

An Adventure in Taking Scripture Literally
or
How to be Accused of Being a Liberal Heretic by Evangelical Christians

© by Peter Hiett

Dear Reader,

Over the last several years, I've found myself "haunted" (I think it was a Holy Ghost) by a certain set of scriptures. Having preached through Ephesians, John, and then the Revelation, I was genuinely surprised by the number of texts that seemed to say that God would redeem "all things." I had always been trained that "all" didn't really mean "all." People argued that these "all" passages were modified by a set of "not all" passages. I guess I always felt uncomfortable about explaining the "all" scriptures away, yet also was aware of the texts that seemed to be contradictory – especially those in the Revelation and Matthew.

As we preached through the Revelation, I realized that we, the church, had said a bunch of things regarding the end and final judgment that scripture didn't necessarily say. Part of the reason I preached through Matthew was that I knew it had some of the most blatant texts regarding an "eternal Hell"...and not just blatant, but straight from the mouth of Jesus. Well as we preached, I kept finding the same thing: texts that I thought said one thing, didn't say that "thing" as clearly as I had thought, and in fact many of them seemed to imply that God's grace was far bigger and more powerful than I ever imagined. The "not all" passages didn't say "not all" as I had imagined. And the text certainly didn't paint a picture of hell that matched popular evangelical belief.

That led me to say some things that made some people pretty nervous. I understand. They made me nervous! On my sabbatical, I didn't plan to mess with this topic much, yet it seemed that wherever I went it kept coming up. And so, I decided to make a list of all the pertinent scriptures. Then I started to add comments as well as quotes from outside sources and sermons that I had preached. I then divided it into sections and produced a summary at the end of each section. The summaries are titled, "It Would Seem That."

Originally, I intended this document to simply be notes for myself, but soon realized that this might be valuable for others. It's not a book or a systematized theology, yet I hope it is a big-time discussion starter. "It Would Seem That" means, "It Would Seem That." I really don't know, and yet the more I look at the text, the more I don't know how to argue with what "seems" to be true. Maybe you do. So pray that God would lead you. Read his Word. Wonder at the depths of His Mercy. AND feel free to disagree with me...but believe the Scripture.

You may ask why I've questioned popular assumptions about "Hell" and the "inclusive" texts of Scripture. Here are several reasons:

I want us to live to the praise of God's Glory revealed in Christ Jesus. I think we have underestimated the sufficiency and power of Christ's work of redemption on the cross. In American Evangelicalism we do this in the name of "free will," which I believe then diminishes the sovereign and gracious choice of God. In this way we claim merit for our own redemption. We thus "serve" God out of a carnal sense of "responsibility" (which is to not serve God), rather than serving him as an act of worship, which is the "chief end of man."

I want us to not idolize ourselves and our "free will." I am concerned that we American believers have come to view life as a great competition. We say that we are saved by grace, but what we mean is that we are saved by our "good choices" or the

quality of our will. I don't believe that we have "free will" until God grants us "free will" through his grace.

I want us to stop competing with each other and the world. When we view life as a competition and judgment as the finish line, when we compare ourselves to each other and measure ourselves against each other, when we judge each other and our selves, when we suspect that God grades on a curve, we need losers so that we can feel like winners. We need failures to define ourselves as successful. We need scapegoats. We already have a scapegoat. One has lost that we all might win. If I have any emotional stake in any other human being suffering in "Hell" other than Jesus, I probably do not understand the Gospel.

I want us to preach biblically. I am concerned that we no longer wrestle with the biblical text and therefore end up preaching societal convention. My understanding is that we are to be "reformed and always reforming" as the living Word leads us in expositing the written word. Expository preaching has forced me to wrestle with numerous texts that I would have otherwise dismissed.

I want us to be honest. I have faith that the Truth sets us free and that we can only arrive at the truth by being truthful. I do not believe I serve the Kingdom by hiding my questions, but by being honest. I also believe in the "Priesthood of all believers." All believers are called to wrestle with The Word. I do not need to protect the church from The Word.

I don't want people to go to Hell. By "Hell" I mean both Hades and Gehenna (where the rebellious are consumed by the eternal punishment and Fire). I know that no one's salvation is dependent on me, yet I believe that God has called me to participate in the proclamation and plan of his redemption. In the Gospels it becomes very clear that those who are most in danger of being cast into outer darkness are the "Sons of the Kingdom," those who struggle with the extent of God's Mercy in Christ. I don't want anyone to be cast into the outer darkness whether for three days or several million years. Furthermore, I do not want them to be devoured by Fire on the Day of Judgment. I want all people to see the glory of God in Christ Jesus NOW, no matter how long "forever" is.

I want us to serve God out of Love rather than Fear. I am to preach the gospel as an act of worship, not because I arrogantly think that God needs me. I am to obey him out of Love, not because I'm afraid that He might torture me in Hell. To serve God out of dreadful fear is to serve God out of faithlessness. Whatever does not proceed from faith is sin. Fear is the beginning of wisdom, but perfect love casts out fear. I want us to be perfected in love.

I want us to love our enemies. This is immensely hard, yet it appears that we only love Jesus as much as we love "the least of these." By asking the question "What if they all are saved?" we are forced to examine our hearts. I'm concerned that for some, possible redemption for all is viewed as terrible news, rather than gospel—great news.

Are we hanging on to resentment, hatred, and un-forgiveness? Jesus said, “If you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your father in heaven forgive your trespasses (Matt. 6:15).”

I want us to trust the heart of our Heavenly Father. “Jesus from the bosom of the Father, he has made him known.” If someone were to tell one of my children that I had other children that I planned to torture in unspeakable torment forever and ever without end, it would create some serious doubt about my character in the heart of my child. It would also fill me with intense wrath for the person that said such a thing. However, if someone told my child that I had other children that I disciplined in Love (even severely), it would create an entirely different response in me, and my child. If scripture is not exceedingly clear about “unending conscious torment with the wrath of God,” we better not say such things. I know that it may be a way to “win” converts at evangelistic rallies, but I can think of nothing else that would infuriate me more as a father than to be misrepresented in such a way. Obviously, God is not determined by my anthropomorphic views of fatherhood; however, He calls himself “Father” for a reason. Perhaps “Hell” is not retributive, but remedial. That makes sense to a Father’s heart.

I want others to trust the heart of our Heavenly Father. I want them to trust Jesus. If I were to ask most unbelievers why they did not WANT to believe in the “Christian God,” I think the first answer given would probably be something like: “I can’t believe in a god that would eternally torture a junior high kid who died in a bicycle accident just because he didn’t say the sinner’s prayer or believe that God had forgiven him.” I’ve always explained God’s prerogative to do so in the way we evangelicals have been trained, but maybe we’ve been defending a picture of God that is not honoring to God and deceptive to unbelievers. God is a consuming fire. Yes, he will discipline us severely at times. But Yes, He is always Love. And He always loves you more than you are even able to love yourself.

This is a working document. I plan on changing it and adding to it. So if it feels incomplete, it is. My hope is not that it would answer every question, but that it would make you fall more in love with our Lord. He is The Savior. We are saved by God's grace through faith in Jesus Christ alone. I'm convinced He is better, “gooder,” and more beautiful than any of us have ever imagined.



Color Key:

Black: Scripture and section titles.

Dark Blue: My commentary on particular texts.

Light Blue: My words from other occasions.

Green: Various outside sources.

Red: These are the “it would seem that” summary sections.

If you’re interested in “cutting to the chase” just read the red sections. If you think, “he’s insane,” go back and read why I think “it would seem that.”

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All Things New

Formerly: An Adventure in Taking Scripture “Literally”¹

Revelation 21:5...And he who was seated on the throne said, “Behold, I am making all things new.” Also he said, “Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.”

Are they trustworthy and true? Is He really making **all** things new? For years this verse has haunted me, and I’ve wanted to believe it, but so many seem to say I can’t, and I shouldn’t and some think that even to hope it’s true is a heresy. They say it doesn’t mean what it appears to mean. Does it?

DOES “ALL” MEAN “ALL”?

One of the first “rules” of hermeneutics (interpretation) is to interpret a word according to its immediate literary context. That is, ask the question: “Does the ‘English equivalent’ make sense within the verse in which it is placed?” Many times a Hebrew or Greek word can have more than one “English equivalent” or no “English equivalent.” Concepts like “dog” or “cat” are relatively easy to translate, (but still a language might have several words for “dog” or one word for “dog” and “cat”). Concepts like “eternity” are incredibly hard to translate. We don’t even know what it means in English. Some words like “Hell” have been used to translate several scriptural concepts, of which some seem to be almost diametrically opposed, one to the other (i.e. “outer darkness” and “consuming fire”). The concept “all” would seem to be relatively easy to translate. Surely all cultures have an idea of the “all” of something. I suspect it is fairly easy to translate. However, my language skills are limited, so I have to rely on textual aids and common sense. I must also welcome correction.

The Hebrew, “*kol*” is translated, “all,” “every,” or “whole.” “*Rab*” is translated “many.” According to J. Jeremias, in Hebrew and in Aramaic “many” (*rab*) sometimes means “all” (see Matt. 22:1-14, and *Jeremias, TDNT*, below). In Greek, the word translated “many” is “*polloi*.” “All” is the Greek “*pas*.” Because the Greek in the New Testament is often a translation of Hebrew or Aramaic, “*polloi*” seems to sometimes carry the inclusive sense of the Hebrew and Aramaic.

In English the immediate context reveals whether or not “all” really means “all” or whether the author is using a literary device like hyperbole. In Matt. 3:5, Matthew writes, “Then Jerusalem and *all* Judea and *all* the region about the Jordan were going out to him.” The context tells us that when Matthew writes “all Judea” he probably means “all the region of Judea,” just like he elaborates in the next phrase. And we all know that a region can’t just go see somebody. The context tells us that folks from all over the region went to see John, or that everybody in that region knew about John or possibly even saw John at the Jordan, but we are probably not meant to believe that they all were going out to him at once.

Below, I have reproduced some important “all” verses.² Many argue that in these verses “all” does not mean “all.” However, if “all” doesn’t mean “all,” it must mean something. What else

¹ Interpreting words in light of their immediate literary context, in light of the text’s literary genre, and in light of the author’s perceived meaning is what I mean by “taking scripture literally.” Many today say they take scripture literally and don’t at all. They take it “scientifically,” “mechanically,” “modernistically,” they take it the way they take the directions to their VCR. That’s a supreme tragedy, for God is so much more than your VCR. We must submit to the text and be comprehended by the Word, even before we comprehend the word.

would it mean? What are the other options? Below, I have offered possible alternatives, but they rarely seem to fit. In many verses, “all” is in parallel with one or more other instances of “all.” You would think that in these verses especially the meaning of “all” would be consistent.

If a text is part of a parable or a particular historical account, one might be alert for metaphor and hyperbole in regard to “all.” However, most of these passages are very theological. Indeed some are from the very heart of Paul’s Theology. Some are even declarative statements from the mouth of Yahweh or the Resurrected Christ.

It’s also interesting to note that all translations (at least that I have read), for these verses consistently use “all” in spite of seeming disagreements with other texts and the fact that these verses appear to clearly state what so many have regarded as heretical. That suggests that the translators had a difficult time translating “all” as anything but “all.”

Genesis 12:3...I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all (“Some of”? “Many of”? “Most of”? “All types of”? “Some from each of”?) the families of the earth shall be blessed.”

It’s critical to understand that from the very beginning, “Judaism” was about the whole world. God was PARTICULAR for the sake of being UNIVERSAL. He was particular in choosing the children of Israel. He became even more particular in “the seed of Abraham,” Jesus the Christ, through whom He makes “all things new.”

In the text there is the anticipation of “cursing,” yet still, “all the families of the earth shall be blessed.” Blessing is the final word. It is possible for people to be blessed after they’ve been cursed. We of all people ought to be aware of that. I’ve heard time and time again that the Hebrew mind thought in terms of community, family, and tribe. Would a family be considered blessed if part of that family was endlessly cursed?

Numbers 33:51-52...⁵¹“Speak to the people of Israel and say to them, When you pass over the Jordan into the land of Canaan, ⁵²then you shall drive out all the inhabitants of the land from before you and destroy all their figured stones and destroy all their metal images and demolish all their high places.

If you know the Old Testament story, you know that God seems to be “anal-retentive” about the “all.” Does He only really mean “all” when talking about condemnation? But when He talks about salvation, he wants us to understand it’s only wishful thinking?

Psalms 86:9...All (“Some of”? “Many of”? “Most of”? “All types of”? “Some from each of”?) the nations [*goyim* (*goyem*)-heathen, gentiles, people] you have made shall come and worship before you, O Lord, and shall glorify your name.

Is God glorified if the worship is forced?

Isaiah 2:2...It shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the house of the Lord shall be established as the highest of the mountains, and shall be lifted up above the hills; and

² The Old Testament verses were written in Hebrew and the New Testament verses were written in Greek.

all (“Some of”? “Many of”? “Most of”? “All types of”? “some from each of”?) the nations [*goyem*]-heathen, gentiles, people] shall flow to it,...

One could argue, I suppose, that “all the *goyem*,” might mean “some from each nation,” yet Isaiah seems to clarify his meaning at the end of his book.

Isaiah 66:23...From new moon to new moon, and from Sabbath to Sabbath, all flesh shall come to worship before me, declares the Lord. “All” is the Hebrew construct noun, “kol-.”

John 1:3...All (“Some”? “Many”? “Most”? “All types of”?) things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made.

Let this be the beginning of a fascinating discussion regarding the nature of Evil. Did Jesus create evil? “For God is not the **author** of confusion but of peace” (1 Cor.: 14:33). I don’t believe that He nor God did, and yet God is the author of all things. Therefore we must ask is Evil a “thing”? Does it “exist”? Does it have substance? That’s not as silly as it sounds. Is a shadow a thing or the absence of a thing? Does it exist? Does it have substance? And yet shadows are a real enemy. Shadows can kill people. In shadows, all life dies. The absence of light is the absence of life. God is Light.

John 3:35...The Father loves the Son, and has given all (“Some”? “Many”? “Most”? “All types of”?) things into His hand.

John 12:32...And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all (“Some”? “Many”? “Most”? “All types”?) people to myself.”

Romans 3:21-26 (KJV)...²¹But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets; ²²Even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe: for there is no difference: ²³For all (“Some”? “Many”? “Most”? “All types”?) have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; ²⁴Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: ²⁵Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God; ²⁶To declare, I say, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus.

Those “being justified” by grace in verse 24 certainly seem to be the same that have sinned in verse 23. How many is this? All. In Romans 8:30 we find that “those whom he justified he also glorified”. It’s also interesting to note that in verse 22, it’s not our faith that makes us righteous, but the faith (or faithfulness) of Jesus. His faithfulness is evident in those that believe. If we stick with the logic of this passage, it would seem that eventually all will believe, since all have sinned and all are “being justified”...and those whom He justified He also glorified.

Romans 5:15-21...¹⁵But the free gift is not like the trespass. For if **many** died through one man’s trespass (Doesn’t “many” mean “all”? Or are there some that didn’t die through Adam’s trespass?), **much more** have the grace of God and the free gift by the grace of that one man Jesus Christ abounded for **many** (all). ¹⁶And the free gift is not like the result of that one man’s sin. For the judgment following one trespass brought condemnation, but the free gift following many trespasses brought justification. ¹⁷If, because of one man’s trespass, death reigned

through that one man, **much more** will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ. ¹⁸Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for **all** (“many”?, “most”?, “all types of?”) men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for **all** (“many”?, “most”?, “all types of?”) men. ¹⁹For as by the one man’s disobedience the **many** (How many?) were made sinners, so by the one man’s obedience the **many** (How many?) will be made righteous. ²⁰Now the law came in to increase the trespass, but where sin increased, grace **abounded all the more**, ²¹so that, as sin reigned in death, grace also might reign through righteousness leading to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

According to verse 20, the work of grace must be larger than the work of sin. The context tells us what that work results in. Judgment follows sin and justification follows grace. Verses 18 and 19 are explicit. If one argues that Christ’s death only “leads” and that leading is not necessarily effective but dependent on man’s will (which Paul argues is dead), Paul immediately clarifies in verse 19, “the many” made sinners (which are all) are “the many” that will be made righteous. And if there’s still any question about the two uses of the word “many,” Paul immediately amplifies his argument by repeating the thought of verse 17 and stating, “Grace abounded all the more.”

PLEASE NOTICE that in verse 17, Paul writes, “Those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness...” If we take this verse literally, it clearly implies or argues that ALL will “receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness.” We assume that some can’t because we knew them and never heard them and are convinced their time is up.

Hebrews 9:27 says “...it is appointed for men to die once, and after that comes judgment.” However we don’t understand God’s judgments (Romans 11:33 says so). To be judged is not the same as being condemned; and just because judgment comes after death (which is at the cross, John 12:31) does not necessarily mean that there are not other things that come in between death and the ultimate consummation. As we’ll see below, at least for some, there most certainly are other things that come between death and the final state. We will also see that many things in scripture are judged and condemned, only to show up later made entirely new. It’s like you just can’t count on things staying annihilated, while the Creator is still walking around speaking the Word.

Some who hang on to, what I consider, the unbiblical notion of “Free Will,” argue that ALL can’t choose Christ because that would somehow violate the dignity of human free will. Apart from that thinking being unbiblical and idolatrous, it doesn’t make sense. If we did have free will after the fall, we ALL chose to participate in the Fall, so why can’t we all choose to receive the “abundance of Grace”?

Romans 8:32...He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us **all** (“Many”? “All types of us”?), how shall He not with Him also freely give us **all** (“Many”? “Most”? “All types of”?) things?

God will freely give me “all things.” What about those that I have loved, that the “church” has judged as sentenced to unending torment in “Hell.” Will God give me them? He will freely give me “all things.” If I take this verse literally, it certainly seems that I must assume that those “people” were actually nothing (in which case God would only be tormenting “nothing” in “Hell”

and I would not grieve their demise, for I would see that they never existed.) OR God would eventually restore them (and more) to me and to himself. If certain “people” are really “nothing,” then we must ask if we could ever “know them.” Because “evil” is so very much like nothing I don’t think anyone truly “knows” evil (except God, perhaps). What we know, is the good thing, created by God, that’s been afflicted with evil.

Romans 11:32...For God has committed them all to disobedience (“Some”? “Many”? “Most”? “All types of them”?), that He might have mercy on all (“Some”? “Many”? “Most”? “All types of them”?).

This functions as the pinnacle of Paul’s argument in Romans. It is NOT an arbitrary comment or a careless “aside.” As in so many of these passages, the “all”s are in parallel. The number committed to disobedience is the same number on which He has mercy.

Romans 11:36...For of Him and through Him and to Him are all (“Some”? “Many”? “Most”? “All types of”?) things, to whom be glory forever. Amen.

1 Corinthians 3:21...Therefore let no one boast in men. For all (“Some”? “Many”? “Most”? “All types of”?) things are yours...

1 Corinthians 8:6...yet for us there is one God, the Father, of whom are all (“Some”? “Many”? “Most”? “All types of”?) things, and we for Him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, through whom are all (“Some”? “Many”? “Most”? “All types of”?) things, and through whom we live.

1 Corinthians 15:22...For as in Adam all die (“Some”? “Many”? “Most”? “All types of men”? “all that do die”?), so also in Christ shall all be made alive (“Some”? “Many”? “Most”? “All types of men”? “all that will be made alive”?).

How many die in Adam? Isn’t it the same number that will be made alive? Does Paul mean they’ll be made alive, so they’ll suffer endless conscious death? Considering what the New Testament describes as life and considering the context, that’s very hard for me to swallow.

1 Corinthians 15:27-28...²⁷For “He has put all (“Some”? “Many”? “Most”? “All types of”?) things under His feet.” But when He says “all (“Some”? “Many”? “Most”? “All types of”?) things are put under Him,” it is evident that He who put all (“Some”? “Many”? “Most”? “All types of”?) things under Him is excepted.²⁸Now when all (“Some”? “Many”? “Most”? “All types of”?) things are made subject to Him, then the Son Himself will also be subject to Him who put all (“Some”? “Many”? “Most”? “All types of”?) things under Him, that God may be all (“Some”? “Many”? “All types of”?) in all (“Some”? “Many”? “Most”? “All types”?).

Is God “all in all” to those eternally cut off from communion with Him in “Hell”?

Notice how Paul is careful to point out the exception to “all” in verse 27. It appears that Paul thinks that, “all” means “all.”

Ephesians 1:11...¹¹In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been **predestined** according to the purpose of him who works all (“Some”? “Many”? “Most”? “All types of”?) things according to the counsel of his will...

Ephesians 1:22...²²And he put all (“Some”? “Many”? “Most”? “All types of”?) things under his feet and gave him as head over all (“Some”? “Many”? “Most”? “All types of”?) things to the church...

Ephesians 4:10...¹⁰He who descended is also the One who ascended far above all (“Some of”? “Many of”? “Most of”? “All types of”?) the heavens, that He might fill all (“Some”? “Many”? “Most”? “All types of”?) things.

Would Jesus be “filling” those who are eternally separated from God without hope, life, and light? He is hope, life, and light.

Colossians 1:15-20...¹⁵He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all (“Some”? “Much”? “Most”? “All types of”?) creation. ¹⁶For by him all (“Some”? “Many”? “Most”? “All types of”?) things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities – all (“Some”? “Many”? “Most”? “All types of”?) things were created through him and for him. ¹⁷And he is before all (“Some”? “Many”? “Most”? “All types of”?) things, and in him all (“Some”? “Many”? “Most”? “All types of”?) things hold together. ¹⁸And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. ¹⁹For in him all (“Some of”? “Much of”? “Most of”? “All types of”?) the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, ²⁰and through him to reconcile to himself all (“Some”? “Many”? “Most”? “All types of”?) things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.

How can someone be reconciled to God in peace through the blood of the cross AND still suffer endless torment in Hell away from God’s presence or actively tormented by God’s presence? At the least this verse requires annihilation, if not total restoration.

1 Timothy 4:10...For to this end we both labor and suffer reproach, because we trust in the living God, who is the Savior of all (“Some”? “Many”? “Most”? “All types of”?) men, especially of those who believe.

“Especially those who believe.” There is a great gift in knowing the savior now. We experience salvation now... or do we? If it’s not a great gift now, perhaps we don’t really believe. Perhaps we have to cover that fact, by inventing torments for others, and turning salvation into nothing but future reward? I don’t know this. It’s a sincere question, but a frightening question. What kind of savior is dependent on the “savee’s,” willingness to be saved, especially if the savior is all-powerful and the very thing the “savee” needs to be saved from is a defective will (an inability to choose the Good)?

When I was a life guard, I was instructed to watch people drown for awhile as I treaded water just out of arm’s reach. In this way a “savee” would come to the end of themselves and thus, be easier to save. I think God does that, but not so that we’re easier to save, so much as that we can then confess and believe that we’ve been saved. If I would have neglected to save someone, and the reason I gave my supervisor was, “I swam out there, but they really didn’t want to be saved.” I would have been fired, then prosecuted, then sent to prison.

In America we’ve made an idol of “Free Will” and “Christians” take credit for “choosing” to be saved. Maybe we have not yet met the savior, for we are still confusing Him with ourselves.

Titus 2:11-14...¹¹For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for **all** (“Some”? “Many”? “Most”? “All types of”?) people, ¹²training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, ¹³waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, ¹⁴who gave himself for us to redeem us from **all** (“Some”? “Much”? “Most”? “All types of”?) lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works.

Verse 11 says “bringing salvation for **all** people.” That doesn’t mean that all people yet experience salvation or know that they’re saved. Do we? That we are “zealous for good works” is a sign that we know salvation, not a way for us to get it. What are good works? Isn’t it something about “the last and least of these”? Who are they for you? Are they already in “Hell – Hades”? Is Jesus with them... “whatever you do to the least of these”? Will you have compassion on them? These are just questions, but they seem to be worth asking.

Hebrews 2:10...For it was fitting for Him, for whom are **all** (“Some”? “Many”? “Most”? “All types of”?) things and by whom are **all** (“Some”? “Many”? “Most”? “All types of”?) things, in bringing **many** sons to glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings.

Does “many” mean “all”?

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

Revelation 4:11...“You are worthy, O Lord, To receive glory and honor and power; For You created **all** (“Some”? “Many”? “Most”? “All types of”?) things, and by Your will they exist and were created.”

Revelation 21:4-5 (NKJV)...⁴And God will wipe away **every** tear from their eyes; there shall be **no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying**. There shall be **no more pain**, for **the former things have passed away**.” ⁵Then He who sat on the throne said, “Behold, I make **all** (“Some”? “Many”? “Most”? “All types of”?) things new.” And He said to me, “Write, for these words are true and faithful.”

This is our theme verse. Jesus seems to be pretty intent on getting us to believe it even if all the other things in the book might cause us to conclude otherwise. Should we not believe the other things in the book as well, but leave the “concluding” to Jesus? I do think we miss the truth at the point of “conclusion”... “teleos.”

Scripture forces a Crisis (Greek “krisis” – judgment). Either...

1. Conclude that Jesus does redeem all things, and therefore we need to seek ways to reconcile other scripture with this scripture and be on guard for premature “conclusions.”

OR...

2. We must “conclude” that Jesus does not redeem all things. It seems to me that Option 2 is not based on clear statements of the biblical text, but our “conclusions” (i.e. “**IF** people are destroyed, **THEN** they cannot be made new” or “**IF** goats go into the “aionios” fire and

punishment, **THEN** Jesus can't make all things new"). Our "IF-THEN" statements are based on our conceptions of the possible. It is NOT wise to confine the WORD of God to our conceptions of the possible.

Obviously some will argue that they don't believe "all" means "all." I'm saying that I'm concerned we don't believe "all" means "all" because of **our** "conclusions," not the evidence of the text. This is the horrendous error of "liberal" Christianity.

I suppose that some could argue that Jesus will make all things new so that He can damn some of those things to endless torment. In the final analysis, our faith is not a faith in the Bible. Our faith is trust in the WORD, who is Jesus. "the word" (scripture) bears witness to "THE WORD" (Jesus)." In the "end" ironically, it does look like "our conclusion" must be involved, although I believe faith is God's conclusion in us. I do not have much or any faith in a Jesus who would make all things new, just so He can damn some to endless torment. I do not believe "the word" testifies to that "WORD," but almost the direct opposite.

Isaiah 45:22-23...²²"Turn to me and **be saved, all** the ends of the earth! For I am God, and there is no other. ²³By myself I have sworn; from my mouth has gone out in righteousness a word that shall not return: 'To me **every** knee shall bow, **every** tongue shall swear allegiance.'

Many argue that "every knee" will bow because some of those knees will be forced into submission and make the "good confession," the way captives in the hands of Muslim extremists confess Allah. Does God want that kind of confession? Is that a victory? Is that our hearts' concept of victory? No wonder we walk in darkness. We think Yahweh is like Allah. This text, which is quoted in two places by Paul, defines the confession (praise). Verse 22 is talking about a confession unto salvation.

Romans 14:11...for it is written, "As I live, says the Lord, **every** ("*pas*") knee shall bow to me, and **every** tongue shall confess (ESV footnote: or *shall give praise*) to God."

Philippians 2:8-11...⁸And being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross. ⁹Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name which is above **every** ("*most*") name,¹⁰that at the name of Jesus **every** ("*most*") knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and **under the earth**, ¹¹and **every** ("*most*") tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

"Under the earth" is Sheol/Hades.

The reason every knee bows before Jesus in praise is this knowledge that he humbled himself to the point of death on the cross. Every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth praises the slaughtered lamb on the throne who is worthy to open the scroll. In other words, every made new thing seems to be conscious of once being an old dead thing made new through the cross, and therefore they offer praise.

Revelation 5:13-14...¹³And I heard **every** ("*pas*") creature in heaven and on earth and **under the earth** and **in the sea**, and **all** ("*pas*") that is in them, saying, "To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever!" ¹⁴And the four living creatures said, "Amen!" and the elders fell down and worshiped.

IT WOULD SEEM THAT:

1. "All" means "all."
2. So if He makes "all things" new, then
 - a) He makes all things new or...
 - b) He makes all things new, but one day you'll discover that some things you thought were things were really no things...nothing.
3. "All things" made new, at least all "creatures" made new, have some sort of consciousness that they were once not new.

IS THAT "GOOD NEWS" OR "BAD NEWS"?

WHAT DIRECTION ARE WE SUPPOSED TO HOPE? (...AND IS GOD A HERETIC?)

Matthew 18:12-14...¹²What do you think? If a man has a hundred sheep and one of them has gone astray, does he not leave the ninety-nine on the mountains and go in search of the one that went astray? ¹³And if he finds it, truly, I say to you, he rejoices over it more than over the ninety-nine that never went astray. ¹⁴So it is **not the will** of my Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish (*apollumi* – "be lost").

Luke 19:10...¹⁰For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost (*apollumi*)."

1 Timothy 2:1-6...¹First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for **all** people, ²for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way. ³This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, ⁴who desires **all** people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. ⁵For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, ⁶who gave himself as a ransom for **all**, which is the testimony given at the proper time.

2 Peter 3:8-10...⁸But do not overlook this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. ⁹The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should **perish** (*apollumi* – *be lost*), but that **all** should reach repentance. ¹⁰But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed.

God wishes that none should "perish," yet clearly as Jesus states in Luke 19:10, some are lost (*apollumi* – *perished*) now. This is a tremendous problem, unless there are different kinds of "being lost." Indeed Verse 9 defines a type of being lost: lost such that you cannot be found – unable to reach repentance. If seeking and saving the lost is what Jesus came for, his coming would appear to have no meaning unless some were lost. And yet if some were NEVER EVER found it would appear that his coming was a failure.

Ephesians 1:11...In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been **predestined** according to the **purpose of him** who **works all things according to the counsel of his will**...

Even our will! - He works according to the counsel of his will. We did not choose Him, He chose us. "Of HIS OWN WILL he brought us forth by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures." (James 1:18). Our will is not stronger than His Will, especially when we are "dead in our trespasses and sins."

Matthew 19:26...But Jesus looked at them and said, "With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible."

I was listening to a wonderful scholar and evangelical leader expound the scripture recently. At the end, he called for questions. Someone asked about the possibility of everyone being saved in the end. He said something to the effect that He didn't think this would happen. I raised my hand and asked, "But do you think it's impossible?" I knew he was stuck, for scripture is clear on God's possibilities. He said, "Well, I'm not going to say it's impossible, but I sure wouldn't bet on it." On reflection that's rather strange. Are we not supposed to "bet" on the power of God's grace through Christ Jesus our Lord to save sinners? And not only is it possible, it is His explicitly stated will.

Jeremiah 32:17... 'Ah, Lord God! It is you who has made the heavens and the earth by your great power and by your outstretched arm! Nothing is too hard for you.

Jeremiah is talking about God's redemption of a field and a Jerusalem that will be utterly shattered like an earthen vessel that "cannot be mended." Jeremiah 19:11, "... say to them, 'Thus says the Lord of hosts: So will I break this people and this city, as one breaks a potter's vessel, so that it can never be mended. Men shall bury in Topheth (Gehenna) because there will be no place else to bury.' As we will see, God promises to do things with Topheth and Jerusalem that no earthly potter could even conceive.

1 Corinthians 13:7-8...⁷Love bears **all** things, believes **all** things, hopes **all** things, endures **all** things. ⁸Love **never** ends...

Let me tell you what I hope, for "Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things," (1 Cor. 13:7) "God is Love."

1. I hope that God has "born" everyone's sin and everyone's Hell.
2. And that He, therefore, "believes" in all people (that is that He gives all people faith in Himself, who is Love).
3. So, therefore, I "hope" all people are "elected in Christ" for salvation (God who is Love wishes – "hopes" – that none should perish and "He accomplishes all things according to the council of His will").
4. For He who is Love has chosen to "endure" all things for us, to His own Glory in my Lord Jesus.

Many Evangelicals would say that I'm a heretic for hoping this, but I try not to care. Remember, "Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things." Karl Barth taught that double predestination means that we were all "chosen in Christ" for salvation. And that Christ was chosen in our place for destruction. I hope that He is right. I do want to not sin, and I do want everyone to believe God's grace now, so that they will stop sinning, because Christ has already chosen to bear that sin. Therefore I should preach and evangelize, not because I'm afraid, but because I'm grateful, and I want to minister to the wounded body of Christ, which I hope is every derelict, every whore, every Pharisee, and even me. If there is anyone that is not of Christ in the end, I hope that they are nothing but a shadow unaware of themselves for they have no selves and never did – only "vessels of wrath," never created in Adam, and therefore never "dead" in Adam. For, "As in Adam all die, so in Christ shall all be made alive." If there are such "things" they must be no "things," like shadows and lies. Therefore, you could not truly "see" them, "know" them, or love them, and they will be revealed as illusion. I suspect that there are no "pure" vessels of wrath among men.

I think "Evil" is such a thing. It is a no "thing" an anti "thing" a desecration of creation. Can anyone "love" evil? Or can one only love the thing that evil is desecrating? To love "evil" is to love "not love," that's not love but "evil." My head hurts.

John 14:13...Whatever you ask in my name, this I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son.

I've always been told that this is asking according to God's will. God "desires all people to be saved," "not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance." The text says, "that the Father may be glorified in the Son." How is the Father glorified in Jesus? How is a Savior glorified? How is a savior not glorified?

Pray this prayer: **"Father in Jesus name, would you save all people."**

Did you? Why wouldn't you? Are you afraid that he might answer? Are you afraid that some don't deserve to be saved? Who are those that deserve to be saved? "Yeah..." you say, "but what about guys like Hitler and Judas... the very worst sinners?" According to sacred Scripture they are not the "chief of sinners," the worst of sinners. Go read 1 Timothy 1:15. Would you condemn St. Paul to unceasing torment in and everlasting "Hell"? Are you worried that people you hate might get in? That God just might forgive them? Read the story of Jonah, then, spend an hour staring at "the sign of Jonah."

"Father in Jesus name, would you save all people." It seems to be a good prayer to pray. And I'm having trouble coming up with a water tight reason as to why God won't answer it.

James 4:3...You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions.

Don't ask for your passions... but how about God's passion?

Luke 23:33-34...³³And when they came to the place that is called The Skull, there they crucified him, and the criminals, one on his right and one on his left. ³⁴And Jesus said, "Father, forgive **them**, for they know not what they do." And they cast lots to divide his garments.

This is truly The High Priestly Prayer. Was there ever a prayer more Holy, more pleasing to the Father, more within the will of God and more instructive for us? Who is the “them” that Jesus prays for? Are they not at least those who crucify him?

1. The Romans, Caesar, Pilate, the Centurions and soldiers that occupy and oppress Israel...The ethnos, the Goyem.
2. The Israel that rejects The Christ, The Crowd, The Scribes and Pharisees, The leaders of Israel. Are they not those:
 - a) to whom Jesus was alluding in the parable when He said, “none of those men who were invited [“having been called”] shall taste my banquet” (Luke 14:24)?...what banquet?...a banquet of grace?
 - b) to whom Jesus was alluding in the parable when He said, “The king was angry, and he sent his troops and destroyed those murderers and burned their city.” (Matt. 22:7)?
 - c) to whom Jesus said, “Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people producing its fruits.” (Matt. 21:43)?
 - d) of whom Jesus referred when He spoke of the “unforgivable” sin? “But when the Pharisees heard it, they said, “It is only by Beelzebul, the prince of demons, that this man casts out demons.” Knowing their thoughts, he said to them,... And whoever speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come. (“not in this age and not in the one being about to be”)” (Matt: 12:24-25,32)
 - e) for whom the most horrifying language of divine wrath is used?
3. Us...every time we sin.

Does Jesus ask according to God’s will? Does God answer Jesus’ prayer? If “them” are forgiven, would God still torment them in “Hell” without end? Would they torment themselves in “Hell” without end? That is would they torment themselves through refusing to believe? Isn’t the grace to believe a gift of that prayer, indeed the greatest gift of that prayer? Is there someone you need to ask God to forgive? Jesus said “The measure you give, is the measure you get.” Are you wishing “Hell” upon someone? Maybe a good policy would be to wish Heaven upon everyone?

IT WOULD SEEM THAT:

1. We’re at least to Hope, like our Father in Heaven, that all would be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth.
2. If we don’t, perhaps we’re not saved, and haven’t come to a knowledge of the truth, for the Truth hopes that all would be saved. “He who is forgiven much, loves much.”

3. God gets what He hopes for, because he “accomplishes all things according to the counsel of His will.”
4. **If** hoping that all will be saved is a heresy, God must be a heretic.
5. “...**hope** does not disappoint us, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit which has been given to us.” (Romans 5:5, RSV)

For a sermon on this topic see, [The Vineyard: What if God is better than you thought?](#) (Matt. 20:1-19), 12-5-04:

Shabat!

Stop!

and look at your heart.

For there is one of two emotions in your heart, and probably both at once:

In some of you, there is a thrill—a wild and outrageous hope has just been set ablaze.

But in some of you, there is anger—intense anger.

In all of us, there are questions... that’s fine.

But in some of you, there is anger—intense anger.

You’re thinking, “I can’t believe that piece of crap gets in!” Or maybe it’s a group of people (named or unnamed). To you, they are the last and the least, which makes you the first. So you’re thinking, “I can’t believe those SOB’s get the same wage as me!”

You’re angry...

like Jonah was angry outside the walls of Ninevah.

like the older brother was angry standing in the field.

like the Pharisees were angry when Jesus ate with tax collectors and sinners.

Angry... like we’re all angry at some point.

You’re angry, and you want to call me a heretic, but this is your problem... all I did was quote scripture (a lot of it). And, yes, I believe all scripture is authoritative. There’s more scripture to read. And, yes, I believe what we’ll soon read in Matthew 25, “The king *will* say to the goats on his left, ‘depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire... into the eternal punishment.’” That is, the consuming fire, the lake of fire and theion, the Gehenna of fire.

Perhaps some come out the other side. Some say “eternal” means “eons.” I don’t know.

Perhaps they don’t come out the other side, but they change and know God as love instead of wrath.

He *is* consuming fire, and He *is* love, and He *is* one.

Perhaps they call punishment by another, new name.

Perhaps they were never “sons of Adam,” but only shadows of people, mere vessels of wrath, without souls, that are destroyed.

Perhaps Christ is the scapegoat that redeems even these goats.

Or perhaps, something else.

I don't understand.

But I'm called to believe and certainly hope.

So, if believing “all will be saved” is a heresy...it's my favorite heresy.

And if hoping that “none will perish” is a heresy...then God is a heretic, for “He wills that none should perish.”

Believing that God gets what He wills is not heresy but orthodoxy...It's called the doctrine of His sovereignty...

So if you experienced a thrill, maybe it wasn't just you, but His Spirit in you. This wild thrill...
 maybe God gets His wish,
 maybe love doesn't fail,
 maybe the blood of the covenant fills the whole world to the depths of a
 horse's bridle, and that blood is so powerful, no one can resist it.

Maybe Christ conquers everywhere,
 every when,
 every how.

Maybe Christ redeems everyone else the way He redeemed me. For I am chief of sinners, saved by grace and not by works. And so I ain't got nothin' against nobody. I hope everybody gets in.

But if you're angry,
 maybe you don't want “everyone to be saved.” That is,
 maybe you don't want the “will of God,”
which means,
 maybe you don't want the kingdom of God.

I don't think anyone receives the kingdom who doesn't want the kingdom. Even though the gates of the eternal city are always open, you can sit outside. You don't have to go in now. And this is a paradox, for I believe they call that place, Hell – that is, Hades, the outer darkness.

And isn't that interesting...
 You thought you were judging this parable,
 and this parable was judging you.
 We thought we were judging the Word,

and the Word was judging us.
Grace was judging us.
Forgiveness was judging us.

“Now is the judgment of the world, and when I am lifted up [speaking of the cross], I will draw all men to myself,” said Jesus (1 John 12:31-32).

But the cross is judgment;
the cross is grace.
It is the bleeding heart of God.

So if you don't want that blood, consider yourself cursed. In which case, I'd advise begging for mercy. And you'll get mercy...but, when you get mercy, you'll want it for all. You know in this parable, it seems that the only ones on the outside are those angry over the fact that all are on the inside. That is, that everyone gets a denarius. To them, it must seem like the landlord isn't worried about getting the work done because He has no problem offending His hardest workers (or should I say, the ones that *think* they're the hardest workers).

You may be thinking even now, “Peter, we shouldn't ponder these things in public. How are we gonna get anyone to work in the vineyard?” I mean, if everybody is paid the same or everybody gets in...

Why work at all?
Why not “sin that grace may abound?”
Why fill out these painful giving cards?
Why take up a cross?
Why “give away all I have and deliver my body to be burned?”
Why “imitate our heavenly Father?”
Why be good?
Why keep the law?
Why work the vineyard?

Well, what is it to work in a vineyard? And why would someone want to work there, if not for a wage? Working in a vineyard is tending grapes, pruning branches, harvesting, treading the wine press.

What do you want? A wage? Is that why you work the vineyard? If so, maybe you're not really even working the vineyard.

Do you know what the vineyard is producing? This vineyard bears fruit. The fruit is grapes. They are like grapes of wrath, for the grapes are placed in a wine press and trampled. The grapes are crushed. They bleed and that blood turns to wine.

In Matthew 9, Jesus looked on the harassed and helpless, sinful people of Israel and said, “The harvest is plentiful.”

What harvest? Just a few verses earlier, when the Pharisees complain that He eats with tax collectors and sinners, Jesus says, “Go and learn what this means, ‘I desire mercy and not sacrifice.’”

Maybe that's the harvest... mercy. He's quoting Hosea who prophesied in the Hebrew language, saying, "I desire hesed [covenant love, steadfast love] more than offerings." Remember Hosea was commanded to marry a harlot, and then shower her with *mercy* that she might be redeemed, *for that was what God was doing with Israel.*

The fruit of this vineyard is mercy, hesed, covenant love!

Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, etc.

If the workers serve the vineyard, they will serve its produce. They will do the work of servant girls, maids, and harlots, but full of hesed, covenant love...

They will be married. They will be brides.

Like law filled with love, they will be workers filled with mercy—the very blood of the landlord. They will be sons. The vineyard is producing children, brides, sons, family... filled with the wine of the covenant. Forgiven people full of grace. The blood that flows from the broken heart of the Father. The vineyard is producing mankind in the image and likeness of God.

And who is God?

God is Love.

He is Love that won't quit.

Love that won't fail.

Love that bears all things,
believes all things,
hopes all things,
endures all things...

on a cross

on a hill

that is a winepress.

WHAT THE HELL?

Sheol, Hades

In the Septuagint (the first century Greek translation of the Hebrew scriptures), the Greek "Hades" translates the Hebrew "Sheol." Paul also translates "Sheol" as "thanatos" (death) in 1 Cor. 15. In the KJV and NKJV "Sheol" is often translated "Hell," as well as "grave." In the KJV, "Hades" is usually translated "Hell," and once as "grave." Most modern English translations, apart from the NKJV, often leave these words as they are in the original texts.

Numbers 16:33...So they and all that belonged to them went down alive into Sheol, and the earth closed over them, and they perished from the midst of the assembly.

Folks normally go down to Sheol dead, but can descend there "alive."

Numbers 27:12-13...¹²The Lord said to Moses, “Go up into this mountain of Abarim and see the land that I have given to the people of Israel. ¹³When you have seen it, you also shall be gathered to your people, as your brother Aaron was

When Moses and Aaron (Numbers 20:22-29) die, they are “gathered to their people.” Aren’t their people in Sheol? They are gathered to their people and not allowed to enter the land because of disobedience at the waters of Meribah. Apart from Christ are there any that aren’t disobedient? Yet check this out: “And after six days Jesus took with him Peter and James, and John his brother, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became white as light. And behold, there appeared to them Moses and Elijah, talking with him.” (Matt. 17:1-3)

Deuteronomy 32:22...For a fire is kindled by my anger, and it burns to the depths of Sheol, devours the earth and its increase, and sets on fire the foundations of the mountains.

The fire of God’s anger is NOT the same as Sheol.

1 Samuel 2:6...The Lord kills and brings to life; he brings down to Sheol and raises up.

God casts into Sheol, but He can also raise things from Sheol.

1 Samuel 28:9-16...⁹The woman said to him, “Surely you know what Saul has done, how he has cut off the mediums and the necromancers from the land. Why then are you laying a trap for my life to bring about my death?” ¹⁰But Saul swore to her by the Lord, “As the Lord lives, no punishment shall come upon you for this thing.” ¹¹Then the woman said, “Whom shall I bring up for you?” He said, “Bring up Samuel for me.” ¹²When the woman saw Samuel, she cried out with a loud voice. And the woman said to Saul, “Why have you deceived me? You are Saul.” ¹³The king said to her, “Do not be afraid. What do you see?” And the woman said to Saul, “I see a god coming up out of the earth.” ¹⁴He said to her, “What is his appearance?” And she said, “An old man is coming up, and he is wrapped in a robe.” And Saul knew that it was Samuel, and he bowed with his face to the ground and paid homage. ¹⁵Then Samuel said to Saul, “Why have you disturbed me by bringing me up?” Saul answered, “I am in great distress, for the Philistines are warring against me, and God has turned away from me and answers me no more, either by prophets or by dreams. Therefore I have summoned you to tell me what I shall do.” ¹⁶And Samuel said, “Why then do you ask me, since the Lord has turned from you and become your enemy?”

Weird, huh?

Job 7:9...As the cloud fades and vanishes, so he who goes down to Sheol does not come up.

Job believes that a person cannot raise himself from Sheol, but does this apply to God?

Job 14:13...Oh that you would hide me in Sheol, that you would conceal me until your wrath be past, that you would appoint me a set time, and remember me!

Job wants to hide in Sheol away from God’s wrath. Unless Job is very mistaken, Sheol is NOT the same as God’s wrath. Indeed in Job’s estimation, it is the place furthest from God’s wrath – the darkness furthest from the Fire.

Psalm 6:5...For in death there is no remembrance of you; in Sheol who will give you praise?

Sheol is a place of mental and spiritual darkness as well as physical darkness.

Psalm 18:5...the cords of Sheol entangled me; the snares of death confronted me.

Sheol can begin in this life in this world.

Psalm 30:3...O Lord, you have brought up my soul (*nephesh* – “soul, life, person”) from Sheol; you restored me to life from among those who go down to the pit.

David believed that at least his “soul” had descended into Sheol AND that God had raised him and restored him to life from Sheol.

Psalm 86:13...For great is your steadfast love toward me; you have delivered my soul from the depths of Sheol.

Psalm 89:48...What man can live and never see death? Who can deliver his soul from the power of Sheol? Selah.

It is assumed that all people descend into Sheol, that is, all die.

Psalm 139:7-12...⁷Where shall I go from your Spirit? Or where shall I flee from your presence? ⁸If I ascend to heaven, you are there! If I make my bed in Sheol, you are there! ⁹If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, ¹⁰even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me. ¹¹If I say, “Surely the darkness shall cover me, and the light about me be night,” ¹²even the darkness is not dark to you; the night is bright as the day, for darkness is as light with you.

God is present, even in Sheol, where minds, hearts, and souls are lost in darkness. Even in that place David trusts that God will hold him.

Proverbs 9:17-18...¹⁷“Stolen water is sweet, and bread eaten in secret is pleasant.” ¹⁸But he does not know that the dead are there, that her guests are in the depths of Sheol.

Ecclesiastes 9:10...Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might, for there is no **work** or **thought** or **knowledge** or **wisdom** in Sheol, to which you are going.

Song of Solomon 8:6...Set me as a seal upon your heart, as a seal upon your arm, for love is strong as death, jealousy is fierce as the grave. Its flashes are flashes of fire, the very flame of the Lord.

Love is strong as death. It appears to be a “fire,” “the very flame of the Lord.”

Isaiah 5:14...Therefore Sheol has enlarged its appetite and opened its mouth beyond measure, and the nobility of Jerusalem and her multitude will go down, her revelers and he who exults in her.

