

Hell-Know

BIBLICALLY DISPELLING THE MYTH OF ETERNAL TORTURE

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INTRODUCTION

The bible teaches that those who reject God's message of reconciliation and gift of eternal life will be cast into the lake of fire, which is described as "the second death." This is eternal damnation – to be damned to death forever, with no hope of resurrection. The purpose of this book is to examine the Holy Scriptures to determine the precise nature of this "second death" and show why it is the soul's destruction and not everlasting torment. Thankfully, many biblically sound, evangelical Christians are now coming to realize this important scriptural truth including John Stott, Clark Pinnock and Dr. David Reagan to name a few.

Let me emphasize beforehand that there's absolutely no disputing the fact that eternal damnation is a horrifying reality in Christian thought. We should take the bible's repeated warnings of such seriously, and encourage others to do the same.

I do not attempt to prove the existence of God or the reliability of the Judeo-Christian scriptures; such issues are beyond the scope of this writing.

This study is intended for *anyone* who has an interest in finding out what the bible plainly and consistently teaches about the nature of hell and related subjects (including a fascinating exploration of human nature in Appendix B). So, whether you're a devoted Christian, a doubting Christian, an agnostic, an atheist – or simply a fellow human being who disdains all such labeling – I welcome you on this journey of discovery.

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MORE INFORMATION

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CHAPTER ONE

ETERNAL DAMNATION: What does the Bible *Really* Teach?

Traditionally, the most prominent view regarding eternal damnation is that the people cast into hell – the lake of fire – will suffer fiery conscious torments forever and ever. Depicting the horrors of this belief was a favorite subject amongst artists in medieval times, resulting in all manner of imaginative and ghastly portraits of people suffering unending agony. Some have since tried to modify this position a bit, suggesting a more metaphorical view, that the unending pain experienced probably refers to the mental anguish of eternal loss and “separation from God;” but it makes no significant difference as both views involve the notion of eternal torment.

This may indeed be the traditionally prominent view regarding human damnation, but is it *biblical*? That is, do the Judeo-Christian scriptures *really* teach it? Will the multitudes of people who reject God, and hence are rejected by God, really be subjected to *never-ending* conscious misery – with no merciful pause to their agony?

One might contend that it is heretical to even question such a long-standing, widely accepted Christian teaching, but if this doctrine is truly scriptural then its proponents have nothing to worry about. Furthermore, it is only proper that *all* doctrines, no matter how traditional or popular, be questioned in light of what the bible clearly teaches, for it is the God-breathed scriptures alone which we must look to for truth, not popularity or religious tradition. This is the theological principle of *sola scriptura*, Latin for “by scripture alone,” which maintains that the bible is the final authority regarding all judgments of Christian doctrine and practice.

Because of this sound principle many traditional doctrines and practices have proven to be false over the years and have properly been discarded. Needless to say it’s a very positive thing for Christians to periodically reevaluate their beliefs and practices because it helps prevent Christendom from straying from the biblical model. Since reevaluating official church teachings is very much a part of the Christian heritage, and is indeed a healthy practice, there should be no problem presently in simply entertaining the possibility that tradition may be in error regarding this belief of perpetual conscious torment.

Eternal Torment in Hell: The Silent Subject of the Church

I recently read in a major news magazine that this teaching of hell as eternal torture has all but disappeared from the pulpit ministry in both mainline and evangelical churches. Why is this so? Why are Christians who are committed to this doctrine so reluctant to openly and honestly preach it? Why do they mask what they really believe by saying that the unredeemed will ultimately “perish” or be “destroyed” or suffer eternal “separation from God?” Yes, you’ll hear ‘hell’ brought up now and then, but you’ll rarely, if ever, hear anyone explain what he or she *really* means when using this term – that is, suffering fiery conscious torment forever and ever with no merciful respite from the misery.

If this is so true, why is everyone so timid about spelling it out loud and clear? The answer is obvious: *they’re ashamed of it*. They’re ashamed of it because, as Clark Pinnock so aptly put it, this doctrine of eternal torture makes God out to be morally worse than Hitler “who maintains an everlasting Auschwitz for his enemies whom he does not even allow to die. How can one love a God like that? I suppose one might be afraid of Him, but could we love and respect Him? Would we want to strive to be like Him in His mercilessness?” (149). Let’s be honest here and tell it like it is: The doctrine of never-ending conscious torment makes God out to be a cruel, unjust, merciless monster. Who would possibly want to accept salvation from such a God?

Although there are many good reasons for questioning this teaching, the most important reason is the simple fact that the bible does not teach it. Contrary to the loud claims of its staunch supporters, it is *not* a scriptural doctrine, and this is being realized by a growing number of biblically faithful Christians today. The bible gives strong, irrefutable proof to any honest reader that hell, the lake of fire, signifies literal *everlasting destruction* for ungodly people,¹ not eternal conscious torment. This is the main reason *why* so many Christians of all persuasions are embracing the doctrine of everlasting destruction not because they’re “going liberal” as supporters of eternal torment claim. In other words, it’s a case of going *biblical*, not going *liberal*.

For clear proof that literal everlasting destruction is what the bible *really* teaches, let us simply turn to the pages of scripture; after all, a thorough, honest study of the bible will always reveal the truth.

¹ This view is often referred to as “conditional immortality” or “annihilationism,” but I prefer “everlasting destruction” based on Paul’s statement in 2Thessalonians 1:9. I consequently refer to it as such throughout this study.

Life and Death: The Two Polar Opposites

The apostle Paul summed up the whole matter of people's reward for sin when he wrote:

ROMANS 6:23

For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Christ Jesus our Lord.

Could anything be clearer than this text? The wages for sin is shown to be death, and eternal life is stated to be a gift from God, not something people already have. This is consistently expressed from Genesis to Revelation, notice:

MATTHEW 7:13-14

“Enter through the narrow gate, for wide is the gate and broad the road that leads to destruction and many enter through it, (14) but small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it.”

JOHN 3:16

“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.”

ROMANS 8:13

For if you live according to the sinful nature, you will die; but if by the spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live.

GALATIANS 6:8

The one who sows to please the sinful nature from that nature will reap destruction; the one who sows to please the spirit, from the spirit will reap eternal life.

PROVERBS 11:19

The truly righteous man attains life, but he who pursues evil goes to his death.¹

All these passages clearly describe the two separate destinies of the righteous and the unrighteous. The “righteous” are people who are in-right-standing with God because they've accepted his sacrifice for their sins, the “unrighteous” are those who are *not* in-right-standing with their Creator because they've rejected his offer of salvation.² The former will inherit eternal life, whereas the latter will reap the wages of sin and be destroyed.

Yet those who adhere to the eternal torture doctrine mysteriously don't accept this blatantly clear biblical truth. They don't believe that the two polar opposites are life and death; they believe the two polar opposites are eternal life in heavenly bliss and eternal life in burning torment. Sounds ridiculous, doesn't it? They may not phrase it in such an open manner, but this is what they actually believe when it comes down to it.

Eternal Life and Immortality – Only Available through the Gospel

The offer to receive eternal life as opposed to suffering everlasting destruction is what the gospel of Christ is all about. We see this plainly expressed in this passage:

2TIMOTHY 1:10

But (God's grace) has now been revealed through the appearing of our Savior, Christ Jesus, who has destroyed death and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.”

¹ See the commentary on this proverb in Appendix A if you don't believe it is applicable to us today in an absolute sense.

² It goes without saying that this description of people as “righteous” should *not* be interpreted to mean that they are “good” in and of themselves. Our own righteousness is as “filthy rags” in God's holy sight (Isaiah 64:6). To become in-right-standing with God we must let go of our *own* righteousness in acceptance of God's “gift of righteousness” through Christ – see Romans 5:17 and 2Corinthians 5:21.

Notice that life and immortality are *only available through the gospel*. What exactly is “the gospel?” The gospel literally means “good news.” Its main message is summed up in the famous passage John 3:16: “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.” Note, once again, what is clearly being contrasted in these passages: In John 3:16 *perish* is contrasted with the gift of *eternal life*; in 2Timothy 1:10 *death* is contrasted with both *immortality* and *life*, which are said to be made available through the gospel. If the eternal torture doctrine were true, these verses would be contrasting eternal life and eternal life being tortured, or immortality and immortality in fiery torment. I realize this sounds absurd, but the bible would certainly speak in such honest, blatant terms *if* this teaching were true. Or do you think God would be misleading or ambiguous about such an important issue in his Holy Scriptures?

The reason the bible doesn’t speak in such a ludicrous way is simply because this doctrine of eternal conscious torment is not a biblical teaching. The above passage, 2Timothy 1:10, makes it plain that until Jesus was raised for our justification, the power of death was *not* destroyed and hence, immortality was not available to us – life was not available to us. This is because we are all sinners (see Romans 3:23 and Ecclesiastes 7:20) and therefore all deserve death, “for the wages of sin is death.” God cannot overlook this because he is perfectly just. One person cannot pay the penalty for another because both are sinful and deserve death. The only way we can escape this imminent death penalty is if a sinless person, who does not deserve death, dies in our place (Griesmeyer 8:1).

So what did God do? Because he so loved the world and didn’t want anyone to perish, he gave his Son as a sin sacrifice in order that we may have the gift of eternal life. The difference between wages and a gift is that wages are earned while a gift is free. Jesus paid the death penalty that we’ve all earned so that we can have the free gift of eternal life. The Lord did this so that we could fellowship with him forever instead of reaping the wages of sin, which is death.

This fact that God Himself wants to have a *relationship* with us explains why the gospel is also referred to as “the message of reconciliation” (see 2Corinthians 5:17-21). The gospel is good news indeed because, not only does it grant eternal life to those who accept it, but, more importantly, it enables us to have a *relationship* with the Creator of the universe!

Notice what John the Baptist declared would happen to those who reject the gospel:

JOHN 3:36

“Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son *will not see life*, for God’s wrath remains on him.”

The passage could not be plainer: those who reject the Son “*will not see life*.” God’s word is absolute, and this is an absolute statement: Those who reject Jesus Christ *will not see any life at all*. This includes even a sadistic life in conscious agony for all eternity. Such people will be justly-but-mercifully put to death, absolute death, for this is the wages of their actions. But our loving Creator doesn’t want *anyone* to perish like this; he has provided a way to eternal life through his Son, Jesus Christ.

Do you see the simple, beautiful, clear message of the gospel here? God is just trying to save his beloved fallen creation, humanity, from the wages of sin. Ezekiel 18:32 reveals the heart of God well on this matter: “ ‘For I take no pleasure in the death of anyone,’ declares the Sovereign LORD, ‘Repent and live!’ ”

Jesus Taught Everlasting Destruction

Didn’t Jesus preach that those who reject the gospel and refuse to repent will suffer never-ending torment in hell? Many ministers adamantly insist on this, but what did Jesus say as recorded in the bible itself? By all means, let’s examine what Jesus himself taught on the issue starting with a statement we’ve already looked at:

MATTHEW 7:13-14:

“ ‘Enter through the narrow gate. For wide and broad is the road that *leads to destruction* and many enter through it, but small is the gate and narrow the road that *leads to life*, and only a few find it.’ ”

Seriously, how much clearer could Jesus possibly be here? *Destruction* is the fate that awaits the “many” that are thrown into the lake of fire, not perpetual undying torture in flames of torment. And please notice, again, that this is in contrast to *life* that will be granted to the “few.”

Jesus repeatedly made this very clear. For example, consider his simple statement, “Unless you repent, you will all likewise *perish*” (Luke 13:3,5 NASB). This mirrors Jesus’ statement in John 3:16 regarding the fact that those who believe in him “... shall not *perish*, but have eternal life.” “Perish” in both these texts is not referring to the death we all must face at the end of this present earthly life. No, Jesus is obviously referring here to a perishing that those who believe in him will *not* have to suffer – the *second* death, which takes place on the day of judgment when the damned are cast into the lake of fire. Revelation 20:11-15 verifies this; verses 14b and 15 of this passage state: “The lake of fire is the second death. If anyone’s name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.”

In Matthew 10:28 Jesus solemnly declared what would happen to people when they experience this “second death:”

MATTHEW 10:28

“Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One (God) who can destroy both soul and body in hell.¹”

Notice that Jesus is telling us explicitly what God will do to unrepentant sinful people on the day of judgment: he will *destroy both soul and body* in the lake of fire, his chosen instrument of destruction.

Jesus is dealing *specifically* here with the subject of the second death and yet he says absolutely nothing about spending eternity in undying conscious torment. If this were true Jesus would tell us to “fear the One who is able to *preserve* the soul in hell.” But this is not what Jesus taught. He didn’t teach it because it is not a biblical doctrine. *Religion* may very well teach it, but the *bible* does not. God is going to unenthusiastically issue out the wages of sin and justly destroy the unrighteous, not sadistically torture them forever. Scripture clearly states:

JAMES 4:12

There is only one lawgiver and judge, the One (God) who is able to save and destroy.

You see, God is going to do one of two things with people: he’s either going to *save* them, that is, grant eternal life to those who respond favorably to his love and gracious gift of life, or he’s going to justly but mercifully *destroy* them. He may or may not necessarily be the one who *personally* executes this sentence, but he is certainly the One who *authorizes* it. In this sense, at least, it is indeed God Himself who destroys the ungodly.

This fact that God is either going to *save* or *destroy* people based upon their freewill decision to accept or reject the gospel is clearly illustrated in this passage from Hebrews:

HEBREWS 10:39

But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who believe and are saved.

Those who believe will be *saved* from the second death and granted eternal life, those who do not will be *destroyed*, both soul and body, in the lake of fire. It’s that simple. Why do religionists insist on making this simple truth so complicated and perverse?

Do People “CHOOSE Hell”?

I’ve heard many people object to the above passages which state that God *Himself* is going to “destroy both soul and body in hell,” specifically adherents of the eternal torment view who for obvious reasons cannot take the word “destroy” literally. Their objection is that God isn’t going to destroy anyone because “people *choose* hell.” What they mean by this, of course, is that, consciously or

¹ “Hell” in this text is translated from the Greek word *Gehenna*, which is an illustrative reference to the lake of fire. We’ll examine *Gehenna* in Chapter Two.

subconsciously, people choose never-ending agony¹ Their reasoning is that we should not attribute something to God that he's not guilty of – in this case, destroying people in hell – since people choose their fate.

I've never heard anyone who truly has biblical knowledge of this subject to ever argue this point, regardless of which view they adhere to, whether eternal torment or everlasting destruction. Let me explain why:

Christians are said to be saved, but saved from what? Many Christians don't realize this but we are saved from *God's wrath* – yes, we are actually saved *from God Himself*. We saw this earlier when John the Baptist declared “whoever rejects the Son will not see life, *for God's wrath remains on him.*” Here's further scriptural verification:

ROMANS 2:5

But because of your stubbornness and your unrepentant heart, you are storing up wrath against yourself for *the day of God's wrath*, when his righteous judgment will be revealed.

ROMANS 5:9

Since we have now been justified by his (Jesus') blood, how much more shall we be *saved from God's wrath* through him?

1THESSALONIANS 1:10b

Jesus, who rescues us from the coming wrath.

1THESSALONIANS 5:9

For God did not appoint us to suffer (his) wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ.

From these texts we observe that Christians are saved from God's wrath which, according to Romans 2:5 above, will be executed on the day of judgment referred to as “the day of God's wrath.”²

Yet, what exactly is God's wrath? In the Old Testament anyone who incurred God's wrath was to suffer destruction at *his* hands (see, for example, Psalm 106:23 and Ezekiel 20:13). In the same way, when God's wrath is poured out on judgment day, whoever's name is not found written in the book of life will suffer destruction at *his* hands. That's why Hebrews 10:31 states that “It is a dreadful thing to fall *into the hands of the living God.*”

As James 4:12 above plainly states, God is either going to save people or destroy them. That's why Jesus said in Luke 12:5 to fear God because he alone has the authority and power to cast people into hell, the lake of fire. And, as shown above, what did Jesus clearly say God would do to people there? He's going to “destroy both soul and body” (Matthew 10:28). The Greek word translated as “destroy” in these two texts is repeatedly used in the bible to describe the eternal fate of the unrighteous, as we shall observe in the very next section. So there's absolutely no question that God is going to destroy people who reject his offer of salvation; this is simply the result of incurring his wrath. The question is what does “destroy” mean? Does it literally mean destroy, as I contend it does, or does it refer to never-ending torment? In either case, the uncontestable fact is that *God Himself* is the One who's doing the destroying.

There's nothing morally or judicially wrong with the fact that God is going to irreversibly destroy sinful people who reject his gracious gift of eternal life. The bible repeatedly makes it clear that the wages of sin is death, and God has also made sure that every human heart instinctively realizes this (see Romans 1:32). Thus, people who reject God's redemption through Christ in favor of living a sinful lifestyle are indeed choosing the wages of their actions, death – whether consciously or subconsciously – and God, who respects their freewill, will unenthusiastically accommodate them. He alone is the ultimate authority and giver of life, and therefore he has the authority and right to take life away – *if* he must.

¹ It must be understood that their definition of the English word 'hell' is “eternal conscious torture.” So whenever they use the term 'hell' this is what they *really* mean.

² Many people will experience God's wrath poured out on this earth during the second half of the future 7-year tribulation period, but the vast majority of unsaved humanity will not experience his wrath until the day of judgment.

