mean for Him to be “all in all?” It should not be a rhetorical question!

John Wesley wrote regarding “all in all” from 1 Corinthians 15:28.⁸⁷ He says, the Son “Shall deliver up the mediatorial kingdom.” God, now unified as One, “may be all in all.” He tells us “All things, (consequently all persons) without any interruption, without the intervention of any creature, without the opposition of any enemy, shall be subordinate to God. All shall say, ‘My God, and my all.’ This is the end. Even an inspired apostle can see nothing beyond this.” Dr. Wesley believes all men from the start of time will say, “My God, and my all.” He does not leave aside unbelievers from this sentiment. He reports the Triune God will be “all in all.” No person created will be excluded. No entity can intervene and prevent any creature from the blessing that God is “all in all.”

Dr. Wesley is conflicted in this assessment, however. A sermon he preached is transcribed for our benefit and is available online. Dr. Wesley had this to say about hell and those consigned to that eternal fate.⁸⁸ “First,” he writes, “the inhabitants of hell are perfectly wicked, having no spark of goodness remaining.” These evil men are not restrained in hell

⁸⁷ John Wesley. “*Wesley's Explanatory Notes*.” Bible Study Tools website. Publication date unknown. <http://www.biblestudytools.com/commentaries/wesleys-explanatory-notes/1-corinthians/1-corinthians-15.html>. Date accessed: 04/02/2018.

⁸⁸ John Wesley. “*Of Hell. (Sermon #73)*.” By John Wesley. [United Methodist Church Global Ministries website](http://www.umcmmission.org/Find-Resources/John-Wesley-Sermons/Sermon-73-Of-Hell). 1872. <http://www.umcmmission.org/Find-Resources/John-Wesley-Sermons/Sermon-73-Of-Hell>. Date accessed: 04/02/2018.

by other wicked men “and not by God, for He has forgotten them.” Dr. Wesley teaches wicked men are cast into eternal conscious torment by God and He “delivered them over to the tormentors.” The pains put upon the wicked men condemned to Hell by God will suffer “torments of body and souls...without intermission.” He preaches the punishments for the rebellion of wicked men will be executed forever more. The “Judge of all gives of the punishment which He has ordained for impenitent sinners.”

John Wesley’s view on unrepentant sinners and their place in eternity is the doctrine of eternal conscious torment. Dr. Wesley proclaims that the believer’s eternal fate in hell is stayed by a merciful God. But, for the unbeliever God’s mercy is not felt.

Chuck Smith recently left this temporal world for a place established for him in heaven. He was the founder of Calvary Chapel in Costa Mesa, California in the middle 1970’s. Calvary Chapel has grown into a kind of denomination and Dr. Smith was essentially that denomination’s head. Dr. Smith teaches doctrine that hell is the place of the damned. His view, though, is that the unbeliever chooses to be in eternal conscious torment. Dr. Smith preached regarding our eternal end. He preaches Jesus warns men about eternal conscious torment for “Jesus said ‘Inasmuch as you did it unto the least of these, you did it to me.’ And those who we are ignoring the needs of those around them, the goats, ‘inasmuch as you didn’t do it unto them, you didn’t do it to me.’”⁸⁹ Because we know Christ, but fail to tell others the Good News of Christ, we have not honored or loved them. Dr. Smith says that Jesus then commands those who are not saved to “depart from me...ye cursed into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels.” But, Dr. Smith wants us to know that “God did not prepare Gehenna for men; it was prepared by God for Satan. Therefore God does not cast men into hell. He didn’t prepare it for men; He prepared it for Satan. However, if a person wants to align himself with Satan and go there, God will do His best to stop him. God has done his best to stop him.”

Dr. Smith is preaching God lacks the ability, strength or desire to save a man. Dr. Smith says, “... a man can by his own volition and his

⁸⁹ Chuck Smith. “Commentary On Matthew 25 and 26.” Calvary Church. Sermon Index. Publication date unknown. <http://www.sermonindex.net/modules/articles/index.php?view=article&aid=36687>. Date accessed: 04/02/2018.

own choices spend eternity apart from God.” Dr. Smith preaches that the will of the unrepentant sinner is stronger than God’s will. He preaches that the unrepentant rebel chooses his eternal fate. Hell to Dr. Smith is to “...spend eternity apart from God.” Dr. Smith also says that because the audience he is addressing is an audience saved by grace then they have nothing to fear and should not worry about their respective fate. Eternal conscious torment was not their fate and was not to be feared.

John Calvin wrote about the precept from scripture, “That God may be all in all.”⁹⁰ He asks, “Will it be so in the Devil and wicked men also? By no means...” Dr. Calvin suggests “It does not distinctly appear that God is all in all.” He tells his audience, “When Christ will have executed the judgment which has been committed to him by the Father, and will have cast down Satan and all the wicked, the glory of God will be conspicuous in their destruction.”

We have heard this refrain before. God is glorified in the eternal conscious torments of others. It is an abhorrent thought. It is an abhorrent doctrine.

Dr. Calvin teaches only believers experience God’s being in them. This is not an extraordinary teaching. He says, “There would, however, be nothing out of place in understanding it as referring exclusively to believers, in whom God has now begun his kingdom, and will then perfect it, and in such a way that they shall cleave to him wholly.”

Dr. Calvin’s authority as a Bible Scholar is well known. A branch of theology has taken his name, that being Calvinism. Calvinism is considered to be orthodox even though Calvinism is at odds with other theologies such as Arminianism. Dr. Calvin has added his prejudice to his interpretation. “All” does not mean “all.” “All” means only those who believe. To Dr. Calvin and to those who follow his line of thinking God is not love. Think about what it means if God is not “all in all.” Billions of His creation are doomed to eternal conscious torment.

A. E. Knoch was a Bible scholar who dedicated much of his life preparing the Concordant Literal Version of the Holy Scriptures. He prepared a Commentary on the New Testament which is cited earlier.

⁹⁰ John Calvin. “*Calvin’s Commentary on the Bible, 1 Corinthians 15.*” By John Calvin. Study Light web site. Publication date unknown. <https://www.studylight.org/commentaries/cal/1-corinthians-15.html>. Date accessed: 04/01/2018.

From the Commentary on 1 Corinthians 15:25-28 he writes, “The reign of Christ is so beneficent, it brings mankind to such a state of perfection, that all further need of the restraints of government vanishes.”

God has imputed the sins of the world on Christ Jesus. We are no longer subject to the rule of the evil one. Dr. Knoch writes, “Rule implies insubordination, and is unnecessary where there is perfect subjection. Rule is a temporary expedient to cope with evil. When evil is banished rule also retires. The effects of evil for mankind are concentrated in death. When the universe has been purged of all other evil, then death itself becomes inoperative and yields up its victims. Not till then is it true that all are made alive in Christ.”

Dr. Knoch’s belief would likely be considered heresy. He is truly preaching, “God is love.” “The universality of Christ’s subject of all under His feet is evident from the one exception – God Himself.” Only God could give His Son to be the perfect atonement for the sins of the world. The Son’s obedience to death on the Cross is “for the sin of the world.” Dr. Knoch goes on to declare “God is All in Christ now.” God will “be All in His saints when we are made alive. He will be All in all when death is abolished.”

Think this through. Do not be quick to judge Dr. Knoch’s interpretation as heresy. He writes, “What a marvelous outcome of God’s purpose! What a Christ we have, Who can accomplish such a complete reconciliation!”

Dr. Knoch writes, “Christ came to ‘destroy the works of the devil’ (1 John 3:8, A.V.) But, if orthodoxy is true, then Satan has not only the vast majority on his side, but his work is not destroyed at all. Its results would never cease to mar the universe.” (“All In All”, pg 152).⁹¹

These verses are profound and define the doctrine of universal reconciliation. They are worthy of reiterated points and more discussion. His love is over all He has created. I believe He will be “all in all.” Adam sinned and there was The Fall. We all know of the story of Adam’s poor and even deadly choice when he took the fruit from Eve and ate it.

⁹¹ Adolph E. Knoch. “All In All.” Concordant Publishing Concern. Santa Clarita, CA. 1978 <https://s3.amazonaws.com/unsearchablerich/booksonwebsite/©CPC+All+in+All.pdf>.

Because of that single event now all men are created by God, but subject to sin within. Adam caused physical death in all men.

We all know the testimony of Christ Jesus and His Holy Word. Christ was buried in a grave. After three days He was resurrected. Because of this divine fact resurrection is now the condition of all created men. "For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive." Is there an argument to be made here that only those chosen by God or only those who have chosen God are saved? "...In Christ shall all be made alive."

The Believer's Bible Commentary is authored by William MacDonald. Dr. MacDonald wrote many books and he took no remuneration for them. He writes that these verses reveal "the final banishment of death itself."⁹² Our Savior is victorious over death and sin. He "will see the victory He won at the cross effectual to the last outpost of rebellion." There is not another party, not Satan, his puppets or fallen angels remaining on earth. Christ has authority over all things and all persons are made alive. "...To the last outpost of rebellion..." Christ's obedience and His Father's mercy extends. There will not be a person who will not be impacted by His obedience to His Father. He is given authority over all men and He gives authority to the Father. "Everything will be subject to Him Who is Lord of all."

Bob Utley is a learned man. He has written a commentary on the New Testament entitled "You Can Understand the Bible: Study Guide Commentary Series."⁹³ Mr. Utley writes "Believers share the reality of His resurrection and by faith, the assurance of theirs." All will be raised, but believers are assured they will." Unbelievers not so much. He says, "Jesus is the first to be resurrected (cf. Col. 1:18), but in due time all of His followers will experience the same. In a spiritual sense we already have resurrection life (cf. Eph. 2:5-6)." Dr. Utley determines that "all will be made alive" only applies to those who know Christ. Is that the true meaning? Is it fair to doubt Dr. Utley's assertion here? In Dr. Utley's

⁹² William MacDonald. "Believer's Bible Commentary (Commentary on 1 Corinthians 15:28-34.) Thomas Nelson Publishers. 1995, pp. 1803-1807.

⁹³ Bob Utley. "You Can Understand the Bible: Study Guide Commentary Series; 1 Corinthians 15." Free Bible Commentary website. Publication date not known. http://www.freebiblecommentary.org/new_testament_studies/VOL06/VOL06A_15.html. Date accessed: 04/02/2018.

understanding as in Dr. Calvin's "all" does not mean "all." The plain understanding of scripture is manipulated to satisfy a predetermined theology.

The verse, 1 Corinthians 15:28, is clear language. "All things are subjected to Him." Christ then puts "all things in subjection under Him." Doing so makes God "all in all." Mr. Sprenger tells us, "This phrase is the real key to understanding God's purposes in relation to His time schedule. 'And when all things are subjected to Him, then the Son Himself also will be subjected to the One who subjected all things to Him, that God may be all in all.' Paul sees clearly to the end, and makes this ultimate and most concise declaration of the eternal purposes of God!"

What is the ultimate end? God will be "all in all." How does He accomplish that? I reiterate. It's not hard to see that "all things" will be given to Christ Jesus. He will give "all things" to His Father Who created "all things." All things are in Christ. All things are in the Father. He is "all in all." These verses support themselves. The Gospel is in these verses. Adam's sin causes all to die. Christ Jesus is the cause of all life...all will be made alive! All die because of Adam. All live because of Christ.

There is not a person created who is not subjected to Christ and consequently subjected to the Father. Who is the Creator of all things? His Sovereignty over all things has never ceased and in the same way His love conquers all. The clear meaning of scripture is this; Adam sinned and consequently came physical death. Jesus comes to end the curse of physical death. Under Christ Jesus all of those who are deceased will be raised to life. There is an order in the resurrection of the dead. First, Himself, then those who He owns, then at the end all are resurrected and given to God the Father. Jesus Christ defeated every known rule, tradition, law, and authority. He is King. There is nothing to hinder our love for Him. "Every knee will bow" and "every tongue will confess Jesus Christ is Lord."

The doctrine of eternal conscious torment does not let the plain meaning of scripture stand. The doctrine agrees that "all" have sinned because of Adam, but refutes the context of "all shall be made alive." The doctrine's advocates preach a need to believe the first use of "all" is all, but the second use of "all" is less than its first use. It's not really all at all.

God has placed everything...all things...under the authority of Christ

Jesus. Christ Jesus declared Himself that He does nothing that is not the will of the Father. Christ's authority is under the Father's authority. For what purpose? So that "God may be all in all." What does it mean "that God may be all in all?" Is he wrathful vengeance in the majority of the world and loving kindness in the rest? Does He love some and hate others to the degree He will assign some to blessings in heaven and the others to eternal conscious torment?

Jesus died for the sins of the world and scripture teaches He will make all things new. Not according to Dr. Calvin, however. Christian Classics Ethereal Library is a wonderful repository of Bible information and scholarly studies. They post Dr. Calvin's Commentary on these verses.⁹⁴ Dr. Calvin tells us, "There would, however, be nothing out of place in understanding it as referring exclusively to believers." Dr. Calvin believes that "all in all" is reserved only for believers. Unbelievers are bound to eternal conscious torment. Unbelievers will never experience the mercy of God. They won't feel the pressure of His love. They will die unrepentant and reap the sorrow they deserve. Dr. Calvin goes so far as to equate the thought that "all in all" includes a unity with Satan. Scripture declares that angels will be cast into the "lake of fire," too. Those who disagree are "impudent madmen." Dr. Calvin's thinking declares God's power is weak. The sacrifice of Christ was insufficient to save the world. Christ did not really die for the sins of the whole world, but only for souls enlightened as Dr. Calvin is enlightened.

But when this perishable body will have become imperishable, and this mortal will have put on immortality, then what is written will happen: "*Death is swallowed up in victory.*" (1 Corinthians 15:54, emphasis added)

Mr. Sprenger remarks, "'The last enemy to be destroyed is death' (I Cor 15:26).... This refers to all death, both physical death and spiritual death. Then the only thing that shall remain is...Life!" Paul is deliberately

⁹⁴ John Calvin. "*Calvin's Commentary on the Bible, 1 Corinthians 15.*" Christian Classics Ethereal Library (CCEL.org). Publication date unknown. <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/calcom40.i.iii.html>. Date accessed: 04/01/2018.

explaining the meaning of resurrected life. He preaches about fruit having to die to yield its seed and the seed having to die and to be brought back to life to produce more of that kind of fruit. He explains how to distinguish between the flesh of men and the various kinds of flesh of others of God's creation.