The multitude of Jerusalem descend into Sheol, yet we know that there are great promises yet unfulfilled for Jerusalem.

Isaiah 28:15-19...¹⁵Because you have said, “We have made a covenant with death, And with Sheol we are in agreement. When the overflowing scourge passes through, It will not come to us, For we have made lies our refuge, And under falsehood we have hidden ourselves.”¹⁶Therefore thus says the Lord God: “Behold, I lay in Zion a stone for a foundation, A tried stone, a precious cornerstone, a sure foundation; Whoever believes will not act hastily (“not be disturbed” – NASV).¹⁷Also I will make justice the measuring line, And righteousness the plummet; The hail will sweep away the refuge of lies, And the waters will overflow the hiding place.¹⁸Your covenant with death will be annulled, And your agreement with Sheol will not stand; When the overflowing scourge passes through, Then you will be trampled down by it.¹⁹As often as it goes out it will take you; For morning by morning it will pass over, And by day and by night; It will be a terror just to understand the report.”

Although Jerusalem tries to hide in the depths of Sheol, God is placing a “stone,” a “cornerstone,” a “sure foundation” in Zion – Jerusalem (We know that the name of that “stumbling stone” is Jesus. Somehow this “stone” will annul Jerusalem’s covenant with Sheol. They will be trampled by this “stone,” yet it undoes the power of death. See Daniel 2:31-45: a great stone crushes the kingdoms of this world and grows into a great mountain covering the whole earth. It is an eternal kingdom. The Stone shows up throughout scripture, and Jesus reveals that the stone is himself.)

Ezekiel 37:11-14...¹¹Then He said to me, “Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel. They indeed say, ‘Our bones are dry, our hope is lost, and we ourselves are cut off!’¹²Therefore prophesy and say to them, ‘Thus says the Lord God: “Behold, O My people, I will open your graves (*qeber*) and cause you to come up from your graves, and bring you into the land of Israel.¹³Then you shall know that I am the Lord, when I have opened your graves, O My people, and brought you up from your graves.¹⁴I will put My Spirit in you, and you shall live, and I will place you in your own land. Then you shall know that I, the Lord, have spoken it and performed it,” says the Lord.’”

The Lord commands Ezekiel to prophecy to the **WHOLE** house of Israel that he will raise them from their **GRAVES**, place them in their land, and fill them with His Spirit. This is a promise far greater than that of modern Zionism. This must be what Paul refers to in Romans. And in this way all Israel will be saved, as it is written, “The Deliverer will come from Zion, he will banish ungodliness from Jacob”; “and this will be my covenant with them when I take away their sins.” “As regards the gospel, they are enemies of God for your sake. But as regards election, they are beloved for the sake of their forefathers. For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable. Just as you were at one time disobedient to God but now have received mercy because of their disobedience, so they too have now been disobedient in order that by the mercy shown to you they also may now receive mercy. For God has consigned all to disobedience, that he may have mercy on all.” (Romans 11:26-42)

Hosea 1:10...“Yet the number of the children of Israel shall be as the sand of the sea, which cannot be measured or numbered. And it shall come to pass In the place where it was said to them, ‘You are not My people,’ There it shall be said to them, ‘You are sons of the living God.’”

Where is it said of them, “You are not My people”? Where is it said of us? Isn’t it only in the place of disobedience that we can receive mercy? In that place of darkened hearts, minds, and souls we are named “sons of the living God”... The God Who’s name is Love.

Hosea 13:14 (NKJV)...“I will ransom them from the power of the grave; I will redeem them from death. O Death, I will be your plagues! O Grave (*Sheol*), I will be your destruction! Pity is hidden from My eyes.”

According to the KJV and NKJV, God Himself will be the destruction of The Grave. How could one destroy death? With more death OR with Life itself... or should we say “Himself”? Jesus is “The Life” – the Life of God.

Hosea 13:14...Shall I ransom them from the power of Sheol? Shall I redeem them from Death? O Death, where are your plagues? O Sheol, where is your sting? Compassion is hidden from my eyes. (see 1 Cor. 15:55. The Hebrew “Sheol” is equivalent to “death” (thanatos) in Paul)

Jesus seemed to have some sort of effect on “Death.”

Amos 9:2...“If they dig into Sheol, from there shall my hand take them; if they climb up to heaven, from there I will bring them down.

Jonah 1:17-2:10...¹⁷And the Lord appointed a great fish to swallow up Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish **three days and three nights**. ¹Then Jonah prayed to the Lord his God from the belly of the fish, ²saying, “I called out to the Lord, out of my distress, and he answered me; out of the belly of **Sheol** I cried, and you heard my voice. ³For you cast me into the deep, into the heart of the seas, and the flood surrounded me; all your waves and your billows passed over me. ⁴Then I said, ‘I am driven away from your sight; Yet I shall again look upon your holy temple.’ ⁵The waters closed in over me to take my life; the deep surrounded me; weeds were wrapped about my head ⁶at the roots of the mountains. I went down to the land whose bars closed upon me **forever**; yet you brought up my life from the pit, O Lord my God. ⁷When my life was fainting away, I remembered the Lord, and my prayer came to you, into your holy temple. ⁸Those who pay regard to vain idols forsake their hope of steadfast love. ⁹But I with the voice of thanksgiving will sacrifice to you; what I have vowed I will pay. Salvation belongs to the Lord!” ¹⁰And the Lord spoke to the fish, and it vomited Jonah out upon the dry land.

God hears a prayer from Sheol. Yet, how would we call on Him that we cannot remember? Jonah declares that He has descended into Sheol, “I went down to the land whose bars closed upon me **forever**.” Did you get that? “forever” in “Sheol.” Pretty hopeless huh? We’ve learned that there is no remembrance of God (Psalm 6:5) in death. There is no work, thought, knowledge or wisdom in Sheol (Ecc. 9:10). How would Jonah even call for a savior? If we take scripture literally it would certainly seem that even Jonah’s will is totally bound. He has literally run from the grace of God, afraid that God will have grace upon the Ninevites. He has tried to hide himself in Sheol and now it would seem that He has become successful. He has obtained his wish and yet his wish is “hell.” Who would see him in this place? How could he ever be saved from this place? How could he even speak a prayer from this place? It’s on the **third day** that Jonah calls out for deliverance. It’s on the **third day** that Jonah remembers. He says that He will make a sacrifice. It is a sacrifice of “thanksgiving” (v.9). He declares, “Salvation

belongs to the Lord!” That is a sacrifice for Jonah, because it means that salvation does not belong to Jonah. Salvation does not belong to us. We are not saved by our own “free will,” our own remembering, or our own wisdom. We’re not even saved by our own sacrifice! Whose sacrifice is this?

Jesus says, “Just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.” Jesus referred to himself as “the sign of Jonah” somehow. Mike Klassen recently preached a wonderful sermon in reference to this text. He mentioned that the Jews always read Jonah on the Day of Atonement, Yom Kippur (That day of sacrifice and the day the scapegoat was released into the wilderness and Israel’s ritual sins were atoned for). The cross is our Day of Atonement. The Apostles Creed (the church’s oldest confessional statement) and scripture tell us that Jesus descended into “Hell” – Hades, Sheol, The Deep.... The belly of the fish.

Maybe Jesus helped Jonah pray. Can anyone pray Jonah’s prayer apart from the grace of God in Christ Jesus our Lord, who died, descended into Hell and rose victorious on the third day? In some very real sense we are already prisoners of Sheol as we walk the face of this earth. On our own, none of us remembers the Lord. None truly has Wisdom. Perhaps Wisdom descends into all of us causing us to make the good confession. Mike said “The belly of the fish was Jonah’s salvation.” That’s a great line! We know that Jesus is God’s salvation, yet he uses things like the belly of the fish to prepare our hearts to receive Jesus, the Word of Grace. Well, the belly of the fish was Sheol.

It is an absolutely priceless gift to be saved in this “life” before one descends into the “belly of the fish.” Yet how can we say that it’s impossible for one to be saved once a person has descended there? Indeed the belly of the fish, Sheol, may be the form of their salvation... the place where they are prepared to pray with Jonah and Jesus, “But I with the voice of thanksgiving will sacrifice to you; what I have vowed I will pay. Salvation belongs to the Lord!”

Matthew 12:40-41...⁴⁰For just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. ⁴¹The men of Nineveh will rise up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and behold, something greater than Jonah is here.

The belly of the fish is Sheol, according to Jonah. It appears that Jesus himself prophesies that he will descend into Sheol, the **heart of the earth**. Hebrew cosmology pictured the center of the earth as the place least like the heavens. The heavens were the place most truly real and solid. Ironically, the earth beneath was least solid, least real. The idea, that what we think of as not solid is most solid and what we think of as most solid is really least solid, permeates all scripture (and now even modern physics). The Lord is the true ROCK, even though His home is in the heavens. The demons come from the pit. They are of the shadows and lies.

Humans live on the surface of the earth. We live on borderland between Light and shadow, Life and death, Truth and lies, Reality and the void (yet the void is not space; the void is the deep). We think of space as empty and earth as full. Perhaps it’s the other way around, like Lewis describes in Out of The Silent Planet.

If you apply this Hebrew cosmology to what we know of the shape of the earth as a sphere, then earth floats in Heaven, like a little bubble of air in the depths of the ocean. This fallen

world is like a little bubble of non-being floating in an Ocean of Being we call God. Maybe each of us, are like a little bubble of “non-being” (a vessel of wrath) floating in “being.” Once we are “burst,” die to ourselves, and are flooded with that ocean of life, we become a vessel of mercy. Maybe when we hide in the depths of our own self-absorbed selves, we’re hiding in the depths of Sheol. Whatever the case, the depths of Sheol are the depths of a bubble in the ocean of life that is our God. Just some wild thoughts here...but maybe Paul was serious when He said to the Athenians, “in Him we live and move and have our being” (Acts 17:28).

Matthew 8:11-12...¹I tell you, many will come from east and west and recline at table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven, ²while the sons of the kingdom will be thrown into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”

The Outer Darkness appears to be Sheol. Sons of the kingdom are cast there, while gentiles recline in the kingdom of heaven. Sons of the kingdom? Could they be “sons of the kingdom,” if they never go to the Kingdom?

Matthew 16:18...And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell (*hades*) shall not prevail against it.

The church will storm the gates of Hades/Sheol. Those gates cannot defend Hades from the power of Christ’s church. What is the power of Christ’s church? Is it not “the word of the cross” (1 Corinthians 1:18), “The Gospel,” “the power of God unto salvation” (Romans 1:16)?

Matthew 22:1-14...¹And again Jesus spoke to them in parables, saying, ²“The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a wedding feast for his son, ³and sent his servants to call those who were invited to the wedding feast, but they would not come. ⁴Again he sent other servants, saying, ‘Tell those who are invited, See, I have prepared my dinner, my oxen and my fat calves have been slaughtered, and everything is ready. Come to the wedding feast.’ ⁵But they paid no attention and went off, one to his farm, another to his business, ⁶while the rest seized his servants, treated them shamefully, and killed them. ⁷The king was angry, and he sent his troops and destroyed those murderers and burned their city. ⁸Then he said to his servants, ‘The wedding feast is ready, but those invited were not worthy. ⁹Go therefore to the main roads and invite to the wedding feast as many as you find.’ ¹⁰And those servants went out into the roads and gathered all whom they found, both bad and good. So the wedding hall was filled with guests. ¹¹“But when the king came in to look at the guests, he saw there a man who had no wedding garment. ¹²And he said to him, ‘Friend, how did you get in here without a wedding garment?’ And he was speechless. ¹³Then the king said to the attendants, ‘Bind him hand and foot and cast him into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’ ¹⁴For many are called, but few are chosen.”

In the parable ALL are called (are the “gifts and call of God irrevocable”?), and ONE is chosen. The King chooses the “friend” who has no wedding garment. Why does he have no wedding garment? Did he give it to the others? The people who refused the feast had their city burned (like Jerusalem in 70 AD). They themselves are “destroyed” [apollumi – also translated as “perish” and “lose” as in “lost sheep.” Jesus came to “seek and to save the lost (apollumi)].” Do they descend into Sheol? The one “Friend” without a wedding garment is cast into “outer darkness.” Paul tells us that we are chosen in Christ Jesus, (Eph. 1:4). Matthew has just revealed in 12:18 (the only other place the term “chosen” appears in Matthew), that Jesus is the chosen one – the chosen “servant” that Isaiah prophesied, who will bring “justice to victory”

and in whom “the gentiles will hope.” Isaiah says that this “suffering servant” will be given as a “covenant for the people” (Isaiah 42:6). “He has born our griefs and carried our sorrows... The Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all” (Isaiah 53). Jesus gives us His Righteousness and bears our unrighteousness. He descends into “Hell” in our place. Jesus is the “chosen cornerstone” (1 Peter 2:2).

How can “the few” be the many that “filled” the banquet hall? The few must be the One. He is the “narrow gate,” the “few,” the one that finds the way to life (Matt. 7:14). He is “The Way” and “The Life.” “Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few.” –Matthew 7:13-14

“Many” find the way that leads to destruction. Indeed, “ALL have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.”

In Greek πολλοί is differentiated from πάντες (ὅλοι) by the fact that it is the antonym of a minority. It is thus used exclusively for many (but not all). In contrast, the Heb. מְרִבִּים / Aram. מְרִבִּים can have an inclusive sense: “the many who cannot be counted,” “the great multitude,” “all.” The same is true of (οἱ) πολλοί in Jewish Greek writings. This inclusive use is due to the fact that Heb. and Aram. have no word for “all.”

The fact that “many” can be used inclusively in Semitic is the solution to the *crux interpretum* in Mt. 22:14: πολλοὶ γὰρ εἰσὶν κλητοί, ὀλίγοι δὲ ἐκλεκτοί → III, 494, 25; IV, 186, 26 ff. The first clause is indeed difficult if πολλοί is taken exclusively (many but not all), for then there is a selection in both clauses. In reality the situation is exactly the same as in 4 Esr. 8:3: *Multi quidem creati sunt, pauci autem salvabuntur* → 539, 12 ff. Formally there is an antithesis between a great and small number, but materially the many represent the totality. If 4 Esr. 8:3 contrasts the totality of those created with the small number of the saved, Mt. 22:14 contrasts the totality of those invited with the small number of the chosen. God’s invitation, like His creation, embraces all without restriction, but the number of those who will stand in the last judgment is only small. This is how Mt. (or his source) took it when the originally isolated logion 22:14 was appended as a generalising interpretation to the parable of the wedding-feast (22:1–13). For in the present context πολλοὶ κλητοί embraces both those who were invited first and also those who were invited last, i.e., Jews and Gentiles as Mt. understands it. –Joachim Jeremias, Kittel’s Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, “*Polloi*”

The Invitation

Matthew 22:1-14

Pastor Peter Hiett

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In two of his books, Philip Yancey, from our church, tells about a prostitute unable to buy food for her two year old daughter. Sick and homeless, she came to Philip’s friend who worked in inner city Chicago. She explained how she had to sell her two year old to men for sex in order to support her drug habit. Philip’s friend had no idea what to say and then asked her if she ever considered going to a church for help. The woman looked back in pure naive shock and exclaimed, “Church... why would I ever go there? I was already feeling terrible about myself. They’d just make me feel worse!”

Something about that is strange for the church is Christ's body, and in Matthew we've found that it was the prostitutes and tax collectors that seemed to come to Jesus first and fastest. He was ridiculed for dining with them, a friend of tax collectors, prostitutes, and Homer Simpson types (like those twelve guys that followed him around).

Jesus sure didn't skimp on the truth about sin, yet He was most quickly befriended by sinners. How could He be so honest about sin, yet so attractive to sinners? They are the very types that seem least attracted to church.

Our text for today is Matthew 22:1-14. It's kind of a freaky story, especially that last part about the guy who gets thrown into outer darkness for violating the dress code. It's a scary story, yet it's a story about a king calling folks to a wedding banquet...it's Jesus' picture of the kingdom of God. The church is the presence of that kingdom in this world and an invitation to the great banquet.

You know, when I'd invited friends to my wedding banquet, I'd say, "Excuse me, I sure don't want to bother you or judge you, and I understand there are many things to do on May 28th, but softly and tenderly I am calling, calling for you and for all. Come party, come party. You who are bummed out, come party." No, I didn't say that! With freedom and joy, without fear and anxiety, I'd say, "Dude, you gotta come to my wedding party. It's gonna be awesome!" And I didn't say, "You better come to my wedding banquet or my dad will send his army and kill you and burn your city. And if you don't dress right, we'll cast you into outer darkness."

Now, those things happened in Jesus' story, but they weren't the business of the servants issuing invitations. You know, if I issued an invitation like that, I'm not sure any of my guests would enjoy my banquet. That is, they couldn't truly receive the banquet through threats. The fear would make it feel like a prison. Fear might get their attention, but love would have to cast out the fear before they could taste the banquet.

Well, Jesus is talking about hell, but he's talking to people that won't listen, people who think they already own the banquet, and the truth is, they can't even conceive of the banquet. They don't own the banquet, but they have been invited. The Israelites had been invited for 2,000 years. Daily, they would offer sacrifices on Mount Zion in the temple in Jerusalem. The sacrifices atoned for violations of external regulations and rituals, but the sacrifices also provided for banquets in the temple. The Jews were commanded to literally feast on their atonement. Yet, it was clear, the atonement was incomplete, and none of the feasting ultimately satisfied. Once I counted, including Sabbaths there were like 80 days of commanded feasting in the Old Testament, but only one day of commanded fasting. That was Yom Kippur, the day of atonement when the High Priest entered the Holy of Holies to sacrifice for the sins of all the people. On that day, they stayed hungry.

Well, Yom Kippur, Passover, all the feasts, the lambs, they all pointed to the Messianic banquet. Isaiah prophesied,

On this mountain the LORD of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of fat things, a feast of wine on the lees, of fat things full of marrow, of wine on the lees well refined. And he will destroy on this mountain the covering that is cast over all peoples, the veil that is spread over all nations. He will swallow up death for ever, and the Lord GOD will wipe away tears from all faces, and the reproach of his people he will take away from all

the earth; for the LORD has spoken. It will be said on that day, [On that day, this is what they'll say... Have you ever heard something like this on a mountain somewhere?] "Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him, that he might save us. This is the LORD; we have waited for him; let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation." Isaiah 25:6-9

As you know, Jesus came preaching, "the kingdom is at hand." His first miracle was turning water into wine at a wedding banquet. Jesus was a party animal; He loved banquets. In Luke 14, Jesus dines at the house of a Pharisee and tells this same story of the great banquet with a few variations. (It must have been a story He told several times.) Well, in Luke 14, He also tells us that when we throw banquets, we are to go to the highways and invite people that can't repay us. Church is to be like a picture of the great banquet. That's why we throw the party at the side of the road. That's why we threw a party for the Deadheads at Chief Hosa. That's why our building campaign was called, "Where the world drives by." (And we preached on the great banquet our first Sunday here.) That's why this room is called, "The Banquet Hall."

You may remember that the last meal Jesus had before His death was a banquet. He threw it on Mount Zion in Jerusalem. It was Passover, the feast of the Lamb that was slain to redeem Israel from death. And at that meal, Jesus broke the bread and poured the wine, calling it His body and blood, and saying, "I will not drink again of the fruit of the vine until I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom." It's fascinating that during passion week when Jesus retells the story of the great banquet, he adds two astounding details, as found here in Matthew. First, that some of those invited to the great banquet murdered the messengers, and so would be destroyed along with their city. And secondly, He talks about the strange man at the banquet who would be cast into outer darkness, naked.

Well, in the story, the servants go first to those that had been invited. They think they're found, but in reality they're lost. They're lost because they don't want the banquet. They have no taste for the banquet. They make light of it, go off one to his farm (his vineyard), and another to his business, his "emporium" in Greek, his empire, where he was emperor, lord and master of all, where he bought and controlled everything. You know, true grace is the ultimate threat to your empire because it cannot be bought, and it is never earned. To receive it, you must surrender control and sacrifice yourself.

We've found that the produce of the Vineyard, the king's banquet, the Lamb, the bread and the wine, it's all a banquet of grace that none can afford. It's mercy. So these folks hate what's for dinner. The king's grace exposes their un-grace. So they judge themselves out and some kill the king's messengers. In 70 A.D., Roman troops came and destroyed the high priests and elders and burned Jerusalem. Jesus says, "The king sent his troops, destroyed those murderers and burned their city. Roman troops...That's scandalous, a stumbling stone.

The king then says to his servants, "Go to the highways," (that would be outside the city, for it's been destroyed) "go to the highways and invite everyone you see bad and good..." Bad and good. See, it's not the knowledge of good and evil that gets you into the banquet. And behold, the unworthy are now worthy, and those that thought they were worthy are unworthy. The lost are found. Those that thought they were found are now lost (apollumi in Greek), destroyed.

I'd like to pause here and discuss a little theology because folks have been rightfully concerned over some of the things I've said regarding the ultimate fate of those that reject the Gospel in this life. There are at least three views held by Bible believing Christians.

1. Everlasting Torment (the majority view): The first view is that hell is everlasting torment. In The Great Divorce, C.S. Lewis describes hell as a place where you get whatever you want but hate all that you get for you can no longer want love. It's a place where your empire becomes your prison for you are a world unto yourself. Lewis argues that hell starts here in this world, like those in the first group that refused the banquet. So Jesus spoke about hell to people that were, in some ways, already in it and utterly deaf to the music of heaven. That's like the Biblical concept of Sheol or Hades (often translated hell), the realm of the walking dead. We've preached on that quite a bit. The Bible also talks about entering "eternal punishment" and suffering "eternal fire." The problem is explaining how Hades, or the experience of punishment, could be eternal or everlasting, for in Revelation 20:14, death and Hades are thrown into the lake of fire, and "no longer will there be anything accursed," Revelation 22:3.
2. Annihilation (an increasingly popular view): The second view is annihilation, the view that people suffer and are then annihilated, destroyed by the "eternal fire," the "eternal punishment." The folks in Jesus' parable that renounced the invitation and killed the messengers reminds me of this view. Their empire, their city, their Hades is devoured by fire, and they are destroyed (apollumi). So Hades is real, but the consuming fire is more real. It's eternal. Scripture says, "God is a consuming fire." I think He is the fire that surrounds New Jerusalem in Zechariah 2:5, that is the fire in the valley of Gehenna that consumes all evil.

We preached on that in Matthew 18. In Matthew 13, we preached on the wheat and the tares. The tares get consumed by fire. We said, "Maybe they are vessels of wrath without souls, like shadows and lies, predestined to destruction." Well, the problem with this second view is that, in the Bible, destroyed things often come back, like the New Jerusalem, the new temple, even Sodom in Ezekiel 16:55. I mean, where God is concerned, you can't always count on stuff staying dead. In our story, these guys are destroyed (apollumi), but that's also translated "lost." Jesus came to "seek and to save the lost," (apollumi), the destroyed. In our story, the lost get found and the found get lost. That is, "the called," Israel, get lost. So the question is, "Can they yet be found or will they stay lost forever?" In Roman's 11, Paul wrote, "And so all Israel will be saved...They are beloved...For the gifts and call of God are irrevocable."

And get this, Paul was a Pharisee and one of those murderers, right? So was he destroyed? He did write, "It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me." Well, the question is, "Can Jesus reach the lost in Hades?" Ephesians 4:8-10, Paul taught that Jesus descended into the lower parts of the earth and ascended to fill all things and lead a host of captives free.

3. Eventual Redemption Through Christ (minority view): The third view is that eventually all are redeemed through Christ, a minority view that was held by some of the early church fathers and modern people like George MacDonald and Karl Barth. These folks believe that somehow, in the end, even after Hades is cast into Gehenna, Jesus will "make all things new," including the hearts of the lost, for Jesus is "the savior of all men, especially those that believe," as Paul wrote in 1 Timothy 4:9. And, "as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive," 1 Corinthians 15:22.

The problem is that Paul also wrote of those that will suffer “eternal destruction away from the Lord,” 2 Thessalonians 1:9. In Luke 14, the king in Jesus’ story says, “None of these called ones will taste my banquet.” Could that be said of one like Paul, who no longer lived but Christ lived in him, that the old Paul never tasted the kingdom, but the new Paul did? I don’t know. Well, we preached on the prospect of the 3rd position in the recent sermon on the Vineyard. Those that take this position Biblically still believe in judgment, wrath, condemnation, the suffering in Hades, and fire of Gehenna. And no matter what, we’re stuck with this one naked guy cast out of the banquet into the outer darkness where men weep and gnash their teeth. I know that’s all confusing... so I included some more scriptures in your bulletin to confuse you more.

Howard Hendricks said, “A mist in the pulpit is a fog in the pew.” Maybe so, but maybe the mist is qadosh, holiness. Once it rested on Mount Sinai for forty days. The people of Israel hated the mist, so they made a golden calf, an idol. Maybe we’ve made an idol to replace the holy mist, and we use the idol to scare people into the kingdom. But then they can’t taste the banquet. Or worse, we use the idol to secretly hate our enemies and feel better about ourselves (the found ones). The truth is, I don’t know the ultimate state of the wicked, but that’s not my job. I’m to issue an invitation to the good and bad to come to the banquet of absolute mercy. Our Lord is the revelation and manifestation of divine mercy. So the ones who least trust mercy are most in danger of hell. And anytime we trust an idol, we crucify our Lord. If hell is the last word, perhaps Jesus is not. And the measure you give is the measure you get. Give Jesus and get Jesus.

Jesus is the manifestation of divine mercy. So the less we trust in mercy, the less we trust in Jesus, and the harder it will be to invite people to His banquet for we no longer have a taste for what’s being served...we no longer hope that “all would reach repentance...we no longer put our trust in irrevocable mercy (mercy that will not stop and is not dependent upon us)...we’re no longer amazed at grace, so no longer delighted at what’s being served...Roast lamb, broken bread, red, red wine. Mercy, it’s what’s for dinner...

You know, when I’ve witnessed to people out of faith, hope, and love in God’s mercy, they seem to listen like they listened when I invited them to my wedding banquet long ago. But when I witness out of duty, anxiety, and fear, fear for them, fear for me, and fear of God’s punishment, well, it doesn’t feel like faith. It doesn’t look like love. “Perfect love casts out fear for fear has to do with punishment,” wrote John. It doesn’t feel like faith, look like love, and it doesn’t sound like Gospel, good news. Good news is “ev-angelia” in Greek. Good angel, good message, good news, Gospel. It’s where we get the term, evangelical. But anymore it seems that few people (especially tax collectors and prostitutes), few people associate the word with those who bring good news. They think more in terms of prophets of doom, religious elite, legislators of good and bad, the morality police...

That makes some sense, I mean, it must have been tempting for the evangelists, the messengers in the parable to call the police, legislate morality. For as Jesus revealed, preaching good news often gets you killed, for nothing is as offensive and scandalous as grace. Well, the last set of servant messengers are a picture of us. The king calls them and says, “Go to the highways. Invite them all, both bad and good.”

Did you get that? Bad and good. It’s the difference between Christianity and all other religions. It’s not the good that are worthy. It’s those that want a banquet of grace who are worthy. “And

so the wedding hall was filled with guests.” Tax collectors, prostitutes...you and me. How can the king afford this much mercy? And what will all these shabby people wear? And where is the bride? And where is the groom, the son of the king? (He showed up in the last parable just about this time.) But now we come to the most shocking part of the story. The wretches have been found for no merit of their own. But now the king’s friend is lost for no merit of His own.

When the king came in to look at the guests, he saw there a man who had no wedding garment; and he said to him, ‘Friend, how did you get in here without a wedding garment?’ And he was speechless. Then the king said to the attendants, ‘Bind him hand and foot, and cast him into the outer darkness; there men will weep and gnash their teeth.’ For many are called, but few are chosen.”

How many are called? I guess all, even the ones that murdered the servants. The many is all. How many are chosen? How few? It wouldn’t be the hall filled with guests. One is chosen, chosen by the king. The few is one. Remember Matthew 7:14, “Narrow is the gate and difficult is the way...and few are those that find it.”

How narrow? As narrow as the law.

How difficult? As difficult as perfection.

How few found it? One.

He is the gate, and He is the way. Remember Matthew 9:37, “The harvest is plentiful and the laborers are few.” How few? One, and “apart from Him we can do nothing.” I believe the few is one and the one is Jesus. Ephesians 1:3, “God chose us in Him before the foundation of the world.” The many chosen is one, all in one (like an ark passing through judgment, like a new creation in a seed). “For our sake God made him to be sin who knew no sin so that in him we might become the righteousness of God,” 2 Corinthians 5:21.

Jesus was predestined to hell (to bear our curse). Jesus was predestined to heaven (that we might become the righteousness of God). He clothed us with His righteousness. He’s naked because He gave us His garments. Galatians 3:27, we are to “put on Christ.” “For as in Adam all die, so in Christ shall all be made alive,” 1 Corinthians 15:22. In four days, Jesus will inaugurate the great wedding banquet at the Passover Feast in the upper room, saying, “This is my body and this is my blood.” He is the Lamb that was slain. He is the bread that’s broken, the wine that’s poured. He is mercy, and He is the friend of God.

But by the end of that day he’ll be taken from the feast (outside the city) to the hill of the skull where they will strip him of his garments to divide them among themselves. They will crucify him naked. At the 9th hour, he will lift his head and cry, “My God, my god, why have you forsaken me!” He had descended into hell where men weep and gnash their teeth. We don’t come to church to hear how we are going to hell. We come to church to hear how He went to hell.

People say, “If mercy is unlimited, why not sin that grace may abound?” Why? Because grace is my savior’s blood. Because my Jesus bears your sin in hell. And I love Him. That’s why. “He has clothed me with the garment of salvation. He has covered me with the robe of righteousness.” Isaiah 61:10. “They have washed their robes and made them white in the

blood of the Lamb.” (Revelation 7:14) “Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his Bride has made herself ready; it was granted [given] her to be clothed with fine linen, bright and pure—for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints.” (Revelation 19:7-8)

You see, the wedding garment is white linen, and the white linen is a dress. The garment is a wedding dress. He is the bride groom, and we (the wretches from the street) are His bride. That’s some pretty amazing grace. So why share your faith? Why invite people to church? Why preach the Gospel?

Well, Why watch a sunset and turn to the person next to you and say, “Isn’t that beautiful? Why eat chocolate and then talk about it? Why sing a song? Why kiss your groom? Why get pregnant and bear fruit? Because He’s good, and now we see it. We see Him. Why love? Because He first loved us. Why? Because we’ve tasted His banquet, even in this world where men weep and gnash their teeth.

Where There Is Weeping and Gnashing of Teeth

Matthew 22:1-14

Pastor Peter Hiatt

March 13, 2005

Well, in scripture hell is real, like Satan is real. Hell is real, but not the way heaven is real. Hell is like the presence of an absence, while heaven is reality in itself. Hell is a mind, heart, soul collapsed upon itself in darkness, while heaven is all things in the light of Christ. So hell is real, but not the way heaven is real...like Satan is real, but not the way Jesus is real. Satan is real the way a lie is real, like the absence of the truth is real...the way darkness is real, like the absence of light is real...the way death is real, like the absence of life is real. Satan is our real enemy and the real presence of an absence. And hell is the dominion of that present absence...the dominion of death, darkness, and lies.

Well, as if that’s not confusing enough, the English word “hell” has been used to translate two very different words and two very different concepts: Gehenna and Hades, fire and darkness. Hades and darkness are like an unspeakable absence The fire of Gehenna is like an unspeakable presence. At the end of the Revelation, death and Hades get thrown into the lake of fire that burns with brimstone. That is, death, darkness, and lies get thrown into life, light, and truth. In the Old Testament (Isaiah 30:33), the breath of God like a stream of brimstone ignites the fires of tophet (that is, Gehenna). In Greek the word for “brimstone” is “theion,” also translated “divine being.” So death and Hades get thrown into “the sea of fire that burns with divine being.” Could there be a worse fate for death, darkness, and lies than to be forever immersed in life, light, and truth? Our Lord is life, light, and truth. And our God is a consuming fire.

Well, when I speak of hell today, I’m speaking of Hades, which is the Greek translation of the Hebrew word “sheol.” The Old Testament viewed sheol as the realm of the dead, where the dead are kept until judgment. (At the judgment in the Revelation, death and Hades give up their dead.) It’s the realm of the dead, yet in the Old Testament, sheol begins here. The Psalmist talks of how the pains of Hell, sheol, have grabbed hold of him. In Psalm 88, the

Psalmist cries that God has placed him in the lowest pit, in darkness, in the deeps. Yet obviously, he's not medically dead for he's still writing.

He asks these questions: "Will you show your wonders to the dead? Shall the dead arise and praise thee? Shall thy lovingkindness [hesed] be declared in the grave? Or thy faithfulness in destruction? Shall thy wonders be known in the dark? Or thy righteousness in the land of forgetfulness?" Righteousness...scripture pictures righteousness as a robe we must put on. Well, my point is that in the Old Testament, sheol begins here and extends into the afterlife.

Lewis writes, "It begins with a grumbling mood, and yourself still distinct from it; perhaps criticizing it. And yourself, in a dark hour, may will that mood, embrace it. Ye can repent and come out of it again. But there may come a day when you can do that no longer. Then there will be no you left to criticize the mood, nor even to enjoy it, but just the grumble itself going on forever like a machine."

Well, I don't know how accurate that is, yet it's clear that just as the kingdom of heaven is at hand, in some way, the kingdom of hell—Hades, sheol—is at hand. Well, whether you're talking about hell on earth or hell under the earth, sheol begins here and extends into the afterlife, the realm of death, darkness, and lies cut off from life, light, and truth. Death, darkness, and lies...in other words, sin. Death, darkness, and lies where men weep and gnash their teeth.

In Matthew 8:11, Jesus says, "I tell you, many will come from east and west and sit at table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven, while the sons of the kingdom will be thrown into the outer darkness; there men will weep and gnash their teeth." Did you get that? There are sons of the kingdom in the outer darkness. In the Psalms, even King David, the man after God's own heart writes that his soul had been in the lowest hell, sheol, (Psalm 86:13). Well, in this realm or the next, Hades, hell, is a terrifying place! As Biblical Christians, we can't deny its existence. Yet we do make it as ethereal, theoretical, and distant as possible. We put it solely in the next world and deny its existence in our world.

This week, Time magazine reported that 1.1 billion people in our world live on less than a dollar a day. 20,000 people will die today due to poverty. I'm not saying poverty is the same as hell. However, I bet if you had to live on less than a dollar a day, there'd be some weeping and gnashing of teeth. We don't like those statistics, and already your mind is probably finding ways to deny them. We talk about pagan cultures sacrificing children to gods like Molech and Baal, and think it has nothing to do with our culture. 40 million abortions in the last 30 years...if you're a party to that, I do not condemn you, and Jesus makes all things new. Yet, I imagine that sometimes it's felt like hell on earth. Whenever we sin, we're making hell on earth. When we deny the sin, we dig it deeper.

Around 6 million people, mostly Jews, were exterminated by Hitler. I toured Auschwitz last year. I remember thanking God for that museum and memorial so we couldn't deny that hell on earth, and hopefully, wouldn't deny the other hells on earth...20 million under Stalin. 40 million in Mao Zedong's China (many martyred for their faith). I've read that more Christians died for their faith in the last century than all the others combined.

Recently, Hawa Ahmed, a Moslem student in North Africa, found a Christian tract, read it, and gave her life to Christ. When her father found out, he and her brothers stripped her, tied her to

a chair fastened to a metal plate, and tried to electrocute her. She finally broke free and ran through the streets naked, humiliated, and in pain. Hell on earth. And of course, we want to deny that it happens, but it happens all over the globe, and it happens in our own city. I thanked God for the Auschwitz memorial, because if we admit it happened to 6 million in Germany, maybe we'll admit that it happens to children in basements and garages in suburban America. It's happened to several in our church. It happened to one of my best friends. Over the years, I've told you about her. Her dad was a Satanist. She's been raped, beaten, abandoned, horrifically abused, subjected to intense torture, literally locked away in outer darkness for days. She's witnessed things and been subject to things far worse than anything I read about at the Holocaust Museum.

I probably wouldn't have believed her stories, except that I've done battle with Satan and the demons that have manifested in her flesh and harassed me in my home. The Lord has even given my wife visions of my friend's memories such that Susan will whisper in my ear what our friend is looking at before she has the courage to tell us. Susan will get physically ill from what she sees and smells...bodies broken, blood shed, and demons. She's seeing and smelling hell. You know, there are people that will complain to me about not seeing signs and wonders in worship. Yet they don't want anything to do with the signs and wonders that show up at 2 am in places where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth, although they'll blow your socks off. And I understand. I probably wouldn't have gone there either, except I felt I had to. Afterwards, I wanted to deny it was real because it's so hard to come to terms with hell on earth.

Denial is like a fortress in our minds to keep us from the pain of hell. America is a culture of denial, a fortress of denial. We dress our corpses in fine clothes and cocoon ourselves from a suffering world with wealth and legislation. You know, Zion was a fortress...against hell, against the outer darkness. The temple was a fortress of stone and legislation that housed the Holy of Holies and the everlasting consuming fire. Some people think this building is like that. So they'll use potty words outside but would never speak them inside. And they'll get real nervous about guarding the communion table from sinners because it's holy. They're worried about guarding God's holiness from this world, but maybe it's really the other way around, and God is guarding this world from His holiness. So it's not that God is in danger of being infected with hell, it's that hell is in danger of being utterly consumed by God. And so God is gentle with hell because we're trapped in it, addicted to it, and yet in denial of it.

Well, my point is that hell is in this world (not to say it isn't in the next). We try to build stone fortresses against it. We even build fortresses in our minds, even denying our own deaths and the slow decay of our bodies. In fear, we hide from hell, Hades, sheol. We hide in outer darkness—where men “weep and gnash their teeth.”

In Matthew 16, Jesus said some fascinating things about hell and us. Peter confessed that Jesus was the Messiah, son of the living God, and then Jesus said to Peter, “I tell you, you are Peter (Rocky) and on this rock, I will build my church, and the gates of hell will not prevail against it.” Do you hear what that statement assumes about us, the church? It assumes we'll attack those gates. Not that hell will try to break down our gates, but that we'll go to hell to bust open its gates. Well dang, if Jesus really meant that, it means Satan's only hope is to keep us, the church, hiding in our stone temples and away from his gates. And so his only real weapon is fear, and our only real lack is faith.

Well, this is the second part of last week's sermon on Jesus' parable of the Great Banquet. In Matthew 22: 1-7, the called ones refuse the Great Banquet so judge themselves out. In the end, any place outside of the Great Banquet of life and light turns into hell where there is "weeping and gnashing of teeth."

Verse 8: "Then he [the king] said to his servants, "The wedding is ready, but those invited were not worthy. Go therefore to the thoroughfares, and invite to the marriage feast as many as you find." And those servants went out into the streets and gathered all whom they found, both bad and good; so the wedding hall was filled with guests."

The found are lost, and the lost are found. Jesus came to seek and to save the lost, the apollumi. He saves us by taking our curse, taking our sin and shame, and giving us His righteousness. All the lost at the marriage supper of the lamb will be wearing the righteousness of one man, Jesus Christ. Apart from Him, we are all utterly naked even though we try to hide with fig leaves and law. It's interesting that in scripture and culture, nakedness is a picture of shame...unless, of course, you expose your nakedness to your covenant partner in order that your spouse might cover you with himself or herself. Then your surrendered nakedness isn't shame, but holy.

We all, the many, are the bride of Christ, and He is the groom. He covers us and completes us. Well, that's something to meditate on, but all these folks from the highways, lost and naked, both bad and good, all these wretches at the Great Banquet in Matthew 22 had to have gotten their wedding garment from someone as a gift because they sure couldn't afford it themselves, someone incredibly wealthy and profoundly generous, someone who deeply wanted the king to be pleased, someone like the king's friend.

"But when the king came in to look at the guests, he saw there a man who had no wedding garment; and he said to him, "Friend, how did you get in here without a wedding garment?" And he was speechless. Then the king said to the attendants, "Bind him hand and foot, and cast him into the outer darkness; there men will weep and gnash their teeth." For many are called, but few are chosen."

Ephesians 1:4, "We have been chosen in him [in Christ]." I think the many are us, and the few is the one chosen, Jesus. We are all called in Him. He's chosen to bear our curse. 2 Corinthians 5, "God made him to be sin who knew no sin that we [the many] might become the righteousness of God." Jesus gave us His garment, and for our sake, descended into hell where men weep and gnash their teeth. (No matter what you think of my interpretation of Matthew 22 and the man with no garment, we all confess in the Apostle's Creed that Jesus descended into hell.)

In four days, Jesus will inaugurate the Great Banquet on Mount Zion by giving His bride His body broken and blood shed. He'll be taken from the banquet outside the city where Roman soldiers will strip Him, dividing His garments among themselves. They crucify Him naked between two thieves in a cursed place where men weep and gnash their teeth. From the 6th to the 9th hour, the sky grew dark. It was the outer darkness. At the 9th hour He cried, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" He had descended into hell. Then "Jesus cried again with a loud voice and yielded up his spirit."

Next verse, Matthew 27:51, “And behold, the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom; and the earth shook, and the rocks were split.” That is, the fortress was breached from the inside out. The curtain ripped and something got out. The Holiness got out. The fire got out. It will descend on the church at Pentecost. Not an old stone temple, but a new temple of living stones. No longer a defensive fortress, but an army to storm the gates of hell. So Jesus cried from the cross, surrendering His spirit. The Holy of Holies was opened.

Next verse, Matthew 27:52, “The tombs also were opened, and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised, and coming out of the tombs after his resurrection they went into the holy city and appeared to many.” Jesus descended into hell, not only to bear our sins unto destruction, but to blow the gates of hell wide open and lead a host of captives free. Ephesians 4, Christ “descended into the lower parts of the earth” and he ascended leading a “host of captives.” He ascended that he might “fill all things.”

1 Peter 3:18-19, “For Christ also died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit; in which he went and preached to the spirits in prison.”

C.S. Lewis wrote, “Only the Greatest of all can make Himself small enough to enter Hell. For the higher a thing is, the lower it can descend. Only One has descended into Hell...All moments that have been or shall be were, or are, present in the moment of His descending. There is no spirit in prison to whom He didn’t preach.”

Revelation 13:8, Jesus is “the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.” So He died once for all, all time, all moments were present to Him at the cross. So He didn’t just descend into some abstract, theological hell. I’m saying He descended into your hell. I think He descended into each and every hell for He died for the “sins of the whole world,” and He will “fill all things.”

It appears that the first person who entered paradise clothed in the righteousness of Christ was a thief who met Jesus where men weep and gnash their teeth. Jesus was the naked, battered man next to him on the cross. Do you remember where Paul, the murdering Pharisee, met Jesus? Jesus was revealed on the Damascus Road, but Paul had already seen Him. Jesus said, “Paul, why do you persecute me?” Jesus had literally, actually, and physically descended into Paul’s hell in the form of the broken bodies and shed blood of those Paul was dragging off to prison where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth. In three chapters, Matthew 25, Jesus tells us what He’ll say on judgment day from His glorious throne, “I was hungry...I was thirsty...I was a stranger...I was naked...I was sick...I was in prison...”

Let me paraphrase...“I was there where men weep and gnash their teeth. Did you come to me or were you hiding in your fortress, afraid to approach the gates that I lay behind?” Do you know why Mother Teresa ministered to those who live on less than a dollar a day? She writes, “I see Christ in the distressing disguise of the poor. The Eucharist and the poor are but one love for me.” He’s there where men weep and gnash their teeth. He’s there in broken bodies and shed blood. He’s there in His people, persecuted for His name.

Hawa Ahmed’s father and brothers stripped her naked and bound her to a chair fixed to a metal plate and placed a Bible on her lap. But the electricity would not flow through her body. Finally, her father just beat her and cast her into the street, naked. She ran through the streets utterly humiliated. People looked at her curiously but not shocked. Her friend found her,

clothed her, and fed her. The next day, this friend asked the neighbors what they thought when they saw Hawa running through the streets naked. They all asked, "What do you mean? The girl had a wonderful white dress on. We asked ourselves why someone so beautifully clothed had to run through the streets." Jesus had clothed her in His garment, a wedding dress. He'd taken her shame and given her His righteousness. That was just a sign of what He's done for all eternity.

Well, stories like that are often common where Christ is preached among those who weep and gnash their teeth, for the Living Word has descended into hell and descends into hell even as you preach the word. By far the most horrifying glimpses of hell on earth that I have ever witnessed have come through the memories of my friend and the visions of my wife as we've prayed. I've never witnessed such darkness, and yet it's there that I've fallen so thoroughly in love with the Light. For Jesus, the Light, has descended into her hell. The Light shines in the darkness. Over and over again, Jesus appears in her memories and my wife's visions and changes the meaning of her hell, like He changed the meaning of the cross from the greatest curse to the greatest blessing. His presence isn't only a mind game. It's the deepest reality. He descends through us in prayer and reveals He was there all along, even before she knew Him.

Once she was tied to a bed and raped. The man who did it took a knife and plunged it toward her heart. Just as he was about to penetrate her chest, the knife stopped. The man dropped it and ran in fear. My friend always wondered why he didn't kill her. We prayed through that memory, and she saw Jesus there. He had stretched out His hand and stopped the knife. Which makes us wonder, "Why didn't He stop the rape?" He didn't stop it...and yet He bore it. My friend called the day after we had prayed and shared this incredibly vivid dream, I was tied up there, and then He appeared. He was wearing this white robe. He walked up to me and untied me from the bed to which I was tied. He bent down and picked me up, and He carried me over to the side of the room and sat me down in a chair. He looked in my eyes and said, "Honey, I'm here to protect your heart and your spirit." Then Jesus took off His white robe. He wrapped it around me. And I felt entirely safe. Then from that place of safety I watched as Jesus walked over to that bed and laid down on that bed where I had lain, and He tied Himself to the bed. Then I watched as they came in and did everything to Jesus that they had done to me. You see, He'd descended into her hell to bear her hell and clothe her with His righteousness which is mercy.

Demons of fear and shame dwell in those hidden memories, but because Jesus is there she has courage to remember and courage to confess and courage to break down the gates of hell. I've seen that Jesus clothes people in wedding garments as He raises them from the dead. He even descends into the old, dead bodies of those He's raised, so their broken body is His broken body, and their shed blood is His shed blood. And Jesus is truly present in the outer darkness in that form where His bride weeps and gnashes her teeth. Cast out...to be with her and that she might taste the hell He chooses to bear for the love of her. And sometimes we've seen it, the fire comes and utterly consumes those hells and purifies what's left. And yet, the fire was already there in the heart of Christ. He is the Way, Truth, Life, and Light in the dominion of darkness, death, and lies. He's the way when there is no way.

Now, you may feel extremely unable to relate to the story I've just shared, but perhaps you have a hell or two of your own. I mean a place of death and darkness and lies where you weep and gnash your teeth, alone in the outer darkness. You think no one knows and no one sees. Perhaps it's a memory or a deep wound. Perhaps it's an affair or a secret habit or a world of

lies or unconfessed sin. Well, if you belong to Christ, He's already there. I suspect He's there weeping and gnashing His teeth on your behalf, waiting for you to surrender your death, darkness, and lies to His life, light, and truth so He can set you free, and so He's no longer alone in your hell, for you have known Him there. Unconfessed sin is hell, but confessed sin is the kingdom of heaven.

Last year at the Living Stones service, Marcia Hinds shared a recurring vision she's had of the ministry of Lookout Mountain around the world. She shared about watching Jesus walk through villages, sad villages where people weep and gnash their teeth. She would watch Jesus give them items from our church, and then she would see us kneeling by Jesus, washing faces, as well as hearts.