After all, justice demands the execution of the penalty of the law. In this case the penalty of the law is death – eternal death – death with no hope of resurrection. The apostle Paul refers to this sentence as “everlasting destruction” (2Thessalonians 1:9). Its execution is necessary in order that God may be just. A government which never calls offenders against the law to account is contemptible and wicked. The biblical doctrine of eternal punishment is our assurance that God is essentially and unchangingly holy and just.

So, to answer the question, do people “choose hell”? Certainly not in a literal sense. After all, people are not going to willingly and gleefully jump into the lake of fire on judgment day. No, God is going to judge them, dispose of them in the lake of fire and utterly eradicate them there. Why? Not because people choose hell, but because people choose sin, and the wages of sin is death. And God, who is the ultimate authority, lawgiver and judge, is the One who will execute this death sentence. He once again may or may not necessarily be the one who *personally* executes this sentence, but he *at least* executes it in the sense that he *authorizes* it. Although, based upon the scriptural evidence, I personally believe that God Himself executes the sentence (we’ll observe support for this as our study progresses, even though the matter itself is inconsequential).

Incidentally, the very fact that some people who adhere to the view of eternal torment argue that God is not Himself guilty of tormenting people forever proves that the idea of eternal conscious torture is indeed a profoundly disturbing concept which naturally offends our moral and judicial instincts. The only way these people can accept this idea and live with themselves is by believing that their good, loving God is not the one carrying out this sadistic sentence.

“Destroy both Soul and Body” as in Complete Incineration

We’ve viewed some pretty clear biblical texts which plainly state that unrepentant sinners will ultimately perish and be destroyed. Let’s dig a little deeper and trace these words to the original language in which they were written.

The words “perish” (from John 3:16 and Luke 13:3,5) and “destroy” (from Matthew 10:28 and James 4:12) are both English translations of the Greek word *apollumi* (*ap-ole’-loo-mee*)¹ which literally means “to destroy utterly” or “to perish” (Bulinger 220; Vine 164).

Apollumi is used most often in the bible simply in reference to the natural death we all must experience at the end of our present lives – the first death. For example, notice how *apollumi* is used in this following text by Jesus’ disciples when a squall threatened their lives as they and Jesus crossed the Sea of Galilee:

MARK 4:38

Jesus was in the stern, sleeping on a cushion. The disciples woke him and said to him, “Teacher, don’t you care if we drown (*apollumi*)?”

As you can see, *apollumi* here simply refers to drowning. *Apollumi* is used 26 other times in the New Testament in reference to the first death. Likewise, Homer, in his epics of Greek antiquity, used *apollumi* chiefly of death in battle.

The apostles, like Jesus, also used this very same word, *apollumi*, in reference to the *second* death – the eternal fate of the ungodly:

1CORINTHIANS 1:18

For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing (*apollumi*); but to those who are being saved, it is the power of God.

2THESSALONIANS 2:10b

They perish (*apollumi*) because they refuse to love the truth and be saved.

2PETER 3:9b

¹ All spellings and pronunciations of biblical Hebrew and Greek words are based on *Strongs’s Exhaustive Concordance*.

He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish (*apollumi*), but everyone to come to repentance.

All these texts are indeed referring to what will happen at the second death and yet, once again, there is mysteriously no mention whatsoever of eternal burning in conscious torment. In view of such blatantly clear biblical evidence, how can adherents of the eternal torture doctrine possibly maintain their view? Their theory is that, in all these cases, the Greek word *apollumi* does not literally mean “to destroy utterly” or “to perish,” but rather that the idea is “not extinction, but ruin, loss, not of being, but of well being” (Vine 164/Pearlman 387). This theory is a good example of trying to make the scriptures line up with one’s favored doctrine rather than lining up one’s doctrine with what the scriptures literally teach.

There are a number of good reasons for rejecting this theory. First of all, the bible itself provides very certain proof of what *apollumi* really means when used in reference to the second death: *apollumi* is used by Jesus in Luke 17:29¹ to describe the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah: “ ‘But the day Lot left Sodom, fire and sulfur rained down from heaven and **destroyed** (*apollumi*) them all.’ ” Since *apollumi* is used to describe this destruction, the question must be asked: how were the cities of Sodom & Gomorrah and their inhabitants destroyed? Was the well-being of these cities merely ruined? No, Genesis 19:24–28 verifies that they were *completely burned to ashes*. This includes all the people in them, all the animals, and even the vegetation – in fact, all the land of the entire plain which these cities occupied! Peter also verifies this:

2Peter 2:6a

If he (God) condemned the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah by burning them to ashes...

“Ashes” here is the Greek word *tephroo* (*tef-ro’-ro*) which means “to incinerate, i.e. consume” (Strong 71), and *apollumi* is the Greek word used to describe this absolute incineration as shown above in Luke 17:29. My point is that *apollumi*, in this case, refers to utter destruction and perishing in the sense of complete incineration. The idea “not extinction, but ruin, loss, not of being, but of well-being” does not fit here at all because the well-being of Sodom and Gomorrah wasn’t merely ruined; these cities were completely and finally destroyed by incineration – forever obliterated!

But there’s more: Peter goes on to state that this utter incineration of Sodom and Gomorrah is an **example** of what will happen to the ungodly:

2Peter 2:6

If he (God) condemned the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah by burning them to ashes and made them an example of what is going to happen to the ungodly;

We know Peter is specifically referring here to what will happen to the ungodly on judgment day when they’re thrown into the lake of fire (the second death) because this will be the only time that *all* the ungodly will experience a fate comparable to the judgment of Sodom and Gomorrah. If the incineration of Sodom and Gomorrah is a true, trustworthy example of what will happen to the ungodly when they suffer the second death, then we must conclude that the ungodly will, in fact, be incinerated; and if it is certain that the Greek word *apollumi* definitely refers to absolute incineration in reference to the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, then it naturally follows that *apollumi* must also refer to absolute incineration when it is used in reference to the second death **because** the incineration of Sodom and Gomorrah is an example of the second death.

So as you can see, by following the hermeneutical law of allowing scripture to interpret scripture (Milne 60-61; Author 74) we have a clear understanding that the Greek word *apollumi*, when used in reference to the second death (e.g. Matthew 10:28), refers to nothing other than complete and final destruction. Thus the silly theory of “not extinction, but ruin, loss, not of being, but of well-being” is proven false.

Yet there’s much more scriptural proof that *apollumi* refers to literal destruction when applied to the second death. To start with, there are *many* other biblical words, besides *apollumi*, which describe the second death strictly in terms of complete and irreversible death and destruction...

¹ Jesus no doubt spoke in Hebrew or Aramaic during his earthly ministry, but Luke, inspired by the Holy Spirit, had his words recorded in Greek.

“The Wages of Sin is Death” not Eternal Conscious Torture

Let’s begin with the Greek word *thanatos* (*than’-at-os*). This word simply means “death” (Strong 35), the express opposite of life (see Romans 8:38) and therefore the cessation of conscious existence. *Thanatos* is most often used in the bible simply in reference to the death that all human beings must one day experience – the first death (e.g. Acts 23:29). The first death therefore refers *at least* to the cessation of conscious existence in the physical realm.

Thanatos is also used in reference to the *second* death – the destruction of both soul and body in the lake of fire. In fact the Greek word translated as “death” in the phrase “the second death” is *thanatos*. For instance, “He who overcomes will not be hurt at all by the second **death** (*thanatos*)” (Revelation 2:11b). The text refers to those who “overcome,” which is simply a reference to all true Christians (see 1John 5:4); they will not be hurt at all by the second death. The second death has no power over spiritually born-again believers because they’ve been saved from God’s wrath through Jesus’ death, burial and resurrection. That’s why Jesus said:

JOHN 8:51

“I tell you the truth, if anyone keeps my word he will never see death (*thanatos*).”

This is obviously not referring to the first death here; after all, Christians who have faithfully “kept his word” have been dying for centuries. No, this is a reference to the *second* death. Jesus’ promise is that true believers will never experience the destruction of the second death in the lake of fire. This coincides perfectly with what Jesus said in John 3:16, that those who believe in him “shall not perish but have eternal life.”

As important as it is to point out what the bible does say, I think it’s sometimes important to point out what the bible does *not* say as well. In this case, notice that Jesus does *not* say, “if anyone keeps my word he will never see eternal life in conscious torment.” Jesus doesn’t say this, does he? No, he simply states that those who keep his word will never see *death* – the second death – the destruction of soul and body in the lake of fire.

The second death is the ultimate consequence of sin. “The wages of sin is *death*” (Romans 6:23), “sin... leads to *death*” (Romans 6:16), and sin will “result in *death*” (Romans 6:21). “Death” in all these texts is the Greek word *thanatos*; and they all refer to the ultimate penalty of sin – the second death.

The bible clearly states in James 1:14-15 that “sin, when it is full-grown, *gives birth to death* (*thanatos*).” Note that sin ultimately gives birth to death, not life in everlasting conscious torment. This is again emphasized later in James:

JAMES 5:20 (NRSV)

You should know that whoever brings back a sinner from wandering will *save that sinner’s soul from death* (*thanatos*).

We clearly observe here that if a person is not brought back from the error of a sinful lifestyle, *their soul will die!* When did Jesus say a soul would die and by whom? He said that God Himself would “destroy both soul and body in hell” (Matthew 10:28). So we know this text is definitely a reference to the second death as well. Notice that a sinner’s soul is not saved from never-ending fiery torment, but from *death*. The bible’s repeatedly clear on this matter.

Let’s briefly examine some other New Testament words that describe the second death strictly in terms of death and utter destruction:

“Their Destiny is Destruction”

The Greek word *apoleia* (*ap-oe’-li-a*), which is the noun form of *apollumi*, refers to utter destruction and is often used in reference to the eternal fate of the ungodly, i.e. the second death. This is the case with the aforementioned Matthew 7:13-14 where Jesus stated “wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction (*apoleia*) and many enter through it.” Jesus spoke of this destruction in

direct contrast to the “life” that would be granted to the righteous “few;” so obviously *apoleia* is the direct opposite of life, namely death.

In 2Peter 3:7 *apoleia* is used to describe the destruction of the second death:

2PETER 3:7

By the same word the present heavens and earth are reserved for fire, being kept for the day of judgement and destruction (*apoleia*) of ungodly men.

The day of judgment is the day when ungodly people will suffer everlasting destruction. This is their “eternal punishment” as God destroys “both soul and body in hell” (please notice that I said “eternal punishment,” not “eternal punishing”).

This is the ultimate destiny of God’s enemies as Paul verifies in Philippians 3:18-19a: “For, as I have told you before and now say again even with tears, many live as enemies of the cross of Christ. *Their destiny is destruction (apoleia).*” Thus the bible repeatedly refers to God’s enemies as “doomed to *destruction (apoleia)*” or “prepared for *destruction (apoleia)*” (e.g. John 17:12b; 2Thessalonians 2:3; Romans 9:22).

Apoleia is also translated as “destroyed” in reference to the eternal fate of God’s enemies: “...they will be *destroyed (apoleia)*” (Philippians 1:28b), “we are not of those who shrink back *and are destroyed (apoleia)*” (Hebrews 10:39).

The eternal destiny of ungodly people who reject God’s love in Christ is *destruction* – they will ultimately be *destroyed*. Seriously, how much plainer could the bible be on the subject?

“They will be Punished with Everlasting Destruction”

The Greek word *olethros* (*ol’-eth-ros*) which means “destruction” (Vine 165) is used by Paul to describe the eternal punishment of the second death:

2THESSALONIANS 1:8-9 (KJV)

In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ: (9) *Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction (*olethros*) from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power.*

The first part of this text reveals that God will punish those who reject the gospel, and verse 9 reveals exactly what this punishment will be: *everlasting destruction*. This obviously refers to destruction that lasts forever and not to an endless process of destroying as supporters of eternal torment contend. To perpetually destroy without ever destroying isn’t really destruction because destruction never actually takes place. Such would be everlasting *torment* but not everlasting *destruction*.

Adherents of eternal torture also argue that if, in fact, “destruction” refers to complete extinction it would be unnecessary to describe it as “everlasting.” The reason the destruction is described as everlasting is obvious: “Everlasting destruction” is a reference to the second death. The second death is different from the first death in that everyone is resurrected from the first death to face judgment. There is, however, no such resurrection from the second death; it is a death that lasts forever – an “everlasting destruction” – destruction that lasts forever.

The text goes on to reveal that this everlasting destruction shall proceed “from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power.” This is further proof that it is God Himself, the supreme authority and judge, who will execute the everlasting destruction of the second death.

The New International Version translates verse 9 as “They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the majesty of his power.” This translation is acceptable as well, as both versions could be read together as such: God will punish the ungodly with everlasting punishment which proceeds from his presence and, consequently, removes or eradicates them from his presence forever (Fudge/Peterson 60).

To shed a bit more light on the meaning of *olethros*, the Greek word translated as “destruction” in this text, the verb form of this word, *olothreuo* (*ol-oth-ryoo’-oh*), is used in Hebrews 11:28 in reference to the death angel – “the destroyer” – who slew all the first-born of Egypt (see Exodus 12:29).

So we're talking about destruction in the sense of slaying here, which will be executed by God himself on "the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men" (2Peter 3:7).

"If You Live according to the Sinful Nature you will Die"

Let's examine yet another biblical word used to describe the second death, the Greek word *apothnesko* (*ap-oth-nace'-ko*). *Apothnesko* simply means "to die off" (Strong 14) – to cease to live – and is exclusively translated as "die," "died," "dies," "dead," "dying" and "death" in the New International Version of the bible. Unsurprisingly, *apothnesko* most often refers to the death all humans and animals must face at the end of our earthly sojourn. For instance, *apothnesko* is used in Matthew 8:32 in reference to pigs which "*died* in the water" and also in Revelation 8:9 and 16:3 in reference to millions of sea creatures which "*died*." We can confidently deduce that *apothnesko* refers to the utter cessation of life in these cases. *Apothnesko* is also used a myriad of times in reference to the (first) death of human beings (e.g. Acts 9:37).

Let's observe how *apothnesko* is used in reference to the second death in a passage already briefly viewed:

ROMANS 8:13

For if you live according to the sinful nature you will die (*apothnesko*); but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live.

Those who embrace sin and reject God will one day reap the wages of their actions; they will *die*. We know this isn't a reference to the first death because even those who "by the Spirit... put to death the misdeeds of the body" will one day die. So this a definite reference to the second death wherein God will "destroy both soul and body in hell."

Here's a case where Jesus used *apothnesko* in reference to both the first death and the second death:

JOHN 6:48-51a

"I am the bread of life. (49) Your forefathers ate manna in the desert, yet they died (*apothnesko*). (50) But here is the bread that comes down from heaven, which a man may eat *and not die* (*apothnesko*). (51) I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever."

In this text Jesus is likening himself to the "bread of life... that comes down from heaven" in comparison to the earthly "bread," manna, which God miraculously provided for the Israelites when they were wandering in the desert (see Exodus 16:15,31).

As you can see, *apothnesko* appears twice in this passage. The first time, in verse 49, it is obviously used in reference to the death which all of us humans must face at the end of our earthly lives, the *first* death, as Jesus points out that the Israelite forefathers who partook of manna, the earthly "bread," died. The second time *apothnesko* appears (verse 50) it is used in reference to the *second* death as Jesus declares that those who partake of him, the heavenly bread of life, will not die, but, as he goes on to say in verse 51, *will live forever*.

We know for certain that, in verse 50, Jesus is not referring to the first death because even people who partake of the bread of heaven – that is, accept Jesus as Lord – will one day die. No, Jesus is referring to another death – the *second* death.

We could succinctly sum up this passage as such: Those who partake of Jesus, the heavenly bread of life, will not suffer the second death, but will live forever.

Let's look at another very similar statement of Jesus' in which *apothnesko* is used:

JOHN 11:25-26

Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life, he who believes in me will live even though he dies (*apothnesko*); (26) and whoever lives and believes in me *will never die* (*apothnesko*). Do you believe this?"

Apothnesko appears twice in this passage as well; and, like the previous passage, the first time it is used in reference to the first death, the second time in reference to the second death.

For verification, note that Jesus states in verse 25 that those who believe in him will live even though they die. All Jesus is saying here is that, because he is the resurrection and the life, those who believe in him, even though they will die (i.e. suffer the first death), they will be resurrected unto eternal life. Jesus spoke of this resurrection when he stated:

JOHN 5:28-29

“... a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice (29) and come out – those who have done good will rise to *live*, and those who have done evil will rise to be condemned.”

We see two classes of people referred to in this text: “Those who have done good” will rise *to live*; this is referring to the resurrection unto eternal life spoken of in Daniel 12:2. Revelation 20:6 states that “the second death has no power over” the people who partake in this resurrection. This explains why Jesus states in John 11:26 above that believers in him “*will never die*” – they will not suffer the second death. The other class of people – “those who have done evil” – will rise to be judged and condemned. Condemned to what? Condemned to the second death where Jesus said God would “destroy both soul and body.”

As we have observed from the texts we’ve examined in this section – Romans 8:13, John 6:50 and John 11:26 – the Greek word *apothnesko*, meaning “to die,” is used to describe the second death. Why? Obviously because the people thrown into the lake of fire on judgment day *will die*. Certainly there will be a period of conscious suffering, however long or brief, and no doubt this suffering will be meted out as divine justice requires for each individual; but the final, everlasting outcome for all people thrown into the lake of fire is that they will *die*. If this were not so, the above passages would not use *apothnesko* to plainly describe the second death.