Glory in all things is God's glory. Glory comes from heaven and from the earth. The glory from heaven is different from the glory that comes from the earth. The planets all have their own, yet different, kind of glory. Each star's glory is different from all the other stars in the heavens. It will be that way when all are resurrected. Perhaps our flesh will be different. The glory we exude to God is different, too. Each child of God dies an earthly death. The flesh of the earth is transformed to the flesh of heaven. The glory we once showed was earthly and is shed for heavenly glory. Earthly flesh dies and it is raised to live eternally with the Anointed King.

Adam was fashioned by God and he "...became a living being (v.45)...." Christ Jesus gives a life giving spirit. Adam's flesh is bound by earth. His spirit "...returned to God Who gave it (Ecclesiastes 12:7)." God's only begotten Son is not bound to earth. He is Emmanuel; God with us. He is Jesus; God saves. God is with us and He saves us. "We shall all be changed...(v.51)." First the dead will be raised from their graves and their bodies will no longer be made of earthly flesh, but of heavenly flesh. Their glory will no longer be earthly glory, but heavenly glory. Those who remain will have perishable bodies changed to imperishable bodies. Then, "death is swallowed up by Victory." The end of death! There is nothing eternal in death. It has been defeated.

The Pulpit Commentary cited earlier provides this insight. "What a glorious change awaits humanity!" The body is raised from its grave. It is "a more glorious resurrection—a resurrection of the human soul from the false, the unrighteous, the impure, to the true, the right and the holy—a resurrection, thank God, taking place every day in the world...."

All men will be resurrected and eventually all of creation will be reconciled to Him. These verses do not divide people who believe in Christ Jesus from those who do not. These verses point to all mankind being changed from earthly flesh to heavenly flesh. They point to a change in the kind of glory all men express. The most vicious man who seldom gave glory will now give heavenly glory. The saintliest woman

will be transformed with a heavenly, imperishable body. The worst and the best are redeemed and all are reconciled to Him. After all, it is His will that none should perish. "A glorious change awaits humanity."

...UR IN 2 CORINTHIANS

For the love of Christ constrains us; because we judge thus, *that one died for all*, therefore all died. *He died for all*, that those who live should no longer live to themselves, but to him who for their sakes died and rose again. Therefore *we know no one after the flesh* from now on. Even though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now we know him so no more. Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old things have passed away. Behold, all things have become new. But *all things are of God, who reconciled us to himself through Jesus Christ, and gave to us the ministry of reconciliation; namely, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself, not reckoning to them their trespasses, and having committed to us the word of reconciliation.* (2 Corinthians 5:14-19, emphasis added)

This is indeed good news. The Pharisees who denied Christ in previous verses are reconciled to God through Christ Jesus. The doctrine of eternal conscious torment requires us to believe that only we and fellow believers are saved. Those who believe the doctrine believe they are reconciled to God. The doctrine requires something other than the plain meaning of scripture. "One has died for all." Christ Jesus's sacrifice is for the whole world; for the whole of humanity. He did not die only for those who believe in Him, but for all flesh; for the whole world.

We are wonderfully blessed when we come to know Him. When we profess our belief in Him we are a new creation. The old self dies and a new self is born. It is a self that sees He is love and practices what is seen. "Behold the old has passed away. The new has come."

The doctrine of eternal conscious torment has to contradict these scripture verses. The doctrine requires these verses be construed the old has passed away, the new has come, but only for those who believe.

Christ died for us and He does not count our sins against us. He died for all even those who rebel against Him. The doctrine of eternal conscious torment concludes Christ did not “reconcile the whole world to himself.” He reconciled only a few.

Albert Barnes is a world famous Presbyterian Theologian. He wrote “Notes on the Whole Bible” which are referenced earlier. He writes that some believe only the elect are saved. Universal reconciliation is the special view and eternal conscious torment is the general view. Using Dr. Barnes example both doctrines “are found in scripture.” The need to explain the consistency or the contradictions between the two is unnecessary he says. It is unimportant to understand the differences between the two doctrines even if we could. Dr. Barnes teaches God’s grace is “...intended to secure the salvation of His chosen people.” What is believed is secondary to being chosen or not.

“In Christ” and “through Christ” we have been reconciled to God. These verses are consistent with God’s love, His limitless mercy. Mr. Sprenger advises us, “According to Paul, then, preaching the reconciliation of all is in fact preaching the gospel.”

...UR IN GALATIANS

The Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the Good News beforehand to Abraham, saying, *“In you all the nations will be blessed.”*
(Galatians 3:8, emphasis added)

God “blesses all the nations” because of Abraham. God did not exclude nations. There is nothing merit based that can be done to gain this blessing. It just is. As simply as is possible to be stated, God blesses all the nations of the world; He blesses all the families of the world.” There is no room for contradiction or distinction.

The doctrine of eternal conscious torment denies “all families” will be blessed. The doctrine of eternal conscious torment requires that “all families” cannot really mean “all families.” The doctrine preaches few nations are blessed.

...UR IN EPHESIANS

In whom we have our redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, *according to the riches of his grace*, which he made to abound toward us in all wisdom and prudence, making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure which he purposed in him to an administration of the fullness of the times, *to sum up all things in Christ, the things in the heavens, and the things on the earth*, in him; in whom also we were assigned an inheritance, *having been foreordained according to the purpose of him who works all things* after the counsel of his will; to the end that we should be to the praise of his glory, we who had before hoped in Christ: in whom you also, having heard the word of the truth, the Good News of your salvation—in whom, having also believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise... (Ephesians 1:7-13, emphasis added)

This is the salvation Gospel of Christ. In Christ Jesus we have redemption. Because His blood was shed for the purpose of atoning for the sins of the world we can claim salvation. His grace is abundant and it is poured out on all. The doctrine of eternal conscious torment limits God's grace. The doctrine diminishes the scope of Christ's sacrifice. The doctrine teaches Christ died not for all, but only for a few.

The mystery is now known. God's plan from the beginning was to make all things righteous through Christ Jesus. It is Christ Jesus Who is obedient to the point of death. Those of us in Christendom who are blessed to see this mystery in its glory realize Christ's sacrifice reconciles us to His Father; to our Father in heaven. Not only are we reconciled, but God's plan "...to sum up all things in Christ, the things in the heavens, and the things on the earth, in him" is complete.

Eternal conscious torment cannot be true if God through Christ "unites all things in Him." Did Christ die that terrible death to "unite all things" or just to unite some things? The traditional doctrine of eternal conscious torment disputes He will "unite all things." Scripture says, "All

things will be united in Him.” It is God’s will that “all things unite with Him.” We believe that is what brings glory to Him. Are “we” just a few or are “we” all things?

For this cause I also, having heard of the faith in the Lord Jesus which is among you, and the love which you have toward all the saints, don’t cease to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers, that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, *the Father of glory, may give to you a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him;* having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope of his calling, and what are the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints, and what is the exceeding greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to that working of the strength of his might which he worked in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and made him to sit at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule, and authority, and power, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age, but also in that which is to come. *He put all things in subjection under his feet, and gave him to be head over all things for the assembly, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.* (Ephesians 1:15-23, emphasis added)

David Guzik is introduced by Enduring Word website as “...a pastor, Bible teacher, and author of a widely used Bible commentary. Millions of people have access to David’s online Bible commentary on sites such as Enduring Word and Blue Letter Bible.” I have read Mr. Guzik’s work. His commentary as been helpful to me in my study. His effort to help others understand God’s Holy Word is commendable. I am using Mr. Guzik’s commentary and explanation of Ephesians 1:15-23 as a guide to better understand His Word.⁹⁵ I would like to be one who receives

⁹⁵ David Guzik. “*Ephesians 1: God’s Ultimate Plan.*” Pastor and Contributor to Enduring Word website. Publication date unknown. <https://enduringword.com/bible-commentary/ephesians-1>. Date accessed: 04/01/2018.

heavenly wisdom and to be one who understands the mystery that is "The Blessed Hope." I pray the "eyes of my heart" are opened and that I fully comprehend the "riches of His glorious inheritance."

Paul gives thanks for the love the Ephesian church holds for others in the church, that is "for all the saints." His gratitude for the Ephesian church is expressed to heaven regularly and always. Mr. Guzik instructs us, "This was because their faith and love were evidence of their participation in this great work of God." Mr. Guzik is correct to say, "Faith and love do not earn us participation in his great work of God. They are evidence of our participation in God's plan." The Ephesians possess a "love for all the saints." Mr. Guzik points out that Paul is giving praise to God for the Ephesian assembly because they love others in the church. Mr. Guzik says, "The real evidence of God's work in us is not the love we claim to have for Him, but our love for His people that others can see."

The True Light that is Christ Jesus is what others see when His love for us permeates our love for others. The love we have for Christ is seen in our love for others. Paul asks God to strengthen the church and to give them a "spirit of wisdom" and "revelation in the knowledge of him." He is asking that the church be given insight and understanding, especially about those things that are about Christ.

We learn about Christ Jesus' position in God's plan. He is elevated to a place in heaven that is demonstrative of His authority and of His power. His position is Sovereign over all creation. His Name is above all other names. All things are subjected to Him. He is given authority "...over all things to the church which is His body...." All things.... Let that sink in!

Pastor Guzik closes his commentary on these verses writing, "If Jesus is the Head, then the community of Christians make up His Body." Christ Jesus is over all things. All things are subject to Him. There is nothing in these verses that lead us to conclude that God will be "all in all" in only a few, that is "the community of Christians" as Pastor Guzik teaches. There is nothing in these scriptures that separates one person from another. All men are included in "all things."

The doctrine of eternal conscious torment diminishes the breadth of God's love and the full impact of Christ Jesus' obedience even to death on a cross. It is not a mystery any longer. Our Father's Son is our Savior.

WE are all subject to Him. He has subjected us to God. God will indeed be “all in all.”

To me, the very least of all saints, was this grace given, to *preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ*, and to make all men see what is the administration of the mystery which for ages has been hidden in *God, who created all things through Jesus Christ*; to the intent that now through the assembly the manifold wisdom of God might be made known to the principalities and the powers in the heavenly places, according to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord; in whom we have boldness and access in confidence through our faith in him. (Ephesians 3:8-12, emphasis added)

Paul tells what his calling is. He has been given “...this grace...to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ....” Paul identifies himself as the least of the disciples and in other scripture as the worst of all sinners. He has been redeemed. The worst of all sinners is reconciled to God. He is not elevating himself or setting himself above any other person. “I am the very least of all the saints....” His ministry mission is to preach to the Gentiles. He is to expose the mystery of God’s plan to Gentiles. Who are the Gentiles? These are all men and women created by God who do not or cannot claim Israel as their birthright. Gentiles are the whole world, the whole human world, minus Israel.

The mystery that Paul is preaching is that God intends to save the whole world through Christ Jesus. Every Gentile ever created and every Israelite ever created will be reconciled to God. That is His Divine Plan. The Light that is Christ Jesus is revealed. The Light that is Christ Jesus shines brightly in His church. It is by God’s Divine Plan that His power is known. It is for His good purpose that the church be given wisdom of “unsearchable riches.” Ask yourself to define “unsearchable riches.” Could there possibly be a limit to His grace considering His “unsearchable riches?”

This knowledge that all of His creation will be reconciled through Christ Jesus to Him is the mystery revealed. It is this knowledge of this

mystery, the knowledge of Christ Jesus, that empowers each of us “to go and make disciples.” It is God Who gives boldness. It is God Who gives faith. It is God Who gives us confidence to speak the Truth.

The doctrine of eternal conscious torment teaches that most of mankind is doomed to suffer eternally. Rebels would rather live in the darkness and ignore the Light. The Light cannot be ignored as it is God's Plan that Light reveals all things. All things will be made new in Him.

There is one body, and one Spirit, even as you also were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, *one God and Father of all, who is over all, and through all, and in us all*. But to each one of us was the grace given according to the measure of the gift of Christ. Therefore he says, “When he ascended on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts to men.” Now this, “He ascended”, what is it but that he also first descended into the lower parts of the earth? He who descended is the one who also ascended far above all the heavens, *that he might fill all things*. (Ephesians 4:4-10, emphasis added)

Paul is closing this letter to the Ephesians. He proclaims himself “a prisoner of the Lord” and uses this position to appeal to the Church. He gives them instructions to “walk in a manner worthy” of the Christ-like life we are called to. Paul encourages us to treat one another “with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.” Paul is not a prisoner of Romans only, but certainly a prisoner of Christ. He writes elsewhere that “to live is Christ, to die is gain.” What manner of life is worthy of Christ's body broken and blood shed? It is love. It is love that is Christ's love. It is love that is the Father's love. Walking in a manner worthy of our calling requires we strive for peace and unity in Spirit. We can only do that in love. We must practice “bearing with one another in love.”

What is the unity of the Spirit? What binds us to peace? Christ's overwhelming, all-consuming love binds us to Him and to the Father. We are in concert with God's Divine Plan when we agree that God is love

and that God Saves. We agree Jesus is “God Saves.” Emmanuel is “God with us.” Jesus and Him only can save any of us. Paul points out there is only One Spirit, “one God and Father of all, who is over all, and through all, and in us all.” One God over all. One God sovereign over all. One God Who is in all. One God Who is love. One God Who reconciles us all.

Christ Jesus has ascended to the Throne of God. He reigns from the right hand of the Father. He was with us for a time and He was buried for a time. He preached to the saints for three days. He was resurrected at the command of His Father. His life, His body broken, His blood shed is sufficient grace to save all. It is God’s will that all shall be reconciled to Himself. God’s Son sacrificed on the cross is redemption for the sins of the world.

...UR IN PHILIPPIANS

Mr. Salisbury asks, “What does it mean for Him (God) to be ‘all in all?’” It is not a rhetorical question. If Christ’s death does not reconcile all to the Father; that is, if Christ’s death does not save all, then Satan wins and Christ fails. To believe Christ does not save all exalts Satan. Mr. Salisbury asks these questions. “Does every knee bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord (Phil.2:11) because God is really like Nebuchadnezzar (Dan.3), forcing all into submission without respect to the desire of their heart?”

We know the story of Nebuchadnezzar. He was a King of Babylon. He brought Daniel and three other young Hebrew men into his Court. We know from scripture that Daniel was able to interpret the King’s dreams and subsequently was made a man of importance in the Babylonian kingdom. Nebuchadnezzar thought highly of himself. He thought himself to be “god.” He built a statue of his likeness and demanded all men bow in subjection to that idol. Daniel’s companions, the three young Hebrew men, refused. Nebuchadnezzar declared that any person refusing to bow to his idol would be burned alive in a pit. The three young men were judged for disobeying Nebuchadnezzar’s edict. The king wanted Daniel’s companions to repent and bow to the idol. These young men were given opportunity to recant their commitment to their God, our God, and to bow before the idol of the king. They would not. We know

how their testimonies continue. A fiery pit was built and the flames of the pit were the hottest they could be made to be. Guards standing near the pit were consumed by the fire's heat. The three young Hebrew men were thrown into that fire. Nebuchadnezzar looked into the fiery pit and he saw a Fourth man with them. Daniel's companions were protected from the destruction caused by the fire.