It was a beautiful vision, but she wrote me later saying, There was one detail I didn't share that night because I didn't know how to say it. Jesus had no clothes on. He had given His clothes to those villagers as He washed their faces. I felt He had given His all, His everything. It's as you described; it's the man who had no wedding garment. It is the Lamb of God who has no wedding garment. He is the garment. Jesus descends into hell and dresses His bride in His own self. He descends into hell before you and then He attacks the gates through you. We, the church, need to stop fearing the gates of hell, and we need to start storming the gates of hell in Jesus' name. Our Lord has already conquered the powers of death. So even if we die, we live. "Even if I make my bed in sheol," wrote David (Psalm 139), "behold thou art there." The way, the gate, the door is there where men weep and gnash their teeth.

If you want to see Jesus shine, take the Gospel and go to where men weep and gnash their teeth...maybe it's villages on the other side of the world, maybe it's the person next to you. When I struggle in worship, I usually close my eyes and think of Jesus in hell where my friend has wept and gnashed her teeth. I think of Jesus there and how He shines there, and then I can't help worshipping "for the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness cannot overcome it."

It's two weeks until Easter. If you want to sing loud on Easter, go to the cross right now where men weep and gnash their teeth. Was there ever a more horrifying sight than the light of the world cast naked into outer darkness? Could there ever be a more glorious sight than the Lamb standing as if it had been slain? The women at the cross on Friday saw Him first on Easter morning.

So, why am I telling you this stuff, Christian? First, because I want us to see Jesus, "the light that shines in the darkness." We'll find Him where they weep and gnash their teeth...like the shepherds found him lying in a manger, where people weep and gnash their teeth. Second, we're called to war against the powers of hell. So we must no longer be afraid to storm those gates in Jesus' name (even if we die, we live). Third, we must no longer be afraid of our own death, for we've been kept in bondage to Satan through the fear of death (Hebrews 2:15).

Isaiah 52:13-53:6...¹³Behold, my **servant** shall act wisely; he shall be high and lifted up, and shall be exalted. ¹⁴As many were astonished at you – his appearance was so marred, beyond human semblance, and his form beyond that of the children of mankind – ¹⁵so shall he sprinkle many nations; kings shall shut their mouths because of him; for that which has not been told them they see, and that which they have not heard they understand. ¹Who has believed what they heard from us? And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed? ²For he grew up

before him like a young plant, and like a root out of dry ground; he had no form or majesty that we should look at him, and no beauty that we should desire him. ³He was despised and rejected by men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not. ⁴Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. ⁵But he was wounded for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his stripes we are healed. ⁶**All** we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us **all**.

Matthew 27:45, 51-53...⁴⁵Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land until the ninth hour...⁵¹And behold, the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. And the earth shook, and the rocks were split. ⁵²The tombs also were opened. And many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised, ⁵³and coming out of the tombs after his resurrection they went into the holy city and appeared to many.

Commentators see v.51-52 as some kind of weird biblical anomaly. How sad.

Luke 16:24-26...²⁴And he called out, 'Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus to dip the end of his finger in water and cool my tongue, for I am in anguish in this flame (*phlox*).' ²⁵But Abraham said, 'Child, remember that you in your lifetime received your good things, and Lazarus in like manner bad things; but now he is comforted here, and you are in anguish. ²⁶And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, in order that those who would pass from here to you may not be able, and none may cross from there to us.'

This is a parable. It portrays traditional first century Hebrew images of Heaven. Lazarus is in Abraham's bosom. Is Heaven, Abraham's bosom? Can we pick a different bosom? What ever the case, there may be a literal "chasm" that has been fixed that none can cross over. Yet, can we imply from this that God in Christ Jesus, for whom "nothing is impossible," CAN'T "cross" over? And even if the "chasm" cannot be bridged (like in the little gospel tracts with a cross forming a bridge over a chasm), can we therefore imply that the chasm cannot be destroyed? That is can we not believe that one day, "Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain." (Isaiah 40:4)? Or can we imply that the flame (flox) which burns the rich man in this place, might not one day consume or dissolve this entire world, including the elements of that chasm, (1Peter 3:10)? And that, that fire could then not refine the rich man or consume the rich man? And that he could not be made new? Is there not a fire that not only consumes, but counsels, comforts, and causes us to speak in other tongues? And might the very fire that once burned the rich man, one day, be his home – like the very air he breaths – Breath, Spirit, Tongues of Fire?

John 5:24-29...²⁴Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life. ²⁵"Truly, truly, I say to you, an hour is coming, and is now here, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and **those who hear will live**. ²⁶For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself. ²⁷And he has given him authority to execute judgment, because he is the Son of Man. ²⁸Do not marvel at this, for an hour is coming when **all who are in the tombs will hear** his voice ²⁹and come out, those who have

done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment.

Let's think this one through:

1. "The dead" heard the voice of the Son of God at some point along about 30-33AD, before Jesus was crucified and also will in the future ("is coming, and is now here").
2. "**All** who are in the tombs (Sheol) will hear his voice."
3. "Those who hear will live."
4. So "All" "the dead" and "those in the tombs" will live.
5. All those in the tombs will live, yet some will come out to "the resurrection of life" and some will come out to "the resurrection of Judgment."
6. If the "**coming out**" is "the resurrection of life," Jesus would be saying: "some will be 'resurrected to life' to 'the resurrection of life'." That's a bit awkward grammatically. It's also a bit awkward theologically. "Life" in the gospel of John is "coming to Jesus." Just 11 verses after this, Jesus tells the religious leaders that they refuse to come to him "that they may have "Life" (v.40). They're walking around, but dead. "In Him was Life and the Life was the light of men" (1:4). "I am... The Life" (11:25,14:6). If you have "Life" in John, you have Jesus. Check out "Life" in John and it's a lot more than just coming out of a tomb. In Revelation 20:12, John sees "the dead standing." They are NOT alive. Furthermore, would God give them "Life" (as in #3)," just to take it away in "judgment"? And if so, the judgment wouldn't be judgment, for these folks would've already been judged. That is, if we assume judgment is primarily a decision, the decision would've already been made. If judgment is condemnation then God would be waking these folks up to give them life just so he could then take it away or torture them for ever. The KJV translates this word "Krisis" as damnation (or perhaps it uses an inferior text) but "damnation" is not what the word normally means.
7. However, if the "**coming out**" is just "coming out" but not "Life," the kind of "Life" Jesus talks about in John, then the "some" who come out to the "resurrection of Life" live because they've already been judged (v.24) by hearing The Word and receiving The Word (John 15:3). However **the others are also promised life**, but only after they hear and are thereby judged. The word translated "judgment" is "Krisis." It's fundamental meaning is "to separate" as in separating the wheat from the tares or sheep from the goats. If they have already been "separated" from those who inherit life, what is the meaning of their judgment. Yet if they also inherit life, they are being separated from their "old self," "this body of sin and death," "the flesh"...perhaps their "vessel of wrath" (see "vessels of wrath and vessels of mercy" below).

Acts 2:25-31...²⁵For David says concerning him, " 'I saw the Lord always before me, for he is at my right hand that I may not be shaken; ²⁶therefore my heart was glad, and my tongue rejoiced; my flesh also will dwell in hope. ²⁷For you will not abandon my soul to Hades, or let your Holy One see corruption. (Because thou wilt not leave my soul in hell, neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption. -KJV) ²⁸You have made known to me the paths of life;

you will make me full of gladness with your presence.’²⁹“Brothers, I may say to you with confidence about the patriarch David that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day.³⁰ Being therefore a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that he would set one of his descendants on his throne,³¹ he foresaw and spoke about the resurrection of the Christ, that he was not abandoned to Hades, nor did his flesh see corruption. (Because thou wilt not leave my soul in hell, neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption. –KJV)

The KJV is more faithful to the Greek text in these verses. It seems very clear that Jesus and David were both in Hades and it appears that just as God did not leave Jesus behind in Hades, Jesus did not leave David behind in Hades either.

Psalm 16:8-11 (a psalm of David)...⁸I have set the LORD always before me: because *he is* at my right hand, I shall not be moved. ⁹Therefore my heart is glad, and my glory rejoiceth: my flesh also shall rest in hope. ¹⁰For thou wilt not leave my soul in hell; neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption. ¹¹Thou wilt shew me the path of life: in thy presence *is* fulness of joy; at thy right hand *there are* pleasures for evermore.

1 Corinthians 15:55...“O death, where is your victory? O death (“Sheol” in Hosea), where is your sting?”

Interesting question. When we preach a death that never comes to an end (indeed The End), a death that cannot be breached, a death whose gates can prevail against anything including Christ and His Church, are we not giving back to death its victory and it’s sting? Do we proclaim death the victor in the name of Jesus?

Ephesians 4:8-10...⁸Therefore it says, “When he ascended on high he led a host of captives, and he gave gifts to men.”⁹(In saying, “He ascended,” what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower parts of the earth? ¹⁰He who descended is the one who also ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill **all** things.)

Sheol is “the lower parts of the earth.” Jesus will fill **all** things. He will burst every bubble of “non-being,” “non-God” with himself, the love of God poured out – fire.

Colossians 1:13...He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son...

Have we been in the grips of death/Sheol? Are we more familiar with the ways of Hades, than of Heaven? Are those ways easier to believe?

Hebrews 11:13-16, 32, 39-40...¹³These all died in faith, not having received the things promised, but having seen them and greeted them from afar, and having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. ¹⁴For people who speak thus make it clear that they are seeking a homeland. ¹⁵If they had been thinking of that land from which they had gone out, they would have had opportunity to return. ¹⁶But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared for them a city...³²And what more shall I say? For time would fail me to tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of **David** and **Samuel** and the prophets...³⁹And all these, though

commended through their faith, did not receive what was promised, ⁴⁰since God had provided something better for us, that apart from us they should not be made perfect.

So like, where were they? Remember Sheol has “depths.” There appear to be levels. Proverbs 9 refers to thieves as in “the depths of Sheol.” In Psalm 86 the Lord delivers David from the “depths of Sheol.” Samuel on the other hand didn’t sound all that “deep” to me, “Why have you disturbed my **rest**,” he says to Saul.

1 Peter 3:18-20...¹⁸For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit, ¹⁹in which he went and proclaimed to the spirits in prison, ²⁰because they formerly did not obey, when God’s patience waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were brought safely through water.

It sure seems like Peter is clearly stating that Jesus went and preached to antediluvians in Sheol and saved them, (if we take Ephesians 4:8-10 “literally”). That is, Jesus preached to those condemned to Sheol, who had rejected the free gift of salvation before impending judgment in the days of Noah. In the New Testament we learn that Noah’s Ark is a picture of Christ who carries us through judgment in his flesh, his body, the church. Jesus preached to the people who missed the boat the first time. Why can he not do it a second time... before this world is flooded with fire? Or maybe in some sense it has already **been** and is **being** flooded with fire. (Mark 9:49, John 12:31, Luke 12:49, Acts 2:3)

1 Peter 4:4-7...⁴With respect to this they are surprised when you do not join them in the same flood of debauchery, and they malign you; ⁵but they will give account to him who is ready to judge the living and the dead. ⁶For this is why the gospel was preached even to those who are dead, that though judged in the flesh the way people are, they might live in the spirit the way God does. ⁷The **end** of all things is at hand; therefore be self-controlled and sober-minded for the sake of your prayers.

“The gospel was preached even to those who are dead.” Who preached it? Jesus – “The Stone,” “The Stone that the builder’s rejected” (1 Peter 2:7). The gospel preached is Jesus, and the preacher is Jesus. And did you notice that the preaching of this gospel appears to be equated with judgment? “Everyone who falls on that stone will be broken to pieces, and when it falls on anyone, it will crush him” (Luke 20:18). Jesus is the judgment. If we fall on him, the stumbling stone, we will be broken. If He falls on us we will be crushed. Perhaps the first is coming to his cross willingly in this life, surrendering our selves and dying with him there – passing through judgment there. The second is being overtaken by Judgment at death or after death...broken or crushed, either way we are judged. Either way our heart of stone is destroyed. Either way Christ is our end. “We have concluded this: that one has died for all therefore all have died” (2 Corinthians 5:14b). “All have died.” If we believe in this age, we receive eternal life now. We rise with him now in Spirit and our bodies rise with him at physical death. If we don’t believe in this age, it appears that we are “crushed.” Are we then “crushed” at death or do we descend into Sheol to be “crushed”? Whatever the case, Sheol does not necessarily mean that the gospel is no longer preached. Perhaps there is really nothing but “the gospel preached.” Is it not the Word of God? “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life and the life was the light of men.” (John 1:1-4) Even Hades must be created and upheld by that Word, who is Mercy. Even if it is

a “living death,” the “life” must come from that Word. “Even there... your right hand shall hold me” (Psalm 139:10)

2 Peter 2:4...For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but cast them into hell (*hades*) and committed them to chains of gloomy darkness to be kept **until** the judgment...

2 Peter 2:17...These are waterless springs and mists driven by a storm. For them the gloom of utter darkness has been reserved.

Fire seems to have a rather illuminating effect on utter darkness. In ancient times (before the twentieth century) wouldn't most light be perceived as coming from fire? The sun is rather fiery...

Jude 6...And the angels who did not stay within their own position of authority, but left their proper dwelling, he has kept in eternal chains under gloomy darkness until the judgment of the great day...

“kept until.” I still have so many questions about “angels,” even though I have encountered “fallen angels” many time in deliverance sessions and as they harass me in my own life. My wife and many friends have seen the good kind, and I've seen their miraculous effects when I have called on them to inflict God's judgment on demons or Satan manifesting in others. Even so, I have so many questions about what they **are**.

1. Are demons “ontological” equivalents to “good angels”? That is are they fallen angels? Some scriptures imply this, however those scriptures don't seem to be explicit. “Angel” means “messenger.” It's a functional category not an ontological category. Men are also called “angels” – “angelos.”
2. “Are they not all **ministering spirits** sent out to serve for the sake of those who are to inherit salvation?” (Hebrews 1:14) Does this include demons? Is spirit, “breath,” an ontological category? If it is, how are these spirits tied to God's Spirit? God is Spirit. Our spirit is God's “breath” in us, (if I understand Genesis 2 correctly). Will God forsake His own breath in us or in an “angel”? How could a demon, in any sense be God's breath?

My wife Susan has visions at times. She's told me that she's “seen” Jesus speak “angels.” She thought I might think she was silly when she told me. Well God speaks all things into existence and to think that Jesus' messages take the form of “messengers” isn't such a stretch. Perhaps all “good spirits” are somehow His Spirit, his breath, the seven spirits before the throne (Rev. 1:4,3:1,4:5,5:6). In my book on the Revelation, I argue that the seven angels of the seven churches are the spirit of Christ resident in those churches.

3. Could demons be like the “shadows” of “good angels”? Like the “satanic trinity” appears to be a shadow of the Holy Trinity.
4. Do “angels” get redeemed?
5. What happens to them “after” (the word, “after” may no longer work “after”) the judgment of the great day?

Revelation 1:17-18...¹⁷When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. But he laid his right hand on me, saying, “Fear not, I am the first and the last,¹⁸ and the living one. I died, and behold I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of **Death and Hades**.

Revelation 20:13-14...¹³And the sea gave up the dead who were in it, Death and Hades gave up the dead who were in them, and they were judged, each one of them, according to what they had done. ¹⁴Then **Death and Hades** were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire.

In the end (and Jesus is the “end,” “the last,” “the omega”), Hades gets thrown into the Lake of Fire and “Death is no more” (Rev. 12:4). It certainly seems to imply that “Hades” is no more. And even if Hades squeaks by somehow (I think it would qualify as a “former thing,” as well as “death”), there is no more crying or pain. It is the “second death,” the death of death.

Revelation 21:4-6...⁴He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and **death shall be no more**, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain anymore, for the **former things** have passed away.” ⁵And he who was seated on the throne said, “Behold, I am making all things new.” Also he said, “Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.” ⁶And he said to me, “It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give from the spring of the water of life without payment.

IT WOULD SEEM THAT:

1. Sheol/Hades is the realm of the dead.
2. Sheol/Hades is the destination of all people apart from Christ (...except perhaps for Old Testament weirdos like Elijah and Enoch, but maybe they are not and never were “apart from Christ.”). This includes “all Jerusalem” and people like David, Job, Samuel, even Aaron and Moses. Sheol is the destination of the dead but not necessarily the final destination.
3. Sheol/Hades begins even in this life and extends beyond this life.
4. It could hardly be called an “afterlife” cause your dead – no remembrance of God, no thought, knowledge, or wisdom.
5. Yet even in Sheol/Hades, God thinks of you and perhaps even upholds you, like David. And so, Wisdom is with you.
6. God raises people from Sheol/Hades. He did it for folks like Jonah, Samuel, and David, in some form... He raised them to “life” in this dead world, but then they still died. Yet he must also be planning to do it, or has done it, when he raises folks like David, Job, Samuel, and the Saints in Hebrews 11, who have been waiting for us. He will raise them or has raised them, not just to more time in this world, where everything dies, but to Life Eternal.
7. Jesus descended into Sheol/Hades and preached to those who rejected grace in this world and “perished” in judgment.

8. Jesus' preaching must not "return void" and did not return void, for he led a host of captives free.
9. I see no reason why Jesus cannot still descend into Sheol/Hades. I see no reason why Jesus can no longer seek and save "the lost" (apollumi).
10. Sheol/Hades is like the "Hell" pictured so brilliantly in C.S. Lewis's The Great Divorce. However, according to Scripture, Sheol/Hades comes to an end...named Jesus. Sheol/Hades is cast into the Lake of Fire.

Excerpts from The Great Divorce, by C.S. Lewis:

Earth, I think, will not be found by anyone to be in the end a very distinct place. I think earth, if chosen instead of Heaven, will turn out to have been, all along, only a region in Hell; and earth, if put second to Heaven, to have been from the beginning a part of Heaven itself...

"All Hell is smaller than one pebble of your earthly world: but it is smaller than one atom of this world, the Real World. Look at yon butterfly. If it swallowed all Hell, Hell would not be big enough to do it any harm or to have any taste."

"It seems big enough when you're in it, Sir."

"And yet all loneliness, angers, hatreds, envies and itchings that it contains, if rolled into one single experience and put into the scale against the least moment of joy that is felt by the least in Heaven, would have no weight that could be registered at all. Bad cannot succeed even in being bad as truly as good is good. If all Hell's miseries together entered the consciousness of yon wee yellow bird on the bough there, they would be swallowed up without a trace, as if one drop of ink had been dropped into that Great Ocean to which your terrestrial Pacific itself is only a molecule."

"I see," said I at last. "She couldn't fit into Hell."

He nodded. "There's not room for her," he said. "Hell could not open its mouth wide enough."

"And she couldn't make herself smaller?-like Alice, you know."

"Nothing like small enough. For a damned soul is nearly nothing: it is shrunk, shut up in itself. Good beats upon the damned incessantly as sound waves beat on the ears of the deaf, but they cannot receive it. Their fists are clenched, their teeth are clenched, their eyes fast shut. First they will not, in the end they cannot, open their hands for gifts, or their mouths for food, or their eyes to see."

"Then no one can ever reach them?"

"Only the Greatest of all can make Himself small enough to enter Hell. For the higher a thing is, the lower it can descend-a man can sympathise with a horse but a horse cannot sympathise with a rat. Only One has descended into Hell."

“And will He ever do so again?”

“It was not once long ago that He did it. Time does not work that way when once we have left the Earth. All moments that have been or shall be were, or are, present in the moment of His descending. There is no spirit in prison to whom He did not preach.”

The Fire & Gehenna

Genesis 15:17...When the sun had gone down and it was dark, behold, a smoking fire pot and a flaming torch passed between these pieces.

When The Lord walks the covenant before Abraham He appears as fire.

Exodus 3:2...And the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush. He looked, and behold, the bush was burning, yet it was not consumed.

“The Angel (messenger) of the Lord” is a unique and interesting figure in the Old Testament. It’s hard to take this figure seriously, without assuming that this “angel” is the pre-incarnate Christ. The miracle of the burning bush was precisely that the bush wasn’t burning. It was not consumed by the consuming fire. Likewise this “angel” is not consumed but is Fire or belongs to the Fire.

Exodus 13:21...And the Lord went before them by day in a pillar of cloud to lead them along the way, and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light, that they might travel by day and by night.

Exodus 24:17...Now the appearance of the glory of the Lord was like a devouring fire on the top of the mountain in the sight of the people of Israel.

Exodus 40:38...For the cloud of the Lord was on the tabernacle by day, and fire was in it by night, in the sight of all the house of Israel throughout all their journeys.

Leviticus 6:13...Fire shall be kept burning on the altar continually; it shall not go out.

Leviticus 9:24...And fire came out from before the Lord and consumed the burnt offering and the pieces of fat on the altar, and when all the people saw it, they shouted and fell on their faces.

Numbers 3:3-4...³These are the names of the sons of Aaron, the anointed priests, whom he ordained to serve as priests. ⁴But Nadab and Abihu died before the Lord when they offered unauthorized fire before the Lord in the wilderness of Sinai, and they had no children. So Eleazar and Ithamar served as priests in the lifetime of Aaron their father.

In Scripture fire appears to belong to God in a peculiar way. It seems to be preeminently God’s. Perhaps in some way God is fire, like He is Light and Love and Life. Nadab and Abihu die for offering “unauthorized fire.” In Rev 13:13-14, the false prophet is “allowed” to bring fire down from heaven to deceive those who dwell on earth. Apart from these two instances, which actually validate fire’s unique status as belonging to God, are there any other instances where fire is pictured as a tool or substance belonging to evil?

Deuteronomy 4:24...For the Lord your God is a consuming fire, a jealous God.

NOT “like a consuming fire,” “IS a consuming fire.” God is also Light (1 John 1:5). In that society, fire must have been almost synonymous with light. In John 8:12, Jesus states that he IS “the light of the world.” God is “the light” and Jesus is “the light of the world.”

Deuteronomy 9:3...Know therefore today that he who goes over before you as a consuming fire is the Lord your God. He will destroy them and subdue them before you. So you shall drive them out and make them perish quickly, as the Lord has promised you.

Isaiah 33:14...The sinners in Zion are afraid; trembling has seized the godless: “Who among us can dwell with the consuming fire? Who among us can dwell with everlasting burnings?”

What is this “consuming fire” and “everlasting burning” but the fire in the temple ignited by the breath of Yahweh?

Numbers 31:21-23...²¹Then Eleazar the priest said to the men in the army who had gone to battle: “This is the statute of the law that the Lord has commanded Moses: ²²only the gold, the silver, the bronze, the iron, the tin, and the lead, ²³everything that can stand the fire, you shall pass through the fire, and it shall be clean. Nevertheless, it shall also be purified with the water for impurity. And whatever cannot stand the fire, you shall pass through the water.

Once the earth was judged with a flood of water. Once the world is judged with a flood of fire. Both water and fire are instruments of judgment and the judgment is **purification**. We are baptized with water and fire.

Deuteronomy 5:26...For who is there of all flesh, that has heard the voice of the living God speaking out of the midst of fire as we have, and has still lived?

Deuteronomy 32:22...For a fire is kindled by my anger, and it burns to the depths of Sheol, devours the earth and its increase, and sets on fire the foundations of the mountains.

It appears that fire is not “native” to Sheol, as it is native to heaven. Indeed, Sheol seems to be the last place that you would expect it. The sun burns in the heavens every day. Men descend into the earth to escape it’s heat, like Job wants to hide in Sheol to escape God’s wrath. Yet even in Sheol the fire burns. Surprisingly, fire sometimes ascends from the roots of the mountains. We call that a volcanic eruption. Perhaps it reminded the ancients that there is no place that one can ultimately hide from God’s judgment.

2 Samuel 22:9-13...⁹Smoke went up from his nostrils, and devouring fire from his mouth; glowing coals flamed forth from him. ¹⁰He bowed the heavens and came down; thick darkness was under his feet. ¹¹He rode on a cherub and flew; he was seen on the wings of the wind. ¹²He made darkness around him his canopy, thick clouds, a gathering of water. ¹³Out of the brightness before him coals of fire flamed forth.

1 Kings 18:24...And you call upon the name of your god, and I will call upon the name of the Lord, and the God who answers by fire, he is God.” And all the people answered, “It is well spoken.”

Our God answers by fire. Who is God's Answer? Remember how the Son of Man is described in Daniel, The Revelation and by Jesus in the Gospels?

1 Kings 18:38...Then the fire of the Lord fell and consumed the burnt offering and the wood and the stones and the dust, and licked up the water that was in the trench.

We are to present ourselves as living sacrifices. Sacrifices were offerings of communion. They were gifts. Fire consumes the gifts. Fire fell on the disciples at Pentecost, and they were consumed ("baptized") with The Spirit, who is Love.

2 Kings 1:10...But Elijah answered the captain of fifty, "If I am a man of God, let fire come down from heaven and consume you and your fifty." Then fire came down from heaven and consumed him and his fifty.

1 Chronicles 21:26...And David built there an altar to the Lord and presented burnt offerings and peace offerings and called on the Lord, and the Lord answered him with fire from heaven upon the altar of burnt offering.

2 Chronicles 7:1...As soon as Solomon finished his prayer, fire came down from heaven and consumed the burnt offering and the sacrifices, and the glory of the Lord filled the temple.

It's like fire is God's Glory. Something, Someone is also His Glory. At Pentecost He descended with tongues of fire and filled the temple (Acts 2).

2 Chronicles 35:13...And they roasted the Passover lamb with fire according to the rule...

Is Jesus in us, his life in us, an offering of communion to the father? Like the burnt offerings in the temple? AND, does Jesus bear our sins into the fire? Like the "sin offerings" in the temple? Does God want us to taste His Sacrifice...to share in the fellowship of His sufferings...to "taste and see that the Lord is Good"?

Psalm 18:8...Smoke went up from his nostrils, and devouring fire from his mouth; glowing coals flamed forth from him.

Psalm 18:12-13...¹²Out of the brightness before him hailstones and coals of fire broke through his clouds. ¹³The Lord also thundered in the heavens, and the Most High uttered his voice, hailstones and coals of fire.

Psalm 50:3...Our God comes; he does not keep silence; before him is a devouring fire, around him a mighty tempest.

Psalm 104:4...he makes his messengers winds, his ministers a flaming fire.

Song of Solomon 8:6-7...⁶Set me as a seal upon your heart, as a seal upon your arm, for love is strong as death, jealousy is fierce as the grave. Its flashes are flashes of fire, the very flame of the Lord. ⁷Many waters **cannot quench** love, neither can floods drown it. If a man offered for love all the wealth of his house, he would be utterly despised.

Is love, “the very flame of the Lord.” Is that flame, “strong as death”? In the end is it stronger than death? (see Rev. 20 and 21) Is it good news...is it perhaps, The Good News, that it burns even to the depths of Sheol? Love is unquenchable, an unquenchable fire.

Isaiah 10:17...The light of Israel will become a fire, and his Holy One a flame, and it will burn and devour his thorns and briers in one day.

Who is “the light of Israel”? Who is the “Holy One”? (Life is a children’s sermon, and the answer is always Jesus.) What is the “one day”? (read John 12).

Isaiah 43:1-2...¹But now thus says the Lord, he who created you, O Jacob, he who formed you, O Israel: “Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine. ²When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you.

Israel will be like the burning bush: unconsumed by the Consuming Fire. Israel will pass through Judgment of water and of fire. We are baptized with water and fire.

Isaiah 66:15-16...¹⁵“For behold, the Lord will come in fire, and his chariots like the whirlwind, to render his anger in fury, and his rebuke with flames of fire. ¹⁶For by fire will the Lord enter into judgment, and by his sword, with all flesh; and those slain by the Lord shall be many.

Jeremiah 23:29...Is not my word like fire, declares the Lord, and like a hammer that breaks the rock in pieces?

“The one who rejects me and does not receive my words has a judge; the word that I have spoken will judge him on the last day...Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you. (John 12:48, 15:3) His Word is Judgment. His Word (logos) is Jesus is Himself is God is Fire. His Word is the Stone, the Hammer that breaks and crushes.

Ezekiel 1:26-27...²⁶And above the expanse over their heads there was the likeness of a throne, in appearance like sapphire; and seated above the likeness of a throne was a likeness with a human appearance. ²⁷And upward from what had the appearance of his waist I saw as it were gleaming metal, like the appearance of fire enclosed all around. And downward from what had the appearance of his waist I saw as it were the appearance of fire, and there was brightness around him.

Is Jesus the Fire of God? “Then I turned to see the voice that was speaking to me, and on turning I saw seven golden lampstands, and in the midst of the lampstands one like a son of man, clothed with a long robe and with a golden sash around his chest. The hairs of his head were white like wool, as white as snow. His eyes were like a flame of fire, his feet were like burnished bronze, refined in a furnace, and his voice was like the roar of many waters. In his right hand he held seven stars, from his mouth came a sharp two-edged sword, and his face was like the sun shining in full strength. “When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. But he laid his right hand on me saying, ‘Fear not, I am the first and the last, and the living one. I died, and behold I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades.’” (Rev. 1:12-17)

Ezekiel 15:6-7...⁶Therefore thus says the Lord God: Like the wood of the vine among the trees of the forest, which I have given to the fire for **fuel**, so have I given up the inhabitants of Jerusalem. ⁷And I will set my face against them. Though they escape from the fire, the fire shall yet consume them, and you will know that I am the Lord, when I set my face against them.

Evil in us is like fuel for the fire. "The inhabitants of Jerusalem" are fuel for the fire. That is fuel for wrath, fuel for judgment, fuel for love, fuel for mercy, fuel for glory, fuel for Jesus who makes all things new.

"And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great, high mountain, and showed me the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God, **having the glory of God**, its **radiance** like a most rare jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal." (Rev. 20:10-11) The New Jerusalem, The Bride of Christ has "the glory of God"!...the God who gives his glory to "**no other**" (Isaiah 42:8). She must actually be like His Body. She Radiates Glory, like a lighthouse, like a temple filled with fire, like a body filled with life... "and the life was the light of men." "The Jerusalem above is free, and she is our mother" (Galatians 4:26).

Ezekiel 22:17-22...¹⁷And the word of the Lord came to me: ¹⁸"Son of man, the house of Israel has become dross to me; all of them are bronze and tin and iron and lead in the furnace; they are dross of silver. ¹⁹Therefore thus says the Lord God: Because you have all become dross, therefore, behold, I will gather you into the midst of Jerusalem. ²⁰As one gathers silver and bronze and iron and lead and tin into a furnace, to blow the fire on it in order to melt it, so I will gather you in my anger and in my wrath, and I will put you in and melt you. ²¹I will gather you and blow on you with the fire of my wrath, and you shall be melted in the midst of it. ²²As silver is melted in a furnace, so you shall be melted in the midst of it, and you shall know that I am the Lord; I have poured out my wrath upon you."

Why is silver and gold melted in the furnace? Because it is so incredibly valuable. Because it is a treasure.

Daniel 3:22-25...²²Because the king's order was urgent and the furnace overheated, the flame of the fire killed those men who took up Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. ²³And these three men, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, fell bound into the burning fiery furnace. ²⁴Then King Nebuchadnezzar was astonished and rose up in haste. He declared to his counselors, "Did we not cast three men bound into the fire?" They answered and said to the king, "True, O king." ²⁵He answered and said, "But I see four men unbound, walking in the midst of the fire, and they are not hurt; and the appearance of the fourth is like a son of the gods."

The fire that consumes some, delivers some. Perhaps in some way it consumes all and delivers all. Perhaps, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego had already been through the fire. It had been kept in the temple in Jerusalem. Through slaughtered lambs, sacrifices and offerings, the Jews had already been to the fire and some had passed through the fire in faith. The fire will not burn where it has already burned.

I've heard that in the event of a prairie fire, the American Indians would immediately light a fire all around them. When the little Indians would ask what they were doing they'd say something like, "The fire will not burn where it has already burned." In the midst of the fire they would be

safe from the fire, because they had sacrificed their immediate fuel to the fire. They sacrificed the dry grass around them.

We can surrender our fuel for the fire at the cross in confession and worship. Then we're saved from the fire at the end of the world. Jesus is the end of the world. When we come to him, we come to the end of the world, the end of the age, and he gives us the life of the next. Who is the dude walking in the fire, with the appearance of "a son of the gods"? (Life is a children's sermon.)

Daniel 7:9-10...⁹As I looked, thrones were placed, and the Ancient of days took his seat; his clothing was white as snow, and the hair of his head like pure wool; his throne was fiery flames; its wheels were burning fire. ¹⁰A stream of fire issued and came out from before him; a thousand thousands served him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him; the court sat in judgment, and the books were opened.

Zephaniah 3:8..."Therefore wait for me," declares the Lord, "for the day when I rise up to seize the prey. For my decision is to gather nations, to assemble kingdoms, to pour out upon them my indignation, all my burning anger; for in the fire of my jealousy all the earth shall be consumed.

The earth will be consumed, and yet there is a "new heaven and a new earth." Technically fire does not consume things such that they cease to exist. It does not destroy matter. Even nuclear fires do not really destroy matter, but change matter into energy... into fire? "...the heavens will be dissolved, being on fire, and the elements will melt with fervent heat? Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells." (2 Peter 3:12b-13 NKJV)

Zechariah 2:2-5...²Then I said, "Where are you going?" And he said to me, "To measure Jerusalem, to see what is its width and what is its length." ³And behold, the angel who talked with me came forward, and another angel came forward to meet him ⁴and said to him, "Run, say to that young man, 'Jerusalem shall be inhabited as villages without walls, because of the multitude of people and livestock in it. ⁵And I will be to her a wall of fire all around, declares the Lord, and I will be the glory in her midst.'"

God will be to Jerusalem a wall of Fire surrounding her and the glory, the fire, in her midst. He is the eternal fire in the midst of the temple and Jerusalem will be God's temple. Gehenna surrounded the old Jerusalem, at least on the south. It was the valley just outside the walls of the city where the residents burned their trash. In the new city there will be no trash, for all that enters must pass through the fire. Zechariah prophesied, "Jerusalem shall be," but now she also "is."

"For they could not endure the order that was given, "If even a beast touches the mountain, it shall be stoned." Indeed, so terrifying was the sight that Moses said, "I tremble with fear." But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel." (Hebrews 12:20-24)

Perhaps there is a fire that surrounds God's people and is the glory within God's people even in this world. Time and time again my wife and various friends have witnessed that fire in visions. It drives away evil and is a warm comfort to believers.

In Dallas on the sidewalk in front of the house in which my friend had been ritually abused as a child, we had communion. I poured the leftover wine along the walk in front of the house. In a vision my friend saw the wine turn to fire, the fire engulfed the house and eventually transformed it, this fire also formed a barrier between her and her abusers. This same fire engulfed us on the sidewalk. Yet the fire did not consume us, it comforted us and protected us. "The fire will not burn where it's already burned." In communion we drink fire, and by God's grace it tastes like wine.

Malachi 3:1-3...¹"Behold, I send my messenger and he will prepare the way before me. And the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple; and the messenger of the covenant in whom you delight, behold, he is coming, says the Lord of hosts. ²But who can endure the day of his coming, and who can stand when he appears? For he is like a **refiner's fire** and like fullers' soap. ³He will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver, and he will purify the sons of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, and they will bring offerings in righteousness to the Lord.

Matthew 3:10-12...¹⁰Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees. Every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. ¹¹"I baptize you with water for repentance, but he who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire. [transliterated: "He will immerse you in Holy Spirit and Fire" or, if the "and (kai)" is epexegetical: "He will immerse you in the Holy Spirit that is Fire"] ¹²His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor and gather his wheat into the barn, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire."

Is the Holy Spirit quenchable? Perhaps for a time, it might seem so ("Do not quench the Spirit" 1 Thessalonians 5:19). Yet even though we try to quench it, Love is unquenchable (Song of Solomon 8:7).

Matthew 5:22...But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council; and whoever says, 'You fool!' will be liable to the hell (*Gehenna*) of fire.

If you talk trash, Gehenna is there to burn the trash. For the Jews in Jerusalem Gehenna, Tophet, the valley of the sons of Hinnom was a very real place.

Matthew 18:8-9...⁸And if your hand or your foot causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life crippled or lame than with two hands or two feet to be thrown into the eternal fire. ⁹And if your eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life with one eye than with two eyes to be thrown into the hell (*Gehenna*) of fire.

It only makes sense that one should surrender his trash to the omnipotent trash collector rather than be thrown into the fire with it.

Matthew 25:41,46...⁴¹"Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal (*aionios*) fire prepared for the devil and his angels...⁴⁶And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life."

It seems clear that “the eternal punishment” is “the eternal fire.” Eternal may mean “of God’s Age or World.” That is divine fire and divine punishment. It means at least that. If eternal means “without end,” then the fire must be Christ who is himself “the beginning and the end,” “the end of the ages,” “all in all,” “very God of very God.” God is the consuming fire and of course He is “eternal,” whatever that means. God is unquenchable, and he does not change. However, that certainly does not mean that anything cast into that fire does not change. No, it stands to reason that the situation is just the opposite. Because He will not change, what is cast into the fire must change. It must cease to be, or be transformed by the fire into a creature of fire. That process of being changed by the fire is called “burning.” Wood no longer burns once it has been consumed or transformed into ash. To burn against your will (“cast into”) is to experience the fire as punishment. The punishment, the fire may not change, but that does not mean that your experience of it or lack of experience of it does not change. To burn is to be in torment. The fuel for the fire, the thing that is burned is evil. Torment for a lie is to be exposed to the Truth. Torment for a shadow is to be exposed to The Light. Torment for death is to be exposed to The Life. Torment for Hades is to be exposed to Heaven. Torment for the Accuser is Grace. Torment for the prosecuting attorney is to see the Judge bear the sins of the accused. Torment for Satan is a Lake of Lamb’s blood, that burns like fire, for it is fire. Torment for evil is to be exposed to The Good, The Blood, The Life of God poured out in Christ Jesus our Lord.

If the experience of burning is unending:

1. What is being burned?
2. Is the burning unsuccessful? Does the consuming fire, not consume? If so, is the thing on fire a miracle bush, Shadrach, Meshach, or Abednego... or Jesus? It’s the good things that aren’t consumed by the fire.
3. If Evil is consumed, it cannot be consumed perpetually, unless it is restored. Does God restore evil so He can consume it?
4. To experience Torment, don’t you have to in some sense be alive? How do you torment a dead thing? [Satan is tormented, but does he experience torment? I would think there is no life in him, for there is “no truth in him” (John 8:44.) In deliverance sessions he sure seems like he experiences torment. Or is it the person infected with him. In visions he is certainly terrified of Jesus. What Satan is or isn’t is a great mystery to me.] Well, at least for people, to experience torment, in some form it seems you have to be alive. Would God continually kill and then resurrect, so he can keep on killing? Or would God continually burn and then heal so he could keep on healing? This is certainly a Greek idea. Remember the fellow chained to the rock who had his liver eaten each day by buzzards, only so that it could grow back in the night and feed the buzzards the next day. Jesus is not a buzzard, and Yahweh is not a pagan god.
5. It stands to reason that nothing is “unending” except “the end.” God in Christ is the end. Whatever is not of God, must come to an end. We must come to an end or somehow become the end... The Very Body of the End.

Brother Lot went to see Brother Joseph and said: 'Brother, as much as I am able, I practice a little fasting, some prayer and meditation, and remain quiet, and as much as possible I keep my thoughts clean. What else should I do?' The old man stood up and stretched out his hands towards heaven, and his fingers became like ten torches of flame. He said, 'Become FIRE!!!' - Yushi Nomura, Desert Wisdom: Sayings from the Desert Fathers, Image Books, New York, 1984. p. 90.

Perhaps, “the eternal fire” is “the eternal punishment” is “eternal life.” Is not the substance of God (the cup we drink), eternal punishment, judgment, and condemnation for evil and also eternal life for all God’s creatures... the life of the Word that upholds all things?

Mark 9:43-49...⁴³And if your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life crippled than with two hands to go to hell, to the unquenchable fire. ⁴⁵And if your foot causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life lame than with two feet to be thrown into hell (*Gehenna*). ⁴⁷And if your eye causes you to sin, tear it out. It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than with two eyes to be thrown into hell, ⁴⁸where their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched. ⁴⁹For everyone will be salted with fire (ESV footnote: Some manuscripts add “and every sacrifice will be salted with salt.”)

Luke 12:5...But I will warn you whom to fear: fear him who, after he has killed, has authority to cast into hell (*Gehenna*). Yes, I tell you, fear him!

God controls the incinerator. Satan does not.

Luke 12:49...“I came to cast fire on the earth, and would that it were already kindled!

He also said, “The Son of Man **came** to seek and to save the lost (Greek: *apollumi*)”(Luke 19:10. Are these two reasons for coming the same reason? We’re all lost. Did he come to save some lost and cast fire on the rest? He did save some lost and cast fire on those very lost ones at Pentecost. It’s fascinating that Jesus said “I came” for fire casting. But he said, “The Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.” From the Old Testament you would think that it would be the other way around. “The Son of Man” is the fiery dude in Daniel, that also shows up in The Revelation. In Matthew 24 and 25 the Son of Man comes in judgment and sits on the throne of judgment dividing the sheep and the goats. Jesus said He came to cast fire and the Son of Man came to “seek and save the lost.” Are they somehow the same thing? Does the Son of Man come once to “seek and save the lost” and the second time to fry the lost? Maybe...at least “the lost” that didn’t know they were lost – like Scribes and Pharisees. But then, would he still not be about “seeking and saving the lost”?

Luke 17:28-29...²⁸Likewise, just as it was in the days of Lot—they were eating and drinking, buying and selling, planting and building, ²⁹but on the day when Lot went out from Sodom, fire and sulfur rained from heaven and destroyed (*Greek: apollumi*) them all...

Literally: “Lost them all”...Yet “he came to seek and to save the lost.” If you’re “eating and drinking, buying and selling, planting and building” you probably don’t know you’re lost. Perhaps you must know you’re lost in order to know that you’ve been found. Perhaps you must know that you are a sinner to know the God who is Mercy. To know God is to live. Perhaps the fire is a severe mercy. God will not leave our soul in Hades. He will not tolerate the walking dead forever.

Acts 2:1-4...¹When the day of Pentecost arrived, they were all together in one place. ²And suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. ³And divided tongues as of fire appeared to them and rested on each one of them. ⁴And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance.

Jesus DID cast fire on the earth. It was kindled at the cross.

Acts 2:14-19...¹⁴But Peter, standing with the eleven, lifted up his voice and addressed them, “Men of Judea and all who dwell in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and give ear to my words. ¹⁵For these men are not drunk, as you suppose, since it is only the third hour of the day. ¹⁶But **this is** what was uttered through the prophet Joel: ¹⁷“And in **the last days** it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams; ¹⁸even on my male servants and female servants in those days I will pour out my Spirit, and they shall prophesy. ¹⁹And I will show wonders in the heavens above and signs on the earth below, blood, and fire, and vapor of smoke;

These are those days. Do you see it or do you suppose they’re just drunk?

Romans 12:20...To the contrary, “if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head.”

You will heap Love. That is “Theion,” Divinity, The Judgment of God, The Blood of Christ, the Eternal Fire.

1 Corinthians 3:11-15...¹¹For no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. ¹²Now if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw – ¹³each one’s work will become manifest, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed by fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done. ¹⁴If the work that anyone has built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward. ¹⁵If anyone’s work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire.

Who is “anyone”? Is it “anyone that believes” or just “anyone.” Paul simply says “anyone.” Whatever the case, it certainly is possible to be “**saved as through fire.**” “

2 Thessalonians 1:5-10...⁵This is evidence of the righteous judgment of God, that you may be considered worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you are also suffering – ⁶since indeed God considers it just to repay with affliction those who afflict you, ⁷and to grant relief to you who are afflicted as well as to us, when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty

angels ⁸in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance (ekdikesis – meeting out justice) on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. ⁹They will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, away from (ESV footnote – or *destruction that comes from*) the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might, ¹⁰when he comes on that day to be glorified in his saints, and to be marveled at among all who have believed, because our testimony to you was believed.

From the immediate context provided by 2 Thess. 2:8 and from the Greek, it seems that the translation in the ESV footnote is most accurate. “Away” is supplied by the translator and not the normal meaning of “apo “ (from). Transliterated, the passage reads, “who right will pay ruin eternal from the face of the master.” The picture is clear. The Thessalonian’s persecutors will melt before the glory of Jesus, like wax melts before the sun. The destruction is not away from the Lord as in Hades, but comes from the very presence of the Lord as in Gehenna and the Lake of Fire. The word translated “destruction” is not “apollumi” but “olethros.” It appears only four times in the New Testament, here and in:

1 Thess. 5:3 - “While people are saying, “There is peace and security,” then sudden destruction will come upon them as labor pains come upon a pregnant woman, and they will not escape.” Labor pains feel like destruction, but in the deepest sense they are just the opposite. They are death to the old world, but the sign of impending life in the new.

1 Tim. 6:9...“But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction.”

1 Cor. 5:5...“you are to deliver this man to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord.” The purpose of the “olethros” is the eternal salvation of this sinner. But is this “eternal destruction”? This destruction comes from Satan it seems. But would that mean he gets his flesh back some day? I don’t think so. His body of flesh, his earthly body is destroyed so that he can receive a spiritual body. The mortal is sown like a seed that dies. Later in the very same letter Paul writes:

1 Cor. 15:35-37,42-49...³⁵But someone will ask, “How are the dead raised? With what kind of body do they come?” ³⁶You foolish person! What you sow does not come to life unless it dies. ³⁷And what you sow is not the body that is to be, but a bare kernel, perhaps of wheat or of some other grain...⁴²So is it with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is **perishable**; what is raised is **imperishable**. ⁴³It is sown in dishonor; it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness; it is raised in power. ⁴⁴It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body. ⁴⁵Thus it is written, “The first man Adam became a living being”; the last Adam became a life-giving spirit. ⁴⁶But it is not the spiritual that is first but the natural, and then the spiritual. ⁴⁷The first man was from the earth, a man of dust; the second man is from heaven. ⁴⁸As was the man of dust, so also are those who are of the dust, and as is the man of heaven, so also are those who are of heaven. ⁴⁹Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven.”

So what is the “Eternal Destruction” (olethros) mentioned in our passage?

1. It is at least “destruction” that comes from an eternal source, the face of Jesus.

2. It could also be “destruction” that is irreversible. If so what is destroyed?

- a. At least “the flesh” is destroyed. The “flesh” is more than the physical body, it is the old sinful self. From 1 Cor. 15, it appears to be destroyed the way a seed is destroyed. A seed is destroyed by life. A dead seed ceases to exist, because it has been transformed into a tree. This happens to believers at the foot of the cross. “it is no longer I (this body of death) who live, but Christ who lives in me” (Gal. 2:20)
- b. Everything? That is, utter annihilation. If so, can God not remake that which he has annihilated? If so would it have consciousness of it’s former self? All the new creatures praising the lamb on the throne in Rev. 5 sure seem to have consciousness of their former selves because they praise Jesus for redemption.

2 Thessalonians 2:8...And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will kill with the breath of his mouth and bring to nothing by the appearance of his coming. [the *epiphaneo* (*epiphany*) of his (*parousia*)]

It’s interesting that Paul uses the phrase “the appearance of his coming.” His “coming” is so problematic for the church, because in so many places in scripture, it seems as if he’s already here. Indeed according to many passages, he came again in the lifetime of those first witnesses (“this generation”). I think the biblical witness is that he’s “coming” all the time. He’s always “with us.” He comes for each believer when they die, the end of their “aion,” “chronos” for them, their edge of eternity. All “Chronos” (temporal time) will end and He will “come,” yet he’s here and always coming.

Judgment is then the epiphany, revelation, manifestation of his coming. To see Him in this way before we’ve surrendered our old selves at the cross, is to be horrifically “burned” by his manifest glory. The disciples on the mount of transfiguration, John on the island of Patmos... they could barely endure what they saw. In each case Jesus had to remind them, “Guys it’s me... your buddy Jesus. We go fishing together. Remember?”