The Language of Destruction

As we have plainly seen, the usual, basic meaning of the Greek word *apollumi* – “to perish” or “destroy utterly” – is backed up by many other biblical words which likewise describe the second death strictly in terms of literal death and complete destruction.

Let us briefly review what Jesus and the apostles plainly taught would happen to ungodly people at the second death. They taught that the ungodly would *die* (John 11:26; Romans 8:13), that they would experience *death* (John 8:51; Romans 6:23; James 5:20), that *destruction* would occur (Matthew 7:13; 2Peter 3:7), that both their souls and bodies would be *destroyed* (Matthew 10:28; James 4:12), and that they would *perish* (John 3:16; 2Peter 3:9).

So there you have it in a nutshell – Jesus and the apostle’s description of the second death: *die*, *death*, *destruction*, *destroy* and *perish*. We could appropriately describe these terms as “language of destruction.” As we have seen, this “language of destruction” is consistently used to describe the eternal fate of the ungodly; *not* the language of eternal conscious torment, *not* the language of “eternal separation from God,” *not* the language of “ruin, loss, not of being, but of well-being,” but *the language of destruction*.

My obvious point here is that if the eternal fate of unrepentant sinners is to be some sort of perpetual life or existence in separation from God in utter misery and torment, God could have said so. He could have used words which have for their basic meaning “separation from God,” “existence in torment,” or “life in misery.” But he did not. He instead consistently used words which have for their general, usual, or basis meaning “die,” “death,” “destruction,” “destroy,” and “perish.” If language means anything at all, we have no choice but to conclude that the second death will be a literal death – utter, awful, complete and final (McFarland 29).

Yet, as if this consistent biblical usage of “the language of destruction” isn’t enough evidence, the bible gives numerous easy-to-understand *examples* to back it up.

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CHAPTER TWO

BIBLICAL EXAMPLES of Everlasting Destruction

In this chapter we will look at some of the more prominent biblical *examples* of literal everlasting destruction.

The Example of Gehenna: “Hell”

Let’s start with the very word ‘hell’ itself. There is only one biblical word translated as “hell” which refers to the lake of fire and is thus relevant to the *final* disposition of ungodly people: *Gehenna* (*gheh’-en-nah*). *Gehenna* is the Greek form of the Hebrew *Ge-Hinnom* which literally means “the Valley of Hinnom.” The Hinnom Valley, also referred to as *Topheth* (*to’-feth*),¹ borders Jerusalem to the south and can easily be located on close-up bible maps of Jerusalem. It is to this valley Jesus was referring to when he said, “...be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in **hell** (*Gehenna*).” Why would Jesus use this ravine located outside the walls of Jerusalem as an example of the lake of fire and the destruction that will take place there on Judgment day?

To answer this let me briefly inform you about *Gehenna*’s history: The worst of Judah’s kings practiced pagan worship in the Hinnom Valley, with child sacrifice being a particularly offensive aspect of this “worship” (2Kings 16:3; 21:6). The valley apparently became a fiery disposal dump for 185,000 Assyrian warriors slain by the LORD (see 2Kings 19:35; Isaiah 30:33 and 37:36), and, later, it would overflow with Israelite corpses as well when God judged Judah for its sins. Consequently *Gehenna* became known as “the Valley of Slaughter” (Jeremiah 7:30-34; 19:2-13). Note incidentally that *Gehenna* was known as “the Valley of Slaughter” and not “the Valley of Eternal Conscious Suffering,” a very important difference.

Needless to say, long before Jesus’ earthly ministry *Gehenna* had a negative image of sinful rebellion, fire and death.

After righteous King Josiah desecrated *Gehenna* as part of his godly reforms (2King 23:10), the valley subsequently became the perpetually smoking trash dump of Jerusalem, which it was at the time of Christ. As a necessary hygienic incinerator, *Gehenna*’s fires were kept constantly burning in order to burn up the all manner of refuse thrown in – trash, garbage, animal carcasses, corpses of despised criminals and vanquished enemies. As would be natural in such a climate, worms or maggots bred freely and preyed upon the filth, so whatever was not burned up in the fires would be devoured by maggots (Hewitt 115).

James Tabor, a professor of religious studies, commented about *Gehenna* on A&E’s *Mysteries of the Bible* segment “Heaven and Hell:”

“I’ve been to hell, many times I’ve been there and walked through it. It’s a valley on the south side of Jerusalem that anciently was a despicable place of child sacrifice – it’s mentioned in the Hebrew bible a number of times. In Jesus’ day it was a garbage dump and so the fire was always burning and the maggots working and dead animals were thrown in there. Today you walk out the gate and look down in the Valley of Hinnom – that’s hell.”

It was this very garbage dump that Jesus referred to as an *example* of the lake of fire where God will “destroy both soul and body” (Matthew 10:28). Why did Jesus feel *Gehenna* would be a good example of the second death? *Because Gehenna was a very certain symbol of destruction which all of his hearers readily understood.* We saw in Chapter One how supporters of eternal torture argue that “destroy” only refers to a ruined condition but this does not fit Jesus’ usage of *Gehenna* as an example

¹ Meaning “a place to be spat on or abhorred.”

of the second death. Every cell of every body thrown into *Gehenna* was either burned up in fire or digested by worms; a body could not be destroyed anymore completely.

The implication is clear: those who reject God's love in Christ will ultimately become God's garbage, and hence will be disposed of in God's incinerating "garbage dump," the lake of fire.

We cannot properly understand Christ's teaching about the lake of fire and eternal punishment without keeping in mind this picture of *Gehenna*. Refuse was thrown into *Gehenna* for the purpose of disposal and eradication; it was thus a perfect choice for Jesus to use as an example of the second death.

These facts make it obvious that it's not really a good practice to translate *Gehenna* as "hell" in English bibles. The reason being that the word 'hell' usually conjures up images based more on medieval mythology (e.g. Dante's *Inferno*) than on biblical fact. The common image 'hell' provokes is that of people eternally roasting in fire pits while devils poke them with pitchforks. By comparison, the biblical image of *Gehenna* is quite different: the Valley of Hinnom conjures up the image of ultimate disposal and utter eradication. It would therefore be more accurate and informative to translate *Gehenna* as "the Valley of Hinnom" in biblical texts, even though it is a symbolic reference to the lake of fire and the second death. For example, Matthew 10:28 should literally read: " 'Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in the Valley of Hinnom.' "

When this is done we get the proper impression of disposal and eradication rather than that of never-ending conscious torment. This is the impression Jesus endeavored to give.

The Examples of Weeds, Trees, Branches and Chaff – Burned Up in Fire

Jesus also used many examples of everlasting destruction in his parables to further back up his words and to clearly illustrate that God would indeed ultimately destroy the ungodly in the lake of fire.

We should take these parables seriously because the bible states that Jesus spoke in parables to reveal "things hidden since the creation of the world" (Matthew 13:35). Jesus used parables as an easy-to-understand way to reveal scriptural truths to the common people. In many of these parables natural things were used symbolically in order to explain principles of truth. For instance, the "ground" in *The Parable of the Sower* (Luke 8:1-15) represents a person's heart and the "seed" represents the word of God.

Let's observe a clear example of everlasting destruction contained in *The Parable of the Weeds* (or *Tares* in the KJV):

MATTHEW 13:24-30

Jesus told them another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed seed in his field. (25) But while everyone was sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and went away. (26) When the wheat sprouted and formed heads, then the weeds also appeared.

(27) The owner's servants came to him and said, 'Sir, didn't you sow good seed in your field? Where then did the weeds come from?'

(28) 'An enemy did this,' he replied.

The servants asked him, 'do you want us to go and pull them up?'

(29) 'No,' he answered, 'because while you are pulling the weeds, you may root up the wheat with them. (30) Let both grow together until the harvest. At that time I will tell the harvesters: First collect the weeds and tie them in bundles to be burned; then gather the wheat and bring it into my barn.' "

In verses 37-39 Jesus explains the symbolism of this parable: The owner of the field who sowed the good seed is Jesus, the "field" is the world, the "wheat" is the righteous, the "weeds" are ungodly people and the "enemy" who sowed them is the devil, the "harvest" is the end of the age, and the "harvesters" are angels. After explaining this symbolism, Jesus states:

MATTHEW 13:40

"As the weeds are pulled up and burned in the fire, so will it be at the end of the age."

Jesus is saying here that *just as* weeds are burned in the fire in his parable, so it will be with ungodly people – God’s enemies – at the end of this age on judgment day.

When literal weeds are burned, they are *burned up*. Was Jesus using a wrong example here or did he mean what he said? The obvious answer is that Jesus meant *exactly* what he said. When the ungodly are thrown into the lake of fire, they – like the weeds – will be burned up.

The above example of weeds is backed up by three other similar examples used in the gospels. In Matthew 7:19 Jesus likened the ungodly to trees: “Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.” In John 15:6 he likened those who reject him to branches: “If anyone does not remain in me, he is *like* a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned.” Similarly, in Luke 3:17 John the Baptist likened evildoers to chaff: “His (Jesus’) winnowing fork is in his hand to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his barn, but he will *burn up* the chaff with unquenchable fire.”

In all these cases, the “trees,” “branches” and “chaff” represent ungodly people – God’s enemies; and each of these combustible articles are to be “thrown (discarded) into the fire and burned.” Luke 3:17 even specifies that they will be “*burned up*.”

As is the case with the Parable of the Weeds above, the “fire” in all these examples is, of course, a reference to the lake of fire. When the ungodly are thrown into the lake of fire, they – like the trees, branches and chaff – will be burned up.

“Like Green Plants They Will Soon Die Away”

Let’s look at some similar examples of everlasting destruction used elsewhere in scripture:

PSALM 37:1-2

Do not fret because of evil men or be envious of those who do wrong; (2) for like the grass they will soon wither, like green plants they will soon *die away*.

Notice how evil people are likened to grass that will soon *wither* and to green plants that will soon *die away*.

Adherents of eternal torment would contend that this text is referring to physical death in the here in now (the first death), not to eternal death (the second death), but verses 9-13 refute this argument:

PSALM 37:9-13

For evil men *will be cut off*, but those who hope in the LORD *will inherit the land*. (10) A little while and *the wicked will be no more*; though you look for them, they will not be found. (11) But the meek *will inherit the land and enjoy great peace*. (12) The wicked plot against the righteous and gnash their teeth at them; (13) but the LORD laughs at the wicked for he knows *their day is coming*.

These verses clearly show that this is an eschatological passage – a text dealing with the ultimate fate of humankind and the world. Note how verse 9 refers to a time when evil people will ultimately be *cut off*, but “those who hope in the LORD” will *inherit the land*. Verse 11 further emphasizes that the meek will inherit the land and verse 29 adds an important detail, stating that “the righteous will inherit the land *and dwell in it forever*.” These two verses coincide with Jesus’ statement in Matthew 5:5 regarding how “the meek shall inherit the earth.” Jesus was of course referring to the *new* earth spoken of in Revelation 21:1-4.

Biblically, we know that *all* evil people will not be cut off *until* “the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men” (2Peter 3:7; Revelation 20:11-15) and that the meek or righteous will not inherit the earth forever *until* the new earth, the home of righteousness, is revealed (2Peter 3:13).

Furthermore, observe verses 10 and 13: “A little while and the wicked will be *no more*... but the LORD laughs at the wicked for he knows their *day* is coming.” Verse 10 refers to a time when *all* the wicked will be “no more;” the bible clearly reveals that the only time that this will become a reality is, once again, “the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men.” That’s why, according to verse 13,

the LORD laughs at the wicked, because “he knows their *day* coming.” What day? Why, the day of judgment, of course!

“They Will Vanish – Vanish Like Smoke”

With the understanding that Psalm 37 is essentially an eschatological passage, let’s observe verse 20:

PSALM 37:20

But the wicked will perish: The LORD’s enemies will be like the beauty of the fields, they will vanish – vanish like smoke.

First of all, note the explicit proclamation that “the wicked will *perish*.” It doesn’t say that the wicked will be consciously tormented in fire forever, but that they will perish. The rest of the text gives a natural illustration so that we may perfectly understand this perishment of the wicked: it likens God’s enemies to “the beauty of the fields” which will be burned up. Notice what it says will be the ultimate end of God’s enemies: *they will vanish – vanish like smoke*. Once again, I have to ask, how much clearer could the scriptures possibly be? The LORD’s enemies will not perpetually exist in fiery conscious torment, they’re going to be utterly consumed by fire and go up in smoke.

A similar illustration is used in the New Testament:

HEBREWS 6:7-8

Land that drinks in the rain often falling on it and that produces a crop useful to those for whom it is farmed receives the blessing of God. (8) But land that produces thorns and thistles is worthless and is in danger of being cursed. In the end it will be burned.

The “land” in verse 8, which is worthless and produces nothing but thorns and thistles, is a figurative reference to worthless Christians who profess to know Christ but bear no fruit (see verses 4-6 for verification). The land that produces a useful crop in verse 7 is an obvious reference to fruit-bearing, faithful Christians; such productive “land” will receive the blessings of God. But notice clearly what will ultimately happen to the worthless land which produces thorns and thistles: *in the end it will be burned*.

This example perfectly coincides with Jesus’ two examples which we just looked at: every tree that *does not bear good fruit* will be cut down and thrown into the fire; every branch that *bears no fruit* is cut off the vine and thrown into the fire. Likewise, the worthless land which produces thorns and thistles will be burned in the end. The purpose for burning such a field is to destroy that which is useless, not to preserve it. In the same way, ungodly people who fail to bear good fruit will be destroyed, not preserved for eternal conscious misery.

“Bring Them Here and Kill Them in Front of Me”

Continuing with the examples of literal everlasting destruction which Jesus used in his parables, let’s look at *The Parable of the Ten Minas*:

Luke 19:11-14

While they were listening to this, he went on to tell them a parable, because he was near Jerusalem and the people thought that the kingdom of God was going to appear at once. (12) He said: “A man of noble birth went to a distant country to have himself appointed as king and then to return. (13) So he called ten of his servants and gave them ten minas.¹ ‘Put this money to work,’ he said, ‘until I come back.’

(14) But his subjects hated him and sent a delegation after him to say, ‘We don’t want this man to be our king,’ ”

¹ One mina was equal to about three months wages.

The symbolism in this parable is obvious: the “man of noble birth” is referring to Jesus, the Son of God; the “distant country” where the man of noble birth goes to have himself appointed as king and then return is referring to the world; the place he would return to is heaven; the subjects who hated this newly appointed king and rejected his kingship is referring to people in this world who love sin, hate Jesus and reject his Lordship.

Now let’s skip down to verse 27 and observe what the king in this parable – again, symbolically referring to Jesus – said should be done to these subjects who hated him and rejected his kingship:

LUKE 19:27

‘But those enemies of mine who did not want me to be king over them – bring them here and kill them in front of me.’

The king having his subjects who hated and rejected him brought before him is an obvious symbolic reference to the pre-millennial judgment of Christ (Matthew 25:31-46)¹ or the white throne judgment (Revelation 20:11-15); both cases in which those who reject Jesus as Lord will be thrown into the lake of fire to suffer the second death. Notice what the king in the parable ordered should be done with these subjects who utterly rejected him – *he said that they should be brought before him and killed in front of him!*

If the destiny of ungodly people who reject Christ is eternal life being consciously tormented in the lake of fire, then Jesus would have certainly reflected it in this parable because the secondary purpose of this story was to reveal the eternal fate of those who reject the Lordship of Christ. Surely Jesus, the Son of God, could’ve easily come up with a clear way to reflect the doctrine of eternal torture in this parable (as well as his other parables). He could have said something like, “But those enemies of mine who did not want me to be king over them – bring them here and torture them in front of me, but be sure not to kill them, just torment them day and night, week after week, month after month, year after year. And all the while I’ll just kick back and pay no mind to it.” Yes, I realize how ridiculous this sounds, but I want to make it as plain as possible how absolutely absurd and unbiblical this doctrine is.

Let’s face it if a king or ruler were to actually do this in the real world, no one in their right mind would hesitate to declare them unjust, wicked and perverse, no matter how evil the subjects might be. By contrast there’s nothing wrong with a king or ruler justly, but mercifully, executing such wicked rebels.

Summing this parable up, let me emphasize that Jesus was teaching this parable in part to back up and reveal the scriptural truth of what will happen to those who reject him as Lord. What will happen to them? According to Jesus in this parable, they will be brought before the King of Kings and *killed* in front of him. This will be accomplished by simply casting them into the lake of fire wherein raging fire will consume them. Could Jesus be any clearer? His words naturally coincide with the numerous passages we’ve already looked at.

“They Will Be Thrown into the Fiery Furnace”

Jesus also likened the lake of fire to a “fiery furnace” in Matthew 13:42 and 50. Like *Gehenna*, “fiery furnace” is an excellent example of the lake of fire because it clearly indicates nothing other than complete incineration – total destruction of soul and body – as Jesus explicitly stated earlier in 10:28.