Is God like Nebuchadnezzar? The answer is certainly not. Nebuchadnezzar was rebuked. He was defeated by the Incarnate Christ standing in a fire to rival hell's flames. God is not loathsome. He is benevolent. His mercies are fresh every day. His mercies are grace upon grace. God is a consuming fire. His fire is a refining fire. He is love.

Nebuchadnezzar ruled with fear. God rules with love. All the ills of the world are conquered in His love. Nebuchadnezzar used his power and authority to coerce people to worship an idol made to look like him. Jesus Christ is not an idol and He does not require symbols or grand statues to demonstrate His power and authority. Nebuchadnezzar was a temporal man. His life ends. Christ Jesus is life and His life never ends. Nebuchadnezzar sought to force his kingdom to bow to his likeness. Not so with the True King. The most sinful will see Jesus and recognize Him. The most sinful will experience the King's grace, mercy and ultimately His love. He will indeed become "all in all."

Pastor Dan Held helps us distinguish between fear and love. He writes, "We can place our faith in fear, which is rooted in our desire to receive, or else we can place our faith in love, which is rooted in our need to give."⁹⁶ We live lives often struggling with conflicts between fear and love. "Our desires conflict with our needs." Love conquers all! Pastor Held concurs, "I believe love is the solution to the universal problem of fear. That's where my own mind now chooses to place my faith after 71 years of arguing back and forth internally between my body's fear and my soul's love. And that's why I believe in Jesus." Pastor Held confirms what we know intuitively. "Jesus was the master of love." Love is "a universal need we all have."

Hate is rooted in fear. Fear is defeated by faith in Christ and faith in

⁹⁶ Dan Held, Pastor. "The Problem With Problem Solving." Pastor Dan Held Blog. September 14, 2017. <https://pastordanheldblog.com/2017/09/04/the-problem-with-problem-solving/>. Date accessed: 04/01/2018.

God's love. It is enjoyable living a life in which I criticize far less and give glory to God far more. Rather than fear I experience His will more often and more completely. "Be a Christian doing rather than a human being." I am no longer quick to hate or to judge. That does not mean that my flesh does not rise up and rebel. I still sin and often the sin is because of my prideful judgment of another. Pastor Held is right to say about love; "It is a universal need we all have." It is a universal need that is fulfilled in Christ Jesus.

If there is therefore any exhortation in Christ, if any consolation of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any tender mercies and compassion, make my joy full, by being like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind; doing nothing through rivalry or through conceit, but in humility, each counting others better than himself; each of you not just looking to his own things, but each of you also to the things of others. Have this in your mind, which was also in Christ Jesus, who, existing in the form of God, didn't consider equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being made in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself, becoming obedient to death, yes, the death of the cross. Therefore God also highly exalted him, and gave to him the name which is above every name; *that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, those on earth, and those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.* (Philippians 2:1-11, emphasis added)

All persons regardless of their respective state of salvation; saved or unsaved, will know the Name of Jesus is "above every name." Every knee will bow in submission to Him and in recognition of His Holy Place. All things will give glory to God. The unsaved (every knee) will bow to Him and bring glory to the Father. Will the Father then send them to eternal torment in spite of their confession? The unsaved will experience

a remedial punishment for their sins and the blood that flowed from Jesus will cover them. The Father will reconcile all to Himself. He will be "all in all."

I use notes from A. E. Knoch's Concordant New Testament as background. Scripture teaches Christ Jesus came from a place with the Father. They were One in the Same. They had the "same love, being in full accord and of one mind...." Christ Jesus was "in the form of God...." He is the Son of the Father, He has the same plan as the Father, and He is His Father's Servant. He "emptied Himself, by taking the form of a servant." He set aside His position and took on Himself the physical nature of His creation. It was a complete transformation. Little of His glory is seen in His physical nature. Before He came to serve He was in form God. He was above all in the heavens. He lowered Himself to take up the curse of death on the cross. He was once almighty and made Himself the least of all. He, of His own volition, descended from the highest. He came to the lowest. The sweep of His plan gathers all to Himself. "Every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

That time wherein all mankind confesses their love for Him has not yet come. There remains a rebellion. There are enemies still that cannot or will not acknowledge His love for them. There is a time coming "when all things are subjected to Him" and when He will "put all things in subjection to His Father, that God may be all in all" (1 Corinthians 15:28). The Father has been exalting His Son since His resurrection. There are enemies still. There are those who oppose Him still. However, the Christ rules over many celestial powers and soon all creation will be subjected to Him. Christ Jesus has ascended to heaven and now sits at the right hand of His Father (1 Peter 3:22). The earth is His Kingdom. He is Sovereign and it is His Dominion. The whole universe is subject to Him.

His shed blood reconciles all things to God. "All things, whether on earth or in heaven..." will be reconciled to God. "All things, whether on earth or in heaven..." will be made subject to Him. He became the lowest and shall become the highest. The Name of Christ Jesus is the Name above all other names. There is none of greater honor. There is none other that blesses us with grace. When His Name is called out "every knee shall bow" and "every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord...!" All of this

to glorify our Father God. By the power of His Name will the knees of every generation bow and tongue of every person confess Christ is Lord.

The doctrine of eternal conscious torment requires we believe that at the Name of Jesus a few knees will bow and a few tongues will confess Jesus Christ is Lord. The glory that is due the Father is lessened because only a few will find salvation in Him. The rest, those who are condemned to eternal conscious torment, will be looked upon from heaven by the Christ that could have saved them, but did not.

The plain meaning of scripture is the best meaning. Every person will be reconciled to God. No person will be abandoned to a place that cannot be proven exists. Mr. Sprenger asks us to, "Remember that 'No one can say, 'Jesus is Lord,' except by the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:3).'" Christians sing with joy in the knowledge of the mystery revealed in Christ Jesus. All means all. Every tongue will confess Jesus is Lord and will be in the Holy Spirit.

For many walk, of whom I told you often, and now tell you even weeping, as *the enemies of the cross of Christ, whose end is destruction*, whose god is the belly, and whose glory is in their shame, who think about earthly things. For our citizenship is in heaven, from where we also wait for a Savior, the *Lord Jesus Christ; who will change the body of our humiliation to be conformed to the body of his glory, according to the working by which he is able even to subject all things to himself.* (Philippians 3:18-21, emphasis added)

If there is an eternal end for the rebellious, then "their end is destruction." These scriptures make a better case for annihilation, also known as conditional immortality, than eternal conscious torment. Those who believe in Christ Jesus and who are brought into the family of God certainly have reason to rejoice. He "will transform our lowly body to be like His glorious body..." That, indeed, is good news. But, greater than that He has the power "...even to subject all things to Himself."

Do we want to say that His power to save even the most heinous person ever created cannot be made subject to Christ? If so, then His power is not all-powerful. Is He love or is His plan to keep only a few

as His people? Does He rule over a Kingdom of all or only a few? If He can subject all things to Himself is it not reasonable to say He will? The doctrine of eternal conscious torment stretches the plain meaning of scripture to say He will not. The doctrine does not allow that Christ will end the spiritual lives of the disobedient by eternal destruction, rather they go another step to say Christ supervises their eternal torment. The doctrine insists Jesus, Who is the Savior of the whole world, really is not.

...UR IN COLOSSIANS

For all the fullness was pleased to dwell in him; and through him to reconcile all things to himself, by him, whether things on the earth, or things in the heavens, having made peace through the blood of his cross. You, being in past times alienated and enemies in your mind in your evil works, yet now he has reconciled in the body of his flesh through death, to present you holy and without defect and blameless before him, if it is so that you continue in the faith, grounded and steadfast, and not moved away from the hope of the Good News which you heard, which is being proclaimed in all creation under heaven; of which I, Paul, was made a servant. (Colossians 1:19-23, emphasis added)

There are some alive today who have not heard the Gospel. Verse 23 dismisses that assertion because "...the gospel you heard...has been proclaimed in all creation under heaven." How that may have been fulfilled I cannot say. I can say with absolute certainty that Christ Jesus said, "It is finished." "All creation" has received the Gospel. It has been proclaimed to "all creation under heaven." "The Blessed Hope" is somehow passed to all generations. "All creation" receives the gospel and "every knee will bow and every tongue confess that Jesus is Lord to the Glory of the Father." What good news! What a Gospel!

Notice Paul declares himself to be a minister of the Gospel of Christ. He never alludes to the traditionalist doctrine of eternal conscious torment. Men and traditions manufacture that doctrine from thin assumptions and questionable interpretations. God is Christ Jesus. Scripture records here

that “all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell” in Him. “All” of God was in Christ Jesus. What was the purpose of that? “To reconcile to Himself all things.” The Father in Christ Jesus. The Father’s plan is fulfilled in Christ Jesus. “All things” are reconciled to the Father through Christ Jesus. The plain meaning of these scriptures is easily understood. The orthodox traditionalist doctrine of eternal conscious torment contradicts them.

We sin because of the fallen state of the world. None of us is ever free of sin. We live sin or we feel sin or we think sin. Sin is all around us. These scriptures teach we can say with confidence we are “reconciled in His body of flesh by His death.” The degree of our sin does not change the fact that “by His death” we will be given to the Father “holy and blameless.” We, all of us, “all things” will be “above reproach before” the Father. Why? Because Christ Jesus reconciles all things. We must also “...grounded and steadfast, and not moved away from the hope of the Good News which you heard, which is being proclaimed in all creation under heaven.” Who can claim they have been every moment of every day “stable and steadfast?” I dare say, none. Who among us has not fallen away “...from the hope of the gospel that...” we heard? I dare say “all things” fall short.

The doctrine of eternal conscious torment to be true must conclude not “all things” will be reconciled to God. Only a few things will be deemed righteous, blameless and holy.

Mr. Sprenger asks, “How could Paul state it any more clearly!?” The plain meaning of scripture makes the doctrine of eternal conscious torment suspect at least. That doctrine requires that not all things are reconciled to Him or that He is unable to persuade unrepentant, rebellious people with His overwhelming love.

where there can’t be Greek and Jew, circumcision and uncircumcision, barbarian, Scythian, bondservant, freeman; *but Christ is all, and in all.* (Colossians 3:11, emphasis added)

Mr. Sprenger tells us, “All creation is birthed in Christ; all creation remains in Christ; but not all of creation has been awakened to Christ ‘Awake, sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will give thee light.’”

(Eph 5:14). Paul provides insight to life in Christ. Because we know Him we are confident He knows us. Because we know Him our focus is on Him at the right hand of the Father. Our focus should be on heavenly things; spiritual things. Our focus should be prayers to be blessed with wisdom. Paul tells us that our temporal lives have changed in Christ. Our spirits are quickened in Christ and we have a life kept with Christ in God. Paul presses the church in Colosse to set aside all things worldly. End all that is earthly in you. End immorality of all kinds. Put aside passions. Do not succumb to self. Let pride and envy go. Do not idolize your self.

Every person ever exposed to the Light of Christ acknowledges his sins. Pride, which is also idolatry, puts up obstacles, but over time with the Spirit of God working in us we “put away: anger, wrath, malice, slander and obscene talk.” We come to live lives in Christ Jesus and we do not deceive one another. Christ has given us a new life and we change. Our old self is discarded and He gives us renewal in Him. He is in us and we strive to bring glory to Him and away from ourselves. The old self that condemns another is put off and love is put on. The old self that judges harshly is put off and love is put on. The old self that practiced the ways of the world is put off and the life of Christ is put on.

Christ's Gospel is not party to any nationality or culture. “There is not Greek or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free; *but Christ is all, and in all.*” Knowing Christ Jesus and being known by Him is crucial. Being a believer “is a gift from God and that by way of faith.” He leads us to believe. Our lives change and our focus is to bring glory to Him. That is Christ-like life...bringing glory to God. God intends that believers set aside animus for those who disagree with us and take up a new life with the Spirit of God at our head. Christ is everything. He is the fullness of God dwelling in Him. God is pleased in Him. Christ Jesus is in the men and women He created. Everything that is created was created by Him at His command. He is in all.

The doctrine of eternal conscious torment teaches billions of people will be eternally punished by a just God. The doctrine lessens the power of Christ. It diminishes the “fullness of God in Him.” These verses simply and plainly understood teach “Christ is all, and in all.”

Dave Armstrong writes a Bible Study from a Catholic perspective. He expositis about forgiveness on a human level and then declares God

cannot forgive an unrepentant sinner.⁹⁷ He writes, “Forgiveness is, of course, a distinguishing characteristic of the Christian life.” We are commanded by no less than Christ Jesus to love our neighbors, to love our enemies, to make peace with our brothers. We are taught to care for widows and orphans. Mr. Armstrong teaches we forgive others “because God has forgiven us.”

Mr. Armstrong tells his audience that the person receiving God’s forgiveness “must repent.” If there is not an act of repentance then the receiver cannot “obtain true forgiveness.” Mr. Armstrong adamantly states Divine forgiveness “is not absolutely unconditional, as many falsely teach.” However, being truly remorseful and truly repenting is “a firm resolve to try to do better...and a determination to cease engaging in that sin.” He writes Christians ought to forgive others unconditionally, especially others who have repented. God, though, does not forgive unconditionally. “...God cannot and will not forgive a person who doesn’t repent and accept the forgiveness (in this case, salvation itself).”

It is not enough that Jesus, Whose Name means “God Saves,” is all, but not in all according to Mr. Armstrong’s apologetic study. Mr. Armstrong understands the fullness of God was pleased to dwell in Him, but that the fullness of God cannot and does not dwell in all men. Jesus is Emmanuel. His Name is “God is with us.” All has been given over to Him and He has subjected it to Himself. He subjects His creation to His Father and God is pleased. These verses stand alone, even so all other scripture supports this simple truth; “It is God’s will that all be saved.” “God is Love. His love will save all.” This is “The Blessed Hope.”