Hebrews 12:29...for our God is a consuming fire.

Remember how Jesus taught Peter to walk on the water? That raging water was a picture of Judgment to the Jews. I wonder if Jesus came to teach us how to walk into Fire? That is hug our Abba our heavenly father.

1 Peter 1:6-7...⁶In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, ⁷so that the tested genuineness of your faith – more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire – may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

Faith (what God desires) is tested, that is purified and refined, by trials. Although evil can be spoken of as the source of the trial. Is God also present as fire, a hunger for truth, justice, and love?

2 Peter 3:5-7...⁵For they deliberately overlook this fact, that the heavens existed long ago, and the earth was formed out of water and through water by the word of God, ⁶and that by means

of these the world that then existed was deluged with water and perished (*apollumi*). ⁷But by the same word (*Who is this Word?*) the heavens and earth that now exist are stored up for fire, being kept until the day of judgment (*crisis*) and destruction (*apoleia: a derivative of apollumi*) of the ungodly.

2 Peter 3:11-12...¹¹Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness, ¹²waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be set on fire and dissolved, and the heavenly bodies (elements) will melt as they burn!

Jude 7...just as Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding cities, which likewise indulged in sexual immorality and pursued unnatural desire, serve as an example by undergoing a punishment of eternal fire.

Sodom and Gomorrah are the perennial picture of punishment and destruction by “eternal fire,” yet as we will see Jerusalem is said to be worse and Ezekiel prophecies they will all be restored.

Revelation 1:14...The hairs of his head were white like wool, as white as snow. His eyes were like a flame of fire,

Revelation 14:9-11...⁹And another angel, a third, followed them, saying with a loud voice, “If anyone worships the beast and its image and receives a mark on his forehead or on his hand, ¹⁰he also will drink the wine of God’s wrath, poured full strength into the cup of his anger, and he will be tormented with fire and sulfur (*theion*) in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb. ¹¹And the smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever, and they have no rest, day or night, these worshipers of the beast and its image, and whoever receives the mark of its name.”

“The smoke of their torment goes up for ever and ever (Transliterated: “into the ages of the ages”)” It does not say their torment is for ever and ever. The picture seems to be that of sacrifices in the temple from which pleasing aroma rises before the nostrils of Yahweh. We are to “present ourselves as living sacrifices to God” (Romans 12:1).

Revelation 15:1-4...¹Then I saw another sign in heaven, great and amazing, seven angels with seven plagues, which are the last, for with them the wrath of God is **finished** (teleo). ²And I saw what appeared to be a sea of glass mingled with fire—and also those who had conquered the beast and its image and the number of its name, standing beside the sea of glass with harps of God in their hands. ³And they sing the **song of Moses**, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying, “Great and amazing are your deeds, O Lord God the Almighty! Just and true are your ways, O King of the nations! ⁴Who will not fear, O Lord, and glorify your name? For you alone are holy. All nations will come and worship you, for your righteous acts have been revealed.”

If “Hell” is a place that does not come to an end, how could it be a place sustained by God’s Wrath, for God’s Wrath is completed, finished, perfected, ended with the seventh bowl of wrath. The context certainly seems to carry the idea that the wrath does not reach some kind of continuing eternal perfection but that it stops. I would suppose that the fire does not stop, it

is like God's nature. The "burning" stops, for all creation has become like Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.

"Teleo" is the word Jesus uses when He cries from the cross, "It is finished" in John 19:30. ("etelesthe" – "was completed" in Rev.15:1. "tetelestai" – "it has been completed" in John 19:30). What is "finished, perfected, completed, ended" at the cross? Judgment, Wrath, Justice, The Exhibition and Perfection of Mercy?

The Song of Moses is the song sung by Moses and the Israelites in Exodus 15 after they cross the Red Sea and watch their enemies destroyed by the judgment of God. Once again God's judgment is water. Once again we're reminded of God's judgment with fire. In Rev 15, the saints stand on the edge of a sea, the sea of glass mingled with fire. A sea of glass is a calm sea, as if it's accomplished what it was there for. It appears as if these saints have passed through this sea, or perhaps "lake," of fire.

One morning about three years ago my wife Susan woke me up early and said, "Peter, I just had a vision!" She said:

I looked in the corner of the room, and I saw dark clouds. Then they parted and the sun came out. Before that I had a clear dream – it seemed so real! I saw thousands of people descending in a line down a spiral staircase. The people were like zombies, like the walking dead. And all along the line there were demons that were harassing them, poking them, and trying to hurt them.

The people didn't even move – they hardly even flinched – because they were used to it. They were used to being dead. It was normal for them. Then all at once I saw this woman, and her eyes weren't cloudy like everyone else's. They were wide open and awake, and she was alive! She kept protesting, "Something's wrong here. I'm not supposed to be here. Something's not right." The demons kept harassing her, trying to horrify her and mock her, but she kept protesting. And the line kept moving.

At the bottom of the staircase there was one huge demon, a beast with eight arms. It would take these zombies and throw them in the Lake of Fire, and they'd be consumed. Then the beast threw that woman in the Lake of Fire. But she wasn't consumed! In fact, she kept protesting, "Something's not right, I'm not supposed to be here."

It absolutely infuriated the beast! He went into a rage and was trying to push her into the fire, but each time she would just float back up protesting. He kept pushing her down, and she kept rising up, and as I watched this, she gradually began to float out of the reach of the arms of this beast. It was like the whole lake shifted and she floated into this area of cool, clear water (like glass).

Then on the shores I began to see vegetation lush with life. Then I saw Him. I saw Jesus. And He reached in and pulled the woman out of the water and stood her right next to Him. And she was gorgeous! It was like she was refined, spun gold. I don't even know what spun gold is, but that's what she was! She was radiant.

Jesus looked at her and said, "Sweetheart, you were meant for here."

Susan had never read Revelation 15. So she said, “Peter, what was that? I understand that the end was Heaven, but where were those walking dead, and who was that woman?”

Maybe this is the land of the walking dead. Maybe you are that woman. Maybe the church is that woman. Perhaps, some people are purified by the fire and some are consumed by the very same fire. Yet even consumed, I doubt that the story is over. “I am making all things new” (Rev. 21:5). Therefore things we see consumed must not really be “things,” or they may be “things” that have yet to be made new.

Revelation 20:9-10...⁹And they marched up over the broad plain of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city, but fire came down from heaven and **consumed** them, ¹⁰and the devil who had deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and sulfur (*theion*) where the beast and the false prophet were, and they will be **tormented** day and night forever and ever.

In Revelation 14, “The smoke of their (people – “worshippers of the beast”) torment goes up for ever and ever.” Here, the satanic trinity “will be tormented for ever and ever” (transliterated – “into the ages of the ages”). In this verse the people are “consumed” by fire and the satanic trinity is “tormented by fire.” This is not called “eternal torment” (aionios torment), but torment for ever and ever (“into the ages of the ages”). I’m not sure what this means, but as we will see, Jesus Christ and him crucified appears to be the “end of the ages” (Hebrews 9:26).

No matter what, it is significant that only the satanic trinity (which appears to be somehow like the shadow of the Holy Trinity) is tormented “into the ages of the ages.”

The Ontology of Satan is extremely confusing. What is he? A Fallen angel? “Angel” is not an ontological word. It means messenger. Lots of things are messengers. “Cherub” does seem to be more ontological. Ezekiel 28:11-19 seems to imply that Satan was a cherub, but technically Ezekiel claims to be prophesying to “the King of Tyre” (28:11), though he refers to the king as having been “in Eden” (v.13), “an anointed guardian cherub” (v.14), [RSV reads “with a cherub”] If Ezekiel is referring to Satan as having been a cherub, in what sense was he a cherub? Is he still a cherub? Did he infect a cherub or was he the cherub? In what sense was he the serpent? In what sense can “evil” be distinguished from Satan? Is Satan a created being? Or is Satan more like the byproduct of creation...something like the shadow cast by God’s glory upon creation, such that as long as there is creation there is this shadow? Or do we see the shadow for as long as there are “ages” and then it is annihilated with light, as creation is “set free from her bondage to decay”; set free from her bondage to desecration, darkness, and lies; as the fruit of Light and Word (according to physicists, all matter seems to be like light and the manifestation of Word) is set free from “not light”/darkness and “not Word”/lies? After all Satan is called “the prince of darkness” and “the father of lies.”

Is Satan a “thing” made new?

A) If Satan is an angel, not simply as a function or activity, but ontologically a cherub, a created being, then it is hard to see how he would not be made new, if “all things are made new.”

B) If Satan is uncreated non-being then he is fundamentally not a thing but a “non-thing” and there would be no “thing” to make new.

“Evil” certainly seems to be a NO “thing,” but that doesn’t mean it’s nothing...it’s Nothing, the presence of an absence. A lie is the presence of an absence. A shadow is the presence of an absence. One is the absence of Truth. One is the absence of Light. Jesus is the Truth and the Life. A lie is a “no truth” infecting truth. A shadow is a “no light” infecting light. Shadows and lies can kill, but they have no being in and of themselves. They are uncreated, because they are non-existence.

John 8:44: “ You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father’s desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, and has nothing to do with the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies.”

If Satan was a murderer from the beginning, how could he be a creation of God? All God creates is good. If Satan was a murderer from the beginning, how could he be a fallen angel? What would he be falling from? If there is no truth in Him, there is no substance in him, for Jesus is the Truth and the Word who upholds all things. Therefore, Satan has no substance and is a no-“thing.”

"I begin to wonder," said the Lady after a pause, "whether you are so much older than I. Surely what you are saying is like fruit with no taste! How can I step out of His will save into something that cannot be wished? Shall I start trying not to love Him – or the King – or the beasts? It would be like trying to walk on water or swim through islands. Shall I try not to sleep or to drink or to laugh? I thought your words had a meaning. But now it seems they have none. To walk out of His will is to walk into nowhere." - C. S. Lewis, Perelandra, pp. 116

Well just perhaps, in these verses we witness something like the shadow of the Trinity cast upon creation or cast by the process of creating, particularly creating beings in the divine image – beings capable of “loving in freedom” (Barth). To make beings that were not simply himself, but like himself wouldn’t God need to create “space” apart from Himself, the Light and The Truth?...beings apart from the Light and apart from the Truth, that would then somehow by His own grace chose the Light and chose the Truth, before being brought back into the Light and into the Truth? Wouldn’t that process cast shadows? Wouldn’t that process require that we touch the void?

Who are we? Of all God’s creatures, we are those that have witnessed and even tasted “not God,” “not being,” “the anti-being,” “the nothing.” Perhaps we are creatures that have witnessed or are witnessing our own creation out of chaos, out of the things that “are not.” God is He “who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist.” (Romans 4:17b). We taste “desecration” that we may be filled with “the Creator” and give praise for our own creation.

We taste “not Light” that we may be filled with “the Light” and give praise to “the Light.”

We taste “not Truth” that we may be filled with “the Truth” and give praise to “the Truth.”

We taste “not Life” that we may be filled with “the Life” and give praise to “the Life.”

We taste “lost” that we may be filled with “the Way” and give praise to “the Way.”

We taste “not God” that we may be filled with God, who is Mercy.

“For God has consigned all men to disobedience, that he may have mercy upon all.” (Romans 11:32 RSV)

“We who first hoped in Christ have been destined and appointed to live for the praise of his glory.” (Ephesians 1:12 RSV)

Karl Barth, Church Dogmatics...On this shadow side the creature is contiguous to nothingness, for this "not" is at once the expression and frontier of the positive will, election and activity of God. When the creature crosses the frontier from the one side, and it is invaded from the other, nothingness achieves actuality in the creaturely world. Nothingness is that which God does not will.

This being which is alien and adverse to grace and therefore without it, is that of nothingness. And this is evil in the Christian sense, namely, what is alien and adverse to grace, and therefore with it. The grace of God is the basis and norm of all being, the source and criterion of all good. Measured by this standard, as the negation of God's grace, nothingness is intrinsically evil.

He knows nothingness. He knows that which He did not elect or will as the Creator. He knows chaos and its terror. He knows its advantage over His creature. He knows how inevitably it imperils His creature. Yet He is Lord over that which imperils His creature. Against Him, nothingness has no power of its own. And He has sworn fidelity to His threatened creature. In creating it He has covenanted and identified Himself with it.

And therefore it is He as the first and true and indeed the only man, as the Helper who really takes the creature's place, lifting from it all its need and labour and problem and placing them upon Himself, as the Warrior who assumes the full responsibility of a substitute and suffers and does everything on its behalf. In the light of this merciful action of God, the arrogant delusion of the creature that it is called and qualified to help and save and maintain itself in its infinite peril is shown to be evil as well as foolish and unnecessary.

As God takes action on its behalf, the creature itself is summoned and empowered. It has no arrogant illusion as to its own authority or competence. It really trusts in God, perseveres in His covenant and chooses His help as the only effective good.

If our thought is conditioned by the obedience of Christian faith, we have only one freedom, namely, to regard nothingness as finally destroyed and to make a new beginning in remembrance of the One who has destroyed it.

Schneider, Kittel's Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, **Torment**... “βασανίζειν means strictly “to test by the proving stone” (βάσανος), i.e., “to rub against it,” “to test

the genuineness of,” “to examine or try,” then “to apply means of torture to find the truth,” “to harry or torture” in a hearing or before a tribunal.”

Even “Torment” carries the idea of testing. In what sense is Satan tested? If He is a cherub/angel this would make some sense. If He is “non-being,” would he need to be tested? If he is a cherub, how does a cherub experience torment? If he is non-being, how does non-being experience anything? Whatever the case, “into the ages of the ages” does not seem to necessarily mean “without end.” (see section on “aion”)

The Lake of Fire and Sulfur: Sulfur is the Greek word “theion,” also translated as “brimstone.” In the Old Testament “brimstone” means God’s breath (spirit). Isaiah 30:33, refers to God’s breath as brimstone. In the New Testament “theion” is used for the Old Testament concept of brimstone. I was utterly shocked to read this in the Greek, for “theion” is so obviously close to “theos,” which means God. Indeed I discovered that “theion” can apparently be translated as “divinity” or “divine substance”! This only makes sense in light of Old Testament usage, wherein the Hebrews spoke of breath and spirit as the same thing, such that if brimstone is the breathe of God, it is also then the spirit of God.

Therefore, “the lake of fire and sulfur” can be translated “the lake of fire and divinity.” If the and is epexegetical (which certainly is justified by the fact that scripture claims that “God IS a consuming fire”), then “the lake of fire and sulfur” should be translated as “the lake of fire that is divinity.” To be thrown into the Lake of Fire is to be thrown into the substance of God: Torment for Satan. Ecstasy for The Bride of Christ and The Children of God?

Revelation 20:14, 21:4-6...¹⁴Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire...⁴He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.”⁵And he who was seated on the throne said, “Behold, I am making all things new.” Also he said, “Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.”⁶And he said to me, “It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give from the spring of the water of life without payment.

“Death” is thrown into pure Life and is no more. Hades comes to an end in the lake of fire. This is “the second death,” the death of death. How could preachers threaten sinners with an unending conscious death when scripture so clearly states that death shall be no more? They must argue that it means “no more death in the New Jerusalem.” But then, what is the meaning of throwing “death” into the lake of fire? Furthermore “To the **thirsty**,” he will “give from the spring of the water of life **without payment**”!

If Dives (the rich man in the story of Lazarus) is still thirsty, HE GET’S HIS DRINK! And it’s not just water it’s living water AND it’s free. How could “Hell” (whatever that means) be a place of “unending divine retribution,” where men and women perceive their debts and have to pay for their debts, yet can never pay off their debts, if they can get the water of life WITHOUT PAY? How could “Hell” (whatever that means), be a place of “unending remorse” where thirsty people forever regret having passed up the water of life while they had a chance, if God will give to the thirsty without payment? It doesn’t even say they have to ask! He gives to whomever is thirsty AND the gates of the city are never shut (Rev. 21:25). The gates are never shut, although outside are all those who practice falsehood (Rev. 22:15). They must not want to go into the city! They must not be thirsty for the water! Wouldn’t an aion in Hades with Dives

make you thirsty? Wouldn't a lake of Fire make you thirsty? Perhaps all God's judgments are mercy.

Revelation 21:8...⁸But as for the cowardly, the faithless, the detestable, as for murderers, the sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars, their portion will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur (*theion*), which is the second death."

1Corinthians 6:9-11...⁹"Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, ¹⁰nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. ¹¹**And such were some of you.** But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God."

If there is a first resurrection that corresponds to the first death, How can we be so certain that there is not a second resurrection that corresponds to the second death? If the folks in Corinth, like us, were once "the unrighteous," but are now the "righteous," have we not been judged, destroyed, and remade? And if so, how can we forbid God from doing it to anyone else ever again? We were "washed" with water. Perhaps some will be "washed with fire." We all must be washed before we enter the city.

Gehenna (Tophet)

Isaiah 30:33 (NKJV)...For Tophet was established of old, Yes, for the king it is prepared. He has made it deep and large; Its pyre is fire with much wood; **The breath of the Lord, like a stream of brimstone, Kindles it.**

"Tophet" or "topheth" is another word for Gehenna, the Valley of the Son of Hinnom. The Fire in this valley comes from "the breath of the Lord." Breath is the Hebrew "nashamaw" also translated spirit.

Jeremiah 7:31-33...³¹And they have built the high places of Topheth, which is in the Valley of the Son of Hinnom, to burn their sons and their daughters in the fire, which I did not command, nor did it come into my mind. ³²Therefore, behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when it will no more be called Topheth, or the Valley of the Son of Hinnom, but the Valley of Slaughter; for they will bury in Topheth, because there is no room elsewhere. ³³And the dead bodies of this people will be food for the birds of the air, and for the beasts of the earth, and none will frighten them away.

They burned their children in the fire. What if they offered their children to demons, but demons were not allowed to receive them? What if the fire in Gehenna, even then, came from the Lord? I mean what if Jesus was there, catching each child on the other side of the fire or in the fire? I only say that because my wife and friend from the coven have seen it in visions: children sacrificed to Satan are received by Jesus. The coven members think they are doing a great evil and they are. Yet Jesus has descended into those places to receive his own and make them new.

Jeremiah 19:1-15...¹Thus says the Lord, "Go, buy a potter's earthenware flask, and take some of the elders of the people and some of the elders of the priests, ²and go out to the

Valley of the Son of Hinnom at the entry of the Potsherd Gate, and proclaim there the words that I tell you. ³You shall say, ‘Hear the word of the Lord, O kings of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem. Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel: Behold, I am bringing such disaster upon this place that the ears of everyone who hears of it will tingle. ⁴Because the people have forsaken me and have profaned this place by making offerings in it to other gods whom neither they nor their fathers nor the kings of Judah have known; and because they have filled this place with the blood of innocents, ⁵and have built the high places of Baal to burn their sons in the fire as burnt offerings to Baal, which I did not command or decree, nor did it come into my mind – ⁶therefore, behold, days are coming, declares the Lord, when this place shall no more be called Topheth, or the Valley of the Son of Hinnom, but the Valley of Slaughter. ⁷And in this place I will make void the plans of Judah and Jerusalem, and will cause their people to fall by the sword before their enemies, and by the hand of those who seek their life. I will give their dead bodies for food to the birds of the air and to the beasts of the earth. ⁸And I will make this city a horror, a thing to be hissed at. Everyone who passes by it will be horrified and will hiss because of all its wounds. ⁹And I will make them eat the flesh of their sons and their daughters, and everyone shall eat the flesh of his neighbor in the siege and in the distress, with which their enemies and those who seek their life afflict them.’ ¹⁰“Then you shall break the flask in the sight of the men who go with you, ¹¹and shall say to them, ‘**Thus says the Lord of hosts: So will I break this people and this city, as one breaks a potter’s vessel, so that it can never be mended.** Men shall bury in Topheth because there will be no place else to bury. ¹²Thus will I do to this place, declares the Lord, and to its inhabitants, making this city like Topheth. ¹³The houses of Jerusalem and the houses of the kings of Judah – all the houses on whose roofs offerings have been offered to all the host of heaven, and drink offerings have been poured out to other gods – shall be defiled like the place of Topheth.’” ¹⁴Then Jeremiah came from Topheth, where the Lord had sent him to prophesy, and he stood in the court of the Lord’s house and said to all the people: ¹⁵“Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, behold, I am bringing upon this city and upon all its towns all the disaster that I have pronounced against it, because they have stiffened their neck, refusing to hear my words.”

According to scripture, is Israel eventually saved? Is Jerusalem made new? God must be a pretty special potter.

Jeremiah 31:38-40... ³⁸“Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when the city shall be rebuilt for the Lord from the tower of Hananel to the Corner Gate. ³⁹And the measuring line shall go out farther, straight to the hill Gareb, and shall then turn to Goah. ⁴⁰**The whole valley of the dead bodies** and the ashes, and all the fields as far as the brook Kidron, to the corner of the Horse Gate toward the east, **shall be sacred to the Lord.** It shall not be uprooted or overthrown anymore forever.”

What else could this mean, other than Gehenna will one day be “sacred”? Gehenna is often translated “Hell.” HOLY HELL?

“The chapter ends, verses 38–40, looking forward to the rebuilding of Jerusalem and takes us on a tour of the city, picking out various prominent features in its topography, from the tower of Hananel in the north-east corner (see Neh. 3:1) to the “Corner Gate” on the west side of the city (see 2 Chron. 26:9). According to the architect’s plans (the measuring line) the city would extend as far as the hills of Gareb and Goath, both places otherwise unknown to us but probably on the south side of the city. The “whole valley” is probably a reference to the valley of Hinnom, a place with grim associations,

including child sacrifice (see comment on 7:29 in vol. 1, pp. 78–79). The grim associations are to be a thing of the past as the valley is set apart (“sacred”) for the Lord. The tour ends in the Kidron valley and at the Horse Gate, both on the east side of the city.” – The Daily Bible Study Series: Jeremiah and Lamentations

Jeremiah certainly seems to say that one day Gehenna will be “sacred to the Lord” and inside the walls of The New Jerusalem. That day appears to be the day that the High Priest bought the Potter’s field in the valley of Gehenna, with the thirty pieces of silver obtained from the death of Christ on the Cross.

Matthew 27:3-10...³Then when Judas, his betrayer, saw that Jesus was condemned, he changed his mind and brought back the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and the elders, ⁴saying, “I have sinned by betraying innocent blood.” They said, “What is that to us? See to it yourself.” ⁵And throwing down the pieces of silver into the temple, he departed, and he went and hanged himself. ⁶But the chief priests, taking the pieces of silver, said, “It is not lawful to put them into the treasury, since it is blood money.” ⁷So they took counsel and bought with them the potter’s field as a burial place for strangers. ⁸Therefore that field has been called the Field of Blood to this day. ⁹Then was fulfilled what had been spoken by the prophet Jeremiah, saying, “And they took the thirty pieces of silver, the price of him on whom a price had been set by some of the sons of Israel, ¹⁰and they gave them for the potter’s field, as the Lord directed me.”

Acts 1:16-19...¹⁶“Brothers, the Scripture had to be fulfilled, which the Holy Spirit spoke beforehand by the mouth of David concerning Judas, who became a guide to those who arrested Jesus. ¹⁷For he was numbered among us and was allotted his share in this ministry.” ¹⁸(Now this man bought a field with the reward of his wickedness, and falling headlong he burst open in the middle and all his bowels gushed out. ¹⁹And it became known to all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, so that the field was called in their own language Akeldama, that is, Field of Blood.)

From the sermon, The Potter’s Field, 2-12-06

God is the Potter, and we are the clay. Isaiah prophesied that over and over. God tells Jeremiah in chapter 18 to go watch a potter at the wheel. The pot is spoiled in his hand, and the potter remakes it. God says, “Oh, Israel, can I not do that with you? Repent.” In chapter 19, God commands Jeremiah to take an earthen vessel, go to the Valley of Hinnon (Gehenna) and publicly smash it in the potter’s field saying, “So will I break this people and this city as one breaks a potter’s vessel so that it can never be mended.”

Yet then in Jeremiah 31, Jeremiah prophesied a new covenant and a new city with new boundaries – boundaries that include the valley of dead bodies – for it will be “holy” writes Jeremiah and “never overthrown again.” Then as Jerusalem is besieged by Babylonians, God instructs Jeremiah to buy a field for He has the “right of redemption.” And the field is a sign that Jerusalem, though it is to be forever destroyed “so it cannot be mended,” will be rebuilt so that it cannot be destroyed because “nothing is too hard for God.” [He instructs Jeremiah to put that deed, that covenant, for the field in an earthen vessel... an earthen vessel like you and me. Every Christian is a “messenger of the covenant.”]

The Bible ends with a vision. Saint John writes, “Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth...

And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.” Old Jerusalem and the temple were finally destroyed in 70 A.D., one generation after Christ’s death on the cross and about the time John had his vision.

Well, Zechariah (who prophesied after Jeremiah) was commanded to “shepherd the flock doomed to slaughter.” The high priest paid him 30 pieces of silver for his pastoring. Then Zechariah was commanded to throw it into the House of the Lord to the Potter.

See, God is the Potter.

Matthew quotes Zechariah almost word for word and says it’s Jeremiah. Some say Matthew screwed up. Well, Matthew’s been quoting Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Zechariah his whole Gospel. So you see what he’s saying? “I don’t entirely understand it, but Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Zechariah... it’s all the same thing, and it’s all about now.

As if *now* is the judgment of this world,
now is the evil one cast out, and
now the kingdom comes”
as Jesus is lifted on His cross, the tree...

Jesus fulfills the moral law, sacrificial law, and even all the little details of the ceremonial law that we’re only beginning to see. Jesus called Judas “friend.” It doesn’t mean Judas was good, but the word does mean “partner” or “comrade.” Through Judas, Jesus fulfilled the prophets and even the ceremonial law. Judas goes to the temple and declares that Jesus is innocent. The priest was to declare the lamb spotless before Passover. Judas casts the money into the temple. Money for the temple treasury was to be used for temple construction. Through Judas and the priests, God used that money to purchase a field, and with His blood He built a temple. The field was used to bury strangers (for the burial of unclean gentiles was not allowed in the city.) Yet God builds His temple with strangers purchased with His blood. They are the new Jerusalem.

Years ago in France (so the story goes) some soldiers brought the body of a dead comrade to a French cemetery. The priest asked if the man had been baptized a Roman Catholic. They said they did not know. The priest said he was very sorry, but in that case, he could not permit burial in the church yard. So the soldiers took their comrade and sadly buried him just outside the fence. The next day, they came back to check the grave and could not find it. They found no trace of the freshly dug soil. Bewildered, they were preparing to leave when the priest came out. He told them that his heart had been troubled because of his refusal to allow their dead comrade to be buried in the church yard. So early in the morning, he had risen from his bed, and with his own hands, he had moved the fence to include the body of their comrade who had died for the kingdom of France.

Thirty pieces of silver, the price of a slave (God made Himself a slave in Jesus). Judas threw it into the temple to the Potter, then hung himself alone on a skulon, a tree in a field. Then he fell headlong, bursting open (like a clay pot that cannot be mended). He fell into Gehenna, a field in Gehenna, but that very day that field was purchased, purchased by the One who had the right of redemption, purchased by the Potter for 30 pieces of silver... blood money.

Whose blood?

Jesus' blood.

It's the field of blood, God's blood.

The Potter's Field
purchased by God
with the blood of Christ.
Judas fell into that field.

Gehenna doesn't belong to Satan. It belongs to the Potter, and God is the Potter.

You know, if clay is wet it can be re-formed on the wheel. It happens to us all the time as God forms that empty place inside of us in order to fill us with Himself. It happened to Peter. If the clay dries, the pot must be broken if it is ever to be remade, "broken so it cannot be mended." But shattered it turns back to clay, and then the Potter can make a new pot. Maybe that happens to Judas.

And even if the clay is fired in a kiln and then shattered, in the presence of water, the ceramics will eventually turn back to clay. It just takes aions. Perhaps Judas is still trapped in Hades in this aion. Perhaps Judas is forever destroyed in this aion. But I cannot say God cannot make Him eternally new in the next.

God makes us new at the cross. He destroys us and recreates us. He shapes us and seals us with His fire which is judgment. If Judas is a thing made new, he is made new through the cross, even if it's at the end of time...the end of time when he passes through the fire, the judgment. No longer a vessel of wrath, but remade a vessel of mercy. (Paul writes that at one time we were all "children of wrath." Ephesians 2:3)

In the name of Jesus, believe that your Father, the Potter, is good.

IT WOULD SEEM THAT:

1. The Fire is the realm of God, Light, and Divine Life. Whereas Hades is the realm of "not God," darkness and death.
2. The Fire descends in this world as blessing and as judgment: blessing for those who desire mercy, judgment for those who despise mercy. Yet the Fire is one fire
3. No one can entirely avoid the fire. If we don't receive it at Pentecost, we will be burned by it in the end. It is the end. Jesus is "the end." Jesus is the revelation of God who is Love. Who is revealed to us as Mercy.
4. The Fire has no end, because it is the End. "Death and Hades come to an end in the Fire.
5. **We have referred to Hades and the Fire as the same thing and called it "Hell," when in fact Hades and the Fire are opposites.**

6. The realm of Hades, encounters the realm of Fire in the valley of Gehenna. The fire descends on Gehenna and when it does it devours all evil.
7. The Fire has no end. Hades comes to an end. Gehenna is transformed in the end.
8. As believers, in some sense we pass through the Fire in this world. We are baptized with Fire.
9. It appears that some are cast into the Fire at the end. Yet, as we will see, things consumed, show up again in “eternity.”
10. It is not explicitly stated that anyone will be cast into the fire except the satanic trinity. However, it is implied: all those who “worship the beast,” and those “whose names are not written in the book of life.” The persecutors in Thessalonica will be destroyed by the “epiphany of His coming” which appears to be like a flood of fire.
11. Whoever the “goats” are in Matthew, they go into the Fire.
12. Jesus is our scapegoat, and he bears our sins into the Fire. He becomes sin for us and bears our iniquity into the consuming Fire.

DAMNED THINGS OR DESTROYED THINGS THAT COME BACK

Sodom:

Genesis 19:24...Then the Lord rained on Sodom and Gomorrah sulfur and fire from the Lord out of heaven.

Matthew 11:23-24...²³And you, Capernaum, will you be exalted to heaven? You will be brought down to Hades. For if the mighty works done in you had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day. ²⁴But I tell you that it will be more tolerable on the day of judgment for the land of Sodom than for you.”

Luke 17:28-30...²⁸Likewise, just as it was in the days of Lot – they were eating and drinking, buying and selling, planting and building, ²⁹but on the day when Lot went out from Sodom, fire and sulfur rained from heaven and destroyed them all – ³⁰so will it be on the day when the Son of Man is revealed.

It sounds like the “Son of Man” is somehow “Fire and Sulfur.” You can’t blame the fire and sulfur for the destruction of Sodom. They are just being what they are. Perhaps we can’t blame the Son of Man for the destruction of the ungodly. He is just being what He is.

2 Peter 2:4-6...⁴For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but cast them into hell (*Tartaroo*- this a verb meaning “to cast down into Hades”) and committed them to chains of gloomy darkness to be kept until the judgment; ⁵if he did not spare the ancient world, but preserved Noah, a herald of righteousness, with seven others, when he brought a flood upon the world of the ungodly; ⁶if by turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah to ashes he condemned them to extinction, making them an example of what is going to happen to the ungodly; ⁷and if he rescued righteous Lot, greatly distressed by the sensual conduct of the

wicked ⁸(for as that righteous man lived among them day after day, he was tormenting his righteous soul over their lawless deeds that he saw and heard); ⁹then the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from trials, and to keep the unrighteous under punishment (*Kolazo*) **until** the day of judgment,...

The word “kolazo” means “to prune.” According to Barclay the corresponding noun (kolasis) refers to remedial punishment. Therefore, it would seem the “kolazo” is a gift of grace in preparation for the day of judgment. Can anything that comes from God, who is Love, not be Grace to one of his creatures?

Ezekiel 16:44-57... ⁴⁴“Behold, everyone who uses proverbs will use this proverb about you: ‘Like mother, like daughter.’ ⁴⁵You (*Jerusalem/Judah*) are the daughter of your mother, who loathed her husband and her children; and you are the sister of your sisters, who loathed their husbands and their children. Your mother was a Hittite and your father an Amorite. ⁴⁶And your elder sister is Samaria, who lived with her daughters to the north of you; and your younger sister, who lived to the south of you, is Sodom with her daughters. ⁴⁷Not only did you walk in their ways and do according to their abominations; within a very little time **you were more corrupt than they in all your ways.** ⁴⁸As I live, declares the Lord God, your sister Sodom and her daughters have not done as you and your daughters have done. ⁴⁹Behold, this was the guilt of your sister Sodom: she and her daughters had pride, excess of food, and prosperous ease, but did not aid the poor and needy. ⁵⁰They were haughty and did an abomination before me. So I removed them, when I saw it. ⁵¹Samaria has not committed half your sins. You have committed more abominations than they, and have made your sisters appear righteous by all the abominations that you have committed. ⁵²Bear your disgrace, you also, for you have intervened on behalf of your sisters. Because of your sins in which you acted more abominably than they, they are more in the right than you. So be ashamed, you also, and bear your disgrace, for you have made your sisters appear righteous. ⁵³“I will restore their fortunes, both the fortunes of Sodom and her daughters, and the fortunes of Samaria and her daughters, and I will restore your own fortunes in their midst, ⁵⁴that you may bear your disgrace and be ashamed of all that you have done, becoming a consolation to them. ⁵⁵As for your sisters, Sodom and her daughters **shall return** to their former state, and Samaria and her daughters **shall return** to their former state, and you and your daughters **shall return** to your former state. ⁵⁶**Was not your sister Sodom a byword in your mouth in the day of your pride,** ⁵⁷before your wickedness was uncovered? Now you have become an object of reproach for the daughters of Syria and all those around her, and for the daughters of the Philistines, those all around who despise you... ⁶²I will establish my covenant with you, and you shall know that I am the Lord, ⁶³that you may remember and be confounded, and never open your mouth again because of your shame, **when I atone for you** for all that you have done, declares the Lord God.”

Did you get that? Like Jerusalem and Samaria (The Northern Kingdom), Sodom will be restored. When Jerusalem is restored she will have **consciousness** (remembrance) of her former “shame.” That is she won’t simply be a New Jerusalem, but Old Jerusalem redeemed, with a knowledge of God’s covenant love. She will be redeemed in the “midst” of an already redeemed Sodom and Samaria. Now go read Romans 9-11. As a very accomplished Pharisee, Paul wrote in the light of Ezekiel 16. A sign that you and I have been atoned for, is that those we have deemed to be like Sodom, are not a “byword” in our mouths.

Jerusalem:

Jeremiah 19:10-15...¹⁰“Then you shall break the flask in the sight of the men who go with you,¹¹ and shall say to them, ‘Thus says the Lord of hosts: So will I break this people and this city, as one breaks a potter’s vessel, so that it can never be mended. Men shall bury in Topheth because there will be no place else to bury.¹² Thus will I do to this place, declares the Lord, and to its inhabitants, making this city like Topheth.¹³ The houses of Jerusalem and the houses of the kings of Judah – all the houses on whose roofs offerings have been offered to all the host of heaven, and drink offerings have been poured out to other gods – shall be defiled like the place of Topheth.’”¹⁴ Then Jeremiah came from Topheth, where the Lord had sent him to prophesy, and he stood in the court of the Lord’s house and said to all the people:¹⁵ “Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, behold, I am bringing upon this city and upon all its towns all the disaster that I have pronounced against it, because they have stiffened their neck, refusing to hear my words.”

Matthew 23:37-24:2...³⁷“O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you would not!³⁸ See, your house is left to you desolate.³⁹ For I tell you, you will not see me again, until you say, ‘Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.’”¹ Jesus left the temple and was going away, when his disciples came to point out to him the buildings of the temple.² But he answered them, “You see all these, do you not? Truly, I say to you, there will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down.”

Zechariah 14:11... And it shall be inhabited, for there shall never again be a decree of utter destruction. Jerusalem shall dwell in security.

Revelation 21:2... And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.

The New Jerusalem is made up of people. The names of the twelve apostles (Judas?) are inscribed on its foundation. And the names of the twelve tribes above its gates. The book of Hebrews tells us that we’ve already been to this city. Paul tells us that she is our mother. Zachariah tells us that she is surrounded by fire, and God (the fire that surrounds her) is the glory in her midst. John saw the city **coming** down. It’s been coming down for two thousand years. Matt. 5:3&10 in the Greek reveal that it actually consists of the “poor in spirit” and those “persecuted for righteousness sake.” It is constructed of “the lost” having been found and redeemed by grace, who no longer boast over Sodom.

Israel:

Deuteronomy 4:24-31...²⁴For the Lord your God is a consuming fire, a jealous God.²⁵“When you father children and children’s children, and have grown old in the land, if you act corruptly by making a carved image in the form of anything, and by doing what is evil in the sight of the Lord your God, so as to provoke him to anger,²⁶ I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that you will soon utterly perish from the land that you are going over the Jordan to possess. You will not live long in it, but will be **utterly destroyed**.²⁷ And the Lord will scatter you among the peoples, and you will be left few in number among the nations where the Lord will drive you.²⁸ And there you will serve gods of wood and stone, the work of human hands,

that neither see, nor hear, nor eat, nor smell. ²⁹But from there you will seek the Lord your God and you will find him, if you search after him with all your heart and with all your soul. ³⁰When you are in tribulation, and all these things come upon you in the latter days, you will return to the Lord your God and obey his voice. ³¹For the Lord your God is a merciful God. He will **not** leave you or **destroy you** or forget the covenant with your fathers that he swore to them.

Verse 26 claims that Israel will be “utterly destroyed” and “perish” if they worship idols (which they did). Verse 29 says that Israel will “return”...after they’ve been utterly destroyed it seems. Verse 30 claims that God will not “destroy” Israel, but remember His covenant.

Isaiah 10:22-23...²²For though your people Israel be as the sand of the sea, only a remnant of them will return. Destruction is decreed, overflowing with righteousness. ²³For the Lord God of hosts will make a full end, as decreed, in the midst of all the earth.

Isaiah 43:28...Therefore I will profane the princes of the sanctuary, and deliver Jacob to utter destruction and Israel to reviling.

Ezekiel 9:8-10...⁸And while they were striking, and I was left alone, I fell upon my face, and cried, “Ah, Lord God! Will you destroy all the remnant of Israel in the outpouring of your wrath on Jerusalem?” ⁹Then he said to me, “The guilt of the house of Israel and Judah is exceedingly great. The land is full of blood, and the city full of injustice. For they say, ‘The Lord has forsaken the land, and the Lord does not see.’ ¹⁰As for me, my eye will not spare, nor will I have pity; I will bring their deeds upon their heads.”

Hosea 13:9 (NKJV)...“O Israel, you are destroyed, But your help is from Me.”

Ezekiel 37:11-14...¹¹Then he said to me, “Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel. Behold, they say, ‘Our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost; we are clean cut off.’ ¹²Therefore prophesy, and say to them, Thus says the Lord God: Behold, I will open your graves and raise you from your graves, O my people. And I will bring you into the land of Israel. ¹³And you shall know that I am the Lord, when I open your graves, and raise you from your graves, O my people. ¹⁴And I will put my Spirit within you, and you shall live, and I will place you in your own land. Then you shall know that I am the Lord; I have spoken, and I will do it, declares the Lord...” (continued below)

Did you get that? The Israel that is redeemed is the **WHOLE** house of Israel, the same one that was dead and in the grave. I think that would include the Israelites “not saved” in Romans 9:27 (yet Romans 9:12 & 26, “full inclusion” and “all Israel” will be saved) and those “broken or cut off” in Romans 11:17 (yet Romans 11:24, they’ll be grafted back in again). It might even include those “wild shoots” grafted in (Romans 11:17). Whatever the case in Ezekiel, the “whole house of Israel” is said to rise from their graves. To the Israelites “the grave” was Sheol. Often “Sheol” is translated “The Grave” in English Bibles. It’s the **WHOLE** house of Israel, and remember, some are buried in Tophet (Gehenna), Jeremiah 19:11.

Ezekiel 37:22-28...²²And I will make them **one nation** in the land, on the mountains of Israel. And **one king** shall be king over them all, and they shall be no longer two nations, and no longer divided into two kingdoms. ²³They shall not defile themselves anymore with their idols and their detestable things, or with any of their transgressions. But I will save them from all the backslidings in which they have sinned, and will cleanse them; and they shall be my people,

and I will be their God. ²⁴“**My servant David** shall be king over them, and they shall all have **one shepherd**. They shall walk in my rules and be careful to obey my statutes. ²⁵They shall dwell in the land that I gave to my servant Jacob, where your fathers lived. They and their children and their children’s children shall dwell there forever, and David my servant shall be their prince forever. ²⁶I will make a **covenant of peace** with them. It shall be an **everlasting covenant** with them. And I will set them in their land and multiply them, and will set my sanctuary in their midst forevermore. ²⁷My dwelling place shall be with them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. ²⁸Then the nations will know that I am the Lord who sanctifies Israel, when my sanctuary is in their midst forevermore.”

They shall have “ONE king.” He is “God’s servant David” and a “shepherd.” That’s weird, since God said he was king of Israel. Who is king, David (or son of David), servant, a shepherd and God all at once? Who also makes an everlasting covenant of peace? And forms Israel into God’s dwelling place and house? Such that the nations know the God of Israel is The Lord? They shall also be “one nation.” Perhaps all the nations will one day be the one nation, as if God has broken down the “dividing wall of hostility” and through this servant David shepherd God king created “in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace.” (Eph. 2:15)

Matthew 27:52-53...⁵²The tombs also were opened. And many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised, ⁵³and coming out of the tombs after his resurrection they went into the holy city and appeared to many.

Matthew must have had Ezekiel 37 dancing around his brain.

Romans 11:26-27...²⁶And in this way all Israel will be saved, as it is written, “The Deliverer will come from Zion, he will banish ungodliness from Jacob”; ²⁷“and this will be my covenant with them when I take away their sins.”

Paul?

Galatians 2:20...It is **no longer I** who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

I don’t suspect that Paul is simply being dramatic, but that this is central to his theology of salvation. He really has ceased to live. He was annihilated at the cross.

Christ?

Galatians 3:13...Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us – for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree...”

2 Corinthians 5:21...For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

Revelation 1:17-18...¹⁷When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. But he laid his right hand on me, saying, “Fear not, I am the first and the last, ¹⁸and the living one. I died, and behold I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades.

Romans 6:4-8...⁴We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. ⁵For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. ⁶We know that our **old self** was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be **brought to nothing**, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. ⁷For one who has died has been set free from sin. ⁸Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him...

It's like I have an "old self" that gets destroyed (brought to **nothing**) and a new self that is Christ. When we threaten people with destruction, how do we know that God won't give them a new self, just like he's given us a new self?

⁷For one who has died has been set free from sin. ⁸Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him.

Hey, if Hell is eternal death, isn't it eternally free from sin? Maybe Hades is the region of "the mostly dead," who refuse to die. Maybe the lake of fire, the second death, sets them free? Maybe then they realize that they're dead? For, who has died? Who is set free from sin?

2 Corinthians 5:14-15...¹⁴For the love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: that one has died for all, therefore **all have died**; ¹⁵and he died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised.

"I have been crucified with Christ." I'm forgiven. My sins are atoned for. Because I believe it, I already walk in "newness of life." However it's not only my sins that are atoned for. "All have died." If "all have died," why would they still need to be punished? Maybe they don't need to be. Maybe their own fear and faithlessness is their punishment (see notes on 1 John 4:17-18 below, particularly Schneider). It too is forgiven, but the fact that they don't yet believe it causes them to run from the "faithful one" who is "Love," the slaughtered lamb on the throne. There darkness is forgiven, yet it still is "burned" by the Light.

I realize there are philosophical circles there, but when I threaten folks with bearing their own sin in Hell and receiving God's punishment (retributive punishment), perhaps I lie about the gospel. Perhaps a scapegoat has already born their sin into the eternal fire, just as the scapegoat has born my sin into the eternal fire. Maybe Christ's warning in Matthew about "better to cut of your hand, then be thrown into Gehenna Fire with it" was actually a very heart felt and pleading sort of command, for every time I sin, Jesus bears my sin to the fire on my behalf. Maybe it's not only on my behalf, but on everyone's behalf... they just may not know it yet. If I love Jesus at all, I surely would make it my aim to preach the gospel in the hope that others would fall in love with him, choosing not to sin, such that Jesus would no longer have to bear their pain. Do we preach the gospel to save our tail or Jesus' tail, because he's already chosen to become cursed sin for us?

All Men (and Women)?

Psalm 22:1,27-31...¹My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? ...²⁷**All the ends of the earth** shall remember and turn to the Lord, and all the families of the nations shall worship before you. ²⁸For kingship belongs to the Lord, and he rules over the nations. ²⁹**All** the prosperous of the earth eat and worship; before him shall bow **all** who go down to the dust,

even the one who could not keep himself alive. ³⁰Posterity shall serve him; it shall be told of the Lord to the coming generation; ³¹they shall come and proclaim his righteousness to a people yet unborn, that he has done it.

THIS IS THE PSALM THAT JESUS QUOTES ON THE CROSS! Maybe we should take it seriously. “Before him shall bow **all** who go down to the dust.”

Isaiah 26:19...Your dead shall live; their bodies shall rise. You who dwell in the dust, awake and sing for joy! For your dew is a dew of light, and the earth will give birth to the dead.

“You who dwell in the dust” – Is that just Israel or do others also dwell in the dust? “The earth will give birth to **THE DEAD**” – That isn’t just Israel.

Romans 5:18-21...¹⁸Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for **all** men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for **all** men. ¹⁹For as by the one man’s disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man’s obedience the many will be made righteous. ²⁰Now the law came in to increase the trespass, but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more, ²¹so that, as sin reigned in death, grace also might reign through righteousness leading to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Not only is Sodom, Israel, Judah, Jerusalem, and Paul condemned, so is Christ and so are all. Not only is Sodom, Israel, Judah, Jerusalem, and Paul raised, so is Christ and so are all...I mean if you took this verse at face value, you might think that the plan for all time was that all things would pass through the cross, which is our judgment. All things would be judged there, and all things would be redeemed there. Adam’s sin would be exposed there (on that tree of knowledge), and Adam’s justification would also be exposed there (on that tree of life). We (as the first Adam) would die there, and we (in the eschatos Adam) would be raised there.

Colossians 1:15-19...“He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities – all things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.”

If we take this verse seriously, then it certainly seems to say, “all things” will be reconciled to God through the blood of the cross, not making animosity torment or subjugation but PEACE. If some renounce the blood and refuse to come to the cross in this life, (world, age, or aion) doesn’t it clearly imply that the story is not over? Can their will to destruction nullify the will of God for salvation? Can it nullify the word of God?

Romans 11:32...For God has consigned **all** to disobedience, that he may have mercy on **all**.

1 Corinthians 15:21-26...²¹For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. ²²For as in Adam **all** die, so also in Christ shall **all** be made alive. ²³But each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ. ²⁴Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every

rule and every authority and power. ²⁵For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. ²⁶The last enemy to be destroyed is death.

It appears that resurrection (being made alive) comes in this order:

1. The firstfruits, which is Christ. James also says that “we” are a type of firstfruits... we are Christ’s body.
2. Those who belong to Christ at his coming.
3. “Every rule, authority, and power.” Is an unrepentant sinner a “rule, authority, or power”? If a “rule, authority, or power” is merely subjugated (like locked in a prison), is it destroyed? Are these “destroyed” as in annihilated or destroyed as in redeemed, such that they praise the lamb on the throne and cease to exist as a rebellious power? The immediate context would seem to imply the latter, since “all” shall be made alive.
4. Did you notice that the last enemy to be destroyed is death? How can death be destroyed if Hell is an unending death. Wouldn’t that be death’s victory, not its destruction? If death were to be destroyed what would it become?
5. (For a discussion regarding “the redemption of Satan,” see Rev. 20:9-10 above)

John 5:21-24... ²¹For as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so also **the Son gives life to whom he will.** (*I think He came to seek and to save “the lost. That is His Will...The Judges Will.*) ²²The Father judges no one, but has given **all** judgment to the Son, ²³that **all** may honor the Son, just as they honor the Father. Whoever does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent him. ²⁴Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life.