Jesus most likely got this apt figure from the Old Testament scriptures, from which he studied and preached. In the Old Testament “furnace” or “fiery furnace” is used in reference to complete incineration or refinement (e.g. Psalm 12:6) but *never* to undying conscious torment. For instance, after the utter obliteration of Sodom and Gomorrah, which is a biblical example of the second death (2Peter 2:6), Genesis 19:28 states that there was only “dense smoke rising from the land, like smoke from a furnace.”

Notice how the figure of “fiery furnace” is used in this Psalm text:

PSALM 21:9

At the time of your appearing you will make them (God’s enemies) like a fiery furnace. In his wrath the LORD will swallow them up, and his fire will consume them.

¹ Also known as “the judgment of living nations.”

There's absolutely no mistaking here that "fiery furnace" refers to being utterly consumed by raging fire as God's enemies are shown to be swallowed up and consumed by his fire, not ludicrously existing in a perpetual state of conscious agony.

In Daniel chapter three, the fiery furnace was so hot that it *killed* Nebuchadnezzar's soldiers who simply went near it as they threw the three Israelites – Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego – into it (Daniel 3:22-23). The only reason the three Israelites survived the fiery furnace was because of God's supernatural protection (verse 27).

"Furnace" was also used by the prophet Malachi in the last chapter of the last book of the Old Testament to describe the day when God will judge evildoers: "That day will burn like a furnace" and "*not a root or branch will be left to them*" for "they will be *ashes*" (Malachi 4:1-3). We will examine this text in more detail shortly.

As you can see, "furnace" in the Old Testament consistently signifies complete incineration, destruction and death, but never perpetual conscious torment.

We can confidently conclude that, if God does not miraculously intervene as he did with Daniel's three friends who were not harmed in the fiery furnace (Daniel 3:13-27), the ungodly who will be thrown into the fiery furnace of *Gehenna* will suffer the precise fate of what the enemies of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego hoped for them: death by incineration (Fudge 104-105).

Raging Fire Will Consume the Enemies of God

Which brings us to another proof text:

HEBREWS 10:26-27

If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sins is left, (27) but only a fearful expectation of judgment *and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God.*

Notice clearly that, on judgment day, raging fire will utterly *consume* God's enemies, not sadistically torture them without end. The Greek word translated as "consume" here literally means "to eat" (Strong 33) and is translated as "devour" in the King James Version. We can soundly conclude that raging fire will literally *devour* God's enemies when they're cast into the lake of fire – *consuming them wholly*.

This brings to mind James 5:1-5 which issues out a warning to rich oppressors. Verse 3 states: "Your gold and silver are corroded. Their corrosion will *testify* against you and *eat your flesh like fire.*" The word "testify" indicates that James is referring to a time of judgment; this is made clearer in verse 5: "You have lived on earth in luxury and self-indulgence. You have fattened yourselves in *the day of slaughter.*" "The day of slaughter" is, of course, a reference to "the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men" (2Peter 3:7). Notice that the day of judgment is referred to as "the day of slaughter," not "the day of the beginning of everlasting conscious torment" (sounds absurd, doesn't it?). That's because the day of judgment *is* a day of slaughter wherein the sins of God's enemies will testify against them and "eat their flesh like fire" – raging fire will utterly consume them just as Paul taught in Hebrews 10:27 shown above.

It is fitting, incidentally, that James refers to the day of judgment as the day of slaughter, since *Gehenna*, the biblical example of the lake of fire often translated as "hell," was otherwise known as "the Valley of Slaughter" (see Jeremiah 7:30-34 and 19:2-13).

Examples of God Consuming His Enemies throughout History

The New Testament declaration that, at the second death, God will utterly destroy his human enemies – soul and body – by raging, consuming fire is in perfect harmony with the *many* Old Testament historical cases of how God dealt with his enemies then. Here's one example:

LEVITICUS 10:1-2

Aaron's sons Nadab and Abihu took their censors, put fire in them and added incense; and they offered unauthorized fire before the LORD, contrary to his command. (2) So fire came out from the presence of the LORD and consumed them, and they died before the LORD.

We see here that Nadab and Abihu ignored God's commands and attempted to approach Him on their own terms. As a result "fire came out from the presence of the LORD and *consumed* them, and they *died* before the LORD." Their disregard of the LORD's will and attempt to approach Him on their own terms represents religion as opposed to Christianity. Religion is the human attempt to connect with God, whereas Christianity is God connecting with humanity through Christ. We can either do it *our* way or *God's* way, it's our choice.

The fiery consumption of Nadab and Abihu is a biblical *example* of what will happen on judgment day to people who disregard God's Word and live their lives with little or no concern of their Creator; these proud rebels are only willing to approach God on their *own* terms. On judgment day such people can expect a fire to come out from the presence of the LORD and *consume* them. They will *die* before the LORD, just as assuredly as Nadab and Abihu did.

Here are a few more examples:

NUMBERS 16:35

And fire came out from the LORD and consumed the 210 men (Korah's followers) who were offering the incense.

2KINGS 1:10

Elijah answered the captain, "If I am a man of God, may fire come down from heaven and consume you and your fifty men!" Then fire fell from heaven and consumed the captain and his men.¹

PSALM 97:2b-3

... righteousness and justice are the foundation of his throne. (3) Fire goes before him and consumes his foes on every side.

PSALM 106:18

Fire blazed among their followers (Dathan's rebellious followers); a flame consumed the wicked.

EZEKIEL 22:31

"So I will pour out my wrath on them (the sinful people of Judah) and consume them with my fiery anger, bringing down on their own heads all they have done, declares the Sovereign LORD."

Just as God dealt with his enemies in the past, so will he deal with his enemies in the future at the second advent of Christ when God's consuming fire will strike the whole earth and "Babylon:"

ZEPHANIAH 1:18

Neither their silver nor their gold will be able to save them on the day of the LORD's wrath. In the fire of his jealousy the whole world will be consumed for he will make a sudden end of all who live on the earth.

REVELATION 18:8-9

Therefore in one day her plagues will overtake her ("Babylon"): death, mourning and famine. She will be consumed by fire, for mighty is the Lord God who judges her.

(9) When the kings of the earth who committed adultery with her and shared her luxury see the smoke of her burning, they will weep and mourn over her.

¹ This exact same judgment came upon another captain and his fifty men as shown in verse 12.

As you can plainly see, the biblical fact that God is going to destroy his human enemies by a consuming fire at the second death perfectly coincides with how God has dealt with his human enemies throughout history. This is testimony to the unchanging, consistent character of God (see Psalm 102:26-27; James 1:17 and Hebrews 13:8). After all, would it not be strange and totally inconsistent with God's just, merciful character as revealed throughout history if, on judgment day, he sentenced his human enemies to never-ending conscious torment – a sadistic, unjust, merciless sentence diametrically opposed to his consistent, unchanging character? Of course it would.

Notice clearly in all the above texts that God *does not* sadistically torture these people perpetually with fire. No, the fire *consumes* them. No doubt there's an amount of terror and conscious pain to this type of execution, but it's not sadistically never-ending – it mercifully results in death.

Is this unjust on God's part? Not at all. Notice Psalm 97:2-3 above: before stating that God will judge and destroy his enemies with consuming fire, it assuredly states that “righteousness and justice are the foundation of his throne.” You see, we can always be absolutely confident of the fact that God's judgments are completely righteous and just; and God is not quick in making a judgment; he is “compassionate and gracious, *slow to anger* abounding in love” (Psalm 103:8); “he is patient... not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance” (2Peter 3:9b). Yet, there's a limit to God's patience and mercy if a stubborn person continually chooses to resist and rebel against him; and when his patience and mercy end, his judgment begins. Yet even God's judgments are balanced by his mercy and justice.

“They Will Be Ashes under the Soles of Your Feet”

The very last chapter of the Old Testament also plainly reveals how God's enemies will be utterly consumed in a fiery “furnace:”

MALACHI 4:1-3,5

“Surely the day is coming; it will burn like a furnace. All the arrogant and every evildoer will be stubble, and that day that is coming will set them on fire,” says the LORD Almighty. “Not a root or branch will be left to them. (2) But for you who revere my name, the sun of righteousness will arise with healing in its wings. And you will go out and leap like calves released from the stall. (3) Then you will trample down the wicked; they will be ashes under the soles of your feet on the day when I do these things,” says the LORD Almighty.

(5) “See, I will send you the prophet Elijah before the great and dreadful day of the LORD comes.”

So ends the Old Testament, followed by the period of 400-years silence between the testaments wherein God would not speak through scripture prophecy. Like the final chapters of Revelation, the last book of the New Testament, the final chapter of Malachi, the last book of the Old Testament, contrasts the final destinies of both the righteous and the unrighteous: For those who revere God's name, “the sun of righteousness will arise with healing in its wings.” They will experience warmth and healing in the light of His presence as He binds up their bruises, heals their wounds and wipes away every tear (see Isaiah 30:26 and Revelation 21:4).

The righteous will “go out and leap like calves released from the stall.” In other words, just as a calf leaps for sheer joy when finally turned loose into the sunlight after being confined to a stall for extended periods of time, so it will be with those who revere God's name.

As for those who do *not* revere God's name, “all the arrogant” and “every evildoer,” they will be like *stubble set on fire*; they will be burned up so completely that “*not a root or branch will be left to them*,” they will be like *ashes* under the soles of the feet of the righteous. These easy-to-understand figures eliminate any possibility of remnant or survivor. A clearer example of literal destruction could hardly be given.

Thus ends the Old Testament with the righteous ultimately rejoicing in God's salvation and eternal life, while evildoers are utterly destroyed – gone forever with no remnant or possibility of restoration.

Once again, there is no mention whatsoever of people existing forever in a perpetual state of fiery conscious torment. All we see is a clear picture of “every evildoer” being utterly and totally destroyed by raging, consuming fire.

Is Malachi 4:1-5 Applicable to Everlasting Destruction?

The above text is such a strong stumbling block to the view of eternal conscious torment that advocates of this view try to dismiss it altogether, suggesting that the text is referring to the battle of Armageddon on the day of Christ’s second advent and thus is not applicable to the second death.

In light of this contention, let’s look at all the scriptural facts and draw a sound conclusion:

First of all, the text is referring to “the day of the Lord” (verses 1,3 and 5). What is “the day of the LORD?” This phrase appears 19 times in the Old Testament and 4 times in the New Testament to express the time of God’s extreme judgment and wrath.

These 23 texts do not all refer to the same specific judgment. For instance, in Ezekiel 30:3 “the day of the LORD” refers to a near future (now historical) judgment of Egypt; in Zechariah 14:1 and 2Thessalonians 2:2 it refers to a far future judgment.

Two “day of the LORD” expressions yet remain to be fulfilled: **1.)** At the end of the 7-year tribulation period or Daniel’s 70th week (see Joel 3:14), and **2.)** At the end of the millennium (see 2Peter 3:10). Both of these specific judgments result in condemned people being thrown into the lake of fire: The pre-millennial judgment of Christ will take place at the end of the 7-year tribulation period (see Matthew 25:31-46) otherwise known as the judgment of nations; and the great white throne judgment will take place at the end of the millennium (see Revelation 20:11-15).

Malachi 4:1-5 is applicable to either of these judgments.

Secondly, Malachi 4:1-5 coincides perfectly with a text we’ve already examined, Matthew 13:40-43, which is an unquestionable reference to the second death. Observe how well these texts parallel each other:

“Surely the day is coming; it will burn like a furnace.” – Malachi 4:1a

“They (the angels) will throw them into the fiery furnace,” – Matthew 13:42

“All the arrogant and every evildoer will be stubble and that day that is coming will set them on fire.” – Malachi 4:1b

“As weeds are pulled up and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of the age.” – Matthew 13:40

“But for you who revere my name, the sun of righteousness will arise with healing in its wings.” – Malachi 4:2

“Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father.” -- Matthew 13:43

As you can see, both texts liken the lake of fire to a blazing furnace; both texts liken “evildoers” to combustible matter that will be burned up (“stubble” and “weeds”); both texts reveal that, after all evildoers are destroyed, the righteous will shine like the sun; and both texts reveal that all that will be left of the ungodly will be ashes (Malachi 4 expressly states this in verse 3; whereas Matthew 13 implies this with the figure of “weeds... burned in the fire”).

Since these are clearly coinciding texts *both* refer to the ultimate end of the ungodly in the lake of fire, the second death.

Thirdly, notice that Malachi 4:1 refers to a time when “*all* the arrogant and *every* evildoer” will be destroyed. Biblically, we know that *all* evildoers will not be destroyed until “the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men” (2Peter 3:7) when all “the wicked will be no more” (Psalm 37:10).

Fourthly, notice that Malachi 4:1 states that “Not a root or branch will be left to them” and verse 3 states that all evildoers will be “ashes.” Both verses are figurative, but the picture they’re intended to portray is clear: there will be *nothing left* of the ungodly but ashes when God’s raging fire consumes them. They will be *totally* destroyed – both soul and body as Jesus solemnly declared.

No mention is made anywhere of their souls living *forever* in a state of fiery conscious torment. If this perverse religious belief were in fact true, why would the LORD leave out something of such importance? This is *way* too significant of a detail to leave out.

Lastly, it just makes good sense that the Old Testament would sign off with a clear declaration of the *final* destiny of the righteous and the unrighteous just as the New Testament does.

In light of all this support, we can confidently conclude that Malachi 4:1-5 is indeed applicable to the subject of everlasting destruction.

The Example of Jesus' Death

The very death of Jesus Christ on the cross is an example of everlasting destruction. Jesus suffered God's wrath and died so that we don't have to. Theologians refer to this as "substitutionary death." All this means is that Jesus suffered and died *in our place*; he was sacrificed for our sakes so that we don't have to reap the wages of our sin. The bible states:

HEBREWS 2:9b

...he suffered death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.

We see here that Jesus suffered and tasted death for everyone. This is what God would have had to do to us on judgment day if Jesus hadn't suffered and died in our place. In other words *Jesus suffered the very penalty that we were to suffer*, and that penalty is suffering that ends in death.

Jesus didn't die for us so that we don't have to experience earthly death, the first death; he died for us so that we don't have to suffer *the second death*. So Christ's death on the cross is a window for us of what the second death essentially is; and the only view we see through this window is that of suffering that ends in death, not never-ending conscious torture. Unlike the ungodly people cast into the lake of fire, who will suffer *everlasting* destruction, Jesus rose from the dead "because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him" (Acts 2:24b) (Fudge/Peterson 204). God *had* to raise Jesus from the dead, otherwise we would not be justified and have the hope of eternal life (see 1Corinthians 15:12-22 and Romans 10: 9-10).

The bottom line is that Jesus "tasted *death* for everyone," he did not taste eternal conscious torture for us, he tasted death. If Jesus' substitutionary death had to consist of what supporters of eternal torture say the wages of sin is, then Jesus would have to *still* be suffering never-ending torment.

Jesus' suffering and death in our place on this earth is a picture of what the second death will be on judgment day in the spiritual realm. And the simple fact is that Jesus suffered and died; this is what people witnessed when he was horribly crucified and this is what we see today when we picture it. *Death* is what we are saved from not eternal conscious torture, for "the wages of sin is death."

Apollumi as "Lost" (the Lost Sheep and Prodigal Son)

In Chapter One we examined the Greek word *apollumi*. We saw how the usual definition of this word – "to destroy fully" (Strong 14) – is applicable to the second death of the ungodly because Jesus used *apollumi* to describe the utter incineration of Sodom and Gomorrah, which is an *example* of the second death.¹ Like many words, *apollumi* has secondary definitions; one of its secondary definitions is "lost." A good example of *apollumi* used in this manner would be Luke 19:10 wherein Jesus states, "For the Son of Man came to seek and save what was lost (*apollumi*)." In this text unredeemed people are said to be "lost" – but lost from what? And lost in what sense? Let's look at two parables wherein Jesus answers these questions.

The first parable we'll examine is *The Parable of the Lost Sheep*. As we read this passage notice how *apollumi* is translated as "lost" and "loses:"

¹ As stated in a previous footnote, Jesus no doubt spoke in Hebrew or Aramaic during his earthly ministry, but biblical writers recorded his words in Greek under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

LUKE 15:3-7

Then Jesus told them this parable: (4) “Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses (*apollumi*) one of them. Does he not leave the ninety-nine in the open country and go after the lost (*apollumi*) sheep until he finds it? (5) And when he finds it, he joyfully puts it on his shoulders (6) and goes home. Then he calls his friends and neighbors together and says, ‘Rejoice with me; I have found my lost (*apollumi*) sheep!’ (7) I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent.”

As you can see, in this parable Jesus likens an unsaved person who is lost from God to a lost sheep that has strayed from its shepherd. Obviously *apollumi* means “lost” primarily in the sense that the sheep was lost from its shepherd. But what would have ultimately happened to the lost sheep if the shepherd had not gone forth to seek and save it? Jesus doesn’t say, but he doesn’t have to. Everyone knows that a lost sheep, separated from the protective care of its shepherd, would die – prey to predators or otherwise – if not found. So the sheep was not only lost in the sense that it was lost from its shepherd, but lost in the sense that it would ultimately perish if not saved as well.

In the same way, a sinner who is lost from God will most certainly perish if not saved; they will suffer everlasting destruction of soul and body in hell. This is the second death. That’s why sinners are biblically said to be “perishing” (e.g. 1Corinthians 1:18), they’re lost from God *and on their way to ultimate perishment*.