...UR IN 1 TIMOTHY

And I thank him who enabled me, Christ Jesus our Lord, because he counted me faithful, appointing me to service; although *I was before a blasphemers, a persecutor, and insolent. However, I obtained mercy, because I did it ignorantly in unbelief.* The grace of our Lord abounded

⁹⁷ Dave Armstrong. “Apologetics-Oriented Biblical Commentary on Colossians (RSV).” Biblical Evidence for Catholicism. July 7, 2015. <http://www.patheos.com/blogs/davearmstrong/2015/07/commentary.html>. Date accessed:06/06/2018.

exceedingly with faith and love which is in Christ Jesus. The saying is faithful and worthy of all acceptance, that *Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief.* However, for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first, *Jesus Christ might display all his patience, for an example of those who were going to believe in him for eternal life.* Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, to God who alone is wise, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen. (1 Timothy 1:12-17, emphasis added)

Mr. Sprenger asks, "If the prerequisite for mercy is ignorance and unbelief, then who will fail to qualify?" Is there any person ever created that does not deserve God's mercy? Who are we to say? Are not all people at first ignorant of God's grace and only exposed to His mercy in stages of their lives? Do not all people have to be shown what their faith is; that it is a gift from God? Mr. Sprenger's question is poignant. "...Who will fail to qualify" for God's mercy especially if Paul is our example?

Paul declares in Holy Scripture that he is the "foremost" of all sinners. Does it not stand to reason that God saves the most wretched man? Who is worse than the most wretched of all men? Mr. Sprenger asks, "Again, if Paul is the foremost sinner, then hasn't God's plan of redemption been accomplished to the foremost?"

Christ said from the cross, "Father, forgive them for they do not know what they are doing." Later as He took His final breath He said, "It is finished." Christ is asking the Lord to forgive the very persons who hate Him. He is asking the Father to overlook and to forgive their complicity in His crucifixion. Will His Father not do what His Son asks? "It is finished." Yet, the doctrine of eternal conscious torment demands Christ's death is not the end for many. Not all are forgiven.

These verses preach "God is love." Christ Jesus is His only begotten Son. Christ Jesus on the cross at the threshold of His death prays to His Father. He asks that His persecutors be forgiven. Will God not answer His Son's prayer affirmatively and reconcile all to Himself through Christ Jesus?

For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior; *who desires all people to be saved and come to full knowledge of the truth.* For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man *Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all;* the testimony in its own times; to which I was appointed a preacher and an apostle (I am telling the truth in Christ, not lying), a teacher of the Gentiles in faith and truth. (1 Timothy 2:3-7, emphasis added)

Sometimes the plain meaning of scripture is modified or manipulated to support the doctrine of eternal conscious torment. Does a contradiction exist in these verses? Is there a contradiction regarding the reconciliation of “all men” to God? Is the “ransom for all” only a ransom for a few who have been chosen or for the few who choose Him? Is there a qualifier at all? Does not “all” mean “all?”

Paul is teaching Timothy and subsequently everyone about worship. The focus of the instruction regards the behavior of men and the behavior of women in church settings and in daily life. Paul exhorts Timothy and all Christians to pray for all men; to pray the needs of all men are met; to pray the hearts of all men would turn to Jesus. His “...is the testimony given at the proper time.”

The doctrine of eternal conscious torment teaches Christ, “...who gave Himself as a ransom for all...,” really did not pay for the sins of all. Rather, the doctrine believes that Christ’s sacrifice applies only to few because they either had the foresight to have chosen to believe Christ or they had the blessing of being chosen by God to believe Christ. These verses show a powerfully, all-consuming loving Father’s boundless mercy. His love for His creation is seen in these verses. Jesus gave His life as a “ransom for all.”

The doctrine of eternal conscious torment contradicts what God’s Word declares about Christ’s sacrifice. There are contradictions between what the doctrine teaches and the plain meaning of scripture. The Father leads us to read His Holy Word. His Spirit leads us. He uncovers God’s Word for us. What He reveals is not revealed in the traditions of men. We have read that Christ’s sacrifice on the Cross is a “ransom for all men.”

We've read that "every knee will bow and every tongue confess that He is Christ to the glory of the Father." We have discussed the contradictions. The doctrine of eternal conscious torment is that Christ's sacrifice is insufficient ransom for all. It is a doctrine in which Christ's sacrifice lacks love for all men, but has sufficient love for some men...the chosen men.

If you instruct the brothers of these things, you will be a good servant of Christ Jesus, nourished in the words of the faith, and of the good doctrine which you have followed. *But refuse profane and old wives' fables.* Exercise yourself toward godliness. For bodily exercise has some value, but godliness has value in all things, having the promise of the life which is now, and of that which is to come. *This saying is faithful and worthy of all acceptance.* For to this end we both labor and suffer reproach, because we have set our trust in the living God, *who is the Savior of all men, especially of those who believe.* Command and teach these things.

Let no man despise your youth; but be an example to those who believe, in word, in your way of life, in love, in spirit, in faith, and in purity. Until I come, pay attention to reading, to exhortation, and to teaching. Don't neglect the gift that is in you, which was given to you by prophecy, with the laying on of the hands of the elders. Be diligent in these things. Give yourself wholly to them, that your progress may be revealed to all. *Pay attention to yourself, and to your teaching. Continue in these things, for in doing this you will save both yourself and those who hear you.* (1 Timothy 4:6-16, emphasis added)

It is ironic that these verses open with "Have nothing to do with irreverent, silly myths." Is Calvinism a set of doctrines loaded with silly myths? Arminianism? Is eternal punishment a silly myth? Is universal reconciliation a silly myth? With which should we have nothing to do? The scripture states "...our hope set on the living God, who is the Savior of *all people*, especially of those who believe."

William MacDonald writes in the *Believers Bible Commentary* regarding these verses, in particular verse 10.⁹⁸ Christians have an outlook on life different than those who do not believe in Christ. It is our passion to reach out to unbelievers and tell them the Truth of God's Holy Word. Dr. MacDonald writes, "The Christian sees beyond the passing things of the world and sets his hope on the living God." Christians are not ever disappointed in their belief. Dr. MacDonald tells us the reason for our hope is "that He is the living God, who is the Savior of all men, especially of the those who believe."

Dr. MacDonald died in 2007. He was a prolific Christian writer and honored God by not accepting remuneration for the written works he produced. He was President of Emmaus College which is affiliated with The Plymouth Brethren Church. I am confident Dr. MacDonald's heart is owned by God. Dr. MacDonald is also an advocate of the doctrine of eternal conscious torment. He applies his predisposition favoring the doctrine to this writing. According to Dr. MacDonald God has made Himself known to the people of the world from the beginning of time and God provides for all. God by His grace made provision for mankind, all mankind, to believe and to be saved. But, only a few take advantage of God's grace. Dr. MacDonald concludes Jesus "...who is the Savior of all people, especially of those who believe..." is only inclusive of those who believe. Some, perhaps most, are excluded from His mercy and saving grace. Dr. MacDonald diminishes Christ's death in this commentary. He writes, "We might say that He is the potential Savior of all men and the actual Savior of those who believe." According to this explanation Christ's death is "potential" salvation, but still sufficient only for "...those who believe."

Dr. MacDonald was surely a loving, kind and generous man while living. He is described as a man truly loving God. He asks, "What does the Bible say about our destiny?" Scripture teaches, "It is appointed to men to die once and after this judgment" (Hebrews 9:27). No man will be able to cheat death. Dr. MacDonald says, "Death is not the end. There is a hereafter." That hereafter for believers is heaven. "After death there is judgment and an eternity of endless suffering for those who are not

⁹⁸ William MacDonald. *"Believer's Bible Commentary."* (Commentary on 1 Timothy 4). Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1995. pp. 2092-2094.

ready to meet God. The Bible says and whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire.” Dr. MacDonald teaches this condition is a fact that cannot be denied or altered.

Kevin Engle is a kind of archivist for The Plymouth Brethren of which Dr. MacDonald is associated. I am not certain Mr. Engle speaks for that denomination. His father, Kenneth, and Dr. MacDonald were contemporaries and close friends. Mr. Engle posts a sermon message by D. L. Moody entitled “Hell.”⁹⁹ Dr. MacDonald’s theology is in line with Dr. Moody’s. Dr. Moody writes about eternal conscious torment. He believes “the worm that dieth not is our memory.” In this life we are forgetful and perhaps we have an ability to bury painful memories. Dr. Moody says, “The time is coming when we shall remember and cannot forget.” He teaches, “God makes us keep our own record.” God causes us to review our record. Dr. Moody suggests Cain remembers his sin against Abel, that Judas will eternally remember kissing Christ Jesus, that the sinners before the flood will remember rejecting salvation in the Ark.

Dr. Moody writes, “There are many men and women now who think that all souls will at last be saved in spite of all their sins.” This is the common understanding of the advocates of universal reconciliation. Dr. Moody believes these advocates are good people in “error.” Dr. Moody does not believe God would sweep any unsaved man into heaven. Noah had to work for his salvation, but the sinners who drowned did not. Does that seem fair? Is it conceivable that God crushed evil men in Sodom leaving behind a few to despair? Dr. Moody’s doctrine concludes so. Dr. Moody’s theology is eternal conscious torment like Dr. MacDonald’s. The unrepentant will be cast into another place. “There will be no tender, loving Jesus coming and offering you salvation there – no loving wife or mother to pray for you there.” There is no hope in that place. There is only eternal conscious torment. Dr. Moody writes that God will say, “Cut them down; the day of mercy is ended.... There will be no preaching of the Gospel there....There will be no revivals in hell.”

These verses should not be construed to mean that “only” those who believe are saved, but “especially” those who believe. We should

⁹⁹ D. L. Moody. “Hell.” Online Library of Brethren Writers (posted by Kevin Engle). August 3, 2005. <http://www.plymouthbrethren.org/article/1478>. Date accessed: 04/02/2018.

not exclude a whole class of people, unbelievers. In fact, we should take pains to demonstrate their inclusion. God instructs us to love even those who hate us. That would mean to love even the most heinous unbeliever, would it not? After all would our Lord command us to love all, but not do the same for all? Do these scriptures read to you as if God is rejecting anyone? These verses read to me as if God is the Savior of all people. There is certainly a blessing upon us who do believe. It is certain God desires all people are saved by the Savior. There is not another scripture that contradicts this one tenet; He is the Savior of all people.

...UR IN TITUS

Eternal conscious torment as a doctrine is true only if verses such as these in Titus are made to mean something other than their plain meaning. Mr. Salisbury's assessment is that scripture has to be made to fit the doctrine of eternal conscious torment. We should not discount his assessment as a possibility. Men hold fast to their respective traditions even to the point of division.

For the grace of God has appeared, *bringing salvation to all men*, instructing us to the intent that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we would live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world; *looking for the blessed hope and appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ; who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify for himself a people for his own possession, zealous for good works.* Say these things and exhort and reprove with all authority. Let no man despise you. (Titus 2:11-15, emphasis added)

Paul is instructing Titus to preach "...what accords with sound doctrine." Paul goes on to describe behaviors and characteristics of Christian men and Christian women. There are lists of good things to do and things to not do. Simple rules for living a life that brings honor to God.

Paul explains from where we draw grace. "The Grace of God has

appeared.” That can only reference Christ Jesus. God’s grace manifest in Jesus. With His appearance as the “only begotten Son of God” He brought with Him “salvation for all people.” He is training all of us for life that is with Him. All of us. Not just the few who feel as if they are chosen and not the few who believe they have chosen. All of us. By His abundant grace He brings salvation to all men. The doctrine of eternal conscious torment contradicts the simple reading of scripture.

Steven J. Cole is a contributor to the website Bible.org. Mr. Cole is identified as a Pastor of a church in Flagstaff, AZ. He writes about “the grace of God and how it works in our lives.”¹⁰⁰ Mr. Cole believes God’s grace “is arguably the most important concept” for Christians to comprehend. He teaches that living in God’s grace is to be equipped for “the battle to be godly.” It is Mr. Cole’s opinion it is necessary to understand God’s grace in order to “experience a close relationship with God and consistent victory over sin (Rom. 6:14).”

“The grace of God” that appears is Christ Jesus. His life, death and resurrection are precepts all men can comprehend. He brings salvation to all people. Mr. Cole is right to say, “...The enemy of our souls has created much confusion and controversy on this topic.” Good meaning men and women have developed “traditions of men” that are just as much to blame for the confusion and controversy.

Mr. Cole suggests the interpretations of these verses from Paul’s letter to Titus are in error. He reports “the KJV (King James Version) and the NIV (New International version) err by translating that God’s grace has appeared to all men. That never has been true.” He is right to conclude “there have always been many that have never heard of God’s grace in Jesus Christ.”

Mr. Cole believes it is more properly understood “that God’s grace that appeared in the person of Christ offers salvation to all that hear of it.” Paul did not intend Titus and subsequently every other person reading this epistle to interpret the verse to mean “God’s grace brings salvation to all men, he means, ‘to all types of people.’” God is diverse in the types of people He saves “including those whom the world despises, even to

¹⁰⁰ Steven J. Cole, Pastor. “Lesson 8: How Grace Works (Titus 2:11-14).” Bible.org website. 2007 <https://bible.org/seriespage/lesson-8-how-grace-works-titus-211-14>. Date accessed: 04/01/2018.

slaves.” Mr. Cole seemingly contradicts himself when he says, “No one is beyond the reach of God’s grace.”

Mr. Cole wants his audience to understand “this does not mean all people are saved or will be saved.” There are people “who by God’s grace believe in Jesus Christ. . . . Those who do not believe in Christ will pay the penalty of eternal separation from God in hell.” Mr. Cole acknowledges there are people, men and women created by God, who have never been exposed to the Gospel. It seems as if Mr. Cole is conflating the appearance of the “saving grace of God” to the hearing of it. Mr. Cole discusses his idea that “all people” is mistranslated and should be rendered as “all types of people.” He declares “not all people are saved or will be saved.” Is Mr. Cole correct?

The Concordant Literal Version translates this verse to say, “The saving grace of God made its advent to all humanity.” Young’s Literal Translation translates this verse to say, “For the saving grace of God was manifested to all men.” What are we to say? Scripture tells us that the “saving grace of God” is made obvious to all men. “The saving grace of God” is Christ Jesus.

Mr. Cole is right to preach “no one is beyond the reach of God’s grace.” That is a precept of the doctrine of universal reconciliation. But, Mr. Cole preaches also that “this does not mean that all people are saved or will be saved.” He then goes on to say, “The Bible is uniformly clear there are two separate final destinations for all people.”

It is not difficult to understand the plain meaning of this verse. The doctrine of eternal conscious torment takes away from “the saving grace of God.” The doctrine of eternal conscious torment requires God’s grace be only for a few. It preaches God’s grace is available to all men, but only given to a few.