It’s not that The Father judges or that The Son judges (“I judge no one”-John 8:15), but that God IS judgment, and Jesus Christ is the revelation of God. Come to Christ in faith, and you come to Judgment; receive Christ and you receive Judgment. You die with Christ, and you are raised with Christ. Paul refers to the Communion wine as “judgment” on those who don’t discern the body, yet it is also God’s gracious Judgment on us. We receive it by faith, and so His judgment is sweet. They do not, and so it burns. Grace burns ungrace. Time and time again I’ve seen communion wine burn Satan and his demons. They’re being judged. (I know that’s weird. So if you don’t believe my stories, that’s fine. Just believe that “Jesus Christ and him crucified is the judgment of this world.”)

John 12:31-33... ³¹Now is the judgment of this world; now will the ruler of this world be cast out. ³²And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw **all** people to myself.” ³³He said this to show by what kind of death he was going to die.

It sure seems like He’s saying **all** will somehow come to the cross, die with him at the cross, and rise with him through the cross. “The only way to the Father is through the Son.” So if all are redeemed it only happens through the blood of Christ shed on the cross. Maybe that whole cross thing is bigger than we think. Maybe its power extends beyond the grave. Maybe the

lamb was crucified from the foundation of the world and everything that's anything is continuously upheld by that slaughtered lamb, God's Word of creative and sustaining power.

IT WOULD SEEM THAT:

1. Just because something is "destroyed" in scripture, it doesn't mean that it can't come back. It's hard to count on things staying desecrated, destroyed and dead, while the Creator is still walking around speaking his Word.
2. Because of the many problems with the doctrine of "Hell" as unending conscious retributive punishment, many Evangelicals have advocated a doctrine of "annihilation." This seems to be a Biblical advance over unending torment, yet we must ask, "How do we know things stay annihilated? And just what is it that gets annihilated in the first place?"
3. Things annihilated that come back, don't come back the same, (Even Jesus left with our curse, sin, and shame and came back without them). It's like they've been judged, separated, and purified. Like all corruption is annihilated, and thus all substance is purified.

JUDGMENT, VESSELS OF WRATH AND VESSELS OF MERCY

Isaiah 66:18-24...¹⁸"For I know their works and their thoughts, and the time is coming to gather **all** nations and tongues. And they shall come and shall see my glory, ¹⁹and I will set a **sign** (*I think we know this sign*) among them. And from them I will send survivors to the nations, to Tarshish, Pul, and Lud, who draw the bow, to Tubal and Javan, to the coastlands afar off, that have not heard my fame or seen my glory. And they shall declare my glory among the nations. ²⁰And they shall bring **all** your brothers from **all** the nations as an offering to the Lord, on horses and in chariots and in litters and on mules and on dromedaries, to my holy mountain Jerusalem, says the Lord, just as the Israelites bring their grain offering in a clean vessel to the house of the Lord. ²¹And some of them also I will take for priests and for Levites (*gentile priests and Levites*), says the Lord. ²²"For as the new heavens and the new earth that I make shall remain before me, says the Lord, so shall your offspring and your name remain (*the consummated kingdom is no longer subject to corruption*). ²³From new moon to new moon, and from Sabbath to Sabbath, **all** flesh (*basar – flesh of creatures men and animals, a Hebrew euphemism for the male organ of generation, what is **circumcised** i.e. Gen. 17:3*) shall come to worship before me, declares the Lord. ²⁴"And they shall go out and look on the dead bodies (*peger – corpse*) of the men who have rebelled (*pawshah*) against me. For their **worm** shall not die, their **fire** shall not be quenched, and they shall be an abhorrence to **all** flesh."

If ALL flesh goes out and looks on the corpses of them that have "rebelled," whose corpses are they looking at? It would have to be at least some of their own OR ALL of their own. I've wondered at the word "basar" translated "flesh." In the Septuagint "sarc" translates the word "basar" and is what Paul refers to as the old nature or self. Why here, is it all "basar" that looks upon the corpses?

It was interesting to discover that this word is also the Hebrew term for a man's reproductive organ. To a modern American this is cause for snickers and jokes (perhaps because we cannot tolerate deep truths), but to the Hebrew mind this would carry the deepest significance. The sign of the covenant people was circumcision, "cutting off" the skin that covers the thing designed for ecstatic communion which deposits seed which bears the fruit of life in the image

of God. In the New Testament we find that circumcision is still required, God just calls us to circumcised hearts. When a Hebrew boy would become a man he would be circumcised. He would look upon that which was cut off as the greatest blessing, the sign of God's grace and favor. He would look upon the foreskin as a corpse. All "basar" go out and look on them that have rebelled – "the men who have rebelled against me."

Who are "the men who have rebelled against me"?

Isaiah 1:2...Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth; for the Lord has spoken: "**Children** have I reared and brought up, but they have rebelled (*pawshah*) against me.

Isaiah 43:27...Your **first father** sinned, and your **mediators** transgressed (*pawshah*) against me.

Isaiah 48:1-2, 8...¹Hear this, O house of Jacob, who are called by the name of **Israel**, and who came from the waters of Judah, who swear by the name of the Lord and confess the God of Israel, but not in truth or right. ²For they call themselves after the holy city, and stay themselves on the God of Israel; the Lord of hosts is his name...⁸You have never heard, you have never known, from of old your ear has not been opened. For I knew that you would surely deal treacherously, and that from before birth you were called a rebel (*pawshah*).

"Before birth"! Almost like they had been "consigned to disobedience"!

Isaiah 53:12...Therefore I will divide him a portion with the many, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong, because **he poured out his soul to death and was numbered with the transgressors** (*pawshah*); yet he bore the sin of many, and makes intercession for the transgressors.

Isaiah 59:11-13...¹¹We all growl like bears; we moan and moan like doves; we hope for justice, but there is none; for salvation, but it is far from us. ¹²For our transgressions are multiplied before you, and our sins testify against us; for our transgressions are with us, and we know our iniquities: ¹³transgressing (*pawshah*), and denying the Lord, and turning back from following our God, speaking oppression and revolt, conceiving and uttering from the heart lying words.

So who are "the men who have rebelled against me" ? Answer: The children that God has reared, Adam, The Priests, Israel, Jesus Christ, and anyone numbered with Him, ALL. If we take this text literally, ALL human flesh (and perhaps more flesh) will look upon their own corpses in the valley of Gehenna, where the fire is not quenched and the worm never dies. Of course the fire is not quenched. According to Zechariah the fire around Jerusalem is God Himself (Zechariah 2:5). He is not quenched. But...what about the freaky worm?

A Note about The Immortal Worm:

Mark 9:48... 'where **their worm** (*This is singular not plural. How come?*) does not die and the fire is not quenched.'

Isaiah 66:24...“And they shall go out and look on the dead bodies of the men who have rebelled against me. For their worm (*tolaw*) shall not die, their fire shall not be quenched, and they shall be an abhorrence to all flesh.”

A few months ago, I had been meditating on that worm. I remember thinking/praying “Jesus, what is that worm? The Fire makes sense, but what is that immortal worm that lives in the Fire and does not die?” The next day I received an e-mail from a friend for whom I have great respect. Once before she had given me a dream and interpretation that she felt was from God, and seemed to me to be from God. This morning I read how she had dreamed of me pulling up a tree before the congregation. In doing so the soil was exposed. Then she writes:

“Peter then picks up the earth and places it into a container. The earth is the blackest, moistest, most fertile rich soil I have ever seen. The smell of this rich soil begins to permeate the entire area. The container, basin of soil is passed from one person to another to look and see what is there.

As I look it is passed; people are cautious at first. Never before has such a strong odor been smelled, and there is some fear to look and see what is really in this soil. As it passes what is seen in the earth that the tree was taken from are what appear to be maggots. There are many of these small, white creatures. But then the information is given that they are night crawlers, or earth worms, just white in color.

The people are told to look and to see that the worms will find their way back into the earth. We look and see that they search to find their way back into the soil where they need to be. These worms line up in perfect formation, and one by one they return. The black rich soil is full - filled with these worms that have made this earth so fertile for growth.”

She then conveyed the rest of the dream and gave an interpretation. Related to the worms she wrote:

“Soil prepared by God is powerful and unfamiliar. The rich smell, the dark and moist dirt that is rich in nutrients is different to behold. Caution is called for. What is it? What will it do? What's in it? The fear that arises within the people is because it is "foreign." People begin to see what they think are maggots. To the people these things are not recognizable. They are gross and repulsive but then the truth is revealed that they are unfamiliar night crawlers/earth worms which actually have been apart of producing such incredible soil. A needed component. But they look different being white in color. They are PURE God created...Ok, Peter, here's the deal. I have been waiting on the Lord for four days now on this one section of the dream. What He keeps giving to me is Mark 9:44, 46, and 48. These come from Isaiah 66:24 the last verse of Isaiah. I see the correlation of what you have been preaching recently here. I see the fruit of after the burning that the worm remains to produce fertile soil, perhaps? It is what earth worms do, but I suspect that the worms that Isaiah speaks of may not be earth worms? However, this is what I see and what God would have you do is understand this portion of the dream through these scriptures. That's all I know.”

Sometimes I think: “There really is a God.” Well, the coincidence was a little shocking and caused me to dig into the text and ask some questions. It's amazing to me how it always

seems that if we just walk into our greatest fears that it's in those places we find the most beautiful pictures of God's grace in Christ Jesus...Almost as if we'll find Easter on the far side of a cross...Almost as if "...in the **very place** where it was said to them, 'You are not my people, they will be called 'sons of the living God'" (Romans 9:26, Hosea 1:10)...Almost as if "...where sin increased, **grace abounded** all the more" (Romans 5:20)...Almost as if, though I make my bed in Sheol, even there "your right hand shall hold me" (Psalm 139:10).

Beside the words of this dream/vision, as I began looking into scripture I had another image in my head. I had recently seen a show on the medical wonder of maggots – not what I had expected. I learned that doctors were now using maggots to heal people's wounds. It turns out that maggots will only eat dead and decaying flesh but not living flesh, so maggots placed in an infected wound can clean the wound far better than any human surgeon with a knife. I also realized that if it weren't for worms this world would be overwhelmed with corpses and trash. Not only do maggots and worms consume dead matter, they turn it into the raw material for Life. They make the soil rich!

Even so I wondered, what would "the worm" eat if at one point "death shall be no more" (Rev. 21:5)? As a kid I collected bugs. I knew that when certain "worms" (the one's we call caterpillars) ran out of food or finished eating, they formed cocoons (chrysalises), and transformed into butterflies. They didn't die. They metamorphosed. Even so I wondered, what worm or butterfly would be immortal? ("God alone has immortality" – 1 Tim. 6:16)

Then I remembered this:

Psalm 22:1-8...¹My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me, from the words of my groaning? ²O my God, I cry by day, but you do not answer, and by night, but I find no rest. ³Yet you are holy, enthroned on the praises of Israel. ⁴In you our fathers trusted; they trusted, and you delivered them. ⁵To you they cried and were rescued; in you they trusted and were not put to shame. ⁶But **I am a worm (tolaw)** and not a man, scorned by mankind and despised by the people. ⁷All who see me mock me; they make mouths at me; they wag their heads; ⁸"He trusts in the Lord; let him deliver him; let him rescue him, for he delights in him!"

Jesus quotes the first line of Psalm 22, on the cross. There he identifies himself as the speaker, subject, and true author of the psalm. The psalm goes on to make that clear. In verse 6 he says, "I am a worm." Is Jesus immortal? Does Jesus inhabit even Gehenna? Is the consuming worm like The Consuming Fire? Is Jesus immortal? Does Jesus consume death and turn it into life? Is the process shocking, even disgusting to the human eye? Is it his scarlet blood that cleanses us white as snow? I researched this word "tolaw" a bit and found that it referred to a particular type of worm. A worm that would eat dead flesh (in the valley of Gehenna for instance), and at a certain point form a chrysalis and transform into a butterfly. The word is also translated "scarlet," because it was from this worm that the Hebrews obtained scarlet dye. When I did a word search in Hebrew, this word showed up in all sorts of verses having to do with the construction of the tabernacle (dwelling of God) and in some fascinating places having to do with ritual sacrifice for cleansing.

Exodus 26:30-31...³⁰Then you shall erect the tabernacle according to the plan for it that you were shown on the mountain. ³¹"And you shall make a veil of blue and purple and scarlet (tolaw) yarns and fine twined linen. It shall be made with cherubim skillfully worked into it.

Leviticus 14:4-7...⁴the priest shall command them to take for him who is to be cleansed **two live clean birds** and cedarwood and **scarlet** (*tolaw*) yarn and hyssop. ⁵And the priest shall command them to kill one of the birds in an earthenware vessel over fresh water. ⁶He shall take the live bird with the cedarwood and the scarlet yarn and the hyssop, and dip them and the live bird in the blood of the bird that was killed over the fresh water. ⁷And he shall sprinkle it seven times on him who is to be cleansed of the leprous disease. Then he shall pronounce him clean and shall let the living bird go into the open field.

Matthew 10:29, “Are not **two sparrows** sold for a penny? And not one of them will fall to the ground without your Father’s will.” It appears that Jesus is referencing this verse and his listeners knew it. They would buy the two sparrows for ritual cleansing, they would also know that “tolaw” was for healing, and they would be personally reminded of the two goats on the Day of Atonement. When God prescribed the Old Testament sacrificial system, he did not define it’s meaning. Jesus defined it’s meaning on the cross. Jesus is the meaning, and at the cross the meaning is revealed. God wanted his people to “know” the meaning with their heart, before they tried to comprehend the meaning with their head. At the cross/tree the Father gave to his children the knowledge of good and evil. It is body broken and blood shed. It is Love. In the Garden they stole it, but it killed them, for stolen Love condemns as law. Love poured out fulfills the Law and is life. In the Garden there were two trees. In the New Jerusalem there is ONE. Come to the Cross and you come to the New Jerusalem. Well... that’s what I think and if you didn’t follow what I just said, I suggest reading Chapter 14 in my book Dance Lessons for Zombies and my three part commentary on the Revelation, Apocalypse Now, also published as one volume by Integrity Publishers as Eternity Now, (Apocalypse Now is better).

Isaiah 1:18...“Come now, let us reason together, says the Lord: though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson (*tolaw*), they shall become like wool.

On the cross, Jesus is stained crimson and scarlet with our sin. And we are cleansed as we are washed in His Blood.

Revelation 7:13-14, 19:7-8...¹³Then one of the elders addressed me, saying, “Who are these, clothed in white robes, and from where have they come?” ¹⁴I said to him, “Sir, you know.” And he said to me, “These are the ones coming out of the great tribulation. They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb...⁷Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his Bride has made herself ready; ⁸it was granted her to clothe herself with fine linen, bright and pure” – for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints.

It’s almost like Jesus is **everywhere** making “all things” new.

As we were saying...

JUDGMENT, Vessels of Wrath and Vessels of Mercy: If “all flesh” looks on “all dead bodies” (Isaiah 66), who is doing the looking and what are they looking at? A wonderful friend shared this vision with me:

I was standing with Jesus along a parade route. We were watching a parade of sorts going by of all different shapes, sizes, and colors of caskets. There was a pure glass casket going by, beautiful beyond description. Flowers surrounded the box, music playing, people marching. Everyone was having a great time. As I peering into the glass casket I could see myself—dead! I wasn't really fearful, but I asked Jesus, "Am I dead? Am I going to die soon? Why am I in the casket?" He said, ever so gently, "Marcia, you are not in the casket. You are standing with me. You are alive." It was then I realized that it was my flesh that had died. When I turned to tell him he was gone.

Matthew 13:37-43 (NKJV)...³⁷He answered and said to them: "He who sows the good seed is the Son of Man. ³⁸The field is the world, the good seeds are the sons of the kingdom, but the tares are the sons of the wicked one. ³⁹The enemy who sowed them is the devil, the harvest is the end of the age, and the reapers are the angels. ⁴⁰Therefore as the tares are gathered and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of this age. ⁴¹The Son of Man will send out His angels, and they will gather out of His kingdom all things that offend, and those who practice lawlessness, ⁴²and will cast them into the furnace of fire. There will be wailing and gnashing of teeth. ⁴³Then the righteous will shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears to hear, let him hear!

From the Sermon, How the Kingdom Comes, 3-28-04:

You'll remember from the parable of the soils that a person is a plant: dirt animated by a seed—a Word. Well, there is an Enemy that sows something too. Jesus stops short of calling it a seed, yet it's like a seed; not a good word, but a bad word, an anti-word—a lie. The Enemy sows tares, and you'll remember he does it while men are sleeping at night in the absence of light, the absence of truth, the absence of the master.

Evil is a mystery to us, and the Enemy is a mystery. George MacDonald wrote, "The darkness knows neither the light nor itself; only the light knows itself and the darkness also. None but God hates evil and understands it."

Well, we believe God created everything, yet God didn't create evil. So maybe evil is, like, *nothing*. As Julian of Norwich writes of her vision, "God does everything that is done, and God does not sin. I saw that sin is not something which is done."

So evil is, like, the presence of an absence, the reality of the unreal; like a shadow; like a lie; like death. Death is the absence of life, a shadow is the absence of light, and a lie is the absence of truth. So when you say, "Look at the shadow," you're saying, "Look at the absence of light." When you say, "Did you hear the lie?" you're asking, "Did you hear the absence of truth?"

But listen closely: Shadows and lies may kill—murder. The Enemy comes in the dark; he is the father of lies and a murderer from the beginning. From the beginning! That means he was never good. I've spoken to him, and I hate him. He is evil. He sows darkness and lies that become tares. When young, tares look like wheat, but they're not wheat.

So then, if we take this parable seriously, it implies some amazing things: For one, it implies there are people who look like people but are *not* people. They're people of the lie, empty

people, inhuman people, like zombies...but zombies that were never human, like machines that have no soul, no breath of God, no spirit *ever*.

Tares look like wheat when they're young. Yet when they're mature, they're obviously not wheat, for they have no fruit. So it seems you can know if someone is wheat by encountering the fruit (love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness, self-control). But you cannot know if they're a tare, for they could just be immature wheat.

This parable also seems to imply this: Tares don't *become* wheat. They don't convert. There's nothing to redeem. In other words, they never *were* wheat, and they never aspire to be wheat. They never *were* the first Adam, and they never aspire to the ultimate Adam. They can't conceive Adam, like tares can't conceive wheat. So when people convert, it's not like tares turn into wheat; it's that the wheat finds out that it's wheat. As Luke puts it in Acts 13:48, "As many as were ordained to eternal life believed."

Now, that's scandalous news if you worship the Declaration of Independence and believe that all wheat and all tares are created equal. It's also scandalous news if you like to take credit for your salvation, thinking you're wheat because you chose to be wheat, so salvation is to your credit, and the kingdom coming is dependent on you. If you believe that, this is *bad news*. Yet it is absolutely *good news*, 100% gospel, if you've been worried that you might screw this whole thing up!

Good news: You were chosen, predestined, ordained unto eternal life, and so you believe.

Good seed from the foundation of the world, so the kingdom will come, and you can't stop it.

But now, you're probably thinking, "Oh, Lord, I hope I'm not a tare." Well then, seek to be wheat. And Jesus said, "Seek and you will find." Seek and you will be wheat. But you didn't turn into wheat. You were wheat all along. Tares don't seek to be wheat; they can't even conceive fruit. Do you seek to bear love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness, and self-control? If yes, then you must be wheat. Tares don't seek love. They can't conceive nor comprehend love. But "he who loves is born of God and knows God" (1 John 4:7).

You may say, "I hate the thought that people like me are predestined to the furnace of fire." Well, they're not. People like you are wheat. In Romans 9, Paul talks about "vessels of wrath created for destruction." They're not "children of God" created for destruction, but "vessels of wrath." In Romans 2, God's wrath is God's absence. Perhaps a tare is a vessel of wrath, is a body but no one is home.

My father told me he had a dream once that one of his friends was a vessel of wrath – a tare. It horrified him. I said, "Dad, if tares exist, I doubt one could be your friend. For you could never know one. There's nothing to truly know. You could see one, yes, but love one, no. They're incapable of love."

Well, that can make your head spin, and perhaps I'm wrong in places, but do you see what this parable implies? I think it means: Everybody that's anybody gets saved. That is: God does not abandon His children to destruction. That is: He who began a good work in you will bring it to completion. That is: Nothing is more powerful than the love that is God. And even though

Satan lies by planting lies that grow into nothing and nobody, if you love at all, you are *not* nothing or nobody; you are *somebody*. And everybody that's anybody gets saved!

That helps me understand all the Scriptures that refer to all people being saved, like 1 Corinthians 15:52: "For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive"...while at the same time there are many verses that refer to some goats, tares, and vessels of wrath destroyed in the furnace of fire. Maybe everybody that's anybody gets saved.

But now you may be thinking, "OK, I'm somebody. I'm wheat, but I think I'm also a tare. I'm like soil that's growing a wheat stalk and a tare stalk." John writes, "He who loves God is born of God and knows God. He who loveth not knoweth not God." Wow! That means I'm, like, two persons: one that loves and one that doesn't love; like an old man and a new man; like a sin nature and a spirit nature. Well, maybe in this world we can be wheat and tares in one body. Karl Barth taught that we are *all* vessels of wrath and *all* hide the vessels of mercy. And the wrath reveals the mercy in glory. Some people think that's a heresy, but it's my favorite heresy, and it should be your favorite heresy. For God desires that none should perish. Do you?

Jesus ends by saying: "The Son of Man will send out His angels, and they will gather out of His kingdom all things that offend...(and Peter Hiatt has things that offend – sin)...and those who practice lawlessness, and will cast them into the furnace of fire. There will be wailing and gnashing of teeth. Then the righteous will shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father."

After preaching on the Wheat and the Tares in Mathew 13, I responded to someone's question in the following way: "Predestination is a given in scripture. We were all 'saved' when we were dead in our sins and we were all saved according to God's plan in Christ. The fact that anyone's a believer is no accident, but the work of our Loving Father calling us home. The question then becomes, 'Can anyone refuse the call of God?' How could they refuse or accept since He calls us when we're dead? If His call is irrefutable, are there those that aren't called? If there are, are they just like the children or are they different at some fundamental level? Not demons but something else. When Paul talks about 'vessels of wrath' in Romans 9 and Jesus tells the story of the tares, they seem to be addressing this issue. It seems to shock people, but it's very reassuring to me.

"It means that if anyone goes to Hell, that they are not human in the sense that a 'Child of God' is human -- they would be like an empty shell, (or possibly that they are refined there but don't stay there). It also means that we cannot 'mess up' God's plan of redemption. It also means that God's love is stronger than our failure of the will. Yet this truth is absolutely critical: WE CAN NEVER KNOW IN THIS LIFE, WHO THE TARES ARE, IF IN FACT THERE ARE TARES THAT ARE NOT ALSO WHEAT. However, we can have a pretty good idea that someone is wheat, from their confession and the fruit they bear."

Aren't we all "Tares"? Aren't we all or weren't we all "vessels of wrath"?

Romans 7:20-24...²⁰Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me. ²¹So I find it to be a law that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand. ²²For I delight in the law of God, in my inner being, ²³but I see in my members another law waging war against the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members. ²⁴Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?

Paul sounds conflicted, like there's two Pauls, his "inner being" and the "wretched man"; a tare and a wheat; a "vessel of wrath" and a "vessel of mercy."

Romans 9:14-23...¹⁴What shall we say then? Is there injustice on God's part? By no means!¹⁵For he says to Moses, "**I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.**" (see Romans 11:32 above) ¹⁶So then it **depends not on human will** or exertion, but on God, who has mercy.

FREE Will: Many say (especially Americans), that God won't save everyone, because "He won't violate our "free will." What free will? Were you saved because of your free choice? So you can boast because of your good choice? If yes, maybe you're not saved because "it depends not on human will." We have been saved by grace through faith, that none should boast (Ephesians 2:8-9).

One popular bible teacher told me he couldn't believe God might one day make everyone new because he wanted to guard our free will (the ability to say "NO" to God) in order to guard our "human dignity." What "human dignity"? And is *that* human dignity? Isn't that sort of "human dignity" called pride? Either saying "NO" or saying "YES" and then taking credit for it is pride.

Joshua said, "Choose this day whom you will serve" (Joshua 24:15). The whole Old Testament bears witness to the fact that they had already chosen, ever since the garden. Already chosen and therefore continuing to choose death. As it is written: "None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God. All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one." (Romans 3:10-12, Isaiah 53:1-3, Psalm 14:1-3)

People quote John 3:16, "whosoever believes." Yet John makes it abundantly clear that "whosoever believes" is whosoever God wills to believe. "All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out." (John 6:37). "You did not choose me, but I chose you" (John 15:16). "...for apart from me you can do nothing" (John 15:5) etc. etc. "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion. So then it depends not on human will..." **It depends on God's will!** If it depended on our will, it wouldn't be grace, and none would be saved, and God would just be some sort of giant power tool that no one ever chose to use. **It depends on God's will!** And what is God's Will? Paul's gonna tell us in Romans 9:26, 11:32, and 14:11. **It depends on God's will!** And PRAISE GOD, that my will does not supersede His Will. Indeed "free will" (the way the Bible defines it) is His Will in me. "For freedom Christ has set us free." (Galatians 5:1) How could Christ set you free if you were already free? "Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is **God** who works **in you**, both **to will** and to work for his good pleasure." (Philippians 2:12-13) It's like I have a self that can only choose in vain...like a vessel of wrath. And a new self that can only will God's good pleasure...like a vessel of mercy.

(continued from above)...¹⁷For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, "For this very purpose I have raised you up, that I might show my power in you, and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth." ¹⁸So then he has mercy on whomever he wills, and he hardens whomever he wills. ¹⁹You will say to me then, "Why does he still find fault? For who can resist his will?" ²⁰But who are you, O man, to answer back to God? Will what is molded say to its molder, "Why have you made me like this?" ²¹Has the potter no right over the clay, to make out of the same lump one

vessel for honored use and another for dishonorable use? (remember all those verses in Jeremiah?)²²What if God, desiring to show his wrath and to make known his power, has endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction,²³in order to make known the riches of his glory for vessels of mercy, which he has prepared beforehand for glory...

Who are the “vessels of wrath”?

Ephesians 2:1-3...¹And you were dead in the trespasses and sins (*Dead things can't choose.*)²in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience – ³among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.

It seems that at one time we were all “vessels of wrath,” like the rest of mankind, like Pharaoh, like unrepentant Israel. In the very place of wrath (our sin) we have encountered mercy. In the very place of non-being we have been filled with Being, who is Grace. In the very place of shame we have experienced the glory of God. In the Bride’s own empty womb she has been filled with the seed, the Word, the Life of God poured out...Jesus. ” And in the very place where it was said to them, ‘You are not my people,’ there they will be called ‘sons of the living God.’” (Romans 9:26)

Do all “vessels of wrath” become “vessels of mercy”? Is there a “Wheat” attached to every “Tare”? For every “old self” is there a “new self”? For every “shadow self” is there a “new self”? For ever shadow is there a substance? For every lie is there a truth? And are they attached?

Do all “vessels of wrath” become “vessels of mercy”?

It seems the answer must be **YES** or **NO**. If **NO**, and we affirm that Jesus makes “all things” new, then “vessels of wrath” are not really “things.” They are only illusion, shadow or lie, having no substance in themselves. If **YES**, and we affirm that Jesus makes “all things” new, then “vessels of wrath” may still have **no substance**, yet each vessel of wrath is tied to or perhaps dependent upon the existence of it’s corresponding “vessel of mercy”; each “lie” dependent upon the existence of a truth; each “shadow self” dependent on a “substantive self”; each “old man” dependent on the existence of a “new man.” That is, the first Adam is dependent on the existence of the last (eschatos) Adam. The first Adam...old me seems to have some sort of substance. So...

A “vessel of wrath” may **have substance**, in which case it is transformed into a “vessel of mercy.” Perhaps then “vessel of wrath” is a necessary step in becoming a “vessel of mercy.” We must encounter non-being within us to be filled with Being from beyond us and then recognize that Being as Mercy, who is God. Each “vessel of wrath” would be dependent upon a “vessel of mercy,” yet also each “vessel of mercy” would be dependent upon it’s corresponding “vessel of wrath.” How else could it be that we would KNOW mercy unless we somehow tasted wrath. How can we know mercy unless there is something to have mercy upon? How can we know forgiveness (body broken and blood shed) unless there is something to forgive? It’s as if, God subjected the creation to “futility...in hope” (Romans 8:20) And so he subjected each “vessel of mercy” to futility as a “vessel of wrath” in the hope that that “vessel” would be emptied of itself and filled with HIM. “And hope does not disappoint us, because

God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit which has been given to us." (Romans 5:5). Perhaps then, God would not suffer the existence of a "vessel of wrath," unless there was a corresponding "vessel of mercy." And each "vessel of mercy" is dependent upon a corresponding "vessel of wrath." (This sounds like Karl Barth's Church Dogmatics II.2.35.3-4...Amazing and Wonderful Stuff, but brutal to read. Also his little book Christ and Adam.)

I don't believe that we should base our theology on modern day visions, but on the revealed Word of scripture. However, I do believe that God still speaks his Word to us in ecstatic visions and revelations, as He does in the Word preached. My friend Dale often has amazing visions during our services. He had this one over several weeks. He would be uncomfortable, if he thought anyone based their theology on it, and yet it does entice us to think in some exciting theological directions. When those directions lead us back to scripture that has always been there but has been veiled in mystery, it's cause for great hope...God is still speaking to us! And he is unchanging. We do change. Perhaps we are growing up, and our Father is much larger and better than we ever imagined.

We had been preaching on the earthen vessels in Paul's writing and in the prophesies of Jeremiah. I had been asking many questions and contemplating clay pots that get filled with communion wine...that is, us.

1/21/06 - Lookout Mountain Community Church, "Left Behind" from Matt: 26:57-68...I saw God the Father, having made himself small, standing on the stage behind the cross and tall enough that His head hit the ceiling. He had a robe that covered the cross and the train flowed over the entire stage and spilled onto the floor. His robe shimmered such that when I looked on it one minute it looked like silver, the next like a starry night, the next like water, the next like fire. The only parts of His body that were not covered by the robe were His head and hands and from these issued such a light, brighter than staring directly at the sun, that I could not look anywhere near them or discern any details or form.

As Peter was preaching, standing in front of God with His robe flowing around Peter's legs, the Word issued from Peter's mouth like water, and it flowed off the stage and mingled with blood coming from under the robe. The water and blood filled the room all the way to the ceiling. The people sat in the rising flood and some breathed in the Word while others tried to hold their breath...they were afraid of drowning.

As the blood and water reached the ceiling the Glory of God sparkled through the water as light through the most brilliant and perfect diamond, except the diamond was red. Then God showed me the people and everyone, whether breathing or holding their breath, did not have a mouth or eyes or ears or nose. There were only jagged holes, like the edge of paper that is on fire. The light sparkling through the flood would enter directly into the orifices of each person and burn their brains, like stepping into sunlight after being in a pitch black room. Those who were breathing in the Word began to raise their hands and sing and dance even though I could not hear any words, only noise. Those who held their breath remained still and over a long period of time, even years, shriveled until there was nothing left.

Then I asked what the music was that the people were singing and dancing to and He, God the Father, opened His robe and showed me Jesus on the cross, the source of the blood and He had music coming out of His mouth. And all around the base of the cross danced some of the most pathetic, destitute, sickly, starving, diseased orphans I have ever seen...their faces aglow with the same light that came from God.

2/11/06 - Lookout Mountain Community Church, "The Potters Field," Matt 27: 3-10 (continued from "Left Behind," 1/12/06)

Then I saw that the faces of the orphans looked just like the people, they too had jagged holes where their eyes, ears, nose, mouth should have been. I also noticed that none of the women or girls had feminine parts or breasts and neither did the men or boys have their male parts, these too were jagged holes. And so it was that no-one had an identity, only a form.

3/11/06 - Lookout Mountain Community Church, "The Greatest Miracle," Matt 27:32-44 ...continued from "The Potters Field," 2/11/06

All those empty and identity-less vessels began to float around in the blood. And then I noticed that the inside of the church had become so large that it encompassed the entire earth and the stage was filled with thousands upon thousands of "Peters" and the sanctuary was filled with billions more empty vessels, all floating. And God had grown proportionally large and the number of orphans had grown into the millions, and there stood among them Kaveta, Alexis, Elaine, and many others like them. However, the cross and Jesus did NOT change size, it was still the same as the little cross in our little building. And then Jesus opened a door...that is while He was hanging there and continuing to bleed, He opened His chest and through it I could see daylight on the other side. And that "door" became like a drain and all of the flood filled with us vessels poured through the drain. But when we each reached the drain our clay vessels were broken so we would be small enough to fit through. On the other side we would suddenly realize that we had a body and we could see with our eyes...except that our body, every limb, was connected, fused to someone else so that the blood that flowed through our veins also flowed through theirs, and the only thing we could see was light. We were all now literally part of Jesus' body, we were the blood vessels. Then I watched as God the Father hugged His Son, Jesus, took the hand of the Holy Spirit, and together they picked up what was left of this now empty "hell hole," crumpled it and swallowed it and said to each other, "It is finished!"

2 Corinthians 4:7...But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, to show that the transcendent power belongs to God and not to us.

You're walking with the Passover Lamb. You're walking with the Pillar of Fire and Cloud, the Lord of Hosts. He's taking you on an Exodus journey from the land of the dead. You're walking out of old Jerusalem so you can walk into the new. The Messiah came to old Jerusalem, but she was full of herself and could not receive her Maker, her Husband, her Groom, the Seed...You are Jerusalem. You are the temple. You are the bride. You're being emptied in order to be filled with grace and glory...life.

Last Wednesday was Ash Wednesday. At the Living Stones service, we put ashes on everyone's forehead, reminding them, "dust to dust and ashes to ashes," but "believe the Gospel." Well, dust and water make clay and from the clay the potter makes **earthen** vessels. "We have this treasure in **earthen** vessels so the transcendent power belongs to God and not to us," writes Paul, "always carrying in the body the death of Jesus so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our mortal flesh." After the service, one of our artists, a sculptor named Kent Smith, took me aside and told me how he makes one of his pieces of art. He sculpts the figure out of wax. His work is in wax, but then he covers the wax in clay. Then he fires the clay which melts the wax. The wax runs out, leaving a void (the nothing). Then he pours into that emptied **earthen vessel** liquid fire, molten bronze, copper, or gold. He said, "It's always a spiritual experience for me, Peter." I think the self we make, our sinful self, is like that wax: God wraps it in clay—sinful, wretched hearts wrapped in bodies of clay. And then God melts our hearts like wax with His fiery mercy. Melts the self, the sin, like wax and then replaces the sin with grace, fills the void with mercy—the eternal substance of God... love poured out, Jesus (See Psalm 22:14-15). Kent described the thrill of breaking off that old **earthen vessel** to reveal the glory and beauty inside. (From the sermon: [Walking with the Reaper](#), 3-5-06)

Just think, "Where sin increased grace abounded all the more." What if the form of our sin, that is our old self, is the form of God's mercy, which is our new self – the inverse of the obverse, the substance that fills the void? Then for all eternity our glory would be declaring our sin in the form of God's grace. That is, we will forever sing "Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like ME"... "ME," uniquely "me" in sin and in salvation. Then we won't "glory in our shame," we'll glory in God's grace in Jesus. I'll forever want to testify: "let me tell you my story, the gospel story, how Jesus saved even me!" It will be the WORD in me, the new me.

Ephesians 4:22-24...²²to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, ²³and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, ²⁴and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.

Colossians 3:9...Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices

Romans 6:6...We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin.

Do I have an old self and a new self? Is my old self damned and my new self saved? OR...has my old self already been damned ("cursed is he that hangs on a tree"... my "old self WAS crucified") and my new self resurrected or being resurrected or both?

1 Corinthians 5:4-5...⁴When you are assembled in the name of the Lord Jesus and my spirit is present, with the power of our Lord Jesus, ⁵you are to deliver this man to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord.

It certainly appears that this man had an "old self" – the flesh. And he had a "new self" or some other "self" – the spirit (Spirit?). Satan is like a dog on a leash. God uses him for his purpose of "destroying the flesh". Isn't this verse shockingly obvious? Is not ALL humanity outside of Christ "delivered up to Satan"? So is not ALL humanity outside of Christ in the process of

having their flesh destroyed so that they may be “saved in the day of the Lord”? “And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ,” - Philippians 1:6 It seems that those “delivered up to Satan” and the Philippians are both perfected on The Day of The Lord. Perhaps the choice is this: surrender your flesh to Satan or surrender you flesh to Jesus. Either way it is ‘destroyed.’ Certainly the latter is the best choice. Jesus will bear my flesh to destruction for me. Paul advocated delivering this man up to Satan, yet he seems confident that Satan will not keep him. How can we say that folks in Hades or Hell have been delivered to Satan, but unlike this fellow they will never be saved?

2 Corinthians 5:13-14...¹³For if we are beside ourselves, it is for God; if we are in our right mind, it is for you.¹⁴For the love of Christ controls us, because we are convinced that one has died for all; therefore all have died.

Does this mean all “old selves” have already been damned? As if God “condemned sin in the flesh” (Romans 8:3) already and for everyone, “in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit” (Romans 8:4)? That would mean all “old selves” are already condemned and some “new selves” are already born alive and walking by the Spirit. If that’s the case, I should never take anyone’s “old self” too seriously. It’s only the mold, used to create the new self (You don’t judge a piece of art by the mold that it’s formed in.) It’s already dead and condemned. It’s not who that person really is. Therefore I have no business condemning THEM for THAT. However, I might be very interested in helping THEM rid themselves of THAT, like the day you chip the mold off a bronze figurine. Therefore, I should regard no one from a human point of view, as if they need to be punished or rewarded for their relative merits. In the deepest reality they’ve already been judged, their sin condemned at the cross, and now I’m just waiting for them to come to life, hoping that I could share in the “ministry of reconciliation” and witness the miracle of their birth. That is, I should love everyone. If I did, “the righteous requirement of the law would be fulfilled in me.” Maybe my view of Hell really does matter. In this world, am I surrounded by sinners who need to be punished with their just desserts (retributive punishment – as opposed to remedial punishment meant only to heal)? Or am I surrounded by fellow sinners, who have also been forgiven and just don’t know it...forgiven at the very highest price because of their surpassing value...forgiven and yet still enslaved by fear and shame to the lies of the Evil One...lies, because that’s really all he has to work with. He HAS been disarmed. He is a prosecuting attorney utterly disarmed...nothing left to prosecute.

“And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross. He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him.” (Colossians 2: 13-15)

If 2 Cor. 5 is our guide, “all” appear to already have been forgiven. All forgiven, all dead, yet all not yet made alive. Satan’s only weapon is to convince dead folks that they must stay dead because they deserve to be dead. In which case preaching the gospel would not be preaching threats, so much as preaching the Truth: “you’re forgiven, ‘Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead and Christ will shine on you” (2 Cor. 5:14).

1 John 4:7-8 (RSV)...⁷Beloved, let us love one another; for love is of God, and **he who loves** is born of God and knows God. ⁸**He who does not** love does not know God; for God is love.

First, John is the most encouraging and discouraging book I know. Whenever I read it I feel so schizophrenic, so divided, so cut in two, so separated, so judged (“krisis) by the Word. The whole book (maybe the whole Bible) is like the two verses above. Verse 7, I think, “I love so I know God and I’m born of God – Yahoo!” Then I read verse 8, I think, “I don’t love, I don’t even know God – Crap!” It’s like there are two of me.

The “me” that doesn’t love, competes. The “other” is something to be overcome, something to impress, subdue, and conquer. The rules of the game are law. My law or God’s law, either one simply defines the playing field on which I compete, but either way I compete for ME. So indeed, in the end, that ME desires that all things become my possession, and so all things become less than me, all persons must die or be my slave. All reality is in competition with ME, so that ME strives to become the prosecuting attorney of all reality, The Adversary, The Satan. I conquer the Universe and yet the Universe isn’t worth conquering. It is Hell. I mean it is Hades (the universe of the dead). Yet God won’t allow it to exist forever. At the end of time, in the end, which is Christ, God consumes it in the sea of unadulterated Love – The Lake of Fire and Theion.

That ME cannot know God who is bigger than me. Unless of course that God emptied himself and became my slave, became small and then big in ME. Of course, that would kill ME. He’d have to give life to that “old me,” but then that “old me” would be a “new me.” Perhaps that happens at once (like in an eternal moment) and yet over time (like a lifetime), so then at least sometime, there might be two “ME”s, such that “I” would cry “Oh wretched man that I am, who will deliver me from this body of sin and death”?

The “me” that does love, no longer competes, for there is nothing left to compete over. All have utterly lost, even God at the cross. All have died, game over, no point left in playing that game. I don’t live by the law, the old record of deeds, in the power of the flesh. I live by the Spirit, convinced that one has died for “all” and so “all” are last, and therefore first - in Christ Jesus who makes his home in the “last and the least.” The old record book of deeds, has been cancelled out by the blood of the cross. I’m rewarded for good deeds, because the deed itself has become a reward to me. Treasure lays buried in every field of human clay. I love because He first loved me! Because, being first he became last, in order to write my name in his “lamb’s book of life.” The old book is necessary, precisely because I need to know it’s been cancelled with the blood of the lamb. I need to know the Love of God poured out, “Jesus Christ and Him crucified.” Forgiven much I love much.

If there are two “me”s, one is destroyed with fire. And one is indestructible, for it is fire...“no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me.” Perhaps that old me can be annihilated from the inside out, when I invite the fire into the temple which is me. And perhaps that old me can be destroyed from the outside in, if I refuse the fire in this age but am cast into it in the next.

If the scripture that we’ve looked at is true, and Jesus is the “end of the ages,” and the cross is “the Judgment of the world” (not a judgment, but “the judgment” – ONE JUDGMENT – though we encounter it throughout time as “judgments”)...if that’s true then it’s important to see that all the Judgment scenes in scripture are describing the same reality from different perspectives, the same reality whether we appear to come to it and chose it in our lifetime or come to it (have it thrust upon us) in the end. He is the end. It appears that you can come to the end or

have the end come to you. Yet even if you choose to come to the end, it's because the end has already chosen to come to you.

John 12:31-33...³¹Now is **the judgment** of this world (*kosmos*), now shall the ruler of this world be cast out; ³²and I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw **all** men to myself." ³³He said this to show by what death he was to die.

Revelation 5:6-13...⁶And between the throne and the four living creatures and among the elders, I saw a Lamb standing, as though it had been slain, with seven horns and with seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth; ⁷and he went and took the scroll from the right hand of him who was seated on the throne. ⁸And when he had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each holding a harp, and with golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints; ⁹and they sang a new song, saying, "Worthy art thou to take the scroll and to open its seals, for thou wast slain and by thy blood didst ransom men for God from every tribe and tongue and people and nation, ¹⁰and hast made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on earth." ¹¹Then I looked, and I heard around the throne and the living creatures and the elders the voice of many angels, numbering myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands, ¹²saying with a loud voice, "Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!" ¹³And I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all therein, saying, "To him who sits upon the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might for ever and ever!"

Who is "lifted up on the throne"? The very same one "lifted up on the cross" in John 12. It is the "Mercy Seat" and the one on it is the slaughtered lamb. I think it is the very same event viewed from two different ages, worlds, or dimensions. The first view is from this fallen world...Hades, perhaps? The second is all reality – the consummated kingdom.

Revelation 20:11-15...¹¹Then I saw a great white throne and him who sat upon it; from his presence earth and sky fled away, and no place was found for them. ¹²And **I saw the dead**, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Also another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, by what they had done. ¹³And the sea gave up the dead in it, Death and Hades gave up the dead in them, and all were judged by what they had done. ¹⁴Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire; ¹⁵and if any one's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.

To be judged solely by what YOU have done is death. To live by what you have done – the law in the power of the flesh - is death. "Law came in to increase the trespass." The books help us see that we're dead and in need of God's Grace. "Law came in, to increase the trespass; but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more" (Romans 5:20). To be judged by the book of life, the lambs book, is life. To believe the lambs book now is to have life now, even in the land of the dead. If I have two "ME"s, do I have two names? Is the name of my "new man" written in the book of life (and on a white stone)? Is the name of my old man written in the book of deeds? Are any human names not written in the book of life? (John did say "if")

Matthew 25:31-46...³¹"When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. [As we clearly discovered preaching through Matthew,

the Son of Man came in that generation, even from the point of His trial before the High Priest (Matt. 26:64 – Jesus says “from now on you will see”) He came in that generation, indeed from the point of the cross through this very day. But did he come in Glory? Well, what is the “slaughtered lambs” glory? That he’s like all shiny or might it also be something like sacrificial Love... and when we encounter it, Jesus Christ and Him Crucified, it/He judges us? He is our Judgment. That’s not to say that this is not a description of the end of time as we normally think of it, but the end (Jesus) may encounter you tomorrow in the last and the least, and you will be judged.] ³²Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate people (“autos” in Greek. This is the pronoun “them.” “People” is supplied by the translator. Clearly the pronoun modifies “ethne” translated “nations” five words earlier) one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. ³³And he will place the sheep on his right, but the goats on the left. ³⁴Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. ³⁵For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, ³⁶I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.’ ³⁷Then the righteous will answer him, saying, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? ³⁸And when did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? ³⁹And when did we see you sick or in prison and visit you?’ ⁴⁰And the King will answer them, ‘Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.’ ⁴¹“Then he will say to those on his left, ‘Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. ⁴²For I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me no drink, ⁴³I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not clothe me, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.’ ⁴⁴Then they also will answer, saying, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to you?’ ⁴⁵Then he will answer them, saying, ‘Truly, I say to you, as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.’ ⁴⁶And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.”

Have you ever given a hungry person some food?...Then I guess you’re a sheep. Have you ever neglected to give a hungry person some food?...then I guess you’re a goat. Do you feel a tad divided, separated, judged? This is an excerpt from our sermon **How to Judge the World**, from 10-8-05. I reviewed some of the things we’d preached and then said:

[Okay, everyone take out your bulletin insert. Turn it over and refer to The Handy Dandy Final Judgment Scorecard.](#)

The Handy Dandy Final Judgment Scorecard©
Present your scorecard on the Day of Judgment to enter heaven.
 (Suggested clothing: Fire retardant jumpsuit)

<input type="checkbox"/> I have given a hungry person food.	<input type="checkbox"/> I neglected to feed a hungry person.
<input type="checkbox"/> I have given a thirsty person drink.	<input type="checkbox"/> I neglected to give a thirsty person drink.
<input type="checkbox"/> I have welcomed a stranger.	<input type="checkbox"/> I neglected to welcome a stranger.
<input type="checkbox"/> I have clothed someone.	<input type="checkbox"/> I neglected to clothe someone.
<input type="checkbox"/> I have visited a sick person.	<input type="checkbox"/> I have neglected to visit a sick person.
<input type="checkbox"/> I went to visit someone in prison.	<input type="checkbox"/> I neglected to visit an imprisoned person.

If you checked any of the boxes on the left, move to the side of the building labeled SHEEP.
 If you checked any of the boxes on the right, move to the side of the building labeled GOATS.

We're gonna settle this once and for all! Right now, I only want you to look at the top section and ask yourself these most pertinent questions...Check the boxes that are true for you. If any are checked on the left you're a sheep. If any are checked on the right, you're a goat. Okay, fill out your scorecard now. [The Jeopardy theme song plays in the background.]