Apollumi is also translated as “lost” in *The Parable of the Lost Son*, perhaps better known as the *Prodigal Son* (Luke 15:11-32). This popular parable tells the story of a man who had two sons. The younger son demanded his monetary share of the estate and then left for a distant country to waste his wealth on wild living. After blowing all his money he resorted to getting a job feeding pigs. At this point the story tells us how he longed to fill his stomach with the pods the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything. This is when he finally came to his senses:

LUKE 15:17-24

“When he finally came to his senses he said, ‘How many of my father’s hired men have food to spare, and *here I am starving to death!* (18) I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. (19) I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired men.’ (20) So he got up and went to his father.

But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him. (21) The son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.’ (22) But the father said to his servants, ‘Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. (23) Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let’s have a feast and celebrate. (24) For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost (*apollumi*) and is found!’ So they began to celebrate.”

As you can see, this parable is very similar to *The Parable of the Lost Sheep*. The main difference simply being that this parable is dealing with a lost *person* rather than a lost *animal*.

The Greek word *apollumi* in this parable means “lost” in the very same way it does in *The Parable of the Lost Sheep*: 1.) The wayward son was lost to his father in the sense that his relationship with him was dead – that is, they no longer had a relationship, it ceased to exist. His son was consequently as good as dead to him. That’s why he exclaimed when the son returned, “For this son of mine was dead and is alive again.” Once the father’s son returned, their relationship resumed and he consequently became “alive” to him again. 2.) Like the lost sheep who would have perished apart from the protective care of its shepherd, the prodigal son was also lost in the sense that he would have perished if he hadn’t returned to his father. This conclusion is supported by verse 17 which clearly states that the lost son would have *starved to death* if he hadn’t “come to his senses” and returned to his father.

In the same way, lost sinners are dead to the Heavenly Father – they have no real relationship with him – and are on their way to “starving to death” apart from him. Unless they “come to their senses” and repent of their sin (accepting Jesus as Lord, of course) they will indeed perish in the absolute sense.

Apollumi as “Lose”

As observed in our reading of *The Parable of the Lost Sheep*, the Greek word *apollumi* can also mean ‘lose:’ “Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses (*apollumi*) one of them.’ ” As already determined, *apollumi* means “lose” here in the sense that the lone sheep was lost from its shepherd and would have certainly perished if not found.

Let’s look at a couple other examples of *apollumi* translated as “lose:”

MATTHEW 10:42

“And if anyone gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones because he is my disciple, I tell you the truth, he will certainly not lose (*apollumi*) his reward.”

Apollumi here obviously refers to suffering the loss of, or being deprived of, a reward.

In this next example Paul is encouraging the crew of a ship in a storm that none of them will lose their lives:

ACTS 27:34b

“Not one of you will lose (*apollumi*) a single hair from your head.”

Paul assured the crew that none of them would suffer the loss of even a single hair.

As you can plainly see from these three examples, *apollumi* simply means “lose” in the sense of suffering the loss of something – a sheep, a reward, a hair.

The Ungodly Will Lose their Lives, their Souls, their Very Selves

With the above understanding, let’s observe how the exact same Greek word, *apollumi*, is used in reference to unredeemed people ultimately *losing* their very lives:

LUKE 9:23-25

Then he said to them all: “If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. (24) For whoever wants to save his life will lose (*apollumi*) it, but whoever loses (*apollumi*) his life for me will save it. (25) What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, and yet lose (*apollumi*) or forfeit his very self.”

Jesus states in the latter half of verse 24 that “whoever loses his life for me will save it.” What exactly does this mean? Well, when a person is born again – repenting of sin and confessing Christ as Lord (Acts 26:20; Romans 10:9-10) – they miraculously become “a new creation; the old is gone, the new has come!” (2Corinthians 5:17). The spiritual part of their being is born anew. That’s why Paul proclaimed, “*I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live*, but Christ lives in me” (Galatians 2:20a). This is basically what Jesus meant by “losing your life for him.” So Jesus was simply saying that anyone who gets spiritually born-again will save his/her life. (See Appendix B for more details on this).

This is in contrast to anyone who tries to save his or her own life; for as Jesus declares in the first part of verse 24 – such a person will lose his/her life! We have all been “bought” and saved by God at a great price – the sacrifice of his Son, Jesus Christ. We are therefore “not our own” (1Corinthians 6:19-20). People who reject this sacrifice are essentially trying to keep or save their own lives. They know that if they truly acknowledge the Lordship of Christ, they’ll have to give up living for themselves and start living for God. This partially means that they’ll have to give up (repent of) sin; unfortunately, many people don’t want to do this because they love their sinful lifestyles and don’t want anyone telling them what they can or can’t do (see John 3:19-20). They don’t want Christianity, they want Selfianity. (I guess they don’t realize the obvious fact that God wants Lordship over our lives and instructs us to do, or not do, certain things *for our ultimate benefit and blessing*, not to deprive us). Jesus made it quite plain here that such people will end up losing their lives.

This fact is reinforced in verse 25: “What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, and yet lose (*apollumi*) or forfeit his very self.” Notice how the word “gain” is used in contrast to “lose” and “forfeit;” we can therefore soundly conclude that lose and forfeit would be the exact opposite of gaining

something. Now note what Jesus said a person who tries to “save his own life” will lose or forfeit: *he said that he would lose or forfeit his very self!*

The Greek word translated “self” here is *heautou* (*heh-ow-too*) which simply refers to a person’s selfhood, that is, a person’s very being (and therefore is translated variously as “himself,” “herself,” “myself,” “yourself,” “ourselves,” etc.) In the matching gospel accounts of this text, Matthew 16:26 and Mark 8:36, the word “soul” is used instead of self. “Soul” in these texts is translated from the Greek word *psuche* which can also be translated “life” in proper contexts, as is the case in verse 24 where Jesus stated, “whoever wants to save his life (*psuche*) will lose it.”

The conclusion we must draw from all this information is simply this: a person who rejects giving up her life for Christ will end up losing her life, her soul, her very self.

This exact thought is similarly expressed by Jesus in this text:

LUKE 17:33

“Whoever tries to keep his life will lose (*apollumi*) it, and whoever loses his life will preserve it.”

How much clearer could Jesus possibly be? The only people who will preserve their lives for eternal life are people who are willing to give up their lives for Christ (once again, this merely means getting born-again and thus being “crucified with Christ”). People who refuse to do this will lose their lives.

Let’s look at one last similar expression from Jesus:

JOHN 12:25

“The man who loves his life will lose (*apollumi*) it, while the man who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life.”

Jesus isn’t at all saying here that Christians can’t enjoy living while in this world (on the contrary, 1Peter 1:8 states that believers will be “filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy”), he’s simply teaching in line with the biblical fact that true Christians are strangers in this world (Hebrews 11:13; 1Peter 1:1) who “are looking forward to a new heaven and new earth, the home of righteousness” (2Peter 3:13).

The reason Christians are said to be strangers in this world and “hate”¹ their lives on this earth is because the present condition of this world *is not the way God wants it to be*. Consider, for example, the pain, death, disease, injustice, poverty, atrocities, wars and crime evident all over this world. All these evils are evidence that the devil is “the god of this world;” in other words, the whole world is under his influence or control (see 2Corinthians 4:4; 1John 5:19). Revelation 21:1-4, on the other hand, reveals how our good, just, loving God wants life to be on earth, for when he creates a “new earth” there will be “no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away” (verse 4).

Getting back to our text, Jesus is simply stating that a person who hates his or her life in this world in the above manner **“will keep it for eternal life.”** By contrast, those who love their sinful, rebellious lifestyles in this wicked world and reject giving up their lives to Christ’s Lordship will ultimately end up losing their lives.

When exactly will these selfish people who reject God’s grace lose their lives, their souls, their very selves? Obviously on “the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men” (2Peter 3:7) where God will “destroy both soul and body in hell (*Gehenna*)” (Matthew 10:28).

Please notice in all these passages that Jesus repeatedly stresses that ungodly people will *lose* their lives if they don’t accept the gospel. He’s says absolutely nothing about people *keeping* their lives and spending it in never-ending conscious agony. This perverse belief is a false, unbiblical doctrine and needs to be exposed for what it is. That’s what this study is all about.

Examples of Everlasting Destruction – Not Eternal Conscious Torment

¹ “Hate” here is translated from a Greek word which by extension means “to love less” (Strong 48).

Let's briefly review the many examples of everlasting destruction that we've covered in this chapter. Take note of how the eternal torture position does not fit any of these examples:

1.) The very word "hell" itself is an unmistakable example of literal everlasting destruction as *Gehenna*, the biblical word translated as "hell" in reference to the lake of fire, was a very certain symbol of *destruction* which all of Jesus' listeners readily understood.

2.) Jesus and John the Baptist proclaimed that "at the end of the age" (i.e. judgment day) the unrighteous will be like weeds, trees, branches and chaff thrown into fire. It goes without saying that such combustible articles as these *burn up* in fire. We also viewed similar examples from the Old Testament and the book of Hebrews.

3.) In *The Parable of the Ten Minas* Jesus used the example of a king having his enemies brought before him and *executed*.

4.) Jesus twice spoke of the lake of fire as a "fiery furnace" – an unmistakable figure of complete incineration as revealed in the Old Testament. Articles thrown into a furnace are burned up, not perpetually preserved.

5.) We viewed many examples of how God consumed by fire his human enemies throughout history and saw that these examples perfectly coincide with the clear biblical passages which state that God's enemies will be *consumed* by raging fire at the second death (e.g. Hebrews 10:27 and Psalm 20:9).

6.) At the very end of the Old Testament we viewed an unmistakable example of ungodly people being likened to stubble set ablaze; "not a root or branch will be left to them" as they will be "*ashes* under the soles of [the righteous'] feet."

7.) We discovered that the very crucifixion of Jesus Christ is an example of the second death. Jesus suffered God's wrath on the cross and died. He was sacrificed in our place. This is a window for us to view the essential nature of the second death, and the clear picture we see through this window is one of suffering that ends in death, not never-ending torture.

8.) We also observed the examples of the lost sheep, which would have perished if not saved by its shepherd, and "the prodigal (lost) son," who would have "starved to *death*" if he didn't make the wise decision to repent and return to his father.

9.) Lastly, we witnessed how these many clear examples are backed up by Jesus' declarations that those who reject God's sacrifice for their sins and try to "save their own lives" will end up *losing* their lives, their souls, their very selves.

As you can see from all these illustrations, not only does the bible repeatedly declare that people will be destroyed in the lake of fire at the second death, it also backs up these plain declarations with numerous easy-to-understand examples. Those who adamantly contend that the bible teaches eternal conscious torment for ungodly sinners are quite mistaken.

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CHAPTER THREE

FURTHER BIBLICAL SUPPORT for Everlasting Destruction

There is one biblical book in particular that simply and clearly backs up all the evidence for literal everlasting destruction we've amassed so far. It is the book of 2Peter.

2Peter on Everlasting Destruction

Let's observe what this book has to say about human damnation starting with a text already briefly touched on in Chapter One:

2PETER 2:6

If he (God) condemned the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah by *burning them to ashes* and made them an example of what is going to happen to the ungodly;

God is telling us right here *precisely* what the eternal fate of ungodly people will be. The utter destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah is shown to be God's example of what will ultimately happen to the ungodly. *How* does this text say that God destroyed these cities as an example? Why, *by burning them to ashes*.

We know this passage is referring to the second death because the text states that ungodly people will experience a judgment similar to the incineration of Sodom and Gomorrah. The only time *all the ungodly* will experience such a fate is at the second death when God will "destroy both soul and body" in the lake of fire.

Jude 7 also speaks of this *example* of Sodom and Gomorrah:

JUDE 7 (KJV)

Even as Sodom and Gomorrah, and the cities about them in like manner, giving themselves over to fornication, and going after strange flesh, are set forth for an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire.

The bible clearly states here that Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed by "eternal fire." Yet, how could this be since the fiery destruction of these cities has long since taken place? This proves that the phrase "eternal fire" refers to fiery destruction that *lasts forever* and not to eternal conscious torture, as some teach. The fire that utterly destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah *has long since gone out, but their destruction remains*. As always, the bible is clear if we simply allow it to interpret itself and resist the temptation to attach our own biased meanings to words and phrases.

Continuing with the book of 2Peter, 3:7 states, "By the same word the present heavens and earth are reserved for fire, being kept for the day of judgment and *destruction* of ungodly men." Verse 9 continues, "The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise (of a new heavens and new earth – verse 13) as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to *perish*, but everyone to come to repentance." We've already addressed verses 7 & 9 earlier in our study, but here's my point: 2:6 states that the ungodly will be burned "to ashes," 3:7 states that they will suffer "destruction," and 3:9 says that they will "perish." Peter keeps bringing up the issue of the second death yet only speaks of it in terms of incineration, destruction and death. He doesn't say anything at all about suffering perpetually in varying degrees of conscious torture. If this perverse belief were true, wouldn't this section of scripture mention it somewhere since it is specifically dealing with the subject of the second death, the eternal fate of ungodly people? I think being consciously tortured forever in flames of torment is much too important of a detail to leave out, don't you? The obvious reason Peter doesn't mention it is because the teaching of

eternal torture is not a biblical doctrine. It is a human-invented myth, a satanic lie (as will be shown in Chapter Four) that has been perpetuated for centuries by the formidable force of religious tradition.

“Born Only to be Caught and Destroyed”

Let’s look at one other enlightening passage from the book of 2Peter which contextually refers to ungodly people “who follow the corrupt desires of the sinful nature” (as verse 10 states):

2Peter 2:12b

They are like brute beasts, creatures of instinct, born only to be caught and destroyed, and like beasts they too will *perish*.

Peter is speaking by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit here and what he’s saying is obvious: “Born” is referring to being born into this world; “caught” is referring to the soul being held in *hades* (*hay’deez*), which takes place after physical decease, where it “awaits” resurrection;¹ and “destroyed” is referring to what will happen after the soul & body are resurrected, wherein the person is judged and cast into the lake of fire. For verification of this, Revelation 20:13 states that “death and *hades*² gave up the dead that were in them” to be judged and “If anyone’s name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire” (verse 15).

Notice, once again, that the bible plainly teaches that ungodly people *will be destroyed* in the lake of fire, not sadistically tortured endlessly. The Greek word translated as “destroyed” here is *phthora* (*fthor-ah*). Paul used this very same word to describe our present mortal, “perishable” bodies in contrast to the immortal, imperishable bodies that believers will receive at their resurrection (1Corinthians 15:42). My point is that we have yet *another* word here that we can add to the seemingly never-ending list of biblical words which refer to the second death strictly in terms of complete destruction and utter perishment.

“Like Beasts They Too Will Perish”

Also notice from the above text that ungodly people are likened to “brute *beasts*, creatures of instinct.” The word ‘beasts’ here is translated from a Greek word which means “animals” (Strong 35). Now note what the latter part of verse 12 states will happen to these ‘animals:’ “and *like beasts* they too will *perish*.” The bible clearly likens unrighteous people here to animals, creatures of instinct, and states that they will ultimately perish in the very same manner as animals do. The question is naturally raised: How do animals perish? Do they perish by being consciously tortured forever and ever? Do they perish by having their “well-being ruined?” Do they perish by spending eternity “separated from God?” No, they perish by simply ceasing to exist (though of course some amount of conscious suffering may be involved in that perishing).

This is not an isolated instance in scripture as Psalm 49:20 states that “A man who has riches without understanding *is like the beasts that perish*.” The word ‘beasts’ in this text likewise refers to “animals” (Strong 19). One might suggest that this text is referring to the first death, not to the second death, but this can’t be so because rich men *with* understanding as well as rich men *without* understanding will both ultimately suffer the first death. Besides this, the writer of the Psalm states in verse 15 that “God will redeem my life from the grave (*sheol*); he will surely take me to him.” The Psalmist confidently believed that God would redeem him from *sheol/hades*; whereas we can confidently deduce that “the man who has riches without understanding” will be resurrected from *sheol/hades* on the day of judgment to be judged and cast into the lake of fire, where *like beasts he will perish*.

¹ Whether one regards the state of the soul in *hades* as conscious, sleeping or dead is not pertinent to the subject of *eternal* punishment, the subject of this study. This is obvious because *Hades* concerns the intermediate state of the soul between death and resurrection; it is a *temporary* condition and thus not relevant to our study on the *eternal* destiny of ungodly people. See Chapter Five’s commentary on “the rich man and Lazarus” and Appendix B for more biblical information on the nature of *hades*. See Part II of this study for a *thorough* biblical examination of *hades* (not included in this edition).

² *Hades* is the equivalent to the Hebrew *sheol* (*sheh-ole*) as a comparison of Acts 2:27 and Psalm 16:10 will verify; Acts 2:27 quotes Psalm 16:10, supplanting the Hebrew *sheol* with the Greek *hades*.

Everlasting Destruction is Not a Denial of Hell

It's important at this point to emphasize that the view of literal everlasting destruction does not in any way deny the existence of hell; although this is obvious I feel compelled to bring it up because adherents of eternal torture often try to give this impression. Let me give an example: a popular fundamentalist heresy hunter¹ had one of his sermons aired on the radio to defend the doctrine of eternal torment in response to the view of everlasting destruction. The title of the sermon was "Why I Believe In Hell." There are two problems with this title. The first is that it gives the impression that adherents of everlasting destruction *don't* believe in hell, while supporters of eternal torture do. This is simply not true. Adherents of both everlasting destruction and eternal torture believe that hell, the lake of fire, exists and that ungodly people will be cast into it on judgment day. The issue of contention concerns the nature of punishment these people will experience in the lake of fire. The bible calls it "the second death." Does the second death consist of eternal conscious torment or literal everlasting destruction? You see, the issue is not whether or not hell exists, but what happens there.