Mr. Cole writes, “Before you can appreciate God’s grace, you need to know that you are justly under His wrath and condemnation. You are headed for eternal judgment unless someone intervenes.” Mr. Cole paraphrases an analogy by Charles Spurgeon. According to this analogy we are all born hanging from ropes. Our respective breaths are being choked out of us. To Mr. Cole’s thinking God, in His wisdom and by His desire, cuts the rope from some. However, most are left dangling from a rope. The irony is too great to reason. God Who creates life also stifles

it!? He could easily cut the ropes of all...and in fact using Dr. Spurgeon's analogy He will. It is God's desire that all be saved.

Christian Apologetics and Research Ministry (CARM) is a culmination of many years of hard work and information sharing. Matt Slick is the force behind this ministry. He believes God chose him for salvation, but did not choose most of humanity. The doctrine of eternal conscious torment excludes many of those created by God from "the appearance of God's grace." Mr. Slick writes this about Titus 2:11.¹⁰¹ "We, the chosen, have had the blessing of saving grace bestowed on us in abundance. Saving grace is based upon the love of God manifested in the sacrifice of Jesus for our sins." Mr. Slick tells his audience that grace is not a substance that can be attained. Grace is a gift from God and on that we agree. Mr. Slick tells us that grace "...is an action of God, therefore, it has a result." Shall we say then that only the chosen are given grace? The doctrine of eternal conscious torment intends exactly this understanding of these verses. The verse says clearly, "the saving grace of God is manifested to all men." The doctrine of eternal conscious torment allows only a few men be gifted by "the saving grace of God."

Bob Utley prepared a commentary on God's Holy Word. He founded "Bible Lessons International" and the website bearing that name. He, Mr. Slick and Mr. Cole have a common understanding of these verses. Dr. Utley writes this regarding Titus 2:11.¹⁰² These verses "give the theological basis for godly living." Dr. Utley tells us, "The life, teaching and death of Jesus fully revealed the Father's love, mercy and grace. When we see Jesus, we see God." Dr. Utley declares "God sent Christ to die for the sin of *all humans*, but they must personally respond by repentance, faith, obedience and perseverance (emphasis added)." Dr. Utley remarks these are scriptures "reflecting the universal scope of Christ's work 'for the world' and 'all men.'" Dr. Utley teaches, "The appearance of the grace

¹⁰¹ Matt Slick. "Titus 2:11-14, *The Results of Saving Grace*." Christian Apologetics Research Ministry website. Publication date unknown. <https://carm.org/sermon-titus-211-14-results-saving-grace>. Date accessed: 04/02/2018.

¹⁰² Bob Utley. "You Can Understand the Bible: Study Guide Commentary Series; Titus 2." Free Bible Commentary website. Date of publication not known. http://www.freebiblecommentary.org/new_testament_studies/VOL09/VOL09_09.html. Date accessed: 04/02/2018.

of God” is universal, that is available to all men, but that grace (Christ Jesus) can only be realized by a work. Dr. Utley writes, men “...must personally respond by repentance, faith, obedience, and perseverance.” In other words those of us who have been blessed to see “the grace of God manifested” must perform a work or series of works in order for salvation to have effect for us.

Dr. Utley writes, “God made humans in His image.... He promised to redeem all humans. He specifically mentions His worldwide agenda even in His call of Abraham...and of Israel....” On one hand we must work; we must repent, we must exercise faith, we must be obedient, and we must persevere. On the other hand God, “...promised to redeem all humans.” Quoting Matt Slick (above), “God’s grace is an action and God’s action has a result.”

The doctrine of eternal conscious torment alters the plain meaning of scripture to make it mean something not intended. It is God’s will that none shall be lost. He is certain to be “all in all.” God’s grace is an action and there is indeed a result. It is “The Blessed Hope.”

...UR IN HEBREWS

God, having in the past spoken to the fathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, *has at the end of these days spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things*, through whom also he made the worlds. His Son is the radiance of his glory, the very image of his substance, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when *he had by himself purified us of our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high*; having become so much better than the angels, as he has inherited a more excellent name than they have.
(Hebrews 1:1-4, emphasis added)

The power of these verses is overwhelming evidence that Christ died on a cross for the sins of all men and that He is “the heir of all things.” He is King over the most pious and He is King over the worst rebel. He owns us all. To Him God gives all and to the Father does Christ give glory.

The Messiah is spoken of by the prophets of God and “in these last days” God speaks to all humankind through Christ Jesus. His Name is Jesus and He is God’s saving grace manifested to all men. Christ Jesus Whose Name is Emmanuel is God with us. It is by no other Authority that our Christ Jesus is “appointed the heir of all things.” He is heir of all the earth; everything on the earth, under the earth, in the sea and throughout the universe. These verses declare with certainty that Christ Jesus is fully credited with the Father for creating the world. It is His creation and we, all of us, are part of that glorious work.

It is Christ Jesus Who purifies all sins. These verses do not limit the sins purified to those who repent, obey, show faith and persevere. These verses declare with certainty that He by His obedience to His Father’s Will purifies us from sins. He is the “heir of all things” and His possession is free of blot. Today He is elevated to the place of Highest Honor at the right hand of the Father where He sits on the King’s Throne.

The doctrine of eternal conscious torment diminishes Christ’s sacrifice. The doctrine concludes that Christ’s inheritance is not “all things.” The doctrine declares the majority of mankind will be sent to eternal conscious torment even though Christ inherits “all things” He creates. The doctrine of eternal conscious torment requires that Christ reigns over eternal torture.

John Piper is a renowned pastor, preacher and author. He provides his sermons and other resources at his website, Desiring God. Dr. Piper “is founder and teacher of desiringGod.org and chancellor of Bethlehem College & Seminary. For 33 years, he served as pastor of Bethlehem Baptist Church, Minneapolis, Minnesota.” Dr. Piper provides a sermon entitled “In These Last Days God Has Spoken By A Son.”¹⁰³ Dr. Piper addresses these verses from Hebrews 1 and Christ’s authority as “heir of all things.”

Dr. Piper asks why the author of Hebrews included the phrase “heir of all things.” Christ’s Supremacy is in the fact that He is “heir of all things.” He is the First born of many. He is the Son of God and it is His Birthright

¹⁰³ Dr. John Piper. “*In These Last Days, God Has Spoken by A Son.*” Desiring God website. March 31, 1996. <https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/in-these-last-days-god-has-spoken-by-a-son#he-can-make-good-on-his-promises>. Date accessed: 04/02/2018.

to be Sovereign over “all things.” Dr. Piper declares that Christ’s authority allows Him to keep promises. “Jesus, the Son of God, can make good on all He promises.” Is that the same as saying “Jesus, the Son of God, will make good on all His promises?”

Is the distinction softening Christ’s authority and placing a kind of limit on the promises He will keep? It is as if Christ will keep some promises, most promises perhaps, but Christ does not have to keep all promises. Dr. Piper points out that Christ is over all things, “...who in the end will have under his complete control and ownership all things (all land, all water, all fire, all wind, all energy, all natural resources, all nations, all military might, all buildings, all bacteria and viruses, all angels, all demons, all spiritual and material beings except God the Father)....”

Christ Jesus, according to Dr. Piper, can, if He chooses, keep the promise that the meek will inherit the earth. He can, if He chooses, keep the promise that nothing will separate us from the love of the Father. He can, if He chooses, keep the promise to end death, mourning, crying or pain. He can, if He chooses, rule unhindered. Who could hinder Him? God gives all authority to Him. Who could delay His promise from being fulfilled? Does God promise that He will be “all in all?” Who will dissuade Him? Who will keep Him from His promise to His Son and to His creation? Dr. Piper answers these questions with this; “...the Son will make good on His own Word.”

Christ Jesus came into the world and is the “propitiation for our sins.” He was made manifest as the “saving grace of God.” He died a horrendous, torturous death as a sacrifice for the sins of the world. Dr. Piper wants us to believe as he does. There are some sins that Christ cannot forgive because the unrepentant person is so steeped in rebellion Christ cannot save him or worse will not save him.

Dr. Piper says, “The fear of hell is a golden opportunity for treating God as big and glorious and utterly real.” I have to ask did God create hell? Or is it a pagan kind of horror used to bring people into compliance? Does God force His children to pay homage to Him in the same vein Nebuchadnezzar made people submit to his idol? How does Dr. Piper explain the millions if not billions of people living in places throughout the world that have never heard the Gospel of Christ Jesus? Is fear of hell

truly “a golden moment for how to teach a child about how real and how great God is?” If God is love, then why is it “golden” to teach children to fear Him? Is it unreasonable to call hell a thing as in part of “all things?” If not, then Christ reigns over the doctrine of eternal conscious torment and its subsequent hell. Is it Christ Who torments? He is the only power that could. His would be the only Authority that could. Satan will be cast into the Lake of Fire. Satan is defeated, too.

Dr. Piper is not alone in his assessment regarding Christ Jesus being “the heir of all things.” Dr. John MacArthur writes about these verses and provides his exposition of them. He preaches Hebrews theme is about “superiority or the preeminence of Christ.... He’s better than everything.”¹⁰⁴ Christ is better than the prophets of the Old Testament and better than anyone in the New Testament. Christ Jesus is the authority over all things.

Dr. MacArthur explains that without God’s forcible voice no person in their natural state could know God exists. Dr. MacArthur believes and preaches that no person could know God under their personal power or effort. He says, “You can’t crawl out of your natural box and discover God. You can’t do it. You and I live in a natural box.” To understand God, to know Him requires an effort on God’s part for your personal benefit. Dr. MacArthur declares no man created by God can know God unless God makes His voice clear. His creation can guess that God exists, but we do not really know unless God speaks.

God does speak. Dr. MacArthur tells us God’s word is “not smattered with a lot of human opinion like so many people try to tell you. Tell you that men wrote the Bible. It’s all God spoke.” Dr. MacArthur sells commentaries of nearly all, if not all, the books of the Bible. His commentaries are constructively “smattered with a lot of human opinion.” That does not take away from the point that God speaks to us through His Holy Word. That begs the question. If a person never held God’s Holy Word (the Bible) or could not understand the language the Bible is presented, did that person hear God speak?

Dr. MacArthur preaches about Christ’s “heirship.” Christ Jesus “is

¹⁰⁴ Dr. John MacArthur. “*Introduction To Hebrews*.” Grace To You website. January 23, 1972. <https://www.gty.org/library/sermons-library/1600/introduction-to-hebrews>. Date accessed: 04/02/2018.

the heir of all that God possesses.” The Kingdom now belongs to Christ Jesus. Everyone in the universe will be His “some day.” Dr. MacArthur acknowledges “even Satan knew” Christ Jesus is preeminent and will possess “all of those existing in the universe.” Dr. MacArthur’s sermons and commentaries are rich. Christ is the “heir of all things.” They are His. He created them. Dr. MacArthur is right to say that everything in the universe; that is everything ever created was created by Jesus Who is Christ for all men. He is right to say that all things will be subject to Him accentuating the fact that He is Sovereign over “all things.” Simply stated, “Jesus is the heir of all things establishing His first glorious preeminence.”

God’s Kingdom is Christ Jesus’ Kingdom. All things created are created for Christ and all things created will be subject to Him. All things created bring glory to God. Dr. MacArthur reminds his audience of Philippians 2:10 wherein it is declared that Christ Jesus’ Name will “cause every knee to bow and every tongue to swear allegiance.”

I believe God’s Holy Word spoken to us. I am confident Dr. MacArthur and Dr. Piper believe His Word with all their hearts, too. They might agree there is not any man, no matter how hateful, no matter how bitter he is toward God, will not see His glory. Scripture teaches every tongue will confess and will swear allegiance to God. Every knee will bow and all will be subject to Him.

You made him a little lower than the angels. You crowned him with glory and honor. *You have put all things in subjection under his feet.*” For in that he subjected all things to him, *he left nothing that is not subject to him.* But now we don’t see all things subjected to him, yet. But we see him who has been made a little lower than the angels, Jesus, because of the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, that *by the grace of God he should taste of death for everyone.* (Hebrews 2:7-9, emphasis added)

Christ Jesus is obedient to the Father. He stepped away from the Throne of God for a little while. He took upon Himself the flesh of mankind. We know the history of His birth. He was “...for a little while lower than the angels....” We know the history of His crucifixion.

We know the history of His time “preaching to the saints” and His subsequent resurrection. He was for a little while a man. He died our Savior. He resurrected as our King. He reigns sitting at the Father’s right hand on the Throne of God. It bears repeating so there will not be any misunderstanding. Jesus was obedient to His Father. He stepped away from His heavenly place and took on human flesh. He became the Savior of all. Jesus was obedient to death. His blood shed for the sins of all men. His body broken for the sins of all men.

Jesus is God’s grace. “...By the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.” God’s manifested grace for everyone. He is light in everyone. He died for everyone. God “crowned Jesus with glory and honor.” His Father put everything under His Son’s Authority. “Everything is in subjection to Him.” There is “...nothing outside His control.”

The doctrine of eternal conscious torment limits who is included in “everyone.” This doctrine’s “everyone” consists of those God chose or consists of “everyone” who chooses God. The doctrine of eternal conscious torment is created from manipulated interpretations of scripture. Our Father says, “I will remember their sins no more.” Yet, the doctrine of eternal conscious torment requires He remember their sins for eternity. Never mind, every man is subject to Him. His death atones for the sins of everyone. His grace is our reconciliation to Him.

“For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel. After those days,” says the Lord; “I will put my laws into their mind, I will also write them on their heart. I will be their God, and they will be my people. They will not teach every man his fellow citizen, and every man his brother, saying, ‘Know the Lord,’ for all will know me, from their least to their greatest. For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness. I will remember their sins and lawless deeds no more.” In that he says, “A new covenant”, he has made the first old. But that which is becoming old and grows aged is near to vanishing away. (Hebrews 8:10-13emphasis added)

The author of Hebrews explains that Christ Jesus is not another

High Priest, but that He is THE High Priest. Our High Priest is seated at the right hand of the Father. Our High Priest is majestic and is the "... grace of God manifested..." for us all. Christ Jesus is not a worldly High Priest. He is the heavenly High Priest. His Ministry is elite and nothing compares to His gift. Others have been appointed priests and prophets to serve for a time. Those men and women served the Lord's purpose to expose the Truth to all. Our High Priest tells us that He did not come to replace the Old Covenant. He came to fulfill it. Christ Jesus says, "I have not come to abolish the Law or the Prophets. I have come to fulfill them" (Matthew 5:17-18).