Time's up. Sheep, go to my right. Goats, go to my left. Now, do it now! [Fran and Gary hold up signs on either side of the church. One says, "Sheep;" the other says, "Goats."] Sheep to the right; goats to the left! Sheep to the right; goats to the left!

What's wrong with you? Didn't you fill out your scorecard? Sheep to the right; goats to the left! [The congregation just sits still.] After all that, and you just sit there. All right, you guys can put the signs down because I don't think they're gonna do it.

What's wrong?

You know, to be honest, when I filled out my card, I checked every box. So I guess I'm like a sheep *and* a goat. I couldn't go to either side because my sheep self is stuck to my goat self, and my goat self is stuck to my sheep self. For this to work, I'd have to be like cut in two...severed. In fact, verse 32 says the king will separate. The word separate literally means to sever. That's what "krisis," judgment means... to separate.

You know, the Word of God pierces to the separation of soul and spirit (Hebrews 4:12). Do you ever feel cut, separated and divided by the Word? Have you ever read 1st John? Try it some time. The whole way through, I'm thinking, "I'm saved. I'm not saved. I'm saved. I'm not saved. I'm saved. I'm not saved."

"He who loves is born of God and knows God..."

I'm saved. Yeah!

"He who does not love, does not know God..."

I'm not saved. Dang!

I love, and I don't love. I mean it's like there are two people in me:

an old man and a new man,
an old Adam and a new Adam,
flesh and spirit,
my old self and Jesus,
a goat and a sheep,
a golem and a Frodo.

Remember that scene at the end of The Lord of the Rings? It was the event that marks the end of that age and the beginning of the next. Frodo and Gollum are like one person. But Gollum is consumed with the Ring of Power in the Fire of Doom while Frodo is freed, and the Kingdom comes. He's severed. Golem means "unfinished vessel." "And we all have this treasure in earthen vessels," writes Paul, "to show the transcendent power belongs to God." Yet our earthen vessel causes us to sin.

Twice already in Matthew Jesus says, "If your hand, foot, or eye causes you to sin, better to cut it off than be thrown into the fire with it." Well, the problem is we'd have to cut off our golem, cut out our hearts. For Jesus said it's "what comes out of the heart that defiles a man,"

makes him sin. I neglected to feed the hungry, welcome the stranger, and visit the prisoner because I have a bad heart and a dead self. And, yeah, I think there's a little sheep in me, but a whole lot of goat. So if I were to cut myself, sever myself, judge myself, I don't think I could survive the surgery. So, what am I to do? Usually we try Auxiliary Method B. This is what most people do. It's included in your scorecard in case Method A is inconclusive. It works like this...

Auxiliary Method B (In case Method A is inconclusive):

1. Calculate the number of times you have done each deed (D), and the number of times you have neglected to do each deed (D').

$$\frac{D}{D + D'} = \text{Your Universal Righteousness Percentage (URP)}$$

2. Compare your percentage to others in case God grades on a curve. (According to some, there are 144,000 rooms prepared in heaven [Revelation 7:4]. If they're not filled by those who score 100%, perhaps you can still get in.)
3. If you score higher than your neighbor, you are first, and they are last.
4. You just judged them as "last" and "least"
which appears to mean...
you just judged the judge as "last" and "least,"
but no matter what...
"The first will be last and the last first."

If you score higher than your neighbor, you just judged them least. You are first, and they are last. You are greater, and they are lesser. They are least. You judged them least and just judged the King on the throne least. For the King on the throne says, "Truly as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me... Truly I say to you, as you did it not to one of the least of these you did it not to me." He also said, "The first will be last, and the last first." That makes Method B (competition) a little scary, don't you think?

Some will say, "Jesus said, 'The least of these my brothers...'" Well, He said "brothers" in the first instance but not the second. So did He mean all the least are His brothers or only some of the least are His brothers? And if that's the case, how do you judge which are His brothers? The Handy Dandy Final Judgment Scorecard? Isn't that begging the question, just a tad?

Already in Matthew we've discovered a Roman Centurion, a pagan Canaanite woman, and Matthew the tax collector are all brethren and family of Jesus. And it turns out, the most notorious Pharisee of all, Paul of Tarsus, is Christ's beloved brother, and he didn't just become His brother on conversion for he was in fact "Chosen in Christ Jesus from the foundation of the world," chosen to "inherit" (like family) the Kingdom. How on earth are you going to judge Christ's brethren when they're that well hidden...even to themselves?

So if you judge someone least, you probably just judged Jesus least, and if you judge Jesus least, I doubt you'd even want to enter His Kingdom, and if He appeared you'd probably run the other way.

Anne Lamott tells about a guy drunk in a bar in Alaska. He was telling the bartender how he'd recently lost whatever faith he'd had after his twin engine plane crashed in the tundra. He said, "Yeah, I lay there in the wreckage hour after hour, nearly frozen to death, crying out to God to save me, praying for help with every ounce of my being, but He didn't raise a finger to help. So I'm done with the charade!" The bartender squinted at him and said, "But you're here. You *were* saved." "Yeah that's right," says the man, "that's right because some God damned Eskimo came along!"

What if the One on the throne is a God damned Eskimo or spick or nigger or Samaritan or Jew or looks like a Pharisee, tax collector, or prostitute? I mean, what if He looks like one of the "last and least of these?" Would you want Him to save you? Would you want into His kingdom or would you run in terror, calling to the mountains and rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the face of Him who is seated on the throne (Revelation 6:16)"?

We love Him only as much as we love the least of these. So I don't think we can enter His Kingdom by beating our neighbor. That is, competition. And please note, on your scorecard it says,

PLEASE NOTE:

If you were "aware" of doing any good deeds for Jesus, for religious reasons, or to score points, The Handy Dandy Final Judgment Scorecard is inaccurate and rendered null and void. If this is a problem, you may see the complaint department in the Valley of Gehenna.

Both the sheep and the goats say, "When did we see you, Lord?" See, neither knew it was Him. They didn't know. Robert Capon writes this, "Knowledge is not the basis of anybody's salvation or damnation." They didn't know. I don't mean "know" as in Adam "knew" Eve. I mean "know" as in the knowledge of good and evil—knowledge of the law, knowledge of what it takes to get in. So you can't just run out deciding to visit sick people so you can get in.

If we know we're doing it for the King,
we're probably not *knowing* the King,
not *loving* the King,
just *using* the King to get to His Kingdom.

Remember Kierkegaard's story of the king who fell in love with a peasant and wanted this peasant to love him as he loved her? He realized he could impress her with his kingdom...his financial power. He realized he could force her with his military...his fire power. But he decided to lay down all power and become a peasant so that she could know his heart. So she wouldn't love him for his things...which wouldn't be love. So she wouldn't love him out of fear... which wouldn't be love.

Maybe God is doing that all the time? So no one in the story loves in order to get to the kingdom. And it appears no one in the story loves because they're afraid of the fire. The eternal fire is also called the eternal "kolasis," translated punishment. It's fascinating that that word, kolasis, only appears in one other place in the New Testament, 1 John 4:18. "There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with [kolasis] punishment. Whoever fears has not been perfected in love. We love because He first loved us."

Biblical scholar, Johannes Schneider, writes “This means that the man who lives in fear (before God) is already punished by this fear. His fear is his punishment, hence the unbeliever is judged already.” That would mean it’s not the substance of the fire, but our fear of the fire that causes it to burn our flesh.

Whatever the case,
at Pentecost, there are tongues of fire.
Jesus came to baptize us with fire.
God is a consuming fire.

The fire comes from God and ignites Gehenna.

The fire comes from God and consumes the sacrifice.

The fire comes from God and fills the temple.

We are the temple, and we’re baptized with the Holy Spirit.

God is consuming fire, and God is love. Perfect love must be fire. So a goat can’t love by fearing perfect love. And if a goat hates love, it will certainly be burned by the fire of love. Perhaps punishment is eternal for perfect love, God, is eternal. He doesn’t change, but that doesn’t mean the thing punished can’t change or be consumed.

No matter what, it appears no one loves in order to get into the kingdom, and no one loves out of fear of the fire. No one loves because of the knowledge of good or evil. That is, no one is saved by works of the law. No one is saved by working The Handy Dandy Final Judgment Scorecard. Sheep inherit the Kingdom; they don’t earn the Kingdom. We evangelicals know we’re not saved by works of the law, but we try to turn faith into a work and stuff like “the sinner’s prayer” into a new law. Did you notice Jesus doesn’t mention any of the sheep saying “the sinner’s prayer”? It may be that they don’t even know the name of Jesus, and that’s why they appear to not recognize Jesus. And yet, they’re all saved by Jesus, and under the name of Jesus, for it’s Jesus on the throne, and it’s Jesus that says, “You loved *me*, fed *me*, clothed *me*.” But none loved in order to earn the Kingdom, and none loved out of fear of the fire. I guess love was just their nature.

But what man was ever all love and never unlove? And what man was never love and only unlove? Well, if there was such a man, he must be simply a vessel of wrath. But we must all be at least part vessel of wrath, part goat, even if we’re part sheep. But what man never neglected to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, and visit the sick? What man was ever a perfect sheep...spotless, without a blemish? What man ever loved perfectly (according to test A) and never judged (according to Method B)? I mean, never rejoiced at wrong, never labeled others last in order to label himself first? And what man ever did all that unselfconsciously? I mean, didn’t love because of some scorecard or some religion but just loved because it was his nature, his joy? His joy to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, and visit the sick. His joy, “the joy of the Master,” to sacrifice all his talents in love. What man?

Well, only One. The One telling this story. The One on the throne.

But then, why is He telling this story? What's the point? We'd hoped we could use it to judge others, but find we're only judging ourselves, cutting ourselves. I read somewhere,

There is so much bad in the best of us,
And so much good in the worst of us,
That it hardly becomes any of us,
To talk about the rest of us.

Jesus may not judge us, but His Word is cutting us in two, into a sheep and a goat, and mostly goat. I can't cut out the goat without dying. I can't grow the sheep by simply trying. It's the knowledge of good and evil—the sheep and the goat—the knowledge of good, but it can't make me good. It can't make me love. In fact it only makes me more aware that I don't.

So why is Jesus telling the story? What's the point? What's the reason? The Logos? Do you see it? We're left cut and crying, "God help us! God save us!" Do you see Him? Have you seen the One standing on the throne? Have you continued reading the story? You know, the chapter divisions were placed in Matthew's Gospel hundreds of years after he wrote it. So he continues...Matthew 25:46

"And these [the goats] will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life." When Jesus had finished all these sayings, he said to his disciples, "You know that after two days the Passover is coming, and the Son of Man will be delivered up to be crucified."

In Exodus 12, God says to the Israelites, "Your Lamb shall be without blemish, a male a year old. You may take it from the sheep or the goats." He tells them to place the blood over the doors so death can't take them, then "eat the Lamb in haste. It is the Lord's Passover." The Passover lamb could be a sheep or a goat. Jesus said the king will separate the people like a shepherd separates the sheep and the goats. But you see sheep and goats are both the property of the shepherd. He didn't say sheep and wolves, but sheep and goats. It turns out the same word is often used for sheep and goats in Hebrew and also in Greek. "Probaton" means sheep or goat. "The good shepherd lays down his life for the probaton (sheep or goat)." In Matthew 25, sheep is "probaton" and goat is "eriphes," which mean young goat, lamb goat.

I'm not sure exactly what all that means.

But when Abraham says to Isaac, "God will provide a lamb," it means goat or sheep. When God commands Israel to slaughter Passover lambs, he specifies sheep or goats. When Isaiah prophecies the Messiah is like a lamb led to the slaughter, the word means goat or sheep. Sheep and goats were the principal sacrifices in the temple which Jesus just said would be replaced. The fire had descended on the temple from heaven as it would soon descend on the church in Acts, chapter two. Both sheep and goats got the fire. Sometimes they were consumed by the fire as a burnt offering. Sometimes they were cooked by the fire as a sin offering – a communion offering, a feast for God and the worshiper.

In Leviticus 5 we read that if a person sins they are to bring to the priest, "a lamb of the goats or the sheep." Part was to be burnt up by the fire; part was to be roasted by the fire for a feast of communion. Part consumed by the fire; part transformed by the fire. Every year on the Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur), the High Priest made sacrifices for the sins of Israel, and on that

day he was to cast lots over two goats in order to divide them, like soldiers would cast lots to divide the garments of Christ on Calvary.

Well, one goat would be eaten before the Lord as communion, and one goat would be driven into the wilderness for on the back of that goat, the High Priest would confess the sins of Israel, the scapegoat. "He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows...like a lamb," said Isaiah. Lamb meaning sheep or goat. John the Baptist said, "Behold the Lamb of God that takes away the sins of the world." John the Revelator said, "Then I saw a Lamb, looking as if it had been slain, standing in the center of the throne," (Revelation 5:6). Then he hears all creation singing. They sing, "Worthy is the Lamb...with Your blood You purchased men for God."

Look on the throne. They couldn't see the throne when Jesus told the story, but you can. On the throne is the Passover Lamb of God. On the third day, they will celebrate the Passover. Then they will watch the Passover as the Passover Lamb is crucified for all to see...hungry, thirsty, stranger to this world, naked, sick with our sin, and imprisoned in our hell.

He is being crucified on the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. He is being nailed to the Law and cursed on our behalf. He is cutting the new covenant and fulfilling the old covenant. All those temple sacrifices were all about Him and fulfilled in Him. "How unsearchable are his judgments," wrote Paul. So I can't fully explain, but Jesus is the judgment.

He is the spotless Lamb of God, communion with God, food for the people of God. Anything good in you comes from Him. Any love is Him. He is the sheep...And He is the goat. He is your scapegoat. Confess your sins to Him, and He carries them into the eternal fire on His back.

A friend called me awhile ago and told me of an experience she had at the door to the prayer room at the back of the sanctuary. It was a Tuesday morning, and she'd come to pray with a group for another hurting friend. She said the Lord told her to leave the room and stand by the door with her hands on the frame. All of a sudden she said she felt like she was hanging on a cross. The she saw Jesus' body imposed on her body. She saw the blood and the wounds on His back. Then she saw a fog come from under the door. She knew the friend inside was confessing sins. She said they were this fog. She could hardly speak as she left the message on my phone, but through her tears she said, "I watched this fog come up the body of Jesus, and I watched as those sins went into Him through the bleeding wounds on His back."

You see, she saw something eternal. She saw the High Priest. She saw the Scapegoat. She saw the Lamb of God taking away the sins of the world. He's already died for the sins of the world and your sins, but He's asking you to believe so you'd let your sin go, so you'd see His love. His Word cuts us, judges us, and separates us so that we'd surrender our sin, confess our sin, and believe His grace, receiving His love. When you come to the communion table, you come to the Passover, the altar, the sacrifice, the fire. You come to the cross. You come to the Word proclaimed and incarnate. You come to the sacrificed Lamb, standing on the throne, and you come to judgment. We come not to judge others, not even to judge ourselves. We come to surrender to the judgment of God; God's judgment is Jesus. He is the Word that cuts (but only to heal). He exposes what is not love and then bears what is not love in His own body, on the tree. He exposes what is love and gives it to us as food.

Here you come to judgment, and the judgment is absolutely good. The judgment is absolute love...bleeding love...mercy.

One Saturday night, my friend Dale had this vision. He writes:

The front of the church turned into a pit of fire. Then I saw Peter on the stage and a pair of huge hands appeared behind him and pushed him towards the fire. Then the hands moved out into the crowd and started pushing them all towards the fire. Each person would walk to the edge of the fire, take some bread, dip it in the wine, and eat it, and then kneel at the edge, and an angel would cut off their head. Their body would fall into the fire and the same hands would catch them in the midst of the Fire. Jesus would then breath on the broken body, and make them whole again, and look straight into their eyes and say, "Welcome home." At that moment each person would realize that their pain, their heartache, their tears were all gone, and Jesus was wearing them all.

The King issues judgment, and the King bears His own judgment on our behalf. So on that night, Passover, the King took bread and He broke it saying, "This is my body, broken for you. Take and eat. Do this in remembrance of me." And in the same way after supper and having given thanks, He took the cup, and He said, "This is the cup of the new covenant in my blood, shed for the forgiveness of sins. Drink of it, all of you in remembrance of me."

Recently I've been fascinated by the theology of Karl Barth, because he seems to be one of the few modern day theologians that respects scripture in practice and not with meaningless declarations of inerrancy that then get nullified by countless statements like, "well surely this is a manner of speaking"...sorry, I digress. Barth argues for double predestination (which seems so utterly hard to avoid in scripture), yet Barth argues that Jesus is the one predestined. God "chose us in him, before the foundation of the world" (Eph. 1:4). Jesus is predestined to damnation. And Jesus is predestined to Glory. Jesus is predestined to bear our sin to annihilation through the wilderness (chaos, death, Hades, Sheol) and into the Fire – He is our scapegoat (sacrifice as we normally think of it). And He is our fragrant offering (sacrifice as a gift), the spotless lamb presented to the Father, anything good in me is Him in me, "the righteous in me." He is my Judgment.

Sheep and Goats:

Exodus 12:5-11...⁵Your lamb ("seh") shall be without blemish, a male of the first year. You may take it from the sheep or from the goats. ⁶Now you shall keep it until the fourteenth day of the same month. Then the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel shall kill it at twilight. ⁷And they shall take some of the blood and put it on the two doorposts and on the lintel of the houses where they eat it. ⁸Then they shall eat the flesh on that night; roasted in fire, with unleavened bread and with bitter herbs they shall eat it. ⁹Do not eat it raw, nor boiled at all with water, but roasted in fire – its head with its legs and its entrails. ¹⁰You shall let none of it remain until morning, and what remains of it until morning you shall burn with fire. ¹¹And thus you shall eat it: with a belt on your waist, your sandals on your feet, and your staff in your hand. So you shall eat it in haste. It is the Lord's Passover.

1 Corinthians 5:7...Therefore purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, since you truly are unleavened. For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us.

Leviticus 1:10...‘If his offering is of the flocks—of the sheep or of the goats—as a burnt sacrifice, he shall bring a male without blemish.

Leviticus 16:8-10...⁸Then Aaron shall cast lots for the two goats: one lot for the Lord and the other lot for the scapegoat. ⁹And Aaron shall bring the goat on which the Lord’s lot fell, and offer it as a sin offering. ¹⁰But the goat on which the lot fell to be the scapegoat shall be presented alive before the Lord, to make atonement upon it, and to let it go as the scapegoat into the wilderness.

Numbers 28:11, 15, 21-22, 29-30, 29:4-5, 10-11, 15-16, 17-19, 20-22, 25, 28, 31, 34, 38...¹¹“At the beginnings of your months, you shall offer a burnt offering to the Lord: two bulls from the herd, one ram, seven male lambs (“*kebes*”) a year old without blemish;...¹⁵Also **one male goat** (“*ez*”) for a sin offering to the Lord; it shall be offered besides the regular burnt offering and its drink offering...²¹a tenth shall you offer for each of the seven lambs; ²²also **one male goat** for a sin offering, to make atonement for you...²⁹a tenth for each of the seven lambs; ³⁰with **one male goat**, to make atonement for you...⁴and one tenth for each of the seven lambs; ⁵with **one male goat** for a sin offering, to make atonement for you;...¹⁰a tenth for each of the seven lambs: ¹¹also **one male goat** for a sin offering, besides the sin offering of atonement, and the regular burnt offering and its grain offering, and their drink offerings...¹⁵and a tenth for each of the fourteen lambs; ¹⁶also **one male goat** for a sin offering, besides the regular burnt offering, its grain offering and its drink offering...¹⁷“On the second day twelve bulls from the herd, two rams, fourteen male lambs a year old without blemish, ¹⁸with the grain offering and the drink offerings for the bulls, for the rams, and for the lambs, in the prescribed quantities; ¹⁹also **one male goat** for a sin offering, besides the regular burnt offering and its grain offering, and their drink offerings...²⁰“On the third day eleven bulls, two rams, fourteen male lambs a year old without blemish, ²¹with the grain offering and the drink offerings for the bulls, for the rams, and for the lambs, in the prescribed quantities; ²²also **one male goat** for a sin offering, besides the regular burnt offering and its grain offering and its drink offering...(In the following verse there are always fourteen or, in the last verse, seven lambs and...) ²⁵also **one male goat** for a sin offering, besides the regular burnt offering, its grain offering and its drink offering...²⁸also **one male goat** for a sin offering; besides the regular burnt offering and its grain offering and its drink offering...³¹also **one male goat** for a sin offering; besides the regular burnt offering, its grain offering, and its drink offerings...³⁴also **one male goat** for a sin offering; besides the regular burnt offering, its grain offering, and its drink offering...³⁸also **one male goat** for a sin offering; besides the regular burnt offering and its grain offering and its drink offering. (This same pattern of “one male goat for a sin offering” along with a multitude of other offerings is repeated twelve times for the twelve tribes at the consecration of the tabernacle in Numbers chapter seven.)

It’s fascinating in the Numbers 27-28 passage above when the offerings for the feast days are prescribed, that each set of offerings contains a multitude of gifts including 7 or 14 lambs and ONE male goat for a “sin offering.” Seven is the complete biblical number and the days of creation. It’s like there are as many lambs as creation has produced, yet there is always **one male goat**. Why just one? And why is that “the sin offering” (*chatta’ah*)? “For our sake he made him **to be sin** (Greek: “*hamartia*” which translates the Hebrew, “*chatta’ah*”) who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.” (2 Cor. 5:21) “God made him who had no sin to be sin [Or “be a sin offering”] for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.” (2 Cor. 5:21, NIV)

New American Commentary, 2 Corinthians 5:21... This verse explains how God did not count the trespasses against us (5:19) and made possible our reconciliation. From the time of Ambrosiaster and Augustine, interpreters have argued that Paul means that Christ became a “sin offering.” This view fits nicely with Isa 53:10, which expresses the Lord’s will “to crush him and cause him to suffer,” and to make “his life a guilt offering.” The word “sin” (*hamartia*) is sometimes used for sin-offering (*hatta.t*) in the LXX. And Paul depicts Christ’s death as a kind of cultic sacrifice in Rom 3:25 and 1 Cor 5:7 (see Rom 8:3). There are problems with this view, however. The word *hamartia* does not have the meaning “sin offering” elsewhere in the New Testament, and if Paul intends that meaning here, then he uses the word with two quite different meanings in the same sentence. In the first instance he states that Christ did not know sin, and there is no indication that he intended a quite different meaning for the word *sin* in the second instance. If Paul had intended to use the noun in the quite different sense of “sin offering,” it would have been more fitting to use the verb “presented” or “offered” rather than “made.” “Sin” also contrasts with “righteousness,” and interpreting the word as “sin offering” destroys the parallel structure of the sentence:

Christ who knew no sin
God made him sin
We [who are sinners]
Become the righteousness of God

Paul therefore intends to say that Christ is made a sinner. The New Testament, however, proclaims that Christ was without sin (John 8:46; 14:30; Heb 4:15; 1 Pet 2:22; 1 John 3:5). By metonymy, using an abstract term in place of a more concrete term and by saying it was “for us,” he protects Christ’s sinlessness. Galatians 3:13 offers an important parallel. Paul asserts that Christ became a curse in order that blessing might come to others.”

Perhaps both Augustine and the NAC are correct: Jesus became sin and our “sin offering.” He also became our righteousness and our “righteousness offering.” Technically there are no offerings called “righteousness offerings,” yet most “offerings” appear to be just that. It seems that they were not all thought to “carry sin” like the scapegoat and perhaps the sin offering or part of the sin offering. (In Leviticus 4:11, the flesh of the sin offering is to be burned outside the camp). Sacrifices were often eaten by priests and worshipers in the temple as an act of communion. They were a pleasant aroma in the nostrils of the Lord, like the pleasant aroma that fills me with gratitude when my wife makes roast lamb. This seems to be a side of the Temple ritual that Evangelicals have somehow neglected. Our lives are to be an offering to the Father. Jesus is our Life, He is life in us.

“For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin (“hamartia”), he condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.” (Romans 8:3-4) Two things happen: Sin is condemned, and the right offering is made.

For those of us who believe in Christ’s work of redemption, every good thing we do is like an unblemished offering that we know is the work of Christ in us. It is Christ in us. “For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a

result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.” (Ephesians 2:8-10). Good works, are Christ in us, a sacrifice of praise. “I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.” (Romans 12:1) Good works are the spotless lamb in us, God’s creation and the lamb in each. Jesus is the good offering in us, and Jesus bears the sin from us. One male goat... and He is sufficient.

We are predestined in Christ Jesus for glory, an offering, communion with God. And Jesus is predestined for wrath on our behalf, the sin offering, the scapegoat. That is at least true for the household of faith, but perhaps in the end, the household of faith is far larger than we thought.

Whatever the case, to simply read Matthew 25 and conclude that certain people are sheep other people are goats is to do incredible violence to the text and ourselves. It is to:

1. Miss the meaning of the text: The Glory of the slaughtered lamb on the throne.
2. Ignore our own obvious culpability. Who hasn’t neglected to feed a hungry person?
3. Ignore the absolutely immense Old Testament context. Jesus told this story to Jews steeped in the temple rituals for a thousand years. We ARE Biblically illiterate.
4. Do the very thing Jesus forbids! We use this text to judge others, yet don’t judge ourselves.
5. We judge others as “last.” Yet “what we do to the last of these we do to Jesus.” This WORD judges us and cuts us open. We should be calling for our savior: the Passover Lamb.

Hebrews 10:4-10...⁴For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins. ⁵Consequently, when Christ came into the world, he said, “Sacrifices and offerings you have not desired, but a body have you prepared for me; ⁶in **burnt offerings** and **sin offerings** you have taken no pleasure. ⁷Then I said, ‘Behold, I have come to do your will, O God, as it is written of me in the scroll of the book.’” ⁸When he said above, “You have neither desired nor taken pleasure in sacrifices and offerings and **burnt offerings** and **sin offerings**” (these are offered according to the law), ⁹then he added, “Behold, I have come to do your will.” He abolishes the first in order to establish the second. ¹⁰And by that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.

Are “burnt offerings” and “sin offerings” parallel to “sheep” and “goats”? It would seem so. The author of Hebrews seems to point out this dualistic pattern in the “sacrifices and offerings”. Whatever the case, Jesus fulfills them all.

Isaiah 53:4...Surely He has borne our griefs And carried our sorrows; Yet we esteemed Him stricken, Smitten by God, and afflicted.

When Jesus spoke the words of Matthew 25, he was a three days away from fulfilling this verse. Maybe he wanted us to see the depths of his love. Maybe we still miss it.

John 1:29...The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, "Behold! The Lamb (in Hebrew, "lamb" can refer to sheep or goats) of God who takes away the sin of the world!

2 Samuel 12:7-25...⁷Nathan said to David, "You are the man! Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, 'I anointed you king over Israel, and I delivered you out of the hand of Saul. ⁸And I gave you your master's house and your master's wives into your arms and gave you the house of Israel and of Judah. And if this were too little, I would add to you as much more. ⁹Why have you despised the word of the Lord, to do what is evil in his sight? You have struck down Uriah the Hittite with the sword and have taken his wife to be your wife and have killed him with the sword of the Ammonites. ¹⁰Now therefore the sword shall never depart from your house, because you have despised me and have taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your wife.' ¹¹Thus says the Lord, 'Behold, I will raise up evil against you out of your own house. And I will take your wives before your eyes and give them to your neighbor, and he shall lie with your wives in the sight of this sun. ¹²For you did it secretly, but I will do this thing before all Israel and before the sun.' " ¹³David said to Nathan, "I have sinned against the Lord." And Nathan said to David, "The Lord also has put away your sin; you shall not die. ¹⁴Nevertheless, because by this deed you have utterly scorned the Lord, the child who is born to you shall die." ¹⁵Then Nathan went to his house. And the Lord afflicted the child that Uriah's wife bore to David, and he became sick. ¹⁶David therefore sought God on behalf of the child. And David fasted and went in and lay all night on the ground. ¹⁷And the elders of his house stood beside him, to raise him from the ground, but he would not, nor did he eat food with them. ¹⁸On the seventh day the child died. And the servants of David were afraid to tell him that the child was dead, for they said, "Behold, while the child was yet alive, we spoke to him, and he did not listen to us. How then can we say to him the child is dead? He may do himself some harm." ¹⁹But when David saw that his servants were whispering together, David understood that the child was dead. And David said to his servants, "Is the child dead?" They said, "He is dead." ²⁰Then David arose from the earth and washed and anointed himself and changed his clothes. And he went into the house of the Lord and worshiped. He then went to his own house. And when he asked, they set food before him, and he ate. ²¹Then his servants said to him, "What is this thing that you have done? You fasted and wept for the child while he was alive; but when the child died, you arose and ate food." ²²He said, "While the child was still alive, I fasted and wept, for I said, 'Who knows whether the Lord will be gracious to me, that the child may live?' ²³But now he is dead. Why should I fast? Can I bring him back again? **I shall go to him**, but he will not return to me."

Where is the son of David? He has descended into the pit-Sheol. David will join Him but they will not stay dead. Paul wrote this about the Son of David, "If we are joined with him in a death like his, we shall surely be joined with him in a resurrection like his." The Son of David dies, but maybe the Lord is still gracious to David (more than David even begins to know).

²⁴Then David comforted his wife, Bathsheba, and went in to her and lay with her, and she bore a son, and he called his name Solomon. And the Lord loved him ²⁵and sent a message by Nathan the prophet. So he called his name Jedidiah ("Beloved of the Lord"), because of the Lord.

It's almost like the Son of David rose from the dead. So, it's almost like He wins by choosing to lose, like the last is first. And did you notice? He's, like, the fruit of David's confession. The Prince of Peace is like the fruit that "befits repentance." He's like the Word of God, the Psalm that rises out of David's sorrow. The Prince of Peace is, like, born right out of David's sin,

sorrow, and shame. Born right out from under the dominion of Molech. He's, like, born in a manger, and the government shall be on his shoulders. He reminds me of someone else.

So if you feel like a failure, you're wracked with guilt and the baby has died...surrender your shame and, good news, the Prince of Peace is born in your manger. Well, Solomon ascends to the throne and builds the temple. He accomplishes the greatest deeds in Israelite history, the Son of David. But remember there were two sons of David in this story: One that bore David's sin and descended into Sheol, like the scapegoat on the day of atonement, the sin offering on every Holy Day...And the other that rose from David's ashes and built the house of God, like a pleasing offering – the good deed – the spotless Lamb.

Two sons of David that are one Son of David. His name is Jesus (of the house and lineage of David). In the next paragraph in 2 Samuel, David defeats the Ammonites. It's a sign, I suppose. But Molech is not yet defeated. Satan is not yet defeated until Jesus (the Son of David) hangs on a wooden cross at the edge of the 7th day, where He descends into the pit, death, and Sheol, bearing our sin and shame and then rises victorious on the third day. Jesus Christ and Him crucified. – **Warriors on Their Couches, 10-8-06**

IT WOULD SEEM THAT:

1. There are like two "me"s. Flesh and Spirit, "wretched man that I am" and "me," "the I who no longer lives" and "Christ in me," the old self and the new self, tare and wheat, vessel of wrath and vessel of mercy, the earthen vessel and the Glory that fills it.
2. Judgment is separation. A Word that is a knife.
3. Jesus is Judgment. Jesus bears my "old man" to destruction – the Scapegoat. Jesus is my "new man" – the spotless lamb offered to the Father in communion.
4. There is One Judgment, who is all God's Judgments – His Word, Jesus. We may surrender to Judgment now, by receiving that Word. But in the end no one can escape Judgment – the gift of God – who is the End.
5. Human ideas and words utterly fail at comprehending this Judgment. Indeed this Judgment comprehends us. "How unsearchable are his judgments!" But may His Judgments – who is Jesus - search me.
6. We need to stop limiting God's Judgment with our judgments.

Romans 11:32-33...³²For God has consigned all men to disobedience, that he may have mercy upon all. ³³O the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!

1 Corinthians 13:8...Love never ends.

SOME THINGS THAT COME TO AN END

Revelation 10:5-7 (KJV)...⁵And the angel which I saw stand upon the sea and upon the earth lifted up his hand to heaven, ⁶And swore by him that liveth for ever and ever, who created

heaven, and the things that therein are, and the earth, and the things that therein are, and the sea, and the things which are therein, that there should be time (*chronos*) no longer: ⁷But in the days of the voice of the seventh angel, when he shall begin to sound, the mystery of God should be finished (*teleo*), as he hath declared to his servants the prophets.

Time – Chronos

If “ALL THINGS” are “reconciled” to God, perhaps time is reconciled to God. Even physicists claim that time (chronological time) is part of the physical order. That is, part of the created order, a “thing.” As C.S. Lewis writes, “How little we are reconciled to time.” Even in our fallen state we are highly critical of time, offended, and even surprised by it. “I can’t believe I’m 45! It’s not right. It seems like only yesterday that...” C.S. Lewis writes that we are like fish constantly surprised at being wet. That’s entirely odd, unless of course, “we were one day destined to walk on land.” What does it mean to be destined for eternity? I’m not sure, I’m stuck in time, but if I was destined for eternity, I might find myself over and over again surprised, frustrated, and dismayed by time, longing to be set free from my “bondage to decay” (Romans 8). If we take Revelation “literally,” “Chronos will be no more.” I suspect it will be reconciled or transformed into “Kairos” – God’s time, eternal time. And we will no longer be time’s servant, but it’s master. This is why the New Jerusalem IS a New Jerusalem. All the Jerusalems from throughout “chronos” are present and redeemed in “Kairos.” It is the house of **I AM**.

In this world we can move in four dimensions (length, breadth, height, and time). We can move in four dimensions, but not eight directions, only seven. That is, we can move back and forth in three dimensions, but we can only move one direction in the fourth. We can even change our speed in this one direction (thanks to Einstein, relative velocities, and specific gravity), but we can’t change direction. Yet we all long to. “If I could only go back!” One day we will go back to the future, the “New Jerusalem coming down.” The house of **I AM** is the **Light** house. No sun or moon for The Lord is in her midst. He is The Light. God is Light, and Jesus is the Light of the world. Modern scientists agree with scripture: Time is relative to Light. Indeed, all creation is like a manifestation of light.

1 Corinthians 10:9-11...⁹We must not put Christ to the test, as some of them did and were destroyed by serpents, ¹⁰nor grumble, as some of them did and were destroyed by the Destroyer. ¹¹Now these things happened to them as an example, but they were written down for our instruction, on whom the **end** of the ages (*aion*) has come.

The Ages (aions)...If “aion” means “ever,” then “ever” has an end. Forever has a duration, a beginning and an end. And his name is Jesus.

“Aion” – some examples of its use...The [Nestle-Aland Greek New Testament with McReynold’s English Interlinear](#) and all other interlinears that I’ve seen, translate the Greek word “aion” with the English word “age.” In parenthesis below, this translation is reproduced with corresponding prepositions, articles and plurality or singularity.

Matthew 12:32...And whoever speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this **age** or in the **age** to come (*transliterated: “not in this the age and not in the one being about to be”*).

Is the “age to come” ageless? Is it another “age” or the ageless age? The Pharisees to whom he is referring in the warning are part of the “whole house of Israel.” They also seem to be those of whom Jesus prays when he prays to the father on the cross saying, “Father forgive them for they know not what they do.” It seems that they weren’t forgiven in that age, but were caught in the destruction of Jerusalem. Is there an age to come or an age beyond all ages, in which Christ’s prayer for them (I think it was for them) will be answered?

Matthew 13:39-40...³⁹and the enemy who sowed them is the devil. The harvest is the close of the **age**, and the reapers are angels. ⁴⁰Just as the weeds are gathered and burned with fire, so will it be at the close of the **age**.

It appears that at the close of this age there will be a FIRE. Is it the Eternal Fire of the ageless age? In which case, the edge of this age and the ageless age, God’s age, eternity may be the day you die. The day you leave “chronos.”

Matthew 21:19...And seeing a fig tree by the wayside, he went to it and found nothing on it but only leaves. And he said to it, “May no fruit **ever** (*“into the age”*) come from you again!” And the fig tree withered at once.

What does “into the age” mean?

John 6:51...I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live **forever** (*“into the age”*). And the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.”

Romans 11:36...For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory **forever** (*“into the ages”*). Amen.

Galatians 1:4-5...⁴who gave himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil **age**, according to the will of our God and Father, ⁵to whom be the glory **forever and ever** (*“into the ages of the ages”*). Amen.

Doesn’t it seem that Paul is trying to describe a “time” beyond time, a “time” that can’t be described in human words?

Ephesians 1:21...far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this **age** but also in the one to come.

Ephesians 2:2...in which you once walked, following **the course** (*“the age”*) of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience...

An “aion” describes more than simply some time, but a system, sociology, ecology, economy. It describes a world.

Ephesians 3:9...and to bring to light for everyone what is the plan of the mystery hidden **for ages** (*“from the ages”*) in God who created all things,...

Does this mean from “before,” ”beyond” the ages? There are no appropriate prepositions, for things beyond space and time. Prepositions must always assume space and time.

Ephesians 3:21...to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, **forever and ever** (*“the ages of the ages”*). Amen.

1 Timothy 1:17...To the King of ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory **forever and ever** (*“of the ages”*). Amen.

Hebrews 1:2...but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created **the world** (*“the ages”*).

God created more than one age in Christ Jesus.

Hebrews 1:8...But of the Son he says, “Your throne, O God, is **forever and ever** (*“the age of the ages”*), the scepter of uprightness is the scepter of your kingdom.

Hebrews 5:6...as he says also in another place, “You are a priest **forever** (*“for the age”*), after the order of Melchizedek.”

Hebrews 6:20...where Jesus has gone as a forerunner on our behalf, having become a high priest **forever** (*“into the age”*) after the order of Melchizedek.

Hebrews 9:26...for then he would have had to suffer repeatedly since the foundation of the world. But as it is, he has appeared once for all at the end of **the ages** to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself.

GET THAT? “The ages” have already come to an end. If we take scripture “literally,” they ended two thousand years ago in Jesus hanging on a cross. At that point ALL was finished as Jesus cried out “tetelestai.” At that point a door was made from “the ages” into the consummated Kingdom of God, the ageless age, eternity. All who come to Him come to “eternal life.” When a believer believes he walks in “eternal life,” “newness of life,” and “the ages” do not control his heart, soul, and spirit. When a believer dies, he leaves “the ages,” body, mind, heart, soul, and spirit. For when a believer dies, he dies in The Lord. “The mortal puts on immortality.” “In a moment in the twinkling of an eye, we are changed” (1 Corinthians 15). Jesus said to the thief on the cross, “TODAY you will be with me in paradise!”

Hebrews 11:3...By faith we understand that **the universe** (*“the ages”*) was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things that are visible.

Hebrews 13:21...equip you with everything good that you may do his will, working in us that which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory **forever and ever** (*“the ages of the ages”*). Amen.

Jude 13...wild waves of the sea, casting up the foam of their own shame; wandering stars, for whom the gloom of utter darkness has been reserved **forever** (*“into the age”*).

Revelation 4:9...And whenever the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to him who is seated on the throne, who lives **forever and ever** (*“into the ages of the ages”*),

Revelation 14:11...And the smoke of their torment goes up **forever and ever** (*“into the age of the ages”*), and they have no rest, day or night, these worshipers of the beast and its image, and whoever receives the mark of its name.”

Revelation 20:10...and the devil who had deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and sulfur where the beast and the false prophet were, and they will be tormented day and night **forever and ever** (*“into the ages of the ages”*).

MORE THINGS THAT COME TO AN END

Time, Chronos, The Ages and...

Ephesians 1:7-10...7 In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, 8 which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight 9 making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ 10 as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite **all things** in him, things in heaven and things on earth.

Revelation 22:13...I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the **end**.”

All “Things”

All things that come to Christ, come to an end because He is the End. God does not “come to Christ” (as we do), for all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell in Christ. He does not “come to Christ” because He is Christ. And through Christ He reconciles to Himself “ALL THINGS” (Col 1:20). All things that come to the end, also come to the beginning, for the end is the beginning, the Alpha and Omega, Jesus. He is the plot, the logos, who gives all things meaning, the reason they were created in the first place. Things that come to the end receive new meaning a new beginning. All things come to an end, the End. Nothing is endless except the End, who is Jesus, who is God, who will fill all things.

Revelation 15:1...Then I saw another sign in heaven, great and amazing, seven angels with seven plagues, which are the last, for with them the wrath of God is finished (*teleo*).

God’s Wrath

If “ALL THINGS” are “reconciled” to God, He can no longer be experienced as wrath. He can no longer be experienced as “burning,” for there is nothing left for the Eternal Fire to burn. The Fire has no end, because it is the end. When all things are reconciled to it, God ceases to be experienced as wrath, but known for who He is: Love. (In this sense “wrath” doesn’t end, we end and then know God as he is.) “Hell” cannot be unending wrath if the wrath of God is finished (“ended” RSV)...and yet it can if it means perfected, but then I think it’s called “heaven.” In the Revelation no more bowls are poured out after the seven, (no more burning), yet the blood still covers the ground. I think the blood is the blood of the lamb on the throne.

John 19:30...When Jesus had received the sour wine, he said, “It is finished (*teleo*),” and he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

Jesus says the same thing on the cross, that is said of the seventh bowl. Was God's wrath "satisfied" at the cross? Does His wrath take the form of mercy at the cross? Is the cross the judgment of this world? Does the message of the cross burn evil like fire?

What Jesus was doing on that cross?

If "ALL THINGS" are "reconciled" to God, there's nothing left to reconcile. Yet, Jesus Christ and Him Crucified is the revelation, manifestation, and presence of the End. The Horror of the cross on good Friday is transformed into the glory of the cross on Easter. The End is the Beginning and Meaning of all things.

Death...and Hades?

Isaiah 25:6-9...⁶On this mountain the Lord of hosts will make for **all** peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wine, of rich food full of marrow, of aged wine well refined. ⁷And he will swallow up on this mountain the covering that is cast over **all** peoples, the veil that is spread over **all** nations. ⁸**He will swallow up death forever**; and the Lord God will wipe away tears from all faces, and the reproach of his people he will take away from all the earth, for the Lord has spoken. ⁹It will be said on that day, "Behold, this is our God; we have waited for him, that he might save us. This is the Lord; we have waited for him; let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation."

When we gather on the mountain and feast on Christ's banquet of broken body and shed blood, don't we sometimes say, "Behold, this is our God; we have waited for him, that he might save us. This is the Lord; we have waited for him; let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation."?

Revelation 20:14...Then **Death and Hades** were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire.

Revelation 21:4...He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and **death** shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away."

How can Hell be everlasting death, if death is "no more"?

IT WOULD SEEM THAT:

1. **ALL THINGS** that come to an end are created things or created things' experience of uncreated things

SOME THINGS THAT NEVER END (BECAUSE THEY ARE THE END) AND NEVER BEGAN (BECAUSE THEY ARE THE BEGINNING)

Exodus 3:14...God said to Moses, "I am who I am." And he said, "Say this to the people of Israel, 'I am has sent me to you.'"

God

Lamentations 3:22...The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases; his mercies never come to an end...

hesed

1 Chronicles 16:34...³⁴Oh give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; for his steadfast love endures forever! [The phrase, “for his steadfast love endures forever” appears 38 times in the Old Testament]

1 Corinthians 13:8...Love never ends.

Agape

1 Timothy 6:13-16...¹³I charge you in the presence of God, who gives life to all things, and of Christ Jesus, who in his testimony before Pontius Pilate made the good confession, ¹⁴to keep the commandment unstained and free from reproach until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ, ¹⁵which he will display at the proper time—he who is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords, ¹⁶who alone has immortality, who dwells in unapproachable light, whom no one has ever seen or can see. To him be honor and eternal (aionios) dominion. Amen.

“Aionios” – some examples of it’s use:

By including a discussion of “aionios” under the heading of “Things that never come to an end because they never began,” I don’t mean to argue that “aionios” necessarily fits within this category, just that some instances of it’s use very well may. The [Nestle-Aland Greek New Testament with McReynold’s English Interlinear](#) and other interlinears that I’ve seen, translate the Greek word “aionios” with the English word “eternal.” “Aion” is a noun, “Aionios” is an adjective. What does “eternal” mean? We struggle with that in English. Lexicons define “aionios” in a variety of ways. A few that I’ve seen:

1. “Of the age” – but which age? The Age to Come? God’s Age?
2. “Age long” – but which age? If there’s only one age: “all time,” “all chronos,” for “ever” from beginning to end.
3. “Ageless” –
 - a) “Forever,” as in for “ever” without end, and possibly without beginning. That is, temporality, linear time, “all Chronos,” for “ever.” Yet in Scripture “‘Chronos’ will be no more” (Rev. 10:6).
 - b) Eternal,” as in “timeless,” “beyond time,” “no chronos,” “before, after, under and over time,” “God’s unique time,” “impossible to define with our time.” In this way “aionios” is used as a predicate of God. And only in this last way could it define a noun as a “thing that never comes to an end because it never began.”

Matthew 19:16...And behold, a man came up to him, saying, “Teacher, what good deed must I do to have **eternal** life?”

Jesus is “The Life,” and Jesus is eternal.

Matthew 25:41...41 “Then he will say to those on his left, ‘Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.

God is “a consuming fire” and God is eternal.

...One of the key passages is Matthew 25:46 where it is said that the rejected go away to eternal punishment, and the righteous to eternal life. The Greek word for punishment is kolasis, which was not originally an ethical word at all. It originally meant the pruning of trees to make them grow better. I think it is true to say that in all Greek secular literature kolasis is never used of anything but remedial punishment. The word for eternal is aionios. It means more than everlasting, for Plato - who may have invented the word - plainly says that a thing may be everlasting and still not be aionios. The simplest way to out it is that aionios cannot be used properly of anyone but God; it is the word uniquely, as Plato saw it, of God. Eternal punishment is then literally that kind of remedial punishment which it befits God to give and which only God can give. – William Barclay, A Spiritual Autobiography, PP. 65-67

Matthew 25:46...And these will go away into eternal punishment (*kolasis*), but the righteous into eternal life.”

The “kolasis” is “The Fire.” The punishment itself never ends, because God doesn’t end. But does the consuming fire, consume without end? Does it burn without end? Does the “kolasis” prune without end? How could it? Unless, God recreated without end, for the soul purpose of pruning, burning, and destroying without end. Which hardly seems to match God’s end and God’s revealed purpose and will in Christ Jesus our Lord. Furthermore, all created things come to an end in Jesus as all is put in reconciled submission to the Father etc. etc. etc. I think quoting this verse as an infinite threat is probably an effective way to get sinners to raise their hands at evangelism rallies and give more to the church mission program, but is it an effective way of making disciples of the One who is Sacrificial Love?

God is the Fire, the punishment, and he is Eternal

As a child did you ever receive a “punishment” that was actually a gift? If you had a good father, they were all gift. What are we telling the world about our Father? Are we misrepresenting Him, in order to grow our churches and fund our programs? Did your good father meet out “retributive punishment” or “remedial punishment”? What was the nature of his wrath? Some would say God is not a Father like an earthly father. Well Ok... he is called Father... and we are being made in His image... but the point is well taken. So... is He a worse Father or a better Father? Which direction does better go? Toward Mercy or away from Mercy? Is God the Father a father who changes? Does he give good gifts sometimes but “not good gifts” at other times? “Do not be deceived, my beloved brothers. Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights with whom there is **no variation or shadow due to change.**” (James 1:16-18)

Mark 3:29 (KJV)...But he that shall blaspheme against the Holy Ghost hath never forgiveness, but is in danger of eternal damnation (“*crisis*” – *judgment*): [see: John 5:22,8:15,12:31]

It reads, “danger.” Are we not all in “eternal” danger apart from the cross on which the Lord bears our curse? And yet, is anything more dangerous than that cross or the eternal Word that “pierces to the division of soul and spirit, body and flesh”? That cross is our Judgment, just as the communion table is Judgment. (“For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment on himself.” 1 Cor. 11:29). Jesus and him crucified is our Judgment (John 5:22,8:15,12:31). Just because something is dangerous, doesn’t mean it isn’t good. Some things are dangerous because they are so profoundly and absolutely Good. Perhaps for the man that ignores the Holy Spirit in this age, the very best gift is a judgment from the next.