The obvious reason supporters of eternal torment resort to such tactics is because they don't want people to be exposed to the monumental scriptural support for everlasting destruction. If they can successfully malign adherents of literal destruction as "heretics who don't believe in hell," most people won't even *consider* the biblical support for everlasting destruction. After all, if they can keep people from studying it they can keep people from believing it. The reason they take this approach is because they cannot disprove literal destruction scripturally; they therefore attempt to keep people from considering the position altogether by misrepresenting it.

Another common avoidance tactic they implement is to say that everlasting destruction is a cultic belief because a couple of cultic or borderline cultic organizations adhere to it in one form or another. Such an argument successfully diverts attention from the proof of scripture, which is where any teaching ultimately stands or falls. See Chapter Six as to why this argument doesn't hold water.

The second problem with the sermon title "Why I Believe In Hell" is the vagueness of the word "hell." Although "hell" usually conjures up ghastly medieval images of people suffering eternally in fire pits, the term means different things to different people. It can just as easily provoke cartoony images from *The Far Side* comic strip or biblical impressions of *Gehenna*, the Valley of Hinnom (see Chapter Two). My point is that advocates of literal destruction could just as well title a sermon "Why I believe In Hell," but refer to ultimate extinction with no hope of resurrection.

The reason supporters of eternal torment like to use the word 'hell' is because it's a good cover-up term for eternal conscious torture. When they speak of 'hell' they're actually referring to never-ending fiery torment in separation from God with no merciful pause to the misery. This, of course, is *way* too heinous of a concept to spell out like this, so they simply use 'hell' as a code word when referring to it. A much more honest and accurate title of the sermon would be "Why I Believe in Eternal Conscious Torture of the Damned." Why are supporters of eternal torment so reluctant to honestly and accurately spell out what they *really* believe in this manner? Why do they feel they must hide behind code words and other misleading words and phrases (e.g. "perish," "death" and "eternal separation from God")? Naturally because if they spell out what they really believe it would expose their belief as the sadistic sham that it is.

The bottom line is that the view of everlasting destruction does not in any way, shape or form deny the reality of hell, the lake of fire; all it denies is the traditional teaching that people will suffer never-ending conscious torture there.

Conscious Suffering Meted Out as Divine Justice Requires

I believe it's also important at this point to emphasize that the view of everlasting destruction allows for all the conscious pain that divine justice might require for any sinner to suffer according to his or her personal degree of guilt. In other words, the second death does not necessarily occur in an instant. Yet the extinguishment of conscious life *will* ultimately occur as any suffering experienced mercifully ends in death – eternal death – death that lasts forever.

¹ Most such "heresy hunters" are not interested in biblical truth but rather in hunting down and discrediting anyone who deviates from their idea of proper Christian orthodoxy; in other words, truth is not the issue, but rather blind adherence to the established and accepted teachings of *their* religious tradition.

This is a biblical principle regarding God’s judgment and justice. Consider, for instance, ‘Babylon’ which will be judged to be destroyed, but will be given “as much torture and grief as the glory and luxury she gave herself” *while* being destroyed:

REVELATION 18:5-7a

“for her (Babylon’s) sins are piled up to heaven and God has remembered her crimes. (6) Give back to her as she has given; pay her back double for what she has done. Mix her a double portion from her own cup. (7) Give her as much torture and grief as the glory and luxury she gave herself.”

As you can see, according to God’s just judgment, conscious suffering will be meted out to “Babylon” in direct relation to the sinful excesses in which she indulged. She is to get back punishment “as she has given,” and this penalty will apparently be doubled. Doubling the payback is in keeping with God’s character as this is exactly how He judged his very own nation of Israel (see, for example, Isaiah 40:2 and Jeremiah 16:18). Chapter 18 goes on to inform us of the “torments” Babylon will suffer (verses 10 and 15). Yet this suffering will end in complete destruction as Babylon will be utterly “consumed by fire” (verse 8), just as this entire present earth will ultimately be destroyed in preparation for the *new* earth (2Peter 3:10-11).

Consider it this way, if you jumped into a bonfire, would you not experience conscious suffering for a brief period of time before you lost consciousness and ultimately burned to death? Of course you would. It’s the same principle with the second death when God casts the damned into the lake of fire; the difference being that the period of suffering will be meted out to each individual according to his/her degree of sinful guilt as divine justice properly dictates. The period of conscious suffering may last a split second, one minute, an hour, a day, a week, or longer. It all depends on whom we’re talking about. Are we talking about the little old ungodly lady who lives down the street or Adolf Hitler? Hitler is responsible for the horrible suffering and death of millions and millions of people. *Perhaps* God will determine that he deserves to experience the suffering and death of those millions of people before his ultimate extinction. We don’t know, of course; I’m just speculating. It’s all up to the Supreme Judge to decide.

This helps explain a couple statements made by Jesus. For instance:

MATTHEW 11:24

“But I tell you that it will be more bearable for Sodom on the day of judgment than for you (referring to the people of the city of Capernaum).”

Adherents of the eternal torment theory have used this text to support the idea that there will be *varying degrees* of ceaseless torture – as if *never-ending* torment is not bad enough. For example, in the case of Capernaum, they would say that the people of this city would receive a harsher judgment and, consequently, a greater degree of perpetual conscious torment. The notion is absurd. The whole point Jesus is trying to make in this section of scripture (Matthew 11:20-24 and Luke 10:12-15) is that the unrepentant cities of Korazin, Bethsaida and Capernaum, where he preached and performed great miracles, are guilty of even greater sins than the infamous cities of Tyre, Sidon and Sodom. Because of this Jesus states that it’s going to be “more bearable... on the day of judgment” for Sodom than these unrepentant cities. Please note that Jesus said it would be more bearable *on the day of judgment*, not more bearable for all eternity experiencing fiery conscious torment in the lake of fire. Jesus is simply pointing out that, on the day of judgment, the second death will be more bearable for the people of Sodom than for the people of Capernaum according to divine justice. Why? Because the people of Capernaum are guilty of a greater degree of sin. That’s simple enough to understand. We should just allow scripture to say what it literally says and not feel compelled to add to it or take away from it (Revelation 22:18-19). In this case, adherents of eternal torment read way too much into Jesus’ simple statement, no doubt because they’re desperate for biblical support of their position.

Jesus also implied that God’s enemies would experience varying degrees of conscious suffering at the second death when he stated that corrupt religious teachers would “receive the greater condemnation” (NRSV) or “will be punished most severely” (Mark 12:40; Luke 20:47). We’ve already determined from numerous passages that the unredeemed will suffer utter destruction of soul in body at

the second death, but some will justly experience a severer degree of conscious suffering when this destruction occurs.

This aspect of the second death is actually quite comforting when one reflects on it. It suggests that everybody's going to get exactly what he or she justly deserves on judgment day. All throughout human history evildoers have unfortunately "gotten away" with their wicked deeds – murderers, molesters, sadists, rapists, robbers, charlatans, oppressors, tyrants etc.; but we can take comfort in the fact that God's justice will ultimately prevail and every unrepentant soul will justly "get what's coming to him/her."

'Everlasting Destruction isn't Severe Enough – If People just Perish in Hell They'll Have No Motivation to get Saved'

I've heard some people object to the view of literal everlasting destruction on the grounds that it's just not severe enough. Their reasoning usually goes something like this: "If people are just going to ultimately die in hell, and that's it, unbelievers will respond by saying 'To heck with Christianity, if all God's going to do is snuff out my life at the end, I'm going to live however I want and sin all I want. What do I care?' "

My response is that this is precisely the choice that God offers all humanity. Witness for yourselves:

DEUTERONOMY 30:19b

"... I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life..."

JOHN 3:16

"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life."

ROMANS 6:23

For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."

We observe here three crystal clear passages from the three most important sections of the bible – the Torah (or Pentateuch), the gospels and the epistles – with all three clearly revealing that God's offer to humanity is *life* or *death*.

This has already been stressed in Chapter One, but it bears repeating: life and death are the two polar opposites, not life-in-bliss and life-in-burning-torment. As John 3:16 implies, God doesn't *want* anyone to perish. Deuteronomy 30:19 above even shows God imploring people to wisely "choose life." But God's attitude is that if people want to reject wisdom's call and foolishly choose sin & death, then that's their choice. They have the free moral right to do so. Such fools are not worthy of God's kingdom anyway. (In a sense, of course, no one is worthy of God's kingdom, but Jesus plainly spoke of "*those who are considered worthy* of taking part" in God's kingdom [Luke 20:35-36]. Who are these people whom Jesus says are worthy? Simply those humble, repentful folks who wisely decide to forsake the folly of sin & death and "*choose life*").

In regards to utter extinction in hell not being severe enough, how much severer should it justly be? How much severer does it need to be?

Just imagine how it will be on judgment day for those people who foolishly reject God: They'll have to stand before the Almighty, who will judge their entire lives, and condemn them to death in the lake of fire – an annihilation so utterly complete that it will be as if they had never existed (see Obadiah 16). Then they'll be removed from His presence and cast into a vast, consuming lake of fire. Can you imagine the depression, shame, guilt and torment of being rejected by the very Creator of the universe who has judged your life so completely worthless that you must be absolutely snuffed out of existence and memory? Can you imagine being led to a vast, dreadful lake of fire, standing at its edge, knowing that *this is it* – your life's going to be blotted out and there's absolutely no hope of resurrection, restoration or recovery? And then, finally, the torment and pain experienced when cast into the fire – suffering that will last precisely as long as God's justice requires.

We're taking the lake of fire in the literal sense here, and why not? If the plain sense makes sense, we shouldn't look for any other sense, lest we end up with nonsense. Yet, because some would argue that the book of Revelation is a book of symbols, let's consider the possibility that the "lake of fire" is a metaphor. Even if this is so, the bible precisely defines what this 'metaphor' stands for: "The lake of fire *is* the second death" (Revelation 20:14b). So regardless of whether we take the "lake of fire" literally or figuratively, it is certain that it refers to the execution of the second death. Thus taking it metaphorically does not make it any less serious or dreadful. As it is written: "It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the Living God" (Hebrews 10:31).

Can anyone look me in the eyes with a straight face and tell me that such a terrible and utter obliteration as this is not severe enough? I must ask once again, how much harsher does God's just judgment on humanity need to be? I'm seriously flabbergasted that anyone would suggest that this is not a severe enough punishment. In fact, I'll go as far as to say this (with no apologies): Anyone who feels the unrighteous should suffer a severer punishment is sick, sadistic and ungodly.

If literal everlasting destruction is not a severe enough punishment to motivate people to "choose life" and serve God, then what inspires me, and numerous other people I know, who adhere to this view? Like everyone else, I have my share of flaws and weaknesses, but I consider myself a devoutly committed Christian who has been serving God for over twenty years. I don't need a constant heinous threat of eternal conscious torture to be faithful to God. (I'll reveal why momentarily).

And what does it say about the character of people – or perhaps I should say *lack* of character – if they need a constant threat of perpetual agony to live a remotely godly life? Does God really want or need such people serving in His kingdom? Can such characterless brutes serve at all? I am reminded of a person I worked with for one day. We took a company van and drove out to do a job. Since we spent considerable time driving we had a lot of time to talk. On the way back from the job the subject of hell was brought up (he was aware of my view and wanted to contest it). He wasn't a very mature Christian or very knowledgeable in the scriptures, but we dialogued on the issue and toward the end it got pretty heated. When I pulled up to his apartment to drop him off, he said something to the effect of, "Well, I need the threat of eternal torment to motivate me to live right." He then got out of the van and walked to his apartment where he was living in fornication with a woman. Shortly later he was fired for stealing. So much for the view of eternal torture inspiring people to live right.

One last important comment on this matter: The argument that everlasting destruction is not a severe enough punishment to motivate the common person to follow God in Christ is based upon a flawed, perverted view of Christianity. This reasoning implies that living a Christian life faithful to God is so utterly boring, rigid and lifeless that it's going to take an over-the-top ghastly threat to coerce people into actually living it.

Such thinking as this comes straight from the kingdom of darkness. I've lived on both sides of the fence – I lived the supposed "wild & crazy" lifestyle till I was 20 years old and I've been following God's way ever since – and I can assuredly testify that there is nothing more joyous, exciting, empowering, peaceful or liberating than living a biblical, Spirit-led Christian lifestyle. Being in fellowship with the Creator of the universe is a never-ending party as God is truly the ultimate "drug." Only He can fill that emptiness within us. This is not to suggest, of course, that the Christian life is void of troubles, hardships or trials – far from it – but any misery one might experience in *obedience* to God is nowhere near the misery experienced in *disobedience* to Him, if you know what I mean. We need to always remember that Jesus came *to set people free* (see, for instance, John 8:31-32,36 and Galatians 5:1).

So if you're a Christian and the lifestyle you're experiencing is boring, rigid and lifeless, I've got news for you, you've settled for a counterfeit gospel! Open your eyes, dig deeper, examine yourself & your supposed relationship with the Most High and perhaps find a *really* biblical church to attend. Biblical Christianity is a *relationship* with the Almighty Creator of the universe, not a life-stifling religion (see Acts 14:15)!

'Everlasting Destruction Isn't Severe Enough to Spur Evangelization'

A similar argument is that literal everlasting destruction is not a severe enough punishment to motivate Christians to evangelize. The obvious implication is that the reason Christians share the gospel is to save people from a supposedly loving God who will condemn them to consciously roast forever in a

hellhole if not reached. Is this really *why* Christians should evangelize? I am reminded of a statement by a woman who addressed a congregation of Christians: “If I *really* believed what I say I believe [i.e. that God will subject the majority of humanity to never-ending torture] then I’d be running up and down these streets banging on doors preaching the gospel.” I hate to tell her but if she actually did this no one would get saved because they’d just think she’s a religious weirdo; in other words, she’d drive people *away* from God rather than *to* Him. Yet, she’s right, in a way. Very few Christians *really* believe the traditional doctrine of eternal conscious torture. Oh, they may affirm it with their mouths so as to appear faithful to (supposed) fundamental doctrine and not go against the grain, but most believers secretly suspect that it’s not really true; and this ultimately reduces their faith in the authenticity of the bible because they’ve been misguided into believing that the scriptures adamantly teach never-ending torment. The whole purpose of this study is to show that this perverse teaching is not and never was a true Christian doctrine.

So *why* should Christians evangelize? Mainly because they love God and want to obey his commands, including ‘the Great Commission:’ “Therefore *go* and make disciples of all nations... teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you” (Matthew 28:19-20). Because Christians have come to *know* God, who *is* love (1John 4:8), they naturally want to share this love with other people as the Spirit guides them; it goes without saying that this must be done *in* love. Most of us have unfortunately experienced Christians sharing the gospel out of a dead works-mentality rather than in a spirit of Christian love. The results are usually disastrous; as noted above, such people inevitably drive others *away* from God rather than *to* him.

Jesus plainly stated that authentic Christians will be recognized “by their fruit” (Matthew 7:16,20); he was talking about the “fruit of the spirit,” the primary fruit being love (see Galatians 5:22-23). Thus any good works performed by a believer *must* be an **extension** of this fruit, an **extension** of love. This explains why Jesus warned of “ministers” who may indeed be performing great works like prophesying, healing, miracles and exorcism but fail to consistently display a character of love, joy, peace, humility, kindness, gentleness, etc. (see Matthew 7:15-23). In such cases, the “good works” are merely a *performance*. The lack of “fruit” exposes them as frauds.

What are some other motivations for evangelizing? The gospel is referred to as “the message of *reconciliation*” in the bible (2Corinthians 5:17-20). Christians share the good news to reconcile people to God so that they may *know* the Creator of the universe. Obtaining eternal life is merely a byproduct of this union. Jesus said “the truth will set you free” (John 8:32), Christians share the gospel to set people free – free from sin, addictions, disease, poverty, depression, hopelessness and meaninglessness. Christians share the gospel to offer life to those who are on the highway to destruction. We must understand that God is in a sense is kick-starting his coming kingdom in this present evil age – the coming kingdom which will be established eternally in the age of the new heavens and new earth; and he’s doing this through his faithful servants, his kingdom “ambassadors.” This clears up the issue of why Christians should be motivated to share the good news of the gospel.

Some may legitimately ask, “What about the millions of people who have never heard the gospel? Or the millions and millions who may have heard but never truly accepted it because they failed to understand it or were force-fed a religionized, faulty version of the gospel, or rejected it because of the hypocritical medium through which it was delivered (e.g. the gospel came to a lot of people *with* the baggage of imperialism, etc.)?” See Chapter Seven’s *Post-Mortem Evangelization – Can a Person Be Saved After Death?*, as well as *Inclusivism and Restrictivism*.

One last point: Christians often have a narrow understanding of the Great Commission. They tend to think that if they’re not fulfilling a good evangelistic quota on a regular basis that they’re not fulfilling this commission. Yet, did you notice what Jesus actually said in the Great Commission quoted above? He said that Christians are to “go and make disciples of all nations... *teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.*” You see, the Great Commission involves much more than merely convincing people to pray the sinner’s prayer; it involves teaching people the rightly-divided Word of God (not just *part* of the Word but the *whole* Word from Genesis to Revelation) and how to walk in newness of life. With this broader understanding, I’m actually fulfilling the Great Commission by writing this book!