Israel was given this first covenant and they were unable or unwilling to accept it. They could not or would not meet the Lord's terms. They were insolent. They were dishonoring. They were human and they failed. The covenant is not faultless. The people are not faultless, for if both were without blame there would not be reason for another covenant. It is incontrovertible.

"...They shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest." Is there any one not subject to the statement, "they shall all know me...?" What will they all know? God is merciful and forgives all sins! God does not add any qualifiers. The least to the greatest will know Him. All will know Him. God says He will be merciful toward their sins and that He would remember their sins no more.

The doctrine of eternal conscious torment requires God remember sins for eternity as He punishes those He supposedly does not know. The doctrine contradicts scripture. God's Word means that all sins are forgiven because all men will come to know Him and be reconciled to Him. He says clearly "they shall all know me." What a blessing it is to know that His mercy will cause Him to "remember their sins no more."

or else he must have suffered often since the foundation of the world. *But now once at the end of the ages, he has been revealed to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself.* (Hebrews 9:26, emphasis added)

A. E. Knoch dedicated his life to preparing the Concordant Literal Version of God's Holy Word. From the commentary he produced we

affirm, "The old covenant...was dedicated with the blood of calves and he goats. The new is inaugurated with the blood of Christ.... No intermediary is involved. The High Priest made Himself the propitiation of our sins without any other human help." The sins of the world are put away because He sacrificed Himself. Mr. Sprenger says, "Though not yet evident, sin will finally be completely put away, and all creation, which is waiting anxiously for its redemption (Rom8:19), will be set free."

Christ has yet to be seen at the end of the eons. Sin has not been put away from all people. Sin will eventually "be banished from the universe." By this we will all know the conclusion of the eons. The ages will be gathered up and an eternal age with Christ will begin. Israel will be restored and the hearts of men will have written on their hearts the words of the Almighty God. Sin will be past and the Father will remember them no more. Praise God we are all Israel.

...UR IN 1 PETER

If you call on him as Father, who without respect of persons *judges according to each man's work*, pass the time of your living as foreigners here in reverent fear: knowing that you were redeemed, not with corruptible things, with silver or gold, *from the useless way of life handed down from your fathers*, but with precious blood, as of a faultless and pure lamb, the blood of Christ; who was *foreknown indeed before the foundation of the world*, but was revealed at the end of times for your sake, who through him are believers in God, who raised him from the dead, and gave him glory; *so that your faith and hope might be in God.*

Seeing you have purified your souls in your obedience to the truth through the Spirit in sincere brotherly affection, love one another from the heart fervently: having been born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, through the word of God, which lives and remains forever. For, "All flesh is like grass, and all of man's glory like the flower in the grass. The grass

withers, and its flower falls; but the Lord's word endures forever.(1 Peter 1:17-25, emphasis added)

God judges each of us because we are fallen. The Father knew that each of us would be unable to meet His expectation of righteousness or love. It was known to the Father and to the Son that the Son's lifeblood restore His creation to Himself. God knew we would fail Him. He knew Adam and every other man since him would fail Him. Our Father judges without favoritism. He does not see denomination, attendance, culture, status or behavior. He judges our walks on the paths of our lives. He judges our work. He causes us to always walk in reverence to Him. Money and things do not make us successful in our walk. We cannot purchase our way to His glorious presence. Our denominational underpinnings are not the way to the truth. Traditions of men are truly worthless in God's sight. He says the things we learned about righteousness are "handed down by tradition by our fathers." Are the things about a Christ-like life taught by our traditions? What about traditions that are contrary to those of our fathers, but in concert with the fathers of others? Is the Southern Baptist walking a straighter path than the path of the United Methodist? Is the Mormon any more righteous by "the tradition of their fathers" than the Roman Catholic who follow the "traditions of his fathers?"

God judges and we are to avoid that. We are saved by the blood of Christ Jesus shed that fateful day at Calvary. Because we have received the gift of faith and that through grace we understand the significance of Christ in our daily walk. We see, feel and express the grace that is in today. Our hope is in Christ and God is reasonable to expect our love to be for Him, in Him, through Him. We are to be His in every moment of every day.

Men build doctrines that include some and exclude most. We build traditions that judge all when we are cautioned not to judge at all.

Sermon Writer is a website that provides resources for Biblical study. They provide this explanation of these verses.¹⁰⁵ We are told "the useless way of life handed down" is Peter's description of "the traditions

¹⁰⁵ "Bible Commentary (Bible Study): 1 Peter 1:17:23." Sermon Writer website. Date of publication not known. <https://www.sermonwriter.com/biblical-commentary/1-peter-117-23/>. Date accessed: 06/07/2018.

and values handed down by their parents – their spiritual inheritance.” Traditions and values form our moral judgments. Beliefs contribute to our understanding of the ways our lives work. The traditions handed down to us from our parents and traditions given to us by way of our Bible teachers are not necessarily good or worthy. We are taught to set all of those aside for the better, purer Way. We are to see and to live and to work our days in “The Blessed Hope.”

...having good behavior among the nations, so in that of which they speak against you as evildoers, they *may by your good works, which they see, glorify God in the day of visitation.* (1 Peter 2:12, emphasis added)

Peter admonishes believers to “put away all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander.” There is not any room in a believer’s heart for anything other than Christ Jesus and the love of God. We are living in the Kingdom of God now. We know, as believers our path to heaven to live a life of eternal peace is assured. He is our Guide and Mentor, we should love as He loves. Reach out to Him for understanding of all situations you face. Seek Him and His direction. Take it in small doses and grow into Him. Better still, let Him grow within you. Being forgiven requires we be forgiving and “...grow up into salvation.”

The Lord our God is good. His Son is good. His Spirit is good. All things come together for the purpose of good especially for those of us who believe. Our Christ is our Bridegroom and we are His. He is building a foundation that cannot be shaken. We are as Peter calls us “a holy priesthood.” We “offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Christ Jesus.” There is nothing evil in His Bride or in the Temple He builds. He, Christ Jesus, the Cornerstone starting the foundation and becomes the Capstone completing the work He starts in us. We cannot be shamed and He cannot be ashamed of us. It is an “honor for you who believe....” Those who do not or simply will not believe will stumble through their lives. Christ will be a stumbling stone to them.

Those people rejecting Him are known to Christ. He created them after all. He knows those who will love Him and live for Him through Him. He knows those, too, who will not love Him. For us, however, we

are chosen to be “a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession....” We should never understand this honor to make us greater than those who are not. We “...now are God’s people.” Our lives, our souls, our spirits have been united with Him by the faith that He gives. We “...have received mercy.”

Peter admonishes us “...to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against our souls.” Judging others does not rest in our authority, but in Christ Jesus through the Father. We do not have any right to lay punishment on any other person. Judgment and punishment are His authority. “Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable....” Let the light of Christ be in all we do. Let Christ’s Truth be our truth. When we are the victim of another person’s sin, let us forgive and not judge that person. When they speak against us, our conduct will be our testimony and our witness. By our “good deeds” God is glorified.

The doctrine of universal reconciliation teaches that as children of God we have a lifestyle that brings glory to God. We are to preach to others with words and deeds. We are to bring the Light into dark places. Christ’s Words and His sacrifice save us. His life is Light. He died as atonement for the sins of the world, that is to say, the sins of the whole world.

We have no reason to conclude from these verses that unbelievers will suffer eternal conscious torment for having not been chosen by God or for not choosing God. We can conclude that believers have a new life now and should live accordingly. “For this is the will of God, that by well-doing you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish men: as free, and not using your freedom for a cloak of wickedness, but as bondservants of God (1 Peter 2:15-16).”

But even if you should suffer for righteousness’ sake, you are blessed. “Don’t fear what they fear, neither be troubled.” *But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts;* and always be ready to give an answer to everyone who asks you a reason concerning the hope that is in you, with humility and fear: having a good conscience; that, while you are spoken against as evildoers, they may be disappointed who curse your good way of life in Christ.

For it is better, if it is God's will, that you suffer for doing well than for doing evil. *Because Christ also suffered for sins once, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring you to God; being put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit; in which he also went and preached to the spirits in prison, who before were disobedient, when God waited patiently in the days of Noah, while the ship was being built. In it, few, that is, eight souls, were saved through water. This is a symbol of baptism, which now saves you—not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ who is at the right hand of God, having gone into heaven, angels and authorities and powers being made subject to him.* (1 Peter 3:14-21, emphasis added)

“...Jesus Christ, Who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers having been subjected to Him.” Christ Jesus sits in Authority now. We are living in the Kingdom of God, now! All angels, all authorities, and all powers are subjected to Him. He reigns, now! Christ reigns and all is subjected to Him.

Peter first encourages wives to be respectful of their husbands and husbands to honor their wives. Peter is encouraging love in the home, in the family, in the assembly. If any of us should suffer for doing the righteous thing; if punishment comes upon us for being truthful and honorable to Him, then we should bear the pain of suffering. We should always keep in our minds, bodies and souls the Truth that is Christ Jesus. We are encouraged to “... always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you....” Defending the hope that is in you is Christ Jesus. The hope is that Christ Jesus will eventually set all things right. Tears and sorrows will be wiped away. Death will be abolished. All will be in His presence. The hope that is in us is Christ Jesus and that is our defense.

These verses are cited by the advocates of the doctrine of eternal conscious torment to rationalize a judgment of others who do not believe the same things in the same ways. These verses are used to “defend” denominational precepts; the “traditions of men” become idols replacing

“...the Hope that is in us.” Many Traditionalist authorities condemn men, women and children to eternal conscious torment and they defend their condemnation using these verses as a catalyst. “Being prepared to give a defense of the hope that is in you” is not the same as giving a defense of eternal conscious torment or other traditions of men.

Christ Jesus is the only Righteous One. He suffered torment on a cross for our salvation. He suffered “once for sins.” He suffered once to pay the ransom for the sins of the world, even the sins of the unrepentant rebel. He suffered once to pay the ransom for believers and for unbelievers. Even for those who never heard His Gospel.

Christ Jesus “was made alive in the Spirit and in which He proclaimed to the spirits in prison....” What did He proclaim? “He suffered once for sins.” Who are the spirits in prison? He preached to the whole of the world who did not obey God’s command to repent during the time of Noah. He preached salvation to those who rejected Him and who died in their sins. He preached He is their blessed hope.

For to this end *the Good News was preached even to the dead*, that they might be judged indeed as men in the flesh, but live as to God in the spirit. But the end of all things is near. Therefore be of sound mind, self-controlled, and sober in prayer. *And above all things be earnest in your love among yourselves, for love covers a multitude of sins.*(1 Peter 4:6-8, emphasis added)

Mr. Sprenger points out the “dead” cited in these verses are the same “saints in prison” written about earlier. He writes, “Peter is still referring to the souls in prison from the days of Noah, whom Christ preached to, presumably following His crucifixion and descension into the ‘lower parts of the earth’, in which He ‘lead captive a host of captives...’(Ephesians 4:8,9)” Consider what this means. It reveals the truth “concerning the purpose of God’s judgments on mankind in order to bring about his future plans for them to live in the Spirit!”

The doctrine of universal reconciliation preaches that Christ Jesus is the hope for believers and the hope for unbelievers. Christ Jesus preached to the dead who never heard His Gospel. He saved those who had no

inclination to believe He was their Messiah. Consequently, all will be reconciled to Him, to the Father and God will be "all in all."

...UR IN 2 PETER

But don't forget this one thing, beloved, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. *The Lord is not slow concerning his promise, as some count slowness; but is patient with us, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.* (2 Peter 3:8-9, emphasis added)

This is the second letter Peter writes to these good folks. He is reminding them of their position in Christ Jesus and the status they hold in the Kingdom of God. These good people have heard the prophets and listened to apostolic teaching. Peter cautions them about the unbelieving world that will mock them and try their patience. The mockery will be rampant and the evidence of sin will be overwhelming. Men will preach with scoffing tones that the promise of Christ's coming is false and wishful thinking. They will preach that nothing has changed since the beginning of time. But, Peter points out the scoffers and mockers ignore the fact that it is God Who created all the earth, everything on the earth, the seas, the skies and everything living in them. God created mankind, even the scoffers. God knows their mockery, too. He is not blind to them.

The Father and the Son created all there is in the world. It is the same power. Peter says that "...heavens and earth that now exist are stored up for fire, being kept until the day of judgment and destruction of the ungodly." The promise is that God does not want any of His creation to perish. It is His wish that "...all should reach repentance." Will God not keep His promise? Will His wish not be? Will His will be thwarted by a man's choice? God is an all-consuming fire. He is a righteous fire. Every person will be tried by His Holy fire. The dross will be burned away to ash and the purity of God's creation will remain. Peter tells us what will be burned away. The fire will come quickly and without warning in the same way a thief comes in the night. The universe will be consumed by fire and dissolved. The works, good and bad, will be exposed by the

burning of God's Holy fire. Peter is confident these things will come to pass and he asks, "...What sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness....?"

Peter tells us we wait patiently for this time to come. God is not slow to keep His promise. We expect the heavens and the earth to be made new. Only righteousness will dwell there. Until then Peter exhorts us to "...be diligent to be found by Him without spot or blemish, and at peace." Mr. Sprenger contends God is "literally not purposing...that any should perish, but for all to come to repentance." The promise originally given to Abraham is still in effect.

This is His promise: None will perish and all will repent. That's as plain as can be spoken. God wishes that none will perish and that all will reach repentance. The doctrine of eternal conscious torment does not allow for a Sovereign God. The doctrine states God is Sovereign, but the doctrine limits God's power to save all men. The doctrine believes God does not choose to save all men. Eternal conscious torment contradicts scripture.

Universal reconciliation is a doctrine teaching no souls will perish and all will repent. All will be reconciled to God. His love is that great, even greater still.

...UR IN 1 JOHN

And he is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not for ours only, but also for the whole world. (1 John 2:2, emphasis added)

Christ Jesus was obedient to His Father to the point of dying on a cross. Christ Jesus died on that cross for the clearing of my account. My sins are no longer recorded. Christ Jesus paid my account in full. Not only has he cleared my account He has cleared the accounts "for the sins of the whole world." His death was not in vain. His death was for the sins of the whole world. He is the propitiation for the sins of the whole world. Mr. Salisbury and many others rightly conclude the doctrine of eternal conscious torment "makes hell an eternal monument to the devil's works of sin and death."