Jesus is our Judgment, and Jesus is Eternal.

“never forgiveness”?

What is it that “never” has forgiveness? That which is blind to the grace of God in Christ Jesus. How are we to see? The Holy Ghost. Only God can heal those born blind. Only the Spirit can give us sight. Is it not our old man, the body of sin and death, the vessel of wrath that is not “born of the Spirit”? Is it not that body of flesh, which is “eternally” separated, pruned and judged? Even so, the word “never” is probably a poor translation. It translates three Greek words. Transliterated, the words read “not into (the) ever.” “Ever” is “aion.” We’ve already seen that all aions and certainly this one end in Jesus, so “not ever” or never cannot mean without end. Perhaps it means then, that it will not be forgiven in this age. Or perhaps “into the age” means it must be forgiven or cut off or “sent off” before passing into God’s Age, the next age, the End. The KJV appears to be using an inferior text. In earlier manuscripts “hamartia” (sin) is in the place of “krisis” (judgment).

Mark 3:29...but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit never has forgiveness, but is guilty of an **eternal** sin (“*hamartia*” – *sin*)

Transliterated the verse reads, “who but might insult in the spirit the holy not he has sending off into the age but guilty he is of eternal sin.” What is “eternal sin”? Sin of the age? Age long sin? Ageless sin? Sin against God’s age? Whatever the case it seems that this sin is faithlessness, a lack of faith in God’s grace, not receiving the Spirit’s testimony to Christ, which ultimately is the basis of all sin, and the very sin that traps people in Hades. As soon as a person stops committing this sin aren’t they at the end of the age...Christ? It is the sin of this aion against God’s aion.

Luke 16:9...And I tell you, make friends for yourselves by means of unrighteous wealth, so that when it fails they may receive you into the **eternal** dwellings.

We are God’s “eternal dwelling.” We are His temple, tabernacle, city, body, and bride.

Romans 16:25-26...²⁵Now to him who is able to strengthen you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery that was kept secret for **long ages** (*chronos aionios* – “*chonois aioniois*” – *TRANSLITERATED: “in times eternal”*)²⁶but has now been disclosed and through the prophetic writings has been made known to all nations, according to the command of the **eternal** God, to bring about the obedience of faith...

Human language is stretched to its limit in these verses. Transliterated the end of 25 reads, **“uncovering of mystery in times eternal having been silent.”** Strictly speaking How could aionios mean timeless? What are timeless times? How could aionios mean forever or “all time”? You can’t reveal a secret in time that has been kept secret for all time? Perhaps you could reveal a secret having been kept secret for all time, if the moment that secret was revealed, the person to whom it was revealed was no longer in time. As if the moment they believed the revelation they had aionios, eternal life. Belief in the Good News would then define the boundary between time and eternity. I’m not sure that’s strictly the meaning here. Perhaps it means something like all the ages of times. The secret is hidden to all the ages of times (Chronoi). It can only be known once all “chronoi” (times) are ended, when “chronos” is no more (Rev. 10:6). And once it is known “chronos” is no more. The person that believes is set free from time. I don’t know anyone on this earth that fully believes...yet. And once they do all “yets” are over. Whatever the case it’s easy to see that aionios is not an easy word to define. And whatever the case, **God is Eternal.**

2 Corinthians 4:17-18...¹⁷For this slight momentary affliction is preparing for us an **eternal** weight of **glory** beyond all comparison, ¹⁸as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are **eternal**.

“I am the LORD; that is my name; my **glory** I give to no other” (Isaiah 42:8). “And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great, high mountain, and showed me the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God, having the **glory** of God, its radiance like a most rare jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal.” (Rev. 21:10-11) Read those three verses again. They should make you tremble. **Jesus is our Glory, and He is Eternal...** we actually are His Body and His Bride, and the two shall become one flesh! The glory is beyond ALL comparison. It is His...our Glory!

2 Corinthians 5:1...For we know that if the tent, which is our earthly home, is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, **eternal** in the heavens.

2 Thessalonians 1:9...They will suffer the punishment of **eternal** destruction (*“olethros”- ruin, not “apollumi”- lose or “the lost”*), away from (*ESV footnote: or “that comes from”*) the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might,

From the context provided by 2:8 and from the Greek, it seems that the presence of Jesus is the source of “olethros.” His presence destroys Hades, where evil hides from the wrath of God and of the lamb on the throne. His presence is Judgment which separates the “old self” from the “new self,” destroying “this body of sin and death” and delivering “me.” His revealed presence is the end of this age and the gateway to “eternity,” the presence of “eternity,” the Kingdom is at hand for the king is at hand. He is the presence of God’s age which ends this age.

2 Thessalonians 2:8...And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will kill with the breath of his mouth and bring to nothing by the appearance of his coming. (*the “epiphaneo” of his “parousia”; the epiphany, revelation, or manifestation of his coming*)

“The Kingdom of Heaven is at hand.” “The Kingdom of Heaven is in your midst.” Paul makes it sound like Jesus has come, is come, and will come. This “coming” is the “parousia,” what we think of as the end of the age...and it IS the end of the age. The day you die is the end of the

age. Jesus' parousia is one event, the boundary of this age and God's age, eternity. The seventh trumpet sounds once, yet it is heard in 70 AD, and it was heard in 2004 AD on the day my father died. I believe he heard it. I have not yet heard it. For discussions of Christ's Coming and the nature of space and time see the following sermons: [The Kingdom Come](#), 7-2-05; [Foolish Virgins and Big Fish](#), 7-9-05; [The Sign of His Coming and of The Close of The Age](#), 10-15-05; also Chapter 2 of [Eternity Now](#), Peter Hiatt.

So anyway...It's like Paul is saying it's not simply his coming that destroys evil, it's the manifestation of his coming. There is no place that he is not. When his presence is revealed it destroys evil, like turning on the light destroys the darkness. Because He is the Light, perhaps a better way to say it might be, "when the covering is removed and evil has no place to hide, it is ruined, destroyed, burned away." Notice that the Anti-Christ is destroyed by the breath (Spirit) of Christ's mouth. Remember Christ's Spirit, The Holy Spirit, appeared to the disciples as tongues of fire. Remember that brimstone comes from the mouth of God, ignites the fires of Gehenna and consumes the offerings on the altar in the temple. Remember that Word rides on breath that comes from the mouth. Preach Christ and Him Crucified and you breath fire which the gates of Hades cannot withstand.

2 Thessalonians 2:16...16 Now may our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God our Father, who loved us and gave us **eternal** comfort and good hope through grace,...

The Holy Spirit is our "eternal" comforter.

1 Timothy 6:16...who **alone has immortality** (*athanasia*), who dwells in unapproachable light, whom no one has ever seen or can see. To him be honor and **eternal** dominion. Amen.

"Atthanasia" comes from "a" (the negative) + "thanatos" (death). If God alone has immortality, the soul is not inherently immortal. The immortality of the soul was a Greek philosophical idea that seems to have crept into the church from Plato. If God alone has immortality, how would sinners suffer immortally in Hell? To suffer immortally is to suffer without death. If we define hell as immortal death, we are defining it as deathless death. We are also saying that death has immortality. Do we want to say that, if "God alone has immortality"? If hell is evil or the people in hell are evil, we are also saying that evil is immortal. Do we want to say that if "God alone has immortality"? We will have immortality (according to John, it seems we already do), because the immortal one gives it to us, gives himself to us. He lives within us. We are His Body!

"Truly, truly, I say to you, an hour is coming, and is now here, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live. For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself. (John 5:25-26). Do we have any idea at all as to what we are saying when we say that some will "live" without "end" in torment in Hell? **No one can "live" without "end" if the "end" is "life."** *Jesus is "The Life," and Jesus is "The End"!*

2 Timothy 1:9-10...⁹who saved us and called us to a holy calling, not because of our works but because of his own purpose and grace, which he gave us in Christ Jesus **before the ages began** (*"pro chronon aionion"* – *TRANSLITERATED: "before times eternal"*), ¹⁰and which now has been manifested through the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel,...

Here we go again. It must mean something like “before all ages,” before “ages of time,” before “times of the age.” How can you have “before” time? Prepositions have to do with position in space and time. They are all inadequate when applied to God who created space and time with the Word.

2 Timothy 2:10...Therefore I endure everything for the sake of the elect, that they also may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory.

Jesus is eternal glory.

Titus 1:2...in hope of eternal life, which God, who never lies, promised before the ages began (*“pro chronon aionion” – TRANSLITERATED: “before times eternal”*),...

My head hurts.

Philemon 15...For this perhaps is why he was parted from you for a while, that you might have him back forever (*TRANSLITERATED: “that eternal him you might have back”*)

Philemon might go “eternal”!

Hebrews 5:9...And being made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him,

“Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace, according to your word; for my eyes have seen your salvation” (Luke 2:29-30). **Jesus is our salvation, and He is eternal.**

Hebrews 6:2...and of instruction about washings, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment.

Jesus is our Judgment, and He is eternal.

Hebrews 9:12...he entered once for all into the holy places, not by means of the blood of goats and calves but by means of his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption.

“God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God. He is the source of your life in Christ Jesus, whom God made our wisdom and our righteousness and sanctification and redemption.” (1 Cor. 1: 28-30) **Jesus is our redemption, and He is eternal.**

Hebrews 9:14-15...¹⁴how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God. ¹⁵Therefore he is the mediator of a new covenant, so that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance, since a death has occurred that redeems them from the transgressions committed under the first covenant.

Hebrews 13:20...Now may the God of peace who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant,...

Jesus is the covenant, and Jesus is eternal. The covenant in his blood is the covenant in his life.

1 Peter 5:10...And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you.

2 Peter 1:11...For in this way there will be richly provided for you an entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Revelation 14:6...Then I saw another angel flying directly overhead, with an eternal gospel to proclaim to those who dwell on earth, to every nation and tribe and language and people.

Jesus is The Word, and The Word is The Gospel, and Jesus is eternal.

IT WOULD SEEM THAT:

1. God alone is inherently endless, because he is the End.
2. “Aion” and “aionios” are two words which are very difficult to build doctrine upon, because their meaning is so difficult to define.
3. Even so, “aionios” things seem to be God things. They are “eternal” because they are somehow God.

GOD IS...

Deuteronomy 6:4-5...⁴“Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. ⁵You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.

Mark 12:29-31...²⁹Jesus answered, “The most important is, ‘Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. ³⁰And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.’ ³¹The second is this: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these.”

Part of the great commandment is that we hear this: God is One. God is One, and we are to be one whole self, consisting of Love.

Romans 3:30...since God is one. He will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith.

There is One Justification.

Galatians 3:20...Now an intermediary implies more than one, but God is one.

There is One mediator, who is God. Jesus and the Father are One. The Father is not the mean one, and Jesus the nice one. They are One Substance.

Ephesians 4:4-10...⁴There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call – ⁵one Lord, one faith, one baptism, ⁶one God and Father of all,

who is over **all** and through **all** and in **all**. ⁷But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift. ⁸Therefore it says, "When he ascended on high he led a host of captives, and he gave gifts to men." ⁹(In saying, "He ascended," what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower parts of the earth? ¹⁰He who descended is the one who also ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill **all things**.)

Because God is One over all, through all and in all, Jesus gave gifts to men – different gifts yet the same gift, Himself – gifts to us and gifts to those in "the lower parts of the earth." God is one for those who come to Christ in this "life" and for those who meet him in the "lower parts of the earth." The story of their redemption is different yet the same: one Lord, faith, baptism, God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. Isn't that what this means?

Isn't the "all" defined as including those "in the lower parts of the earth"? He descended that He might fill "All things." And because he is one, He is the same One to those in the "lower parts of the earth" that He is to us in church on Sunday morning.

John 4:24...God is **spirit**, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth."

Psalm 99:9...Exalt the Lord our God, and worship at his holy mountain; for the Lord our God is **holy!**

Deuteronomy 4:24...For the Lord your God is a **consuming fire**, a jealous God.

Hebrews 12:29...for our God is a **consuming fire**.

1 John 1:5...This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is **light**, and in him is no darkness at all.

1 John 4:8...Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is **love**.

1 John 4:16...So we have come to know and to believe the love that God has for us. God is **love**, and whoever abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him.

God is not 30% consuming fire, 35% Holy, and 35% Love. God is One, and God is unchanging. We change.

James 1:16-18...¹⁶Do not be deceived, my beloved brothers. ¹⁷Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights with whom there is **no variation** or **shadow due to change**. ¹⁸Of **his own will** he brought us forth by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.

God is unchanging. God is all-good. He is always "gift" to us. Our salvation is due to HIS WILL, not ours. We are a kind of first fruits. First fruits imply further fruit. If those of us who now believe are firstfruits, what are the later fruits?

Does Jesus' personality change when He comes back? Does He no longer seek and save the lost? Is He no longer "meek and lowly of heart"? Was it actually NOT "finished" on the cross... and when He comes back He'll finish it... Rambo style? Does the steadfast love of God in Christ Jesus come to an end and then he "kicks ass"?

Hebrews 9:26-28...²⁶as it is, he has appeared once for all at the **end of the ages** to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself. ²⁷And just as it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment, ²⁸so Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, **not to deal with sin** but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him.

When Jesus comes back it won't be to deal with sin. If that's true, then why do we keep preaching about the Rambo Messiah who will "come back and fry your butt in Hell for all eternity, because his patience has run out and he's had enough of your sin"? THE STEADFAST LOVE OF THE LORD NEVER CEASES. HIS MERCIES NEVER COME TO AN END. They are the end, for He is the end.

Lamentations 3:22...The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases; his mercies never come to an end...

God's patience does not run out.

Revelation 6:15-17...¹⁵Then the kings of the earth and the great ones and the generals and the rich and the powerful, and everyone, slave and free, hid themselves in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains, ¹⁶calling to the mountains and rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who is seated on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb, ¹⁷for the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand?"

They're running from the Slaughtered Lamb on the throne! Mercy is their Judgment. Mercy is the fabric of all reality, the Word that upholds all things. And so they are exposed, their old man is exposed, as shadow and lie. See [Why Jesus Rose from the Dead](#), preached 5-2-04. Death is to think He rose from the dead just to "kick our ass" when in fact he rose from the dead to say, "All is forgiven, COME HOME!"

IT WOULD SEEM THAT:

1. God is One - One Holy Spirit Consuming Fire that's Light and Love. He is not part Fire and part Love, but all "Fire" and all "Love."
2. God's patience does not run out, and His Steadfast Love ("*khesed*," Mercy) never comes to an End. It is the End, Jesus.
3. God does not change. He is good, and the good gift giver all the time.
4. Hades is a gift of His Mercy. The Fire is His Mercy. That is "Hell" is not retributive (the opposite of mercy), but remedial (the gift of mercy).

CAN GOD FAIL?

1 Corinthians 13:8 (NKJV)...Love never fails...

1 Corinthians 15:53-55...⁵³For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality. ⁵⁴When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the

mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written: "Death is swallowed up in victory." ⁵⁵"O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?"

"O Death, where are your plagues? O Sheol, where is your sting?" (Hosea 13:14) How do we answer? If Sheol is unending conscious torment from which an immense portion of humanity can never escape, and Sheol can never come to an end, and for these people the walls can never be breached, it sounds as if Sheol has a pretty immense victory. Where is the sting of Sheol? Is it in the faithless fear of humanity, through which Satan keeps people in bondage through the lifelong fear of death? (Hebrews 2:15)

Matthew 19:26...But Jesus looked at them and said, "With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible."

I recently read the testimony of a man who said that he spent 23 minutes in "Hell." He describes its absolute unending agony and how none can ever escape (yet he did?). But Jesus rescues him and weeps over all those who suffer in Hell. To me, that sounds like Jesus. In visions Jesus will weep and weep for those who suffer. However, this person seems to say that Jesus weeps because he wants no one to go to Hell, and He can't seem to stop them from going to Hell or get them out of Hell once they are there, so He **needs us** to tell them about His Mercy. I think this man may have had a very real experience, I think Jesus may have also told him some things. However, this man's conclusions seem so unbiblical to me, that I wonder if his testimony is just infested with the enemy's lies. Do we really want to say that it's impossible for God to get people out of Hell, at any time?...even though he wants to? Aren't we then saying: Satan wins, and we really ought to be terrified of Sheol; the gates of hell can withstand the will of God; so once you're there you're stuck and well, this one thing really is impossible for God? I absolutely cringe at the thought of being responsible for people's suffering, let alone in Hell. So I feel extremely cautious about raising these questions, yet if we don't I'm concerned that we speak the enemy's lies for him and slander our Father in Heaven.

James 2:12-13...¹²So speak and so act as those who are to be judged under the law of liberty.
¹³For judgment is without mercy to one who has shown no mercy. **Mercy** triumphs over **judgment**.

If Christ's death on the cross was the judgment of this world (John 12:31), then it would seem that in a very real way mercy is judgment. In the Holy of Holies the top of the ark was referred to as the throne of God and was called the "Mercy Seat." In Revelation 6 everyone runs from, "the face of him who is seated on the throne, and from the wrath ("orge") of the Lamb." The picture that emerges is that Jesus was enthroned on his cross, and His Mercy is our Judgment.

If a person has not shown mercy, because they have not received mercy and loved mercy, then they are judged by that mercy which consumes them as the fire. Judgment is without Mercy for that person, because they cannot perceive God as Mercy, only Fire. They will not receive Mercy and so Mercy is Judgment upon them. All that is not of God is consumed by God. God is Love. To those who receive Him He is perceived as Mercy. To those who reject Him he burns like Fire. He is The Consuming Fire. But Yahweh, the Lord God does not change. We do. He is not 45% judgment and 55% mercy, He is One.

“For judgment is without mercy to one who has shown no mercy,” writes James, but then he declares, “**Mercy triumphs over judgment.**” Must we not declare both parts of that verse? But must we not also, let the last word be Mercy? God judges and consumes, yet it all is perfected in Mercy. Mercy is the end. Jesus is the END.

William Barclay, A Spiritual Autobiography, pp. 65-67...I believe implicitly in the ultimate and complete triumph of God, the time when all things will be subject to him, and when God will be everything to everyone (1 Cor. 15:24-28). For me this has certain consequences. If one man remains outside the love of God at the end of time, it means that that one man has defeated the love of God - and that is impossible. Further, there is only one way in which we can think of the triumph of God. If God was no more than a King or Judge, then it would be possible to speak of his triumph, if his enemies were agonizing in hell or were totally and completely obliterated and wiped out. But God is not only King and Judge, God is Father - he is indeed Father more than anything else. No father could be happy while there were members of his family for ever in agony. No father would count it a triumph to obliterate the disobedient members of his family. The only triumph a father can know is to have all his family back home. The only victory love can enjoy is the day when its offer of love is answered by the return of love. The only possible final triumph is a universe loved by and in love with God.

Karl Barth, Church Dogmatics, p. 137-138, 140-141, 143, 145-146...On this shadow side the creature is contiguous to nothingness, for this "not" is at once the expression and frontier of the positive will, election and activity of God. When the creature crosses the frontier from the one side, and it is invaded from the other, nothingness achieves actuality in the creaturely world...Nothingness is that which God does not will...This being which is alien and adverse to grace and therefore without it, is that of nothingness...And this is evil in the Christian sense, namely, what is alien and adverse to grace, and therefore with it...The grace of God is the basis and norm of all being, the source and criterion of all good. Measured by this standard, as the negation of God's grace, nothingness is intrinsically evil...He knows nothingness. He knows that which He did not elect or will as the Creator. He knows chaos and its terror. He knows its advantage over His creature. He know how inevitably it imperils His creature. Yet He is Lord over that which imperils His creature. Against Him, nothingness has no power of its own. And He has sworn fidelity to His threatened creature. In creating it He has covenanted and identified Himself with it...And therefore it is He as the first and true and indeed the only man, as the Helper who really takes the creature's place, lifting from it all its need and labour and problem and placing them upon Himself, as the Warrior who assumes the full responsibility of a substitute and suffers and does everything on its behalf. In the light of this merciful action of God, the arrogant delusion of the creature that it is called and qualified to help and save and maintain itself in its infinite peril is shown to be evil as well as foolish and unnecessary...

As God takes action on its behalf, the creature itself is summoned and empowered. It has no arrogant illusion as to its own authority or competence. It really trusts in God, perseveres in His covenant and chooses His help as the only effective good...If our thought is conditioned by the obedience of Christian faith, we have only one freedom, namely, to regard nothingness as finally destroyed and to make a new beginning in remembrance of the One who has destroyed it.

George MacDonald, Lilith, (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1895), p. 153...“Nothing will ever close that wound,” he answered, with a sigh. “It must eat into her heart! Annihilation itself is no death to evil. Only good where evil was, is evil dead. An evil thing must live with its evil until it chooses to be good. That alone is the slaying of evil.”

Karl Barth, Church Dogmatics 11.2: The Doctrine of God, p. 496...It is a serious matter to be a Pharaoh, a Saul, a Judas, an Alexander or a Hymenaeus. It is a serious matter to be threatened by hell, sentenced to hell, worthy of hell, and already on the road to hell. On the other hand, we must not minimize the fact that we actually know of only one certain triumph of hell--the handing-over of Jesus--and that this triumph of hell took place in order that it would never again be able to triumph over anyone.

IT WOULD SEEM THAT:

1. Telling God what He cannot do because of our conception of the possible is not good theology and horrendous Christianity. Jesus says that He will make “all things new.” If God said somewhere in scripture that he would not do this or that Jesus did not mean what he so clearly seems to mean as he speaks from the throne, then I would understand. However, I have not found the Bible verse that does this and undoes Christ’s statement. All arguments in the end seem to come back to what we think is possible...or dare I say it, what we want to be possible.
2. God is more merciful than us.

FEAR

Psalm 111:10...The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; all those who practice it have a good understanding. His praise endures forever!

It does seem there is a type of “fear” spoken of in scripture that is much like reverence or “awe.” Fear may be a good example of how human words cannot fully encompass the realities of God. Even so, Fear of God is the “beginning of Wisdom.” It’s like the edge of the eternal city...where the wall of fire burns all that is unholy, all that is unlove, before it enters the city of Love. I believe we have been wed to a bridegroom named Wisdom. Fear is the beginning of the wedding night but not the end.

2 Corinthians 7:1...Since we have these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit, bringing holiness to completion in the fear of God.

It's true "the fear of God is the beginning of wisdom," but fear of God is fear of love for God is love. So "the fear of God is the beginning of wisdom," but "perfect love casts out fear."

If you're a father, a good dad, you understand that. The fear of Dad is the beginning of wisdom because sometimes it's the only language the children can hear. In the beginning, fear is the only language we can hear, so the Father says to His little child, "Son, come here. Peter, look here. Don't fear the other kids on the bus. Do not fear what they think of you at church. Don't fear people. Don't fear failure. Don't fear Satan. Don't fear death. I am bigger than all of them. I am your father. You fear me. Fear only me...

And now, Peter,
now that I've got your attention,
look in my eyes,
and receive my Word.
I love you.
I die for you.
I bleed for you.
I give nations and kingdoms for you.
I weep when you weep.
I laugh when you laugh.
I beset you behind and before. I work all things for our good.
I will never leave you nor forsake you.
I forgive you.
Do not fear!
I am Love.
I am your Father." –SERMON, [The Joy of The Master](#), 9-25-05

1 John 4:17-18...¹⁷By this is love perfected with us, so that we may have confidence for the day of judgment, because as he is so also are we in this world. ¹⁸There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment (*kolasis*), and whoever fears has not been perfected in love.

Of greater theological significance is 1 Jn. 4:18: ὁ φόβος κόλασιν ἔχει, “fear contains punishment in itself.” This means that the man who lives in fear (before God) is already punished by this fear. His fear is his punishment. This thought may be linked with the express statement in Jn. 3:18 that the unbeliever is judged already. The opposite of fear is love. Perfect love is free from every fear, because perfect love for God drives out fear before Him. -*J. Schneider*, *Kittel's Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, *Kolasis*

In all of scripture, this word only appears here in I John 4:18 and in Matthew 25:46, “And these will go away into eternal punishment (*kolasis*), but the righteous into eternal life.” Isn't it a tad ironic, that Matthew 25:46 is the principle verse used to make the argument that we should fear and teach others to fear a “Hell” of endless “*kolasis*”?

“...One of the key passages is Matthew 25:46 where it is said that the rejected go away to eternal punishment, and the righteous to eternal life. The Greek word for punishment is *kolasis*, which was not originally an ethical word at all. It originally meant the pruning of trees to make them grow better. I think it is true to say that in all Greek secular literature *kolasis* is never used of anything but remedial punishment. The word for eternal is *aionios*. It means more than everlasting, for Plato - who may have invented the word - plainly says that a thing may be everlasting and still not be *aionios*. The simplest way to out it is that *aionios* cannot be used properly of anyone but God; it is the word uniquely, as Plato saw it, of God. Eternal punishment is then literally that kind of remedial punishment which it befits God to give and which only God can give.” - William Barclay, *A Spiritual Autobiography*, pp. 65-67

Hebrews 2:14-15...¹⁴Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of

death, that is, the devil, ¹⁵and deliver all those who through **fear of death** (*thanatos*) were subject to lifelong slavery.

In 1 Corinthians 15:55, where Paul quotes Hebrews 13:14 in Greek, he certainly seems to equate “thanatos” and “Sheol.” Isn’t Paul saying that it’s through the fear of death/Hades that Satan keeps people in lifelong bondage? So if we preach a fear of “thanatos,” (at least in certain ways), might we be feeding into Satan’s schemes?

Revelation 6:15-17... ¹⁵Then the **kings of the earth** and the great ones and the generals and the rich and the powerful, and **everyone**, slave and free, hid themselves in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains, ¹⁶calling to the mountains and rocks, “Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who is seated on the throne, and from the wrath (“*orge*”) of the Lamb, ¹⁷for the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand?”

They are running from Judgment. They are running from “wrath.” They are running from a slaughtered lamb lifted on a throne, just as Jesus was lifted in Judgment upon the world on his throne, his “mercy seat,” THE CROSS (John 12:31). They are running from the “orge” of the lamb. One of the definitions for this word in Strongs Lexicon is “any violent emotion.” This is the same root from which we get our word “orgasm” (Webster,s New Collegiate Dictionary: “1: an intense or paroxysmal emotional excitement.”) Isn’t it interesting that an “orgasm” can be experienced as the very height, consummation, and sacrament of the covenant of marriage or...rape. It is experienced as rape when we do not have FAITH in the character of the one who seeks to “make love” to us, because that one has not vowed himself to us in a covenant (beirit) **OR** we refuse to believe the covenant which has been made and our bridegroom’s corresponding “covenant love” (khesed).

Jesus has vowed himself to us in a covenant ratified with his blood. He is returning to receive his Bride and manifest his covenant love in all things... to fill all things. He wants us to believe, so we don’t hide in the closet on our wedding night... so we don’t hide in Sheol as he begins to draw us into his arms. Even if the “kings of the earth... and **everyone**” hide under the rocks, Sheol, He will still be Love. He will still be Savior. And will he not still, “seek and save the lost”? He is not through with “the kings of the earth” in the Revelation, and we have already read about “everyone.”

Revelation 21:23-24...“And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and its lamp is the Lamb. By its light will the nations walk, and **the kings of the earth** will bring their glory into it, and its gates will never be shut by day—and there will be no night there.”

Neither can one who wills the Good do so out of fear of punishment. In essence, this is the same thing as willing the Good for the sake of a reward. The one who wills in truth one thing fears only doing wrong, not the punishment. In fact, he who does wrong, yet sincerely wills the Good, actually desires to face the consequences - so that the punishment, like medicine, may heal him. He understands that punishment only exists for the sake of the sinner. It is a helping hand. It goads one to press on further toward the Good, if one really wills it. On the other hand, the one who is divided considers punishment or hardship as a sickness. He fears all worldly setback for there is nothing eternal in him.

True, fear deceptively offers to help us. It too offers to keep us on the right track. Yet the one who strives in fear never becomes God's friend. Fear is a deceitful aid. It can sour your delight, make life arduous and miserable, make you old and decrepit; but it is never able to help you toward the Good. The Good will not tolerate any alien helper.

Those who live in fear may indeed desire heaven but not for itself...Only one thing can help us to will the Good in truth: the Good itself. -Kierkegaard, Provocations (Farmington, PA: The Plough Publishing House, 1999), p. 37

Some people say, "If in the end everybody gets to heaven, why should I worry about being good?" Well if that's really why they're good - fear of punishment - they've never been good nor tasted the good. Some say, "Then why should I preach the gospel?" If that's really why they preach the gospel - fear of punishment - then perhaps they've never preached it. Perhaps they are only a mercenary, an employee, but not a son. Perhaps they think salvation depends on them, in which case they couldn't preach the savior. Saviors save people who need saving. Perhaps they think God is impressed with their "fear," and yet it means they do not truly KNOW him, for He is Love.

Sometimes I fear that apart from fear, I would have no motive at all. However, anything that "does not proceed from faith is sin." That would be faith in God, who is Love. And isn't love the fulfilling of the law, such that whatever is not love is sin. "He who does not love, does not know God, for God is Love" and "There is NO FEAR in love, but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with kolasis, and whoever fears has not been perfected in love. We love because he first loved us."

IT WOULD SEEM THAT:

1. We should not fear or be motivated by fear.
2. We should not preach fear.
3. We should preach the "Gospel." That means "Good News" - the slaughtered lamb is on the throne.
4. That doesn't mean that people still won't run from Him in fear. After all, He is the Judgment on all this world and on all our flesh, that world and flesh which we thought we could not live without.

And by the way it's not as if there's nothing to fear for those who don't surrender to God. Fear God. Fear the fire that cannot be quenched. Fear aions in Hades. Fear the darkness of living in this world without faith, hope, and love. But we don't have to invent fears to scare people into the Kingdom. "It's His kindness that leads us to repentance" (see Romans 2:4).

LOVE

1 Corinthians 13:1-3...¹If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. ²And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not

love, I am nothing. ³If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing...

Would God deliver up bodies to be burned, unless it was somehow for the sake of Love? How does unending conscious torture produce love or result from love?

1 Corinthians 13:13... ¹³So now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love.

2 Corinthians 5:13-15... ¹³For if we are beside ourselves, it is for God; if we are in our right mind, it is for you. ¹⁴For the **love of Christ controls us**, because we have concluded this: that one has died for all, therefore all have died; ¹⁵and he died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised.

The Love of Christ is to control us, not fear over saving our tails. When we are “consumed” by love, we forget our selves and our tails. We do good deeds and aren’t aware that we did them. “When did I see you hungry and thirsty?.” Our right hand doesn’t know what our left hand is doing. We begin to dance to the tune of God’s Love in Christ Jesus. Fear over our own tails, throws us back on ourselves, we lose sight of the Lord and sink in the storm. Satan’s only power is to psyche us out of the kingdom, that is to keep us in “lifelong bondage through the fear of death.”

Romans 5:19-6:2... ¹⁹For as by the one man’s disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man’s obedience the many will be made righteous. ²⁰Now the law came in to increase the trespass, but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more, ²¹so that, as sin reigned in death, grace also might reign through righteousness leading to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. ¹What shall we say then? **Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound?** ²By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it?

When I suggest that perhaps that “as by the one man’s disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man’s obedience the many will be made righteous,” people inevitably say, “Well then, if everybody gets in, why should I preach the gospel, why should I worry about sin?” Maybe they don’t even know the gospel and what they speak IS SIN! If we only “avoid sin” and do “good deeds” to save our tails from “Hell,” we are sin, never do good deeds, and are already in the bondage of “Hell.” Good deeds are never done by mercenaries. “Whatever does not proceed from faith is sin” (Romans 14:23). “Anyone who does not love does not know God, for God is Love” (1 John 4:8). “For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything, but only faith working through love.” (Galatians 5:6)

And by the way, Jesus bears our sin. We may not go to “Hell” (Hades or Gehenna), but Jesus does. Every time we sin we pound the nails in his hands and feet, drive Him into the outer darkness and cast Him into the consuming Fire bearing our sin. And do we preach the Gospel in order to save people from “Hell.” Well yes we want to save people from the despair of Hades and the Torment of being cast to the fire, but do we think that we’re the savior, and is that why we’re called to preach?

1. No one’s salvation is dependent upon you, praise God! You are not the savior! It is the gift of the savior that you might be his vessel (James 5:20).

2. We preach because we have been called to “live to the praise of His Glory” (Ephesians 1:12). All evangelism is worship! Preaching is the obedience of faith, not the desperation of fear. When we preach in the desperation of fear, we lie about the gospel.
3. Even if God does “save everyone” in the end. Isn’t the gospel good news now? How sad if our faith is only that we could get something later, like the seventy virgins of the Moslems. Isn’t the knowledge of God’s love the greatest news any ear could ever hear? In this life people are set free from sin, fear, shame, self-hatred, confusion, and despair, the oppression of demonic spirits, and even sickness and disease. Do we have to invent eternal terrors to make Jesus good news?
4. And even if God saves everyone in the end, perhaps salvation now saves a person from aions in Hades. I think it does save them from the agony of having the “Hell” burned out of them by the fire or perhaps being extinguished by the fire.
5. Even more, I strongly suspect that Jesus has descended into every hades. He is there suffering in the darkness with those who are in bondage to death, such that when you preach the gospel unto the least of these and you preach it to Him, you become Jesus incarnate come to Jesus in the bondage of death. That’s mind boggling, yet I believe it’s the testimony of scripture, and it’s what I’ve witnessed in ministry. Jesus suffers in the darkness of lives cut off from His Glory. Minister to Him in the power of His own Spirit, and you participate in the Love which exists in the interior of the Trinity.

IT WOULD SEEM THAT:

1. We are to be motivated solely by Love.
2. To be motivated by fear is to confess lack of faith in the gospel.
3. To renounce sin in order to keep your tail out of “Hell” is sin.
4. To preach the gospel because you need to save people from “Hell” is to preach against the gospel.

SOME MORE INTRIGUING VERSES

Luke 14:22-24...²²And the servant said, ‘Sir, what you commanded has been done, and still there is room.’ ²³And the master said to the servant, ‘Go out to the highways and hedges and compel people to come in, that my house may be filled. ²⁴For I tell you, none of those men who were invited (Greek: “having been called”) shall taste my banquet.’”

This is a parable. Because the men in the story will not taste the King’s Banquet, does that necessarily imply that “Hell” is eternal conscious torment, or that these men may not be annihilated, or that because they miss this banquet they will never have another? Jesus doesn’t even state that the men in this story have an exact equivalent with a group of men in this world.

Actually, I suspect they do have an equivalence with a group of men in this world. That group was at least the Jews who refused the Messiah in 33AD, who then had their “city burned”

(Matthew 22:7) in 70AD. They are those that were “called” but refused the call. Paul was one of them, a Pharisee. He has this to say about those men:

“As regards the gospel, they are enemies of God for your sake. But as regards election, they are beloved for the sake of their forefathers. For the gifts and the calling of God are **irrevocable**. Just as you were at one time disobedient to God but now have received mercy because of their disobedience, so they too have now been disobedient in order that by the mercy shown to you they also may now receive mercy. For God has consigned all to disobedience, that he may have mercy on all.” (Romans 11:28-32)

It seems that pretty much all of Christ’s talk of looming judgment and condemnation was directed at Jews, the very same group for whom all those great prophecies of restoration were directed. Surely that ought to make us pause. I do not understand how some can be so adamantly pro “Israel” (as in “all Israel will be saved”) and at the same time be so pro “Hell” (as in a bunch of people are going to burn there forever).

Genesis 2:7...then the Lord God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature.

I realize that this brings up controversial arguments between Protestants and Roman Catholics, but what ever happened to that “breath” (spirit)? It descended at Pentecost as a mighty wind, but in another sense was it already there, for without it could we even be called a “living creature”? Perhaps, if by “living creature” we mean the “walking dead.” Is that the meaning here? Rev. 16:3 refers to “living creatures,” “living souls” (KJV) that die in the sea. This is the same Greek term Paul uses in 1 Corinthians 15 when he says the “first Adam became a living soul” (KJV). Paul is using the Greek term used to translate Gen. 2:7 in the Septuagint. This term “nephesh chay” is also found in Genesis 1:24 and 2:19 in reference to animals, therefore it does not seem to necessarily refer to some uniquely human spiritual capacity, but simply being alive in the normal sense. Did animals receive the “nashamah” as well, although it’s not recorded in scripture. Or was it not the “nashamah” that made us “nephesh chay.” At the fall, did we lose the “‘nephesh’ of life,” the breath, Spirit, spirit of God?

Genesis 7:22,KJV, “All in whose nostrils was **the breath (nephesh)** of life, of all that was in the dry land, died.” The antediluvians (the ones Christ preached to) had it. Job 27:3,KJV, “All the while **my breath (nephesh)** is in me, and the spirit of God is in my nostrils...” Job seems to think he had it. Job 32:8 and 34:14, “But it is the spirit in man, **the breath (nephesh)** of the Almighty, that makes him understand...If he should set his heart to it and gather to himself his spirit and **his breath (nephesh)**, all flesh would perish together, and man would return to dust.” Elihu thinks that “man” has it and that if God took it away all would turn to dust. Proverbs 20:27, KJV, “**The spirit (nephesh)** of man is the candle of the LORD, searching all the inward parts of the belly.” Wow!

So what happened to that breath? Will God forsake it? Has God forsaken it? Did it return to him? Without it we’re dead. In what sense could people be kept endlessly alive in “Hell” without that breath? Yet with that breath, they are not utterly forsaken. They may be “lost” (apollumi) but the breath, “nashamah,” Spirit of God is “lost” with them. The Word that is or rides that breath has descended into Sheol with them, as if He will not leave them nor forsake them. AND who is so arrogant that they would say to Him, “You must never rise again”?

One more verse: Isaiah 30:33, KJV, “Tophet is ordained of old; yea, for the king it is prepared; he hath made it deep and large: the pile thereof is fire and much wood; **the breath (nephesh)** of the LORD, like a stream of brimstone, doth kindle it.” It would seem that God has got “Hell” covered...literally.

1 Corinthians 15:22-24...²²For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. ²³But each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ. ²⁴Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power.

Some argue that verse 22 is diminished by verses 23 and 24. I disagree. What Paul writes reflects the order found in the Olivet Discourse (Matt. 24:3-25:46), which we preached on extensively. The disciples ask:

1. “When will these things (the destruction of the temple – Christ’s body and the Temple in Jerusalem) be?”
2. “What will be the sign of your coming (parousia?)”
3. “And of the close of the age?”

I’ve argued that these three reflect three forms of the “Parousia”:

1. The events around Jesus’ death and resurrection. Christ comes in his resurrection appearances and at Pentecost.
2. Christ comes for each of us when we die. He would come in “that generation” at the destruction of the temple.
3. He comes at the close of the age. For each of us that is the day we die. Yet the age will come to an end. Hades will be thrown in the Lake of Fire.

Karl Barth, Church Dogmatics, p. 242-243...If we find in the coming of the Resurrected, His coming in the Holy spirit and His coming at the end of the age three forms of His one new coming for all their significant differences, there need be no artificiality in explaining that these passages refer to the first and immediate form in which His coming did really begin in that generation as the Easter event and in which the two remaining forms are plainly delineated and intimated...

The outpouring of the Holy Spirit is also the parousia. In this it has not only taken place but is still taking place to-day. And as it has taken place in the resurrection and is taking place to-day in the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, it is also true that it will take place at the end of the days in the conclusion of the self-revelation of Jesus Christ.

In the passage at hand:

1. Christ is the “firstfruits” (in other texts, we are also called “firstfruits”

2. "At his 'parousia', those that belong to him. At death, believer's do not enter into judgment, but pass into life. Perhaps non-believers descend into Hades OR perhaps they immediately appear before the throne, the "teleos", the slaughtered lamb, the cross.
3. "Then comes the 'teleos', - the end, the completion, the perfection, the end of the age. At the end Hades is thrown into the Lake of Fire and death is no more.

2 Thessalonians 2:13...But we ought always to give thanks to God for you, brothers beloved by the Lord, because God chose you as the **firstfruits** to be saved, through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth.

James 1:18...Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of **firstfruits** of his creatures.

Revelation 14:4...It is these who have not defiled themselves with women, for they are virgins. It is these who follow the Lamb wherever he goes. These have been redeemed from mankind as **firstfruits** for God and the Lamb,...

If we are "firstfruits", who are "secondfruits"?

FIRSTFRUITS Firstborn child or animal or first parts of any crop that, in Hebrew thought, were considered as holy and therefore belonged to the Lord. **The firstfruits, as a foretaste of more to come**, were offered to God in thanksgiving for his goodness in providing them. Firstfruit offerings could include produce either in its natural state or prepared or processed in some way, such as dough, bread, wine, olive oil, and wool. The firstborn son and the firstborn of the animals that one owned were to be treated as belonging to God. The firstborn children and the firstborn of the unclean animals were "redeemed" (paid for) with money by the offerer, and the firstborn of the cows, sheep, and goats were offered in sacrifice to God (Nm 18:14–17). – *Tyndale Bible Dictionary, "Firstfruits"*

IT WOULD SEEM THAT:

1. "Hell" as endless conscious torment is Biblically untenable.
2. We have used this one word "Hell" to translate many different Biblical words, and two concepts that are in diametric opposition.
3. Hades/Sheol is the horrifying realm of the dead and demons. It is especially horrifying in its lowest levels.
4. "The Consuming Fire" is "The Lake of Fire and 'theion'" is the substance of God. It never ends because it is the End, Jesus.
5. Gehenna is where the trash gets burned, where death and Hades come to the End.

6. When Jesus said, “Behold I make all things new... write this down, these words are trustworthy and true.” (Rev. 21:5 RSV) he meant it. Jesus is the Word, trustworthy and true. (Rev. 19:11) Every “thing,” that is any “thing” will be made new.
7. We don’t know exactly how he will do it, for God’s judgments are “unsearchable” and “inscrutable” are his ways (Romans 11:33). Jesus is God’s Judgment, and Jesus is The Way.
8. God is One and Unchanging. We change. God is not part wrath and part love. He is not a different God at different times in different places. Yet, God is most fully revealed and perfectly revealed in Jesus Christ and Him Crucified, the revelation of Mercy.
9. We are called to worship and preach this Jesus... AND His supreme victory over ALL.
10. God is good, all the time, and someone has been filling us with fear that He is not.

THEOLOGY

Calvinism

Calvinist Doctrine is often summed up with the acronym, TULIP...**T**otal Depravity (also known as Total Inability and Original Sin); **U**nconditional Election; **L**imited Atonement (also known as Particular Atonement); **I**rrresistible Grace; **P**erseverance of the Saints (also known as Once Saved Always Saved)

I’ve heard many pastors asked, “Where do you stand regarding the five points of Calvinism?” I don’t think I’ve ever heard one affirm all five points of Calvinism, without at least expressing reticence about Limited Atonement. Most say they are “four point Calvinists”. This position is even affirmed by The Westminster Confession of Faith (as amended in 1903). Chapter 35 clearly states that God “commands all to embrace the offered mercy”. It is, “sufficient for and adapted to the whole lost race of man”. I believe that Chapter 35 is a very biblical amendment to the confession, since limited atonement is so difficult to justify biblically. (1 John 2:2, “He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.”) 1 Tim. 2:3-6, “This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all, which is the testimony given at the proper time.”

IT WOULD SEEM THAT:

1. To affirm all points of Calvinism except limited atonement is to state that eventually all will be saved. If Jesus died for all and all he died for are effectively called to salvation, then all will be saved.

THE WESTMINSTER CONFESSION OF FAITH

Chapter 9 Concerning Free Will

3. Man fell into a state of sin by his disobedience and so completely lost his ability to will any spiritual good involving salvation. Consequently fallen man is by nature completely opposed to spiritual good, is dead in sin, and is unable by his own strength either to convert himself or to prepare himself for conversion.

4. When God converts a sinner and brings him into a state of grace, He frees him from his natural enslavement to sin. By God's grace alone, freely given, sinful man is enabled to will and to do what is spiritually good. However, since the old sinful nature also remains, the believer cannot consistently or perfectly will to do what is good but also wills evil.

Chapter 10

Concerning Effectual Calling

1. At the right time, appointed by Him, **God effectually calls all those and only those whom He has predestined to life.** He calls them by His word and Spirit out of their natural state of sin and death into grace and salvation through Jesus Christ. He enlightens their minds spiritually with a saving understanding of the things of God. He takes away their heart of stone and gives them a heart of flesh. He renews their wills and by His almighty power leads them to what is good. **And so He effectually draws them to Jesus Christ. But they come to Jesus voluntarily, having been made willing by God's grace.**

2. This effectual call is freely made by God and is entirely an act of His special grace. It does not depend on anything God foreknew or foresaw about the person called, who is completely passive. God Himself gives life and renewal by the Holy Spirit. He thereby enables each person to answer His call and to accept the grace He offers and actually gives.

Chapter 35

Of the Gospel of the Love of God and Missions

1. God in infinite and perfect love, having provided in the covenant of grace, through the mediation and sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ **a way of life and salvation sufficient for and adapted to the whole lost race of man, doth freely offer this salvation to all men in the gospel.**

2. In the gospel God declares his love for the world and his desire that all men should be saved; reveals fully and clearly the only way of salvation; promises eternal life to all who truly repent and believe in Christ; invites and **commands all to embrace the offered mercy** and by this Spirit accompanying the word pleads with men to accept his gracious invitation.

Quotes by John Paul II and other Roman Catholic sources on Apokatastasis (from <http://www.romancatholicism.org/jpii-quotes.htm>):

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places’ (Eph. 1:3). These words of the Letter to the Ephesians reveal the eternal design of God the Father, his plan of man's salvation in Christ. It is a universal plan, which concerns all men and women created in the image and likeness of God (cf. Gen. 1:26). Just as all are included in the creative work of God ‘in the beginning,’ so all are eternally included in the divine plan of salvation, which is to be completely revealed, in the ‘fullness of time,’ with the final coming of Christ. In fact, the God who is the ‘Father of our Lord Jesus Christ’-these are

the next words of the same Letter-'chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. He destined us in love to be his sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace, which he freely bestowed on us in the Beloved. In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace' (Eph. 1:4-7)." (Encyclical, Redemptoris Mater 7:1)

"The Church's universal mission is born of faith in Jesus Christ, as is stated in our Trinitarian profession of faith: "I believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father.... For us men and for our salvation he came down from heaven: by the power of the Holy spirit he became incarnate from the Virgin Mary, and was made man." The redemption event brings salvation to all, "for each one is included in the mystery of the redemption and with each one Christ has united himself forever through this mystery." ... Just as "by his incarnation the Son of God united himself in some sense with every human being," so too "we are obliged to hold that the Holy Spirit offers everyone the possibility of sharing in the Paschal Mystery in a manner known to God." God's plan is "to unite all things in Christ, things in heaven and things on earth" (Eph 1:10)... It is necessary to keep these two truths together, namely, the real possibility of salvation in Christ for all mankind and the necessity of the Church for salvation... We know, however, that Jesus came to bring integral salvation, one which embraces the whole person and all mankind, and opens up the wondrous prospect of divine filiation. Why mission? Because to us, as to St. Paul, "this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ" (Eph 3:8). Newness of life in him is the "Good News" for men and women of every age: all are called to it and destined for it." (Encyclical, Redemptoris Missio 4, 6, 9, 11)

"My dear Brother Bishops, as you make your way back to your local Churches, I ask God to strengthen you in your commitment to a renewed integral evangelization, in your efforts to "present the One who inaugurates a new era of history and announce to the world the good news of a complete and universal salvation which contains in itself the pledge of a new world in which pain and injustice will give way to joy and beauty" (Pastores Gregis, 65)." (Address Of John Paul II To The Bishops Of The Philippines On Their Ad Limina Visit, Thursday, 30 October 2003)

"Dear young friends, Toronto is waiting for all of you who can make it! In the heart of a multi-cultural and multi-faith city, we shall speak of Christ as the one Saviour and proclaim the universal salvation of which the Church is the sacrament." (Message Of The Holy Father To The Youth Of The World On The Occasion Of The XVII World Youth Day, Toronto 18-28 July 2002)

Apocrypha:

"For thou canst shew thy great strength at all times when thou wilt; and who may withstand the power of thine arm? For the whole world before thee is as a little grain of the balance, yea, as a drop of the morning dew that falleth down upon the earth. But thou hast mercy upon all; for thou canst do all things, and winkest at the sins of men, because they should amend. For thou lovest all the things that are, and abhorrest nothing which thou hast made: for never wouldest thou have made any thing, if thou hadst hated it. And how could any thing have endured, if it had not been thy will? or

been preserved, if not called by thee? But thou sparest all: for they are thine, O Lord, thou lover of souls.” (Wisdom 11:21-26)

The Second Vatican Council maintained the doctrine that all will be saved in the *Apokatastasis* or *Final Restoration of All Things*. The following is taken from the constitution *Gaudium et Spes* (1:45, 2:57).