The Apostle Paul Proclaimed “The Whole Will of God” and “Fully Proclaimed the Gospel”

I'd like to close this third chapter of support for literal destruction by focusing on an important statement made by Paul the apostle. Paul is by far the most important figure in the New Testament aside from Jesus Christ. *Over half* of the book of Acts, which is a biblical documentation of the early church, is devoted to Paul's exploits in ministry. *Over one third* of the entire New Testament and *over two thirds* of the epistles were actually *written* by Paul under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit (see 2Peter 3:15-16).¹

With this understanding, let's look at Paul's statement which he made to a group of elders from Ephesus:

ACTS 20:26-27

“Therefore, I declare to you today that *I am innocent of the blood of all men.* (27) For I have not hesitated to proclaim to you the whole will of God.”

Paul declares here that he is innocent of the blood of all people because he faithfully proclaimed “the *whole will* of God” or, according to the King James Version, he declared “*all the counsel* of God.” Paul backed this statement up in his letter to the Romans:

ROMANS 15:19b

So from Jerusalem all the way around to Illyricum, I have fully proclaimed the gospel of Christ.

Why was Paul “innocent of the blood of all men”? Simply because everywhere he went he *fully* proclaimed the gospel – the *whole* counsel of God. Paul didn't hide anything that the Lord revealed to him, he didn't hide any aspect of the gospel message – he shared *it all*. He was thus innocent of “the blood” of all people.

My point is that if Paul fully proclaimed the whole counsel of God, as scripture verifies, then he would have certainly mentioned *something somewhere* about unrepentant sinners suffering eternal conscious torment *if* this doctrine were true. This is way too important of an issue to forget to mention, yet Paul says absolutely nothing about eternal torture anywhere in his inspired writings or in his exploits as recorded in Acts.

Out of the fourteen biblical letters written by Paul (assuming he's the writer of Hebrews) in all but six of them he repeatedly made very clear statements about the eternal fate of those who reject the gospel of reconciliation. Although we've already looked at many of these passages, let's review them here. As you will see, viewing everything Paul consistently taught concerning the nature of the second death is powerfully illuminating.

Paul fully proclaimed the whole counsel of God by plainly declaring:

That those who live a lifestyle of unrepentant sin “deserve **death**” – Romans 1:32

That “all who sin apart from the law will also **perish** apart from the law” – Romans 2:12

That sin “leads to **death**” – Romans 6:16

That sin “results in **death**” – Romans 6:21

That “the wages of sin is **death**” – Romans 6:23

That those who live according to the sinful nature “will **die**” – Romans 8:13

That the gospel is foolishness “to those who are **perishing**” – 1Corinthians 1:18

That “in Adam all **die**” – 1Corinthians 15:22

That those who preach the gospel are “the smell of **death**” “to those who are **perishing**” – 2Corinthians 2:15-16

That the Old Testament law “**kills**” and ultimately brings “**death**” – 2Corinthians 3:6-7

That the gospel is “veiled to those who are **perishing**” – 2Corinthians 4:3

That those who please the sinful nature “from that nature will reap **destruction**” – Galations 6:8

That “they will be **destroyed**” – Philippians 1:28

That “their destiny is **destruction**” – Philippians 3:19

That “they will be punished with **everlasting destruction**” – 2Thessalonians 1:9

¹ These figures are based on the probability that Paul is the writer of Hebrews and the classification of Revelation as an epistle.

That they “are **perishing**” – 2Thessalonians 2:10

That “they **perish** because they refused to love the truth and so be saved” – 2Thessalonians 2:10

That “Christ Jesus... has destroyed **death**” – 2Timothy 1:10

That they are like worthless land that will “**in the end**... be **burned**” – Hebrews 6:8

That sins are “acts that lead to **death**” – Hebrews 9:14

That raging fire “will **consume** the enemies of God” – Hebrews 10:27

That those who “shrink back” in unbelief will be “**destroyed**” – Hebrews 10:39

In various ways with various words Paul was sure to repeatedly declare *precisely* what would happen to those who foolishly reject the gospel. He was sure to do this because God appointed him to *fully* proclaim the *whole* counsel of God. Paul didn't hide any aspect of the truth – including the awful truth that those who reject Christ will be utterly destroyed by the raging, consuming fire of the Lord. If words have any meaning at all then this is what we must conclude.

Allow me to add that if Jesus supposedly preached eternal torture, as many contend, then Paul would have certainly backed it up. Yet Paul taught no such thing because Jesus taught no such thing, not to mention the bible they taught from – the Old Testament – teaches no such thing.

Lastly, I'd like to point out that, in Acts 20:26-27 quoted above, Paul declared he was “innocent of the *blood* of all men” because he didn't hesitate to share the *whole* counsel of God, including the unfortunate news of what would ultimately happen to those who reject the gospel. The very fact that Paul says he's innocent of the *blood* of all people is a sure indication that people will actually die when they suffer the second death. Whether physical blood or spiritual blood, it doesn't matter, the fact is that people's blood will spill on the day of judgment, which is called “the day of slaughter” in the bible (James 5:5). *Gehenna*, often translated as “hell” in English bibles and used as a symbolic reference to the lake of fire, was also known as “The Valley of Slaughter.” “Slaughter” plainly signifies that blood will be spilled, and the simple fact is that *when blood is spilled people die*. Paul's statement makes no sense whatsoever if people don't really perish in the lake of fire, if people exist forever in conscious torment their blood would not be spilled at all – they'd still be alive, *forever*.

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CHAPTER FOUR

THE GREAT LIE: 'What about the "Immortal soul"?'

In light of the colossal amount of scriptural evidence for literal everlasting destruction that we've amassed so far, how could anyone who knows how to read possibly adhere to the theory of eternal torment? What is it that prevents adherents of this position from accepting all this evidence for everlasting destruction literally? After all, don't they generally adhere to a literal view of the bible?¹

Actually there are a number of reasons why they refuse to take the bible literally on this subject, such as the influence of religious tradition, denominational allegiance, job security and pride (we'll take a closer look at these reasons in Chapter Seven). Yet, perhaps the strongest reason is that they foundationally adhere to the doctrine of "the immortal soul," the teaching that every human being once created can never cease to live (a less common name for this theory is "the eternal spirit"). Supporters of eternal torture cannot very well take such words as "die," "death," "destruction," "destroy" and "perish" literally if they believe that it is impossible for people to cease living.

Anytime you hear or read of "the immortal soul" spoken of as an unquestionable truth it indicates that the person is an adherent of eternal torment. For instance, simply scan the "Statement of Faith" of various Christian organizations – whether it's for a church, denomination, magazine, college or website – and you'll quickly be able to determine if they officially adhere to the doctrine of eternal torture. If they believe in "the immortal soul" they consequently *must* believe in eternal torture as well. If this is the case, their Statement of Faith will usually read something like this: "We believe in the immortality of the soul, that the righteous shall receive eternal life in communion with God and that the ungodly shall suffer eternal separation." Some may say "eternal punishment" rather than "eternal separation" but, regardless, what they really mean by these words is "never-ending torment in the lake of fire." You see, because these people believe human beings inherently possess undying souls they have no choice but to conclude that every person will end up either living forever with God in eternal bliss or apart from God in eternal torment. The fact that the bible continually warns that ungodly people will *die*, be *destroyed*, suffer *death* and be *consumed* by raging fire is rendered completely irrelevant because of the doctrine of the immortal soul.

It is this belief in unconditional human immortality that propels the traditional view of hell as perpetual conscious torture and prevents people from taking the bible literally on the subject.

'The Immortal Soul' is Not Taught in the Bible

The fact is that the doctrine of the immortal soul cannot be found in scripture. You can search in vain all you want, but you'll find no scripture in the bible that teaches human beings possess immortality *apart from Christ*. That's because this immortal soul belief did not originate from the scriptures, but rather entered Judeo-Christian thought through contact with pagan Greek philosophy (Crim 212). The bible teaches that God alone has immortality (1Timothy 6:16) and he offers it to people *only* through the gospel: "... Christ Jesus, who has destroyed death and *has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel*" (2Timothy 1:10).

The only support adherents of eternal torment can come up with for this immortal soul theory is to suggest that human beings are created "in the image of God" (Genesis 1:27) and therefore have an immortal soul and cannot die. Their reasoning here is that God is immortal and therefore if human beings are created in His image then they must be immortal as well – that is, some core aspect of them, namely the soul (or mind or spirit), must be immortal. This argument assumes that being created "in the image of God" *must* refer to inheriting God's characteristic of immortality. The obvious problem with this line of reasoning is that God has other characteristics such as omnipotence (all-powerful),

¹Adherents of eternal conscious torture often refer to their doctrine as "the literal view," but it's not really a literal view at all because, as we've seen, they fail to take the bible literally on the subject. Everlasting destruction is the true literal view. See Chapter Nine for more details on this.

omniscience (all-knowing) and omnipresence (present everywhere at the same time), yet we human beings have never possessed any of these characteristics even though we're created in the image of God.

God did indeed bless the first man "Adam"¹ with the gift of eternal life when he created him; Adam had immortality. There was, however, *a condition to maintaining this immortality* as God clearly instructed Adam that if he sinned he would "surely die:"

GENESIS 2:16-17

And the LORD God commanded the man, "You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; (17) but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die."

The Hebrew word translated as "die" in this text is *muwth* (*mooth*) which means "to die" or "kill" (Strong 63) and is repeatedly used in the Old Testament simply in reference to death, including the death of animals:

EXODUS 7:18a

The fish in the Nile will die, and the river will stink;

EXODUS 14:11a

They said to Moses, "Was it because there were no graves in Egypt that you brought us to the desert to die?"

If Adam never sinned he would have never died. Yet he did sin, and the second that he did, part of him died – his immortal nature. We know this because the aging process started that very day culminating in his death many years later (Genesis 5:5). God foretold Adam's death immediately after Adam's fall, "For dust you are and to dust you will return" (Genesis 3:19c). This helps us to understand why *muwth* – "die" – is actually used *twice* in Genesis 2:17; a more literal translation of this passage would read: "but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it, dying, you will die." In other words, the very day Adam sinned part of his being would die, leading to his eventual demise.

The Hebrew word *muwth* always indicates that something has died or will die. It does not mean "separation" as some claim; if God meant to warn Adam that he would "separate" He would have used the Hebrew word *badal* (*baw-dal'*). In Adam's case the death of his immortal nature was merely the consequence of a much deeper death – spiritual death. Spiritual death simply means that the human spirit is dead to God. If the human spirit is dead to God it is impossible to have a relationship with Him because the human spirit is the facet of human nature that "connects" with God. As Jesus said: "God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth" (John 4:24). If a person is spiritually dead it is impossible to know and worship God in spirit and truth.

The immediate spiritual death of Adam and Eve is evident by the fact that they hid from God and were afraid of Him (see Genesis 3:8-10). Their relationship with God severely changed when they sinned, meaning the old relationship died. Humankind has been hiding from God ever since. Like Adam and Eve we've tried to cover up our sin with the fig leaves of religion, but religion can never solve the problem of spiritual death. That's why Jesus, the second Adam, taught that we need to be spiritually born again to have a relationship with God (see John 3:3-6).

So God originally created human beings with immortality, but it was *conditional* immortality. Unfortunately our primeval parents failed to live by this condition and consequently passed on the curse of sin and death to us all.

The Soul Can Die

For further biblical support that the human soul is *not* inherently immortal and can indeed die or be destroyed, let's go to "the creation text" which describes *exactly* how God created human beings:

¹ In the biblical Hebrew *adam* (*aw-dawm'*) simply means "a human being (an individual or the species)" (Strong 8) or "the man" (see NIV footnotes for Genesis 2:7 and 20).

GENESIS 2:7 (KJV/NIV)

And the LORD God formed the man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living soul.

The word “soul” in this passage is the Hebrew word *nephesh* (*neh-fesh'*) which is equivalent to the Greek word *psuche* (*psoo-khay'*) used in the New Testament.¹ *Psuche* is incidentally where we get the words “psyche” and “psychology.” There’s much theological debate regarding the exact definition of what a human being is. Yet, if nothing else, we can all definitely agree that this verse reveals that human beings are, at their core, *living souls*. Isn’t this what this text clearly says? God formed the human body from the basic chemical elements of the earth,² breathed into it the breath of life, and the man *became a living soul*.

Because humans are essentially souls, the bible often simply refers to people as such. For example, “All the souls (*nephesh*) that came with Jacob into Egypt” (Genesis 46:26a KJV). “Souls” in this text simply refers to the *people* that accompanied Jacob to Egypt. Another example would be Joshua 10:28 where it shows Joshua taking the city of Makkedah and killing “all the souls (*nephesh*) that were therein” (KJV). In the New Testament Peter spoke of the “eight souls (*psuche*)” that were saved in Noah’s ark (1Peter 3:20 KJV); “souls” here obviously refers to the eight *people* that were saved in the ark. Most modern versions of the bible would translate *nephesh* and *psuche* in the above three passages as “persons,” “everyone” or “people” (see, for example, the New International Version).

In light of this biblical information it’s obvious that “soul” (*nephesh/psuche*) in its broadest sense refers to the *whole* person, the *whole* human being – spirit, mind and body. In a narrower sense these Hebrew and Greek words for “soul” can refer to various *facets* of human nature. For instance *nephesh* specifically refers to a “dead body” in Leviticus 21:11 and Numbers 19:11; in Acts 14:2 *psuche* refers to the “mind;” and in Revelation 20:4 *psuche* refers to disembodied saints and thus to the entire immaterial facet of human nature – mind and spirit. (See Appendix B for a more detailed study on the soul and human nature: spirit, mind and body).

Notice, incidentally, that the creation text quoted above also speaks of the “life” that God breathed into Adam. “Life” is translated from the Hebrew word *chay* (*khah'ee*) and is equivalent to the Greek word *zoe* (*zo-ay'*) which is used in the phrase “eternal life” throughout the New Testament.³ The kind of “life” (*zoe*) that God originally breathed into Adam was *eternal* life; but, as we’ve already seen, this God-given gift of eternal life was conditional. Adam sinned and therefore failed to live by this condition; consequently, he lost this gift of *eternal* life. It’s obvious that he still had life (*zoe*) after he sinned, as evidenced from the fact that he lived to be 930 years old, he just no longer had *eternal* life (*zoe*). All of Adam’s descendants – that is, every person born into this world since Adam – have inherited Adam’s life (*zoe*) because we’ve all been born in his likeness and image (Genesis 5:3).⁴ Thus no one born into this world intrinsically possesses eternal life because we’ve been born of the perishable seed of Adam. The only life (*zoe*) that people born of the perishable seed of Adam possess is the *temporal* life (*zoe*) which God “gives *all* men” (Acts 17:25). To inherit *eternal* life (*zoe*) we must be born again of the imperishable seed of Christ, the second Adam. This is what the gospel of Christ is all about. As it is written:

1CORINTHIANS 15:22

For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive.

1PETER 1:23

For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God.

¹ When Old Testament passages are quoted in the New Testament, the Greek *psuche* is used for the Hebrew *nephesh* – for example, Acts 2:27 which quotes Psalm 16:10 and 1Corinthians 15:45 which partially quotes Genesis 2:7.

² This is a scientific fact not known until relatively recently, but our Creator was displaying it here thousands of years ago.

³ See, for example, 1Peter 3:10 which quotes Psalm 34:12 or Acts 2:28 which quotes Psalm 16:11, both cases in which the Greek *zoe* supplants the Hebrew *chay*.

⁴ The entire human race was in Adam’s loins. He was thus humanity’s moral, spiritual and physical fountainhead and lone representative. When he sinned he did not act as an individual person but as an entire race.

This helps us to understand why Jesus said we must be “born again” to see the kingdom of God in John 3:3,6. Incidentally, notice, once again, the two polar opposite fates spoken of in the first passage above: “in Adam all *die*” but “in Christ all will be *made alive*.”

It’s interesting to note that the very same Hebrew word *nephesh*, translated as “soul” or “being” in the creation text, is used 29 times in the Old Testament in reference to animals, although most versions do not translate *nephesh* as “soul” when used in this manner. For instance, “let the water teem with living creatures (*nephesh*)” and “let the land produce living creatures (*nephesh*)” (Genesis 1:20,24). *Psuche*, the Greek equivalent to *nephesh*, is also used in reference to animals in the New Testament (for example, Revelation 8:9 and 16:3). As a matter of fact, “breath of life” is also used in reference to animals (e.g. Genesis 1:30). The question might be raised: If both humans and animals are “souls” animated or sustained by a “breath of life” from the Almighty, what’s the difference between humans and animals? The obvious difference is that human beings – unlike base, instinct-oriented animals – are created “in the image of God.” We thus have the capacity to know and worship God because we possess a higher spiritual dimension to our nature. Animals, of course, do not have a spirit as such. Our spiritual dimension is contrasted by the sinful nature (“flesh”), which is the human proclivity to rebel against God and do evil. Animals likewise do not have a sin nature; as instinctual creatures their actions are neither good nor evil. See Appendix B for more details.

The bottom line is that nowhere does the bible state the human soul, once created, is immortal and can never die. *Nephesh*, the Hebrew word for “soul,” appears over 750 times in the Old Testament and *psuche*, the Greek word for “soul,” appears over 100 times in the New Testament. These over 850 references should tell us all we need to know about the soul, yet none say anything about it being immortal by nature. If the immortal soul doctrine is true, why did God inspire *hundreds* of references to the soul without mentioning anything about it being inherently immortal? On the contrary, as already pointed out, God plainly stated to Adam, who was a “living soul,” that he would “surely die” if he sinned (Genesis 2:17). He also stated in Ezekiel 18:4,20 that “the soul (*nephesh*) who sins... will *die*.” And, as we’ve already observed, Jesus plainly declared that God would “*destroy* both soul (*psuche*) and body in hell” (Matthew 10:28). A usual knee-jerk, but hollow, response is to argue that these scriptures “are taken out of context.” I would like to use this same argument by pointing out that biblical references to the immortal soul are taken out of context, but I can’t *because no such passages exist!* (Griesmeyer 4:2-3).

Obviously this idea that a human soul cannot die or be destroyed is alien to the God-breathed scriptures.

The Great Lie and the Tree of Life

The bible reveals exactly where this immortal soul belief originated. Remember what God plainly said to Adam and Eve would be the consequence of disobedience? He warned that they would “surely *die*” (again, Genesis 2:17). Not only did God say that they would die, He said they would *surely* die. The LORD made it perfectly clear way back in the beginning that going the wrong way – the way of selfishness and rebellion – would lead to death. This is in harmony with the biblical fact that “the wages of sin is death” (Romans 6:23). Yet when Satan, “the father of lies” (John 8:44), tempted Eve to sin in Genesis 3:4, he *contradicted* what God said by stating that Eve would “*not* surely die” if she sinned. This is the very first lie recorded in the bible. The devil was saying in essence, “What God said is a lie, you will not surely die – you have an immortal soul.” Unfortunately people have been believing this lie about the so-called immortal soul ever since; this false doctrine infiltrated Christianity early on and has gone on to become the “orthodox” view, even though the bible does not teach it, thus proving the power of religious tradition and denominational allegiance. This long-lasting mass deception explains why I refer to this belief as The Great Lie.

After the unfortunate fall of Adam and Eve, notice what the LORD God says to Himself:

GENESIS 3:22

And the LORD God said, “The man has now become like one of us, knowing good and evil. He must not be allowed to reach out his hand and take also from the tree of life and eat, *and live forever.*”

First of all, God would not say this if Adam already possessed an immortal soul (unconditional immortality). Secondly, this statement makes it clear that human beings can obtain unconditional immortality if they eat of the tree of life. The obvious reason God did not want Adam to eat of the tree of life is because he was unredeemed. If Adam ate of the tree of life in his unredeemed condition he would have attained unconditional immortality and thus would have condemned himself and his descendants to live forever in a fallen, ungodly state (like the devil and his angels, as we shall look at shortly). The LORD is just, righteous and merciful and didn't want such a horrible tragedy to befall humanity, so he immediately banished Adam & Eve from the garden and was sure to guard the way to the tree of life (verses 23-24).

The LORD would have to redeem humankind before allowing us to eat "from the tree of life and live forever." That's what the gospel of Christ is all about. And this explains Jesus' statement in Revelation 2:7, "To him who overcomes *I will give the right to eat from the tree of life*, which is in the paradise of God." Notice clearly that only those who are born of God and overcome the world by faith (see 1John 5:4) have the right to eat of the tree of life and live forever. That's because, as we've already seen, eternal life and immortality are only available through the gospel (2Timothy 1:10). God wisely doesn't want sinful, unredeemed people to inherit unconditional immortality because then they'd have to live forever in a fallen state miserably separate from their Creator. In such a scenario they would indeed have the gift of immortality, but this "gift" would actually be a curse to them. After all, what good is living forever if you have to live it in utter misery?

Resurrection unto Unconditional Immortality

Eating of the tree of life may simply refer to the resurrection of the dead unto eternal life. You see Jesus spoke of two different kinds of resurrections:

JOHN 5:28-29

"for a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear His voice (29) and come out – those who have done good will rise to live, and those who have done evil will rise to be condemned."

The two different kinds of resurrections are clear: the righteous – those in right-standing with God – will rise to live; the unrighteous – those *not* in right-standing with God – will rise to be judged and condemned.

Notice clearly that *only the righteous will "rise to live."* Only the righteous will be granted "life and immortality" (2Timothy 1:10). *If* only the righteous will rise to live, it naturally follows that the other group will rise to *not* live; that is, they will be judged and condemned to the second death, the lake of fire, where God will "destroy both soul and body." We've already searched the scriptures to see how plainly evident this is.

According to 1Corinthians 15:42-54, the righteous who "will rise to live" will receive an imperishable, glorified, spiritual body at the time of their resurrection. Verse 54 of this passage speaks of this: "When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: 'Death has been swallowed up in victory.'" Incidentally, some adherents of eternal torment, apparently desperate for proof texts, will cite this passage to support their view that "every human being will have immortality" (Menzie 244), yet even a novice student of the bible can see that the passage exclusively refers to born-again believers (e.g. see verse 50 which plainly points out that the people addressed are to "inherit the kingdom of God").

As you can see, this resurrection unto eternal life is a resurrection unto *unconditional* immortality. Those who "will rise to live" will *never* die – for "death has been swallowed up in victory." Jesus made this clear:

LUKE 20:34-36

"The people of this age marry and are given in marriage. (35) But those who are considered worthy of taking part in that age and in the resurrection from the dead will neither marry nor be given in marriage, (36) and they can no longer die; for they are like the angels. They are God's children, since they are children of the resurrection."

Firstly, notice that Jesus speaks of two ages here: “this age” – the present age we’re living in; and “that age” – the age that is to come of which only those “who are considered worthy of taking part... in the resurrection of the dead” will experience. “The resurrection from the dead” in this text *only refers to the resurrection unto eternal life*, not to the resurrection unto condemnation.

Secondly, notice what Jesus says about the righteous people who are worthy of partaking in this resurrection from the dead: He states that “*they can no longer die*; for they are like the angels.” This proves that the resurrection of the righteous is a resurrection unto *unconditional* immortality. We who partake in this resurrection “can no longer die;” that is, no matter what, death – the cessation of life – will never be a possibility for us throughout eternity. This is supported by Revelation 20:6 which states that the second death has no power over those who take part in this resurrection, which is referred to as “the first resurrection.” Since believers will be immortal and can never die, the second death has no power over them.

Thirdly, notice that Jesus states the righteous “can no longer die; *for they are like the angels*.” Jesus doesn’t say these righteous people would *become* angels, but that they would be *like* angels in the sense that they “can no longer die.” This proves that angelic beings possess the God-given gift of intrinsic unconditional immortality. No matter what, angelic beings *can never die* – even if they choose to rebel against their Creator, like the devil and his demons. We’ll look at this matter in a moment.

This resurrection unto eternal life and immortality is a very fundamental aspect of the gospel of Christ. Acts 17:18 states that Paul preached “the good news about Jesus *and the resurrection*” and “for his hope *in the resurrection of the dead* he was put on trial” (Acts 23:6). Unfortunately you won’t hear much emphasis on the resurrection of the dead unto eternal life in many churches today. It’s more likely you’ll hear about “going to heaven” when you die, as this belief seems to have replaced the doctrine of the resurrection unto eternal life in importance. See Chapter Six for a brief biblical look at the nature of eternal life, i.e. the new Jerusalem, new heavens and new earth (in the section ‘*What About “You Will Spend Eternity in Either Heaven or Hell”?*’).

‘What about the Devil and his Angels?’

As noted above, Jesus made it clear that angelic beings *can never die*, that is, they intrinsically possess unconditional immortality. Therefore even if some of them would choose to rebel against their Creator – like the devil and his angels (Isaiah 14:12-14) – they would *still possess immortality and thus can never die*. Why? Because their immortality is *unconditional*.

So, at the end of this age, what has God decided to ultimately do with the devil and his angels who have chosen to rebel against Him and who are, evidently, beyond redemption? The bible teaches that the lake of fire is an “eternal fire *prepared for the devil and his angels*” (Matthew 25:41b). This passage makes it clear that God originally created the lake of fire as an eternal habitation for the fallen angels who decided to reject his Lordship. Revelation 20:10 reveals exactly what will happen to the devil and his angels when they’re cast into the lake of fire at the end of this age: “And the devil, who deceived them, was thrown into the lake of burning sulfur, where the beast and the false prophet had been thrown. *They will be tormented day and night forever and ever.*”

It’s important to point out that, as the above text from Matthew plainly states, the lake of fire was not prepared for human beings, but for the devil and his angels. Yes, God will use the lake of fire to execute “the second death” of human beings as we have already clearly seen, but the lake of fire was not originally created for people. Obviously the nature of the lake of fire is such that it will utterly extinguish any being that lacks immortality.

The devil and his angels, on the other hand, will not experience death in the lake of fire because they possess unconditional immortality; the very nature of *Gehenna* will torment them. This explains why the lake of fire is *never* referred to as “the second death” in reference to the fallen angels; it is *only* called such in regards to human beings (e.g. Revelation 2:11; 20:6,14 & 21:8). Why? Obviously because people will be utterly destroyed there, not perpetually tormented.

Adherents of eternal conscious torture often cite the above text, Revelation 20:10, to support their view by suggesting that “the beast and the false prophet” are human beings and this text shows that

they will be tormented day and night forever and ever. Their suggestion is that “the beast” refers to the antichrist and the false prophet is his prophetic cohort. Well, what does the rightly-divided Word of God teach on this matter? The antichrist is indeed a human being and is described in scripture as “the man *doomed to destruction*” (2Thessalonians 2:3). However, “the beast” from Revelation 19:20 and 20:10 is not at all referring to this man, but to the evil spirit that possessed him. This is clear because the bible plainly states that the beast *originated from the Abyss* (Revelation 11:7 and 17:8). “The Abyss,” according to scripture, is the furnace-like pit where *evil spirits* are imprisoned, *not* human beings (see Luke 8:31; Revelation 9:1-2 and 20:1-3). I can therefore confidently assure you that “the man doomed to destruction” from 2Thessalonians 2:3 did not originate from the Abyss, but from his mother’s womb! Likewise, the false prophet is referred to as “*another* beast” (13:11-17; 16:13 and 19:20). The Greek for “another” here is *allos* (*al’-los*), which means “*another of the same kind.*” Therefore the false prophet is an evil spirit that originated from the Abyss as well.

For further proof that the beast and the false prophet are evil spirits and not human beings, consider Revelation 16:13: “Then I saw three evil spirits that looked like frogs; they came out of the mouth of the dragon (Satan); out of the mouth of the beast; and out of the mouth of the false prophet.” First of all, notice that the beast and the false prophet are spoken of on a par with the devil himself here; this signifies that they are evil spirits of the highest ranking, not mere human beings (in fact they may be separate manifestations of Satan¹). Secondly, notice that evil spirits come out of the mouth of the beast and false prophet just as they come out of the mouth of the devil.

Lastly, the bible shows both the human antichrist and his human prophetic partner performing awe-inspiring miracles, such as “causing fire to come down from heaven” (e.g. Revelation 13:1-18 and 19:20). To do such they would have to be possessed by high-ranking demons or even Satan himself, as no human being could perform such miracles. Such miraculous phenomena always stem from a supernatural source. The source of these miracles, in this case, is the beast and the second beast, called the false prophet, who will possess the antichrist and his partner.

At this point some might argue that I’m admitting that God will allow *some* of his created beings to suffer everlasting conscious torment. In light of this, why do I have such a problem if this were to apply to human beings? Mainly because I understand what God’s Word clearly teaches from Genesis to Revelation regarding the eternal fate of ungodly people as revealed in this study. Secondly, because *I am* a human being and consequently have firsthand personal knowledge of the human experience and condition. I therefore have the capacity to make sound judgments regarding human affairs based upon the universal moral and judicial instincts that God has granted all people created in His likeness. And my judgment of this doctrine of never-ending torture of human beings is that it is a heinous, revolting, perverse teaching – completely blasphemous to the just, moral, loving, merciful name of the Almighty. Thirdly, because I am *not* an angelic being, have no comprehension of the nature of their existence in the spiritual realm, and only know about these entities by faith through a handful of non-detailed passages in the scriptures. I therefore have no recourse but to trust that God’s eternal judgment of the fallen angels is just and righteous. Lastly, because the devil is directly responsible for the fall of humankind and, hence, all the horrible evil and suffering that’s ever been experienced on earth throughout history. I’m therefore not too overly disturbed by the idea that he and his colleagues have to suffer forever in a state of torment. I admit that the thought that *any* being has to suffer such a fate is tragic, but I think the devil and his angels – who, unlike humans, have existed for millennia – were quite aware of the consequences of their foolish rebellion against the Almighty. Naturally I can’t help but feel that they perhaps deserve their fate.

Remember Jesus’ statement from Luke 20:35-36 that, at the resurrection from the dead, the righteous “can never die; for they are like the angels?” The righteous will become like the angels in the sense that they will inherit *unconditional* immortality and thus will never again be able to die. The righteous will in essence become “immortal souls;” this is the *only sense* that the immortal soul doctrine is biblically valid. The only bad side to this I can think of is that if any of the partakers in this resurrection should choose to rebel against God at some point in the age to come, they will have to suffer the exact same fate as that of the devil and his angels. Why? Naturally because they possess unconditional immortality and can never die. Let me add here that I seriously doubt any of the righteous would ever foolishly rebel against God after their resurrection unto eternal life (no doubt the everlasting

¹ If this is so, the dragon, the beast and the false prophet could be viewed as a sort of “unholy trinity,” a blasphemous perversion of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

example of the fallen angels will be enough to deter them).. After all, God would take little joy in creating robots *programmed* to love and obey him.

I should add here that there are many adherents of literal everlasting destruction who reject this position that the fallen angels will suffer eternal conscious torment in the lake of fire. They believe that such angelic beings will ultimately cease to exist as well, and they present a pretty good argument. I have open-mindedly considered their view on this matter, but am persuaded by scripture in maintaining the position presented above. Regardless, this is a detail matter and should not cause division.

Eternal Life (Aionios Zoe) – What is it Exactly?

In our study so far we've examined countless passages that mention God's gift of "eternal life" (or "everlasting life") such as John 3:16 and Romans 6:23.

Yet, what exactly is "eternal life"? What precisely does it mean to possess "eternal life"? Does "eternal life" simply refer to life that lasts forever? To find out we'll need to dig a little deeper in our study.

First of all, let's examine the word "life." As shown earlier in this chapter "life" is translated from the Greek *zoe*. The popular Greek and Hebrew scholar, James Strong, offers a one-word definition of *zoe*, stating that it simply means "life" (35). The Greek scholar W.E. Vine states that *zoe* "is used of that which is the common possession of all animals and men by nature" (368). Vine then cites Acts 17:25 as an example. Let's go ahead and examine this text, along with the verses that bracket it:

ACTS 17:24-26

"The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by hand. (25) And He is not served by human hands, as if He needed anything, because He Himself gives all men life (*zoe*) and breath and everything else. (26) From one man (Adam) He made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and He determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live."

The apostle Paul, the man God used to write over one-third of the New Testament, is speaking in this passage, and he plainly states that God gives **all people** *zoe*. Every human being alive on this earth has *zoe* – "life." In fact, as Vine tells us above, animals have *zoe* as well. The scriptures support this statement because the Hebrew equivalent to *zoe*, *chay*, is used in reference to the life of animals:

GENESIS 6:17

"I (God) am going to bring floodwaters on the earth to destroy all life under the heavens, every creature that has the breath of life (*chay*) in it. Everything on earth will perish."

GENESIS 7:15

Pairs of all creatures that have the breath of life (*chay*) in them came to Noah and entered the ark.

This agrees with E.W. Bullinger's definition of *zoe* as "life in all its manifestations, from the life of God down to the life of the lowest vegetable... Each living person or thing has that portion of it which is needful for his or its designed position or purpose. Its only one source is God, who is 'the living One'" (453). This explains why Paul stated "For in Him we live and move and have our being" (Acts 17:28).

Bullinger's initial definition of *zoe* is "life, the perfect and abiding antithesis of *thanatos* [death]." This is supported by Paul in Romans 8:38-39 where he lists a series of complete opposites: "For I am convinced that neither death (*thanatos*) nor life (*zoe*), neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, (39) neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord." As height is the express opposite of depth and angels the antithesis of demons, so *zoe* is the exact opposite of death.

All this information helps us to understand *zoe* simply as life – the state of being alive or consciously existing, the express opposite of death. There's nothing bizarre or mystical about *zoe*; it refers to "life" and that's why English bibles unanimously translate *zoe* as such.

Now let's examine the word "eternal." The Greek for "eternal" is *aionios* (*ahee-o'-nee-os*) which means "perpetual" (Strong 9) or, more literally, "age-lasting." This is understandable since *aionios* is derived from the parent noun *aion* (*ahee-ohn'*) meaning "an age" (Strong 9). With this understanding let's re-examine a passage that uses *aion* twice, in reference to two different ages:

LUKE 20:34-36

Jesus replied, "The people of this age (*aion*) marry and are given in marriage. (35) But those who are considered worthy of