Everyone who sins also commits lawlessness. Sin is lawlessness. You know that he was revealed to take away our sins, and in him is no sin. Whoever remains in him doesn't sin. Whoever sins hasn't seen him, neither knows him. Little children, let no one lead you astray. He who does righteousness is righteous, even as he is righteous. He who sins is of the devil, for the devil has been sinning from the beginning. *To this end the Son of God was revealed, that he might destroy the works of the devil.* (1 John 3:4-8, emphasis added)

Christ Jesus came from His place in heaven. He came in the likeness of His Father and in the likeness of mankind. He is the atoning sacrifice for sins of the world. Every evil thing Satan caused Jesus Christ made void.

I paraphrase A.E. Knoch's commentary on these verses from the Concordant Literal Version (CLV). Satan is the Christ's Adversary. That title is appropriate considering Satan's goal to disrupt God's creation even to destroy it. It was in Eden that Satan constructed the lie that led to Eve's disobedience and subsequently to Adam's Fall. Peter warns in 1 Peter 5:8, "Be sober! Watch! For your plaintiff, the Adversary, is walking about as a roaring lion, seeking someone to swallow up;" It is Satan who inflicts Job with painful boils when Satan challenges God to remove His protection from Job. Satan introduced sin. False doctrines and slanderous thoughts are caused by Satan's deceptions. He is the root of lawlessness. He stands at the door and beckons men to idolize any and everything that is not of the Father.

Jesus came. He lived, preached, was persecuted, punished and hung on a criminal's cross. He was mercilessly impugned by those He came to save. He died and was placed into the grave. From that grave He was resurrected. In all of this He and He alone annulled all that Satan has done or caused to be done. All sin has been made void. Jesus came and Jesus lives. He has undone what Satan, the Adversary, has done. Eventually the Adversary will be bound and his influence on God's creation will no longer be. Christ Jesus did not die for the sins of those only who believe Him. He died for the sins of the world.

Ask yourself if it is even possible, remotely possible, that Satan has been successful in causing yet another delusion? I ask you to consider Christian celebrations such as Christmas and Easter which are heavily influenced by pagan festivals. Would Satan, if he could, cause some men to declare other men will burn in hell fire for eternity? Would he give those same men credence in the world to the degree their false proclamation would surpass the love of God?

I believe God's nature is first and foremost love.

Beloved, let us love one another, *for love is of God; and everyone who loves has been born of God, and knows God. He who doesn't love doesn't know God, for God is love.* By this God's love was revealed in us, that God has sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we loved God, but that *he loved us, and sent his Son as the atoning sacrifice for our sins.* Beloved, if *God loved us in this way, we also ought to love one another.* No one has seen God at any time. If we love one another, God remains in us, and his love has been perfected in us.

By this we know that we remain in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit. We have seen and testify that the Father has sent the Son as the Savior of the world. Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God remains in him, and he in God. We know and have believed the love which God has for us. *God is love, and he who remains in love remains in God, and God remains in him. In this love has been made perfect among us, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment, because as he is, even so are we in this world.* There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear has punishment. He who fears is not made perfect in love. *We love him, because he first loved us.* If a man says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who doesn't love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen? This commandment we have from him, that

he who loves God should also love his brother. (1 John 4:7-21, emphasis added)

There is much that can be made of this chapter from God's Holy Word. First without doubt is the precept that God is love. We, as believers, should at least love all other believers with the kind of love that the Father has for us. His love is an agape love. We should always pray for others, even those who may not know Him. We should always have their interests above our own. After all the Father set aside His best interest when He first created each of us and when He gave the life of His Son, Christ Jesus, for the atonement for the sins of the world.

Scholars often conclude from verses of this chapter that God only loves those who believe in Christ Jesus. But is that the truth? God's love is pure. His love is not tainted with fleshly concerns.

He who doesn't love doesn't know God, for *God is love*. (1 John 4:8, emphasis added)

It takes an honest assessment of ourselves to try to confirm that we know God. Without love we cannot know God, "...God is love." Something less than love cannot know God. I have been honest with myself and my assessment of myself with regard to love is bleak. I miss the target badly. Without the corrective force of God's love I could never know Him. Without the corrective force of God's love Paul would have carried out terror on "The Way." God's love is manifested in Christ Jesus. He is the corrective force applied to His creation. "...Every knee will bow and every tongue will confess Jesus is Lord to the glory of the Father." The corrective force of Christ's presence will bring about repentance even repentance by wretched men like Paul, like me. We live with Christ in us. We live with the love of God in us! Why?

In this is love, not that we loved God, but that *he loved us, and sent his Son as the atoning sacrifice for our sins*. (1 John 4:10, emphasis added)

Christ Jesus is God's love. Christ Jesus is God's Judgment! Christ Jesus loved us before we ever knew Him. He created us from before the

foundation of the world. He loves us the moment He creates us. He loves us through all that is good and through all that is not. He loves us through trials. He tests us to fortify His love in us. Christ Jesus so loved the world that He gave His life as the Holy and Final atonement for the sins of the whole world. Who in His creation can be excluded from His love? The doctrine of universal reconciliation preaches no person can forever reject Christ. Christ's love overcomes the world. His power is not of this world. The corrective force of His love changes the hearts of all men.

Because God's love is within us we should love one another. We should love even our enemies. We should give them food to eat and living water to drink. We should consider our enemy our brother. "There is no love greater than the love of a brother who gives his life for another." When we love one another the power of God lives in us and His power sustains us. There is nothing to fear in love. He lives in us and we need not fear in His love. The world cannot overcome us. Jesus is the Son of God. One day every person will be judged. Until that day we live in this world, but we should not fear our life in it.

We have seen and testify that *the Father has sent the Son as the Savior of the world*. (1 John 4:14, emphasis added)

We are admonished in this letter written by John to seek the Holy Spirit and test everything being learned to confirm "they are from God...." There are people in every corner of the world making claims to have supernatural power and authority. There are men and women bearing theological doctorates and professional standing espousing doctrines that are questionable, at least, false doctrine, at worst. They teach us spiritual things and we accept what they teach without questioning them or even questioning their motives.

We are warned that false prophets are in the world. They are many. Their intent is not Truth, but something far less than that. John describes how we can discern the true from the false. He tells us to test them, challenge them to prove they are from God. John encourages us to be confident in our position in Christ Jesus. The Light of Christ within us overcomes the darkness of the world. His Power in us is living and courageous. It is greater Power than any other in the world.

Our hearts are not in this world even though we live in it for a short time. John understands not everyone is going to listen to what he and the others are preaching. Those who listen have the Spirit of God within them. Those who do not listen have fear and terror in Its place.

We love him, *because he first loved us.* (1 John 4:19, emphasis added)

God loves all. John writes that we lie when we say “I love God,” but hate our brother. It is not congruent. God is love and in us. God in us does not hate. God from His Throne does not hate. Any man saying he loves God must also love his brother.

The doctrine of eternal conscious torment requires God's love be only partial. God must possess a vengeful wrath that hates His children. God must maintain tormenting fires that punish the rebellious creation.

Universal reconciliation teaches God is love and He will be “all in all.” Christ Jesus lovingly obeyed His Father. To His glory the whole of creation is subjected to Him. He in turn subjects all to the Father. God is all in all.

...UR IN REVELATION

“Worthy are you, our Lord and God, the Holy One, to receive the glory, the honor, and the power, for *you created all things, and because of your desire they existed, and were created!*” (Revelation 4:11, emphasis added)

The angels sing and the Twenty-four Elders cast their crowns. They glorify God with these words. “All things” are created by His will. It is His will that all be saved.

The doctrine of eternal conscious torment interprets “all things” are created by His will, but not “all things” will be reconciled to Him by His will. The doctrine teaches His will is that only some will be reconciled. The majority of mankind, according to the doctrine, must be eternally, consciously tormented. The doctrine concludes that God the Father and God the Son purposely created some that are not redeemable.

God puts His Spirit into the lives of every person He creates. The Spirit of God cannot be overwhelmed by the will of those He creates.

I saw, and I heard something like a voice of many angels around the throne, the living creatures, and the elders; and the number of them was ten thousands of ten thousands, and thousands of thousands; saying with a loud voice, "Worthy is the Lamb who has been killed to receive the power, wealth, wisdom, strength, honor, glory, and blessing!"

I heard *every created thing which is in heaven, on the earth, under the earth, on the sea, and everything in them*, saying, "To him who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb be the blessing, the honor, the glory, and the dominion, forever and ever! Amen!"

The four living creatures said, "Amen!" The elders fell down and worshiped. (Revelation 5:11-14, emphasis added)

What a scene! Every angel in heaven singing. There were more angels than a person could count. The number of angels singing is indescribably large. Angels at the Throne of God singing. Elders singing praises to the Son of God. There should be no doubt that "...every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all that is in them..." means every creature. There is not an excluded creature. "Every creature..." praises the Father and the Son.

The doctrine of eternal conscious torment excludes the majority of mankind. It must in order for the doctrine to be accepted by those being taught. The doctrine requires "every creature" means something less than "every creature."

They sang the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying, "Great and marvelous are your works, Lord God, the Almighty! *Righteous and true are your ways, you King of the nations*. Who wouldn't fear you, Lord, and glorify your name? For you only are holy.

For all the nations will come and worship before you. For your righteous acts have been revealed.”(Revelation 15:3-4, emphasis added)

Mr. Sprenger rightly tells us, “This is the ‘great mystery’ spoken of by Paul concerning God’s eternal, redemptive purpose to reconcile all creation back to Himself.” We should conclude that God will be “all in all.” These verses from The Revelation of Jesus Christ describe the world after the judgments have been laid upon the earth. Bowls and trumpets of judgment have been poured out. Even so we are told, “All the nations will come and worship before you.”

Are we to conclude “all the nations” are all nations or are they only nations remaining after the judgments? These verses are a reiteration of the promise given to Abraham in Genesis as Mr. Sprenger points out. Do we have any authority to rule out any other person or any other nation aside from ourselves? If “all the nations” are those remaining who are they? Serious questions deserving your hard study.

He will wipe away from them every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; neither will there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain, any more. The first things have passed away.”

He who sits on the throne said, “*Behold, I am making all things new.*” He said, “*Write, for these words of God are faithful and true.*” (Revelation 21:4-5, emphasis added)

It does not matter if your theology is historical or futurist. It does not matter if you believe Jesus has already come or if He is coming again. No matter your eschatological theology He is “...making all things new.” What things? All things! The doctrine of eternal conscious torment wants us to believe these verses do not apply to all people, but only to people who agree with the doctrine. If you are a pre-tribulation futurist then you believe you will be caught up to heaven before a great tribulation comes. “All things new” would not apply to you, because you have already been made new. So, too, has the mid-tribulationist believer already been made new. The post-tribulation believer will be among those “all things made new.”

Universal reconciliation teaches the believer and the rebel will be reconciled to Him. "All things will be made new." The doctrine of eternal conscious torment does not want us to believe "these words are trustworthy and true" on their face. The doctrine adds that every person during these "end days" will have already been chosen or has already chosen. All others are not among "all things made new." All others are condemned by God, Who is love, to an eternal conscious torment. It is convenient for the advocates of eternal conscious torment that their doctrine reserves for themselves the eternal life of pleasure in Christ. Billions of others are committed to eternal conscious torment.

CHAPTER 17

Heresy?

Biblical scholars from days past and days present have written about their advocacy of the doctrine of eternal conscious torment. Dr. Sawyer built a collection of quotes and resources spoken or written by great theologians regarding their advocacy of this doctrine. I augment those quotes and resources from current contemporary Biblical scholars. The torments of the doctrine have been fairly expressed in this work. The Internet is a great conduit to the sermons, editorials and thoughts of those advancing the doctrine. As Dr. Sawyer hoped in 1879 I hope in this century that the words used to describe the tortures put upon unrepentant men will cause many to stop and reconsider the doctrine.

We have discussed the doctrines of total depravity, probation, infant salvation and eternal conscious torment. They are all linked. We looked at the theological principles of Calvinism and of Arminianism as they relate to the doctrine of eternal conscious torment. We've examined dozens of scriptures that are convincing that God's will is that all will be reconciled to Him; universal reconciliation. Even if these scriptures do not convince you completely, I pray, they, at least, give you pause. If there is even a doubt the traditional doctrine of eternal conscious torment is flawed, then it should not be preached as if it were true.

Eternal conscious torment and universal reconciliation are theological doctrines and they are contradictory. Both doctrines cannot be simultaneously true. However, good men and women believe with their whole hearts in God's ultimate redemption of all. Good men and

women believe just as completely in the doctrine of eternal punishment and all that comes with that.

There should not be a division between the advocates of eternal conscious torment and the advocates of universal reconciliation. We are brothers after all. We share the same belief in the same Gospel. Unfortunately, the two sides are far apart. In the eyes of the scholars and advocates of eternal conscious torment the advocates of universal reconciliation are engaged in heresy. How did we get here? How is it honorable, educated men; men seeking righteousness, come to such a degree of disagreement?

Tommy Clayton is a Content Developer and Broadcast Editor. He has written an article for the Grace To You website in which he declares eternal conscious torment is hell.¹⁰⁶ Hell is real justice and provable in Scripture. He speaks roughly of persons holding an opposing view that the atoning sacrifice of Christ Jesus is so powerful that all persons ever created will be reconciled to God. Mr. Clayton makes a distinction between people who believe as he does and those who disagree with the doctrine he advocates. He writes, “Others hold to a form of Universalism that holds out the false hope that hell is not the final destination for sinners. In their view, God’s redeeming work doesn’t stop at death. God will eventually reconcile every creature to Himself—yes, even those in hell.”

Advocates of universal reconciliation do not believe in hell. Men will not be redeemed from a place that does not exist. Mr. Clayton’s advocates a hell that is eternal conscious torment. Advocates of universal reconciliation believe what God tells us in His Holy Word. It is no different for the advocates of eternal conscious torment.

We differ on interpretations of hell. Hell is an unseen place. It means a grave. It could be the word for pit. I think Mr. Clayton presumes to know much about what advocates of universal reconciliation believe about hell. Mr. Clayton reports that “God’s redeeming work” stops at death. I think Mr. Clayton is speaking about the death of a man. Once that man passes to death the chance for redemption is passed, too. A physically dead man is redeemed because he believed in Christ Jesus while alive. If

¹⁰⁶ Tommy Clayton. “*The Truth About Hell.*” Grace to You website. April 30, 2011. <https://www.gty.org/library/blog/B110430/~>. Date accessed: 06/07/2018.

not redeemed while alive there is no chance for redemption from eternal conscious torment in hell.