While helping the world and receiving many benefits from it, the Church has a single intention: that God’s kingdom may come, and that the salvation of the whole human race may come to pass. For every benefit which the People of God during its earthly pilgrimage can offer to the human family stems from the fact that the Church is ‘the universal sacrament of salvation’ simultaneously manifesting and actualizing the mystery of God’s love.

For God’s Word, by whom all things were made, was Himself made flesh so that as perfect man He might save all men and sum up all things in Himself. The Lord is the goal of human history, the focal point of the longings of history and of civilization, the center of the human race, the joy of every heart and the answer to all its yearnings. He it is Whom the Father raised from the dead, lifted on high and stationed at His right hand, making Him judge of the living and the dead. Enlivened and united in His Spirit, we journey toward the consummation of human history, one which fully accords with the counsel of God’s love: ‘To reestablish all things in Christ, both those in the heavens and those on the earth’ (Eph. 1:10).

...Moreover, by the impulse of grace, he is disposed to acknowledge the Word of God, Who before He became flesh in order to save all and to sum up all in Himself was already ‘in the world’ as ‘the true light which enlightens every man’ (John 1:9-10).”

The new, post-Vatican II *Catechism of the Catholic Church* also gives us to hope that all will be saved.

1058 The Church prays that no one should be lost: ‘Lord, let me never be parted from you.’ If it is true that no one can save himself, it is also true that God ‘desires all men to be saved’ (1 Tim 2:4), and that for him ‘all things are possible’ (Mt 19:26).

Universalism, Calvinism, and Arminianism: Some Preliminary Reflections

By Tom Talbott, Professor, Department of Philosophy Willamette University

When I first began interpreting the New Testament along universalist lines, I was struck by how many regarded such an interpretation as not only mistaken, but utterly unreasonable and heretical as well. I found that a good many of my Calvinist friends, who did not regard Arminianism as heretical (only mistaken), and a good many of my Arminian friends, who did not regard Calvinism as heretical (only mistaken), were united in their conviction that universalism is both mistaken and heretical. This curious response started me thinking. Why should Calvinists regard universalism as any more heretical than Arminianism?—and why should Arminians regard it as any more heretical than Calvinism?

As I reflected upon these questions, I also began to reflect upon the following inconsistent set of propositions:

- (1) It is God's redemptive purpose for the world (and therefore his will) to reconcile all sinners to himself;
- (2) It is within God's power to achieve his redemptive purpose for the world;
- (3) Some sinners will never be reconciled to God, and God will therefore either consign them to a place of eternal punishment, from which there will be no hope of escape, or put them out of existence altogether.

If this is indeed an inconsistent set of propositions, as I believe it is, then at least one of the propositions is false. Calvinists reject proposition (1); Arminians reject proposition (2); and universalists reject proposition (3). But in fact we can also find **prima facie** support in the Bible for each of the three propositions. So one day I sat down and, setting aside disputes over translation and sophisticated theological arguments, began to review the obvious.

In support of proposition (1), one might cite such texts as II Peter 3:9: "The Lord...is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance"; I Timothy 2:4: God "desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth"; Romans 11:32: "For God has imprisoned all in disobedience so that he may be merciful to all"; and Ezekiel 33:11: "As I live, says the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn away from his way and live..." All of these texts seem to suggest that God sincerely wants to achieve the reconciliation of all sinners, and that his failure to achieve this end would therefore be, in some important sense, a tragic defeat of one of his purposes.

Similarly, in support of proposition (2), one might cite such texts as Ephesians 1:11: God "accomplishes all things according to the counsel of his own will"; Job 42:2: "I know that thou canst do all things, and that no purpose of thine can be thwarted"; Psalm 115:3: "Our God is in the heavens; he does whatever he pleases"; and Isaiah 46:10b & 11b: "My counsel shall stand, and I will accomplish all my purpose...I have spoken, and I will bring it to pass; I have purposed, and I will do it." These texts seem to imply that God is able to accomplish all of his purposes—including, therefore, all of his redemptive purposes. And in addition to these texts, a number of others seem to imply that God has both the will and the power to bring all things into subjection to Christ (I Corinthians 15:27-28), to reconcile all things in Christ (Colossians 1:20), and to bring acquittal and life to all persons through Christ (Romans 5:18).

But finally, in support of proposition (3), one might also cite such texts as Matthew 25:46: "And they will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life"; II Thessalonians 1:9: "They shall suffer the punishment of eternal destruction and exclusion from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might . . ."; and Ephesians 5:5: "Be sure of this, that no immoral or impure man, or one who is covetous (that is, an idolater), has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God." These texts may seem to imply that at least some persons will be lost forever and thus never be reconciled to God.

After a quick review of these texts in my own mind, one point struck me as altogether obvious: Anyone who takes a position with respect to our three propositions—whether the person be a Calvinist, an Arminian, or a universalist—will end up denying a proposition for which there is at least some *prima facie* biblical support. And in that respect universalism is no different from either Calvinism or Arminianism. So I found myself, at this point, wanting to put several questions to those who would simply dismiss universalism as heretical: If it is not heretical for the Arminians to believe that God, being unlimited in love, at least wills (or sincerely desires) the salvation of all (proposition (1)), why should it be heretical for the universalists to believe this as well?—and if it is not heretical for the Calvinists to believe that God, being almighty, will in the end accomplish all of his redemptive purposes (proposition (2)), why should it be heretical for the universalists to believe this as well? And finally, if it is not heretical to accept proposition (1), as the Arminians do, and not heretical to accept proposition (2), as the Calvinists do, why should it be heretical to accept both (1) and (2)?

Now as a matter of logic, there is a possible answer to this last question. If the biblical warrant for proposition (3), or a doctrine of everlasting separation, were overwhelmingly greater than that for the other two propositions, then one might conclude that only (3) could not reasonably be rejected. But nothing like that seems to be true at all, and here, at least, is how I see the matter. The biblical warrant for proposition (1), that God wills the salvation of all, is simply overwhelming—so overwhelming that those who worry about heresy, as I do not, ought to regard Calvinism, not universalism, as heretical. The biblical warrant for proposition (2), that almighty God will eventually accomplish all of his redemptive purposes, is likewise exceedingly strong, as the Calvinists have always insisted. And proposition (3) is the weakest of the three. For only (3) seems to rest upon controversial **translations** as well as controversial interpretations; and whereas (1) and (2) seem to rest upon systematic teachings in Paul, the texts cited on behalf of (3) are typically lifted from contexts of parable, hyperbole, and great symbolism.

Others will no doubt assess matters differently. But to those who claim, as many do, that everlasting punishment is clearly and unmistakably taught in the New Testament, I would put this question: Which of our other two propositions would you then reject? Would you deny that God wills (or sincerely desires) the salvation of all human beings?—or would you deny that he has the power to accomplish his will in this matter? And finally, why do you believe that the biblical warrant for proposition (3) is stronger than that for propositions (1) and (2)? It is not enough, in other words, merely to cite the standard proof-texts in support of (3). For if (3) is true, then either (1) or (2) is false. To provide a full biblical defense for a doctrine of everlasting punishment, therefore, one must show that the biblical warrant for (3) is stronger than that for (1) or stronger than that for (2)—a daunting task indeed! And I know of no one who has even tried to build any such comparative case as that. So why do so many regard it as heretical to reject a doctrine of everlasting punishment, but not heretical to limit God's love or to limit his power? Which view does more, in the end, to undermine the glory and the majesty of God? (From www.tentmaker.org)

CHURCH HISTORY

By the fifth century AD, the church had pretty much abandoned the Scriptures. The Scriptures were translated into Latin by Jerome who introduced many mistakes in the translation. Later, the people were forbidden to read the Scriptures in any language including Latin. During this period, the church incorporated thousands of pagan doctrines, rituals and traditions that, according to Jesus “made the word of God of no effect.” (Matt. 15:6-9) While the Protestant church has discarded many of those traditions that nullify the plain word of God, it still has much Dark Age baggage on its back. Some of that baggage got into some of our English Bible translations. The “lying pen of the scribes” (Jer. 8:8, NIV) added some of that Dark Age theology to our Bible versions. They put mythological characters like unicorns and satyrs into translations like the KJV even though we know today such creatures never existed. But the King James translators believed in them in seventeenth century England and so we have in some translations many things NOT found in the Hebrew or Greek.

The biggest tradition of fallen men that translators added to some Bible translations was the pagan teaching of a Hell of everlasting punishment. The word “Hell” comes from Teutonic mythology, NOT from the sacred Hebrew and Greek Scriptures. Most Christians do not even know there are major differences between English Bible translations. Most do not know there are many translations that do NOT contain the concept of a hell of eternal punishment. Here are a few of them: Young’s Literal, Rotherham’s Emphasized, Weymouth’s N.T. in Modern Speech, Concordant Literal N.T., 20th Century N.T. as well as many more. While not popular in Hell-teaching circles, these Bibles can be ordered through most Christian book stores.

Clearly, the early believers of Christ and the church leaders taught universal salvation. St. Basil the Great, writing in the fourth century wrote, “The mass of men (Christians) say that there is to be an end of punishment to those who are punished.” (De Asceticis) St. Jerome wrote in the same century, “I know that most persons understand by the story of Nineveh and its king, the ultimate forgiveness of the devil and all rational creatures.” St. Augustine, while himself teaching eternal torment wrote, “There are very many (imo quam plurimi, which can be translated majority) who though not denying the Holy Scriptures, do not believe in endless torments.” (Enchiridion, ad Laurent)

An honest look at history shows that the majority of the early church believed that all would eventually be saved. The Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge by Schaff-Herzog says in volume 12, page 96, “In the first five or six centuries of Christianity there were six theological schools, of which four (Alexandria, Antioch, Caesarea, and Edessa, or Nisibis) were Universalist; one (Ephesus) accepted conditional mortality; one (Carthage or Rome) taught endless punishment of the wicked.” A most crucial and important point in church history: when Emperor Constantine militarized and politicalized the church, the teaching of Hell became a more powerful weapon of control than a loving God who loved all mankind. At that point the teaching of universal salvation began to be stamped out through severe persecution. The result? The church created what we now call “The Dark Ages.”

Before the Dark Ages, the church was vibrant with the teaching of God's love for all mankind. The second major church council composed of hundreds of bishops from the entire church met in Constantinople in 381 AD and elected Gregory of Nazianzus, an avowed Universalist, as president proving clearly that the great majority of the church leadership at the end of the fourth century believed in universal salvation. – Gary Amirault, www.tentmaker.org (8-21-06)

Origen



Stronger than all the evils in the soul is the Word, and the healing power that dwells in Him, and this healing He applies, according to the will of God, to everyman. The consummation of all things is the destruction of evil...to quote Zephaniah: "My determination to gather the nations, that I am assemble the kings, to pour upon them mine indignation, even say all my fierce anger, for all the earth shall be devoured with the fire of my jealousy. For then will I turn to the people a pure language that they may all call upon the name of the Lord, to serve Him with one consent"...Consider carefully the promise, that all shall call upon the Name of the Lord, and serve him with one consent.

Seeing, then, that such is the end, when all enemies will be subdued to Christ, when death - the last enemy - shall be destroyed, and when the kingdom shall be delivered up by Christ (to whom all things are subject) to God the Father; let us, I say, from such an end as this, contemplate the beginnings of things. For the end is always like the beginning: and, therefore, as there is one end to all things, so ought we to understand that there was one beginning; and as there is one end to many things, so there spring from one beginning many differences and varieties, which again, through the goodness of God, and by subjection to Christ, and through the unity of the Holy Spirit, are recalled to one end, which is like unto the beginning. (De Principiis, Book I, Chapter 6, Sections 1 and 2, ANF, Vol 4)

When the Son is said to be subject to the Father, the perfect restoration of the whole of creation is signified, so also, when enemies are said to be subjected to the Son of God, the salvation of the conquered and the restoration of the lost is in that understood to consist." (De Principiis, Book III, Chapter 5, Section 7, ANF, Vol 4)

We think, indeed, that the goodness of God, through His Christ, may recall all His creatures to one end, even His enemies being conquered and subdued...for Christ must reign until He has put all enemies under His feet.

Clement of Alexandria



And how is He Saviour and Lord, if not the Saviour and Lord of all? But He is the Saviour of those who have believed, because of their wishing to know; and the Lord of those who have not believed, till, being enabled to confess him, they obtain the peculiar and appropriate boon which comes by Him.

"...all things are arranged with a view to the salvation of the universe by the Lord of the universe, both generally and particularly. It is then the function of the righteousness of salvation to improve everything as far as practicable. For even minor matters are arranged with a view to the salvation of that which is better, and for an abode suitable for people's character. Now everything that is virtuous changes for the better; having as the proper cause of change the free choice of knowledge, which the soul has in its own power. But necessary corrections, through the goodness of the great overseeing Judge, both by the attendant angels, and by various acts of anticipative judgment, and by the perfect judgment, compel egregious sinners to repent." --Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata*, Book 7, Chapter 2, ANF, Vol 2

1 John 2:2. "And not only for our sins,"--that is for those of the faithful, - is the Lord the propitiator, does he say, "but also for the whole world." He, indeed, saves all; but some [He saves], converting them by punishments; others, however, who follow voluntarily [He saves] with dignity of honour; so "that every knee should bow to Him, of things in heaven, and things on earth, and things under the earth;" that is, angels, men, and souls that before His advent have departed from this temporal life. --Clement of Alexandria, *Commentary on 1 John 2.2*, Fragments from the Latin Translation of Cassiodorus, ANF, Vol 2

III. The APOKATASTASIS or final restoration of all rational beings to holiness and happiness. This seems to be the most satisfactory speculative solution of the problem of sin, and secures perfect harmony in the creation, but does violence to freedom with its power to perpetuate resistance, and ignores the hardening nature of sin and the ever increasing difficulty of repentance. If conversion and salvation are an ultimate necessity, they lose their moral character, and moral aim.

Origen was the first Christian Universalist. He taught a final restoration, but with modesty as a speculation rather than a dogma, in his youthful work *De Principiis* (written before 231), which was made known in the West by the loose version of Rufinus (398). In his later writings there are only faint traces of it; he seems at least to have modified it, and exempted Satan from final repentance and salvation, but this defeats the end of the theory. He also obscured it by his other theory of the necessary mutability of free will, and the constant succession of fall and redemption.

Universal salvation (including Satan) was clearly taught by Gregory of Nyssa, a profound thinker of the school of Origen (d. 395), and, from an exegetical standpoint, by the eminent Antiochian divines Diodorus of Tarsus (d. 394) and Theodore of Mopsuestia (d. 429), and many Nestorian bishops. In the West also at the time of Augustin (d. 430) there were, as he says, "multitudes who did not believe in eternal

punishment." But the view of Origen was rejected by Epiphanius, Jerome, and Augustin, and at last condemned as one of the Origenistic errors under the Emperor Justinian (543).

Since that time universalism was regarded as a heresy, but is tolerated in Protestant churches as a private speculative opinion or charitable hope. [Schaff, P., & Schaff, D. S. (1997). *History of the Christian church*. Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.]

THE GENERAL LOVE OF GOD TO ALL MEN.

This doctrine of a divine will and divine provision of a universal salvation, on the sole condition of faith, is taught in many passages which admit of no other interpretation, and which must, therefore, decide this whole question. For it is a settled rule in hermeneutics that dark passages must be explained by clear passages, and not *vice versa*. Such passages are the following: —

"I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth, saith the Lord our God: wherefore turn yourselves, and live" (Ezek. 18:32, 23; 33:11). "And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw *all men* unto myself" (John 12:32). "God so loved the *world*" (that is, all mankind) "that he gave his only begotten Son, that *whosoever* believeth on him should not perish, but have eternal life" (John 3:16). "God our Saviour *willeth* that *all men* should be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth" (1 Tim. 2:4). "The grace of God hath appeared, bringing salvation to *all men*" (Tit. 2:11). "The Lord is long-suffering to you-ward, *not wishing* that *any* should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (2 Pet. 3:9). "Jesus Christ is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but *also for* (the sins of) *the whole world*" (1 John 2:2). It is impossible to state the doctrine of a universal atonement more clearly in so few words.

To these passages should be added the divine exhortations to repentance, and the lament of Christ over the inhabitants of Jerusalem who "would not" come to him (Matt. 23:37). These exhortations are insincere or unmeaning, if God does not want all men to be saved, and if men have not the ability to obey or disobey the voice. The same is implied in the command of Christ to preach the gospel to the whole creation (Mark 16:15), and to disciple all nations (Matt. 28:19).

It is impossible to restrict these passages to a particular class without doing violence to the grammar and the context.

The only way of escape is by the distinction between a *revealed* will of God, which declares his willingness to save *all men*, and a *secret* will of God which means to save only some men. Augustin and Luther made this distinction. Calvin uses it in explaining 2 Pet. 3:9, and those passages of the Old Testament which ascribe repentance and changes to the immutable God.

But this distinction overthrows the system which it is intended to support. A contradiction between intention and expression is fatal to veracity, which is the foundation of human morality, and must be an essential attribute of the Deity. A man who says the reverse of what he means is called, in plain English, a hypocrite and a liar. It does not help the

matter when Calvin says, repeatedly, that there are not two wills in God, but only two ways of speaking adapted to our weakness. Nor does it remove the difficulty when he warns us to rely on the revealed will of God rather than brood over his secret will.

The greatest, the deepest, the most comforting word in the Bible is the word, "God is love," and the greatest fact in the world's history is the manifestation of that love in the person and the work of Christ. That word and this fact are the sum and substance of the gospel, and the only solid foundation of Christian theology. The sovereignty of God is acknowledged by Jews and Mohammedans as well as by Christians, but the love of God is revealed only in the Christian religion. It is the inmost essence of God, and the key to all his ways and works. It is the central truth which sheds light upon all other truths. [Schaff, P., & Schaff, D. S. (1997). *History of the Christian church*. Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.]

There were a number of fathers in the early church (the first four centuries) who believed in apokatastasis, which means "universal restoration" (Acts 3:21). They believed that the real meaning of the resurrection of Christ was that God's love was so perfect and so victorious that in fact it would finally win out in every single person's life. They were so sure about this that their thought partially gave rise to the mythology of purgatory -- in or shortly after the death agony God's love will still get at you. You cannot resist such a love. Most forget that the original folk belief in purgatory represented an overwhelming sense of God's always-victorious love and mercy. Like many great mysteries, it deteriorated into its exact opposite. ...Could God's love really be that great and that universal? Is life just a great school of love? I believe it is. Love is the lesson, and God's love is so great that God will finally teach it to all of us. We'll finally surrender, and God will finally win. That will be God's "justice," which will swallow up our lesser versions. Richard Rohr, Everything Belongs, p. 131-133

Apocatastasis

Catholic Encyclopedia on CD ROM

Gr., *apokatastasis*; Lat. *restitutio in pristinum statum*, restoration to the original condition).

A name given in the history of theology to the doctrine which teaches that a time will come when all free creatures will share in the grace of salvation; in a special way, the devils and lost souls.

This doctrine was explicitly taught by St. Gregory of Nyssa, and in more than one passage. It first occurs in his "De animâ et resurrectione" (P.G., XLVI, cols. 100, 101) where, in speaking of the punishment by fire assigned to souls after death, he compares it to the process whereby gold is refined in a furnace, through being separated from the dross with which it is alloyed. The punishment by fire is not, therefore, an end in itself, but is ameliorative; the very reason of its infliction is to separate the good from the evil in the soul. The process, moreover, is a painful one; the sharpness and duration of the pain are in proportion to the evil of which each soul is guilty; the flame lasts so long as there is any evil left to destroy. A time, then, will come, when all evil shall cease to be since it has no existence of its own apart from the free will, in which it inheres; when every free will shall be turned to God, shall be in God, and evil shall have no more wherein to exist. Thus, St. Gregory of Nyssa continues, shall the word of St. Paul be

fulfilled: *Deus erit omnia in omnibus* (1 Corinthians 15:28), which means that evil shall, ultimately, have an end, since, if God be all in all, there is no longer any place for evil (cols. 104, 105; cf. col. 152). St. Gregory recurs to the same thought of the final annihilation of evil, in his "Oratio catechetica," ch. xxvi; the same comparison of fire which purges gold of its impurities is to be found there; so also shall the power of God purge nature of that which is preternatural, namely, of evil. Such purification will be painful, as is a surgical operation, but the restoration will ultimately be complete. And, when this restoration shall have been accomplished (*he eis to archaion apokatastasis ton nyn en kakia keimenon*), all creation shall give thanks to God, both the souls which have had no need of purification, and those that shall have needed it. Not only man, however, shall be set free from evil, but the devil, also, by whom evil entered into the world (*ton te anthropon tes kakias eleutheron kai auton ton tes kakias eyreten iomenos*). The same teaching is to be found in the "De mortuis" (*ibid.*, col. 536). Bardenhewer justly observes ("Patrologie," Freiburg, 1901, p. 266) that St. Gregory says elsewhere no less concerning the eternity of the fire, and of the punishment of the lost, but that the Saint himself understood this eternity as a period of very long duration, yet one which has a limit. Compare with this "Contra Usurarios" (XLVI, col. 436), where the suffering of the lost is spoken of as eternal, *aionia*, and "Orat. Catechet.," XXVI (XLV, col. 69), where evil is annihilated after a long period of time, *makrais periodois*. These verbal contradictions explain why the defenders of orthodoxy should have thought that St. Gregory of Nyssa's writings had been tampered with by heretics. St. Germanus of Constantinople, writing in the eighth century, went so far as to say that those who held that the devils and lost souls would one day be set free had dared "to instil into the pure and most healthful spring of his [Gregory's] writings the black and dangerous poison of the error of Origen, and to cunningly attribute this foolish heresy to a man famous alike for his virtue and his learning" (quoted by Photius, *Bibl. Cod.*, 223; P.G. CIII, col. 1105). Tillemont, "Mémoires pour l'histoire ecclésiastique" (Paris, 1703), IX, p. 602, inclines to the opinion that St. Germanus had good grounds for what he said. We must, however, admit, with Bardenhewer (*loc. cit.*) that the explanation given by St. Germanus of Constantinople cannot hold. This was, also, the opinion of Petavius, "Theolog. dogmat." (Antwerp, 1700), III, "De Angelis," 109-111.

The doctrine of the *apokatastasis* is not, indeed, peculiar to St. Gregory of Nyssa, but is taken from Origen, who seems at times reluctant to decide concerning the question of the eternity of punishment. Tixeront has well said that in his "De principiis" (I, vi, 3) Origen does not venture to assert that all the evil angels shall sooner or later return to God (P.G., XI, col. 168, 169); while in his "Comment. in Rom.," VIII, 9 (P.G., XIV, col. 1185), he states that Lucifer, unlike the Jews, will not be converted, even at the end of time. Elsewhere, on the other hand, and as a rule, Origen teaches the *apokatastasis*, the final restoration of all intelligent creatures to friendship with God. Tixeront writes thus concerning the matter: "Not all shall enjoy the same happiness, for in the Father's house there are many mansions, but all shall attain to it. If Scripture sometimes seems to speak of the punishment of the wicked as eternal, this is in order to terrify sinners, to lead them back into the right way, and it is always possible, with attention, to discover the true meaning of these texts. It must, however, always be accepted as a principle that God does not chasten except to amend, and that the sole end of His greatest anger is the amelioration of the guilty. As the doctor uses fire and steel in certain deep-seated diseases, so God does but use the fire of hell to heal the impenitent sinner. All souls, all impenitent beings that have gone astray, shall, therefore, be restored sooner or later to

God's friendship. The evolution will be long, incalculably long in some cases, but a time will come when God shall be all in all. Death, the last enemy, shall be destroyed, the body shall be made spiritual, the world of matter shall be transformed, and there shall be, in the universe, only peace and unity" [Tixeront, Histoire des dogmes, (Paris, 1905), I, 304, 305]. The palmary text of Origen should be referred to "De principiis," III, 6, 6; (P.G. XI, col. 338- 340). For Origen's teaching and the passages wherein it is expressed consult Huet, "Origeniana," II, qu. 11, n. 16 (republished in P.G., XVII, col. 1023-26); and Petavius, "Theol. dogmat., De Angelis," 107-109; also Harnack ["Dogmengeschichte" (Freiburg, 1894), I, 645, 646], who connects the teaching of Origen on this point with that of Clement of Alexandria. Tixeront also writes very aptly concerning this matter: "Clement allows that sinful souls shall be sanctified after death by a spiritual fire, and that the wicked shall, likewise, be punished by fire. Will their chastisement be eternal? It would not seem so. In the Stromata, VII, 2 (P.G., IX, col. 416), the punishment of which Clement speaks, and which succeeds the final judgment, constrains the wicked to repent. In chapter xvi (col. 541) the author lays down the principle that God does not punish, but corrects; that is to say that all chastisement on His part is remedial. If Origen be supposed to have started from this principle in order to arrive at the *apokatastasis*--and Gregory of Nyssa as well--it is extremely probable that Clement of Alexandria understood it in the same sense" (Histoire des dogmes, I, 277). Origen, however, does not seem to have regarded the doctrine of the *apokatastasis* as one meant to be preached to all, it being enough for the generality of the faithful to know that sinners will be punished. (Contra Celsum, VI, 26 in P.G., XI, col. 1332.)

The doctrine, then, was first taught by Origen, and by Clement of Alexandria, and was an influence in their Christianity due to Platonism, as Petavius has plainly shown (Theol. dogmat. De Angelis, 106), following St. Augustine "De Civitate Dei," XXI, 13. Compare Janet, "La philosophie de Platon" (Paris, 1869), I, 603. It is evident, moreover, that the doctrine involves a purely natural scheme of divine justice and of redemption. (Plato, Republic, X, 614b.)

It was through Origen that the Platonist doctrine of the *apokatastasis* passed to St. Gregory of Nyssa, and simultaneously to St. Jerome, at least during the time that St. Jerome was an Origenist. It is certain, however, that St. Jerome understands it only of the baptized: "In restitutione omnium, quando corpus totius ecclesiae nunc dispersum atque laceratum, verus medicus Christus Jesus sanaturus advenerit, unusquisque secundum mensuram fidei et cognitionis Filii Dei . . . suum recipiet locum et incipiet id esse quod fuerat" (Comment. in Eph., iv, 16; P.G., XXVI, col. 503). Everywhere else St. Jerome teaches that the punishment of the devils and of the impious, that is of those who have not come to the Faith, shall be eternal. (See Petavius, Theol. dogmat. De Angelis, 111, 112.) The "Ambrosiaster" on the other hand seems to have extended the benefits of redemption to the devils, (In Eph., iii, 10; P.L., XVII, col. 382), yet the interpretation of the "Ambrosiaster" on this point is not devoid of difficulty. [See Petavius, p. 111; also, Turmel, Histoire de la théologie positive, depuis l'origine, etc. (Paris, 1904) 187.]

From the moment, however, that anti-Origenism prevailed, the doctrine of the *apokatastasis* was definitely abandoned. St. Augustine protests more strongly than any other writer against an error so contrary to the doctrine of the necessity of grace. See, especially, his "De gestis Pelagii," I: "In Origene dignissime detestatur Ecclesia, quod et

iam illi quos Dominus dicit æterno supplicio puniendos, et ipse diabolus et angeli eius, post tempus licet prolixum purgati liberabuntur a poenis, et sanctis cum Deo regnantibus societate beatitudinis adhærebunt." Augustine here alludes to the sentence pronounced against Pelagius by the Council of Diospolis, in 415 (P.L., XLIV, col. 325). He moreover recurs to the subject in many passages of his writings, and in Book XXI "De Civitate Dei" sets himself earnestly to prove the eternity of punishment as against the Platonist and Origenist error concerning its intrinsically purgatorial character. We note, further, that the doctrine of the *apokatastasis* was held in the East, not only by St. Gregory of Nyssa, but also by St. Gregory of Nazianzus as well; "De seipso," 566 (P.G., XXXVII, col. 1010), but the latter, though he asks the question, finally decides neither for nor against it, but rather leaves the answer to God. Köstlin, in the "Realencyklopädie für protestantische Theologie" (Leipzig, 1896), I, 617, art. "Apokatastasis," names Diodorus of Tarsus and Theodore of Mopsuestia as having also held the doctrine of *apokatastasis*, but cites no passage in support of his statement. In any case, the doctrine was formally condemned in the first of the famous anathemas pronounced at the Council of Constantinople in 543: *Ei tis ten teratode apokatastasis presbeuei anathema esto* [See, also, Justinian, Liber adversus Originem, anathemas 7 and 9.] The doctrine was thenceforth looked on as heterodox by the Church.

It was destined, nevertheless, to be revived in the works of ecclesiastical writers, and it would be interesting to verify Köstlin's and Bardenhewer's statement that it is to be traced in Bar Sudaili, Dionysius the Areopagite, Maximus the Confessor, Scotus Erigena, and Amalric of Bena. It reappears at the Reformation in the writings of Denk (d. 1527), and Harnack has not hesitated to assert that nearly all the Reformers were apocatastasists at heart, and that it accounts for their aversion to the traditional teaching concerning the sacraments (Dogmengeschichte, III, 661). The doctrine of *apokatastasis* viewed as a belief in a universal salvation is found among the Anabaptists, the Moravian Brethren, the Christadelphians, among rationalistic Protestants, and finally among the professed Universalists. It has been held, also, by such philosophic Protestants as Schleiermacher, and by a few theologians, Farrar, for instance, in England, Eckstein and Pfister in Germany, Matter in France. Consult Köstlin, art. cit., and Grébillot, "Exposé de théologie systématique" (Paris, 1890), IV, 603.

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Eschatology and final restoration (apokatastasis) in Origen, Gregory of Nyssa and Maximus the Confessor

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The problem of the fate of evil in the last things and the question of whether the post-Apocalyptic equilibrium will allow for the restoration of the Devil, have been recurrent and quite controversial throughout Patristic tradition. The last judgment and the Second Coming of Christ signify the final victory of good over evil, but it is not always clear how this victory will take place. As several theologians keep repeating, it is always good to avoid narrow definitions for things we have no explicit knowledge or revelation about.

The fairly recent discussion on the ancient view of the toll-houses has shown exactly the nature of the problem.

Nevertheless, the problem of the restoration of all is too important to put aside, even if it has to fall under speculative theology. This issue is closely connected with the views on the nature of evil. According to most accounts by the early Christian Fathers that have written on the nature of evil, (Athanasios, Basil, and Gregory of Nyssa for instance, but also Augustine), evil does not have a real existence of its own, even more so in the eschatological future; it exists as a deprivation or perversion of good, born from the exercise of the free will, and the jealousy of Satan. At any rate, evil was not created by God, and the final state of the cosmos cannot be compromised with the post-Apocalyptic existence of evil. At the same time, Christian and pagan writers alike, such as Origen, Plotinos, Gregory of Nyssa and Proklos, have described the tendency of the fallen creation to return to its original state in almost identical terms, pointing towards a future that will be even better than the original Paradise. Therefore, the fate of humanity and the fallen angels at that time is rather problematic.

Alexandrian theology in the second/third century starts a particularly Eastern theological strand of eschatology that leads all the way to Mark of Ephesus in the fifteenth, one which differs from most Western views if not necessarily and officially on the eternity of evil, at least on the question as to where this evil is to be found and therefore comes from – in doctrinal contrast to the views of Western theologians such as Abelard, who saw the torments of hell as a punishment very often more cruel than the sins that warranted it, in a place that had specifically been created by God for this purpose, as it was believed after Augustine. The ancient as well as the late Byzantine position, certainly before the Western influences on Greek and Russian theology after the Renaissance, was that nothing evil can come from God, not even punishment. The punishment and torments of hell are only inflicted from ourselves, both in this world and in the next one. Hell and its fire is not different, essentially, from the benevolent energy of God, when experienced by the sinners. The restoration of all, at best an interesting and possible speculation though not a doctrine, is an idea not too far from all this.

Origen, the writer most commonly associated with *apokatastasis panton*, although not the first one (Clement of Alexandria was the first Christian writer to speak of the fire of Hell as a "wise" fire, the means by which sinners are purified and, ultimately, saved), saw an end to the cycle of successive worlds, predicting if not a final restoration, from which there would be no Fall, at least the possibility of it. Origen's cosmological scheme starts with the creation of the logikoi who, falling away from God undergo an ontological change to psychai (souls), and ends with the return of (all) the souls to God.

In *De Principiis* 1 VI 3 Origen argued that even the logikoi most remote from God can ascend to the human condition and from there to the angelic. He did not explicitly say that everybody will eventually be saved, but it seems he believed so, from statements like "you, reader, must judge whether this portion of the creation [the evil men and angels] shall be utterly and entirely out of harmony even with that final unity and concord, both in the ages that are *seen* and *temporal* and in those that are *not seen* and *eternal*." And further down "every rational nature can, in the process of passing from one order to another, travel through each order to all the rest, and from all to each, while

undergoing the various movements of progress or the reverse in accordance with its own actions and endeavors and with the use of its power of free will."

Origen's position follows naturally after two assumptions: that the power of free will remains to the soul after death, and that God has not created an eternal place of damnation. Augustine, on the other hand, believed hell to be eternal and also created specifically for the punishment of the sinful, and influenced, probably unfortunately, the entire Western Christian tradition. Origen saw the entrapment of the logikoi in matter, as well as the flames of hell, both as a punishment and as a means of rehabilitation, so that they can be "encouraged" to return to God. Furthermore, he writes elsewhere (*De Principiis* 2 X 8) that hell is not eternal. "There is resurrection of the dead, and there is punishment, but not everlasting. For when the body is punished the soul is gradually purified, and so restored to its ancient rank. For all wicked men, and for demons, too, punishment has an end, and both wicked men and demons shall be restored to their former rank." The whole system was recapitulated by Origen in the triad becoming, rest, movement. Nevertheless, Origen's system, at least as it was known from the works of his enemies as well as from his admirers, allowed for the return of all the fallen souls to God and their salvation, even the salvation of Satan, although it is not certain that these souls would not turn their attention away from God once more, and their fall would not be repeated again and again.

Gregory of Nyssa in *On the Soul and the Resurrection* 7 and in the *Catechetical Oration* 26 followed Origen in that the fire of hell has a purifying role and is, therefore, not eternal. He goes even further in his argument however, positing that since evil has no real existence, its "relative" existence will be completely annihilated at the end of time. According to how much the souls are attached to the material condition, purification may be instant or long and painful. Gregory compared purification by the fire of hell to the chemical purification of gold by fire, and to a muddy rope that is cleaned when passed through a small hole. Although his images seem dangerously dualist, we should not forget that evil for Gregory has no real existence, and therefore what he presents is no more than the destruction of everything that was not created by God in the first place. In both writings mentioned above, he stated his belief in the final restoration of all: "When, over long periods of time, evil has been removed and those now lying in sin have been restored to their original state, all creation will join in united thanksgiving, both those whose purification has involved punishment and those who never needed purification at all" (*Catechetical Oration* 26).

The main role of divine judgment, according to Gregory, is not to punish the sinners. Instead, it "operates by separating good from evil and pulling the soul towards the fellowship of blessedness" (*On the Soul and the Resurrection* 7). More than merely "separating," the purifying fire will melt away evil so that what is left is only good. We have to keep in mind that in several of the writings of Gregory of Nyssa on the Fall and the nature of evil, Satan is not presented as the adversary of God but as the adversary of man. In that sense, the "relative" existence of evil does not diminish God's power or goodness. Evil is directly connected with the pain experienced by sinners after the last judgment, when they are given to torture "until they pay back all that they owe." Then they will "enter into freedom and confidence" and "God will be all in all."

Gregory put forward a view of the universe, where the cosmos was created "so that the wealth of divine good things might not be idle." Our bodies are the receptacles of "good things" and as they are fed thus grow and require even more divine food. Participation in the divine is likened to a growth with no limit, nourished by God's limitless supply of goodness. This is the divine plan, and the attachment to the "material condition" is only a hindrance for this growth. Gregory, moreover, sees the final restoration in a resurrected body, made "from the same elements, but not with its present coarse and heavy texture, but subtler and lighter." This is quite important, because Gregory's metaphors often give the impression, on a first reading, that they hold matter in contempt, sounding almost dualist at times, but his view of evil and matter is decisively different from this. The "material condition" he often mentions is a condition of the soul rather than an inherent property of body matter. Gregory had an interesting view of the "material condition," or the "condition of the flesh," which is not directly associated to the original body of Adam and Eve. After the Fall, he argued, God gave Adam and Eve "garments of skin," that correspond to the fallen body and the bodily passions, but the natural, original condition of the human being is still part of the human nature, which will eventually return to it. This way Gregory maintains the ascetic ideal, but combined with a deep respect for matter itself. The ontological transformation of the body, both before the fall and after the end, are consequences of the movement of the soul away from or towards God. In that, Gregory differs significantly from Origen, whose theory of beginning and eschatology has no place for matter and the body.

Nevertheless, Gregory does not accept the restoration of all and the subsequent forgiveness of all as an inescapable necessity. Nobody will be saved without going through repentance, cleansing and forgiveness, and his view of the apokatastasis is merely the belief that everyone will be able to see truth as it is at the end, and everyone will be given the chance to repent. He never wrote anything to the effect of a blanket forgiveness of everyone, but he seems to believe that since everyone will see and understand the truth and everyone will be given the chance to repent, everyone *will*, most likely, do just that.

Now, we have to realize that although the idea of the restoration of all is a part of the Eastern spiritual tradition (even if as a hypothesis), the Church could never accept it as a doctrine because, if nothing else, its perceived determinism can lead to spiritual apathy. The theory of apokatastasis has unofficially cost Gregory of Nyssa for many centuries recognition as a theologian of the rank of Basil, Gregory of Nazianzos and John Chrysostom, and was one of the reasons Origen was anathematized. Yet in some ways it can also be found in the theology of Maximos the Confessor, a Father of the Church who has often been considered the measure of orthodoxy in doctrinal matters and the summit of Orthodox theology.

The ideas of Maximos can be connected to the concept of apokatastasis in three different ways. First, he has written some passages that pertain explicitly on the apokatastasis. Second, some issues examined in his writings can be connected with the apokatastasis, and this association has been drawn by certain scholars, but Maximos refuses to discuss them in detail, in the apophatic expression he borrowed from pseudo-Dionysios, "honoring the truth by silence." Third, Maximos' entire theological system of cosmic salvation and his views on what exactly is restored in the kind of apokatastasis

recognized by the Church, can give us a good insight to his views on the possibility of a final restoration of all.

Maximos, in *Questiones et Dubia* 19, commenting on the notion of apokatastasis as found in Gregory of Nyssa, writes that the Church knows or recognizes three kinds of restoration: The first meaning applies to the restoration of the individual through virtue; in this case restoration means the return to the primordial condition of man's goodness. The second meaning applies to the restoration of the whole nature of man during the resurrection of bodies: the ontological condition of paradisaical incorruptibility and immortality is restored. The third, and here Maximos refers specifically to Gregory of Nyssa, applies to the restoration of the powers of the soul to the state they were created, before they were altered by sin. This kind of restoration presents an interesting point for us: to what extent did Maximos share Gregory's (and Origen's) view of final restoration of all as an eschatological certainty?

First, Maximos seems to compare the restoration of the soul to the resurrection of the body: that would mean that this kind of restoration applies to all and not only to the ones who have progressed sufficiently in the course of virtue. It is an ontological restoration then, something like a consequence of the resurrection of the body. Second, restoration of the souls seems to suggest the annihilation of evil, because the effects of sin are healed. This will be achieved by the expulsion of evil from the souls in the continuation of the ages. Finally, all restored souls will come to know God and see that he is *anaitios tês hamartias*, not responsible for the existence of sin, which is the same as saying they will know the true nature of good and evil. The "perverted" powers of the soul will then cast off the memories and the effect of evil, and in a way similar to the thought of Gregory of Nyssa, this involves punishment and purification. Maximos leaves the issue there: His restoration account goes as far as to state that every soul will have knowledge of "good things" (*agatha* – probably the energies of God), but not necessarily participation in them. It is for this reason that he is sometimes thought of as not suggesting the inevitability of restoration of all. Apparently, the step after knowledge of the energies of God is left to the free will of God's creatures. Salvation of all is not an ontological necessity, although it seems to be strongly suggested as the rational consequence of the restoration of the powers of the soul. This seems to be corroborated by Maximos' writings on the transformation of man's gnostic will as a result of restoration:

[Transformation of man's gnostic will will happen] because of the general change and renewal which will take place in the future, at the end of the ages, through God our Savior: a universal renewal of the whole human race, natural but by grace.¹

This point deserves a closer examination, and we shall return to it. Modern commentators of Maximos, such as Brian Daley and Polycarp Sherwood, have located, in addition to the passage where Maximos writes directly on the apokatastasis, three other passages from the *Questiones ad Thalassium*, which most likely imply Maximos' belief in the final restoration and forgiveness of all. Two of those comments refer to the two trees in the Garden of Eden, a theme connected to the apokatastasis since Origen, and the third to the victory of Christ over evil through his crucifixion. In these passages Maximos states that there is a "better and more secret explanation, which is kept in the minds of the mystics, but we, as well, will honor by silence."

Modern commentators see this honorable silence as an implicit support of the idea of apokatastasis, that remained silent mostly for pastoral reasons. Nevertheless, Maximos never gives his clear support to the idea, and with the exception of the writings cited above, he never engages it at length. Sherwood has also noted the absence of any lengthy criticism on it, in contrast to other Origenist ideas which gave Maximos the language and the chance to develop his system. It is true, on the other hand, that there are many passages in Maximos' work that discuss the situation after the Final Judgment and speak of eternal punishment for the ones who "freely used the *logos* of their being contrary to nature."

Modern scholarship has mined the thought of Maximos in pursuit of direct or even implied support of the concept of apokatastasis rather successfully, but has perhaps overlooked one aspect that seems to take us further inside Maximos' understanding of the last things. As we mentioned previously, the third kind of restoration known by the Church, according to Maximos, the one he connected with Gregory of Nyssa, has to do with the restoration of the powers of the soul before the fall, and it is common to all people, just like the resurrection of the body. We also saw that in the passage from *Expositio in Psalm 59*, Maximos names will as at least one of the powers of the soul that will be restored. Does that mean that gnostic will (the deliberative will particular to the fallen nature) will be transformed into natural will? If so, and that seems most likely to be the case, this is the boldest statement in support of the apokatastasis that we can find in the writings of Maximos. How can it be possible not to repent and to beg for the forgiveness of God in the most profound and sincere way, once our will has been restored to the natural will which is subject to God's will? Maximos' explicit account stops at the moment when every human being has knowledge (*epignosis*) of God, even if not everyone could participate in his energies. This condition however, is going to be brought about for everyone, and has little to do with the spiritual struggle towards God. Now, how can we understand the restoration of the natural will in the human being, with everything this entails about the passions and the soul? Is it possible for human, angelic and even demonic souls at the moment of their bodily and psychic restoration to repent, be forgiven and be accepted in the kingdom of God, since they cast off their deliberative, gnostic will, and should be able to see the difference between good and evil, or will the return be restricted to the ones who repented during life on earth? This is the big question. Maximos, however, is talking about a clear knowledge of God, a disembodied, objective knowledge, which is not necessarily accompanied by a "movement of the soul," something that not only cannot be forced, but that requires the restoration of the virtues, probably necessary for salvation.

What are the problems that such an understanding of Maximos' theology would entail? First of all, if the ontological restoration of the body and the soul were to lead to forgiveness so easily, automatically perhaps, there is no point in trying to do good in this or the next life, something pointed out by most Fathers who wrote on the last things. There would be no judgment, just a blanket forgiveness to everyone. Second, if free will, gnostic or natural, is preserved after the Second judgment, there is a danger of a second fall, in an Origenist fashion, starting a new cycle of events. Maximos, quite emphatically, modified Origenist cosmology, correcting the Origenist triad of *becoming, rest, movement, into becoming, movement, rest*, indicating precisely that the final situation has to be a cosmic balance, a stable conclusion. In *Ambigua* 65 he writes

about the *ogdoad*, the eight day or the age to come, which will be the "better and endless day," which comes after "things in motion have come to rest," and he does make the distinction between the fate of the righteous and the fate of the wicked. It is possible then, that the restoration of the natural will is not sufficient to guarantee that there will be no second fall. It is no surprise that the discourse on the apokatastasis is traditionally connected to the original fall in the Garden of Eden, and the Fathers of the Church saw the original sin not as an ontological fall but as an illness that will nevertheless be concluded in a condition better – and therefore more stable – than the beginning.

How can this be compromised with the restoration of all? On the one hand Maximos foresees the restoration of the natural will and speaks of the purifying fire of the Second Coming, something that implies an end to the purification, but on the other hand he emphasizes the final rest. Perhaps the answer can be found in a comment from the *Questiones ad Thalassium* 22, where Maximos draws a distinction between the present age, the "age of the flesh," which is characterized by doing, and the age of the Spirit that will be characterized by undergoing. This suggests that the final rest will not necessarily be a static rest, but that some kind of activity is conceivable. Moreover, it is not specified if the activity of that age is limited to the righteous only, the analogy to the age of doing suggests the opposite. Is it possible then, that with the mysterious phrase "aeikinetos stasis" (ever-moving rest) that appears in his writings, Maximos envisioned a rest similar to the unification of the soul with God as described by Gregory of Nyssa, where the soul moves infinitely towards God without ever being able to reach the end of infinity, but experiencing and participating increasingly in his energies. The "undergoing" of the sinful souls then might be translated into the contrition and repentance they never had in life, which could perhaps even then bring them closer to God, while the righteous advance in their blissful participation of the divine. Something like that would be consistent with the possibility of a final restoration of all and with Maximos' views on the rest. This active rest would have to be understood as an unchangeable condition in spite of the movement or undergoing of the souls, something that would satisfy its position at the end of the Maximian cosmological triad as the conclusion. It would also mean that there won't be an ontological difference between the righteous and the wicked, as there is not one now.

Eschatology is one of the most precarious aspects of theological thought, because it tries to explain things that have not happened yet, and even when they do our language and understanding might be too limited to fathom them. The apophatic "honor by silence" in Maximos' writings, seems more correct than any treatise on the subject. The restoration of all however, a valid possibility according to the Church, although not a doctrine, has a special place in the hopes of saints who pray for the redemption of their enemies, and it expresses our hope for the charity of God. Possibly the honorable silence expresses this hope, which in spite of the danger of determinism, becomes almost a certainty in this light: If even one human being is able to forgive and pray for the salvation of the entire cosmos, wouldn't God's providence find a way to make it happen?

Notes:

1 Maximos the Confessor: *Expositio in Psalm 59*, PG 90, 857 A4-15