Advocates of universal reconciliation examine scripture from the Old Testament to refute the idea that God's redeeming work stops at death. Ecclesiastes 12 speaks to our need to remember God, our Creator. We should have no pleasure in the evil days we live in. Our pleasure rests in Him. There will come a time when life will be a burden. Skies will be darkened. There will be a time when laborers are few and warriors are weak. Blindness, a weakening of sight overcomes all eventually. We become fearful our days are waning. Things that are precious to us in this temporal world become of little consequence. Then comes the end when "the dust returns to the earth as it was, and the spirit returns to God who gave it." (Ecclesiastes 12:7)

These verses are as valid for us today as they were for the Israelites then. No matter how difficult or how easy our lives are all men will die. Shall we say God's Word applies only to the Israelites? I doubt that is a good idea. It is clear God's redeeming work has been done on earth through Christ Jesus as all spirits return to the One Who created them.

Mr. Clayton cites another evangelist, John Blanchard. Mr. Blanchard opens his argument against the doctrine of universal reconciliation. He writes, "The idea that those who go there [ECT in hell] will eventually be released and join the rest of humanity in heaven has not a shred of biblical evidence to support it." He impugns the character of millions of persons who disagree with him by claiming their belief "is in a fairy tale."

Mr. Clayton then suggests the advocates of universal reconciliation have fallen into a trap set by the devil. Mr. Clayton presumes his interpretation of scripture is superior to the interpretation of others. He declares with certainty the Holy Word of God clearly defines eternal conscious torment. Mr. Clayton would have the world believe that advocates of universal reconciliation are deceived by no less than Satan. The advocates of universal reconciliation declare with equal certainty the Holy Word of God proves their doctrine is true. Mr. Clayton's views are shared by hundreds of thousands, even millions, of traditionalist Christians. Calvinist theologians, Arminian theologians, Orthodox theologians all agree that God is not love. Or, at the very least runs out of love.

Mr. Clayton is right to say, though, Satan does have the ability to deceive good folks. The traditionalist is so certain of his doctrine of eternal conscious torment that he gives himself license to judge someone who disagrees with him on that doctrine. Advocates of universal reconciliation recall Christ's cautionary words. "You will be judged by the measure you judge others."

Nearly every major denomination in the Western world and beyond advocates eternal conscious torment and they call it hell. Wikipedia lists the major denominations by numbers of members.¹⁰⁷ In America the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) has a reported 15 million members. The National Baptist Convention, USA, Inc. (NBC-USA) consists of 7.5 million members. Calvinist churches combined call 55 – 85 million people members. Among the Calvinist churches are Presbyterians. Pentecostalism worldwide consists of 280 million people of which the Assembly of God (AoG) claim 65 million. These are but a few of the thousands of divisions among believers and denominations. Denominationalism is not a good thing. It is the thing of traditions.

The SBC met in Phoenix, Arizona in 2011. They met to define their position on the doctrine of eternal conscious torment in response to Rob Bell who had written a very popular book entitled "Love Wins." The SBC resolved and affirmed their "belief in the biblical teaching on eternal, conscious punishment of the unregenerate in hell."¹⁰⁸ They advocate and strongly exhort "Southern Baptists to proclaim faithfully the depth and gravity of sin against a holy God, the reality of hell, and the salvation of sinners by God's grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ Jesus alone, to the glory of God alone."

The NBC-USA publishes their statement of beliefs at their website. They advocate eternal conscious torment and speak directly to "The

¹⁰⁷ "List of Christian Denominations by Number of Members." Wikipedian. Publication date unknown. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_Christian_denominations_by_number_of_members. Date accessed: 04/02/2018.

¹⁰⁸ "On the Reality of Hell." A Resolution of the Southern Baptist Convention. Phoenix, AZ. 2011 <http://www.sbc.net/resolutions/1214/on-the-reality-of-hell>, Date accessed: 04/02/2018.

World to Come.”¹⁰⁹ They affirm “the wicked will be adjudged to endless punishment, and the righteous to endless joy, and that this judgment will fix forever the final state of men in heaven or hell...”

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) hosts a membership of nearly 4 million people. ELCA is a liberal denomination. In 2011 they completed a conference with the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops and published the outcome.¹¹⁰ Item 37 defines the position regarding hell they agreed upon. “The wicked are separated from God in death: If you believe from the witness of the divine word that the souls of the saints are in heaven, you also have to believe as well that the souls of the wicked are in hell.” The conference also concludes in the same publication that the saving or redeeming work of God does not end at death as do other denominations. In ELCA’s doctrines there remains hope after death that follows the Catholic concept of purgatory.

The United Methodist Church (UMC) claims a membership of 15 million souls. Their denomination has a softer view of hell and what happens to people after death. They write, “The traditional Christian view has always been that those who believe will share eternal joy with God in heaven, while those who refuse God’s love suffer endless separation from God.” It could be said that to “...suffer endless separation from God...”¹¹¹ could be eternal torment. The doctrine of the UMC is only different from other Western churches in the degree of suffering.

Presbyterians, Pentecostals, Independent congregations and a myriad of smaller denominations advocate the doctrine of eternal conscious torment for the unrepentant rebel. Some soften the language. Some are more vocal and vehement in their assertions that God is not willing to save all. Others play around the edges and avoid the subject.

¹⁰⁹ “*What We Believe: Articles of Faith.*” National Baptist Conventions U.S.A. Inc. Publication date not known. <http://www.nationalbaptist.com/about-us/what-we-believe.html>. Date accessed: 04/02/2018.

¹¹⁰ Lowell G. Almen and Richard J. Sklba. “*The Hope of Eternal Life: Lutherans and Catholics in Dialogue XI.*” Lutheran University Press. Minneapolis, MN. Publication date not known. http://download.elca.org/ELCA Resource Repository/The_Hope_of_Eternal_Life.pdf. Date accessed: 06/07/2018.

¹¹¹ “*What Happens After A Person Dies.*” The United Methodist Church. Publication date unknown. <http://www.umc.org/what-we-believe/what-happens-after-a-person-dies>. Date accessed: 04/02/2018.

That's where we are. We disagree and in disagreement accusations and arguments develop. The proponents of eternal conscious torment vigorously defend their doctrine even at the cost of dissociating themselves from their brothers in Christ. Where do the divisions start? Hard to say for sure, but a main cause of friction between them starts in the ways in which God's Holy Word is translated. Every division, however, is likely rooted in "traditions of men."

Leave the doctrine of eternal conscious torment aside for a moment. Consider all the other divisions that have been built up by good Christian men and women. Leaders of denominations and congregations cannot agree on a multitude of doctrines. Each Leader will expound on theories and theologies developed by other leaders who developed theories and theologies based on men they studied.

The purest early Christian church was remarkably simple. There was a person known to the congregation as an authority and that person led the community of believers. This role was originally held by the Apostles. The church grew so large that Peter and the others could not adequately lead the church. There were factions growing between the Jews who lived in Israel and the Jews who lived in Greece, but stayed on in Jerusalem after Christ's ascension. Barnabas may have been among this group. The Apostles appointed others to serve and to fill the unmet needs of the community. Stephen was among this group. Early on there is a division developing in the church. This one in the form of privilege. Organic Jews were seemingly better treated than foreign Jews. Divisions formed one upon another until we come to today and there are divisions within divisions. The church first formed in Jerusalem would look nothing like congregations today.

It is impossible to say the biases of the many scholars have not made their way into Bible translations, doctrines and traditions. There are divisions in the church over which translation is truly the "Authorized Version." God fearing men will consciously and even conspicuously disdain any other believer who does not follow their Bible interpretation exclusively. There is a core of dedicated Christian believers who are convinced the King James Version (translation) of the Bible is the only "authorized version." There are believers trusting modern translations as infallible forgetting that the Bible they are reading was published for the

purpose of making money through sales. Some of those are copyrighted and the owners will not allow the use of their translations for commercial purposes even though they did not write the Bible themselves.

There is a certain Truth. That Truth is Light. That Truth destroys darkness. That Truth is in every person ever created. Jesus told His Disciples that the Holy Spirit would cause them to remember all He had taught them. The "Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things, and will remind you of all that I said to you."

I think it is provable that the traditions of men block or distort the teaching of the Holy Spirit. It is provable in the fact brothers and sisters have segregated themselves into denominations and congregations. The Holy Spirit still "teaches all." For a time the traditions of men try to overwhelm the Truth. The Truth cannot be overpowered by the traditions of men. The traditions of men will be exposed by the Truth.

Paul describes to Timothy what the world looked like during his era. Paul pointed out there were charlatans everywhere. Paul told Timothy that there were men in the world making a profit on the Word of God. But he said, "Every Scripture is God-breathed and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work"(2 Timothy 3:16-17).

"Hold fast!" Paul says. We know what is true because it is the Holy Spirit teaching us all. "All scripture is inspired by God." It is the Spirit of God that teaches us all. He is not a God of confusion, yet men have distorted His inspired word in many ways. Men use God's inspired Word to persuade themselves and others that eternal conscious torment is indeed inspired by God. It is not. The doctrine of eternal conscious torment is a man made tradition that has been elevated to scriptural fact in orthodox Christendom. The doctrine is weak, but it carries a great deal of weight in the Western world.

The scholars have written volumes regarding every imaginable spiritual lesson to be gleaned from God's Holy Word. Scholars have written studied theses and have been rebutted by other scholars of scripture. There is a lack of agreement between men and their various traditions, but on the doctrine of eternal conscious torment the level of agreement is very nearly universal. Eternal conscious torment is a

doctrine that should be discussed openly and disputed. I have maintained that if there is even a remote possibility that eternal conscious torment is a false doctrine it should not be preached.

Biblical scholars will go a long way to “prove” the doctrine is a fact. I have talked with Pastors after sermons in which they declare in certain terms that the unbeliever will suffer God’s undying wrath in eternal conscious torment. They buttress the doctrine with poorly developed answers. They’ll cite the same passages of scripture that advocates of universal reconciliation use to disprove the false doctrine. Their explanations fall short.

Bible translations are almost too numerous to count. It’s important to remember, though, Bibles have publishers. Publishers want to sell books, even Bibles. It’s a profit motive for them. In 1983 I purchased my first Bible. I still have it and I refer to it often. It is an early edition of the New International Version (NIV). The NIV New Testament was completed in 1973. This version was touted to be easier to read, that much of the arcane language in the King James Version was replaced with up to date language. In the preface of the Bible I purchased it says this: “As in other ancient documents, the precise meaning of the Biblical texts is sometimes uncertain. ...Although archaeological and linguistics discoveries in this century aid in understanding difficult passages, some uncertainties remain.”

I’ve looked at several translations. For a long while I was naive in my thinking that all the translations were precisely the same, but only the presentation varied among them. I have since learned that the versions omit scripture verses and poorly translate Greek or Hebrew words to common language. Much of what makes it into a Bible translation are the biases of the men producing it. I openly declare I know little to nothing about Greek, Hebrew or Aramaic. If I had to diagram a sentence in English I’d probably be stymied after identifying the subject and predicate. I am dependent on the scholarship of others to translate and to interpret the meanings of words in these foreign tongues. I am not alone. Translators have biases. Their prejudices are reflected in their work. If they are looking for eternal punishment their translations of original texts will find it. If they approve of a particular doctrine their interpretations will uncover proof for that doctrine.

What, then, am I to do when translations and interpretations of God's Holy Word do not agree, especially, on a doctrine as critical as eternal conscious torment? It is not that difficult to solve this problem. Literal translations of the original texts are readily available. Young's Literal Translation and The Concordant Literal Version are excellent word for word translations. The World English Bible is an excellent resource that was deliberately produced and put into the Public Domain so others could employ scripture without fear of violating copyright laws.

Gerry Beauchemin provides his insight regarding the Concordant Literal Version. In his book, *Hope Beyond Hell*, Mr. Beauchemin parses the meaning of "aion" deliberately, delicately and forthrightly. "Aion" does not mean "everlasting" or "forever and ever." It means for an age, an eon, a specified length of time with a beginning and an end. Only God is eternal...without a beginning and without end.

For me, this revelation changed my belief in eternal conscious torment. Because I came to a better understanding of the word I am better able to understand the Word. I give honor and glory to God Who never fails, never ceases to love and whose mercies are fresh every day.

As for me and for my house we will love the Lord. There is no force powerful enough to cause the love of the Father to reject any of His children, much less design a wrathful judgment as described by those holding fast to the doctrine of eternal conscious torment. It is my prayer all who read this book will find reason to pause and consider their personal theology and reject this awful and hateful doctrine.

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Note: These are references provided by Dr. Sawyer in the production of his volume entitled, "Eternal Punishment: In the Very Words of Its Advocates." Links to Internet resources are added by the author of this book to facilitate further research. Contemporary resources in this book are presented in the form of footnotes.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

James “Jim” Barnes will tell you he is nobody special in the sight of the world. He will tell you he is forever grateful that God considers him special. Jim believes God considers all of His creation specially made.

Jim’s life and accomplishments are few. He is only a hero in the eyes of his family and even then with “rose colored glasses.” He was fortunate to graduate from high school. He served in the U. S. Army for seven years. He earned a college degree in Social Work.

Jim’s career was social service. He investigated elder abuse and supervised a small contingent of social work specialists. He helped steer policy implementation in a State protective services agency. Then, retirement came.

Jim will tell you that his greatest accomplishments came in church. He served his church as a Vacation Bible School teacher, Sunday School Teacher and events helper. God blessed Jim with a desire to preach and God provided the places. For a decade Jim has preached in small churches throughout the Texas Gulf Coast. He preaches when asked. His family might say he preaches even when not asked.

God tells us in his Holy Word that “not many should strive to be preachers, for they will be judged more strictly.” This is an admonition to be certain that preaching is truly a person’s calling, and that what is preached must be the absolute truth. Yet human traditions are problematic, and basic Christian doctrines are formally established within these traditions. Traditions cause divisions among believers. Preachers should take care to advocate the truth for they will be judged more closely.

In *God’s Gift to Humanity*, author James Barnes explores a conflict in doctrines, noting that while we are called by God to be unified to others in love, many preachers and denominations preach the doctrine of eternal conscious torment. But this doctrine is cruel, and both traditional biblical authorities and advocates of the doctrine of eternal conscious torment have spread this cruel message throughout the world while eschewing the doctrine of universal reconciliation, which is the blessed hope that God actually describes in his Word.

God’s primary and foremost attribute is love—not callousness and cruelty. God’s love will always be overwhelming, and in the light of his mercy and grace, we can look forward to that day when he will call us back to him in a universal reconciliation. Because as it is written, all things will be made new.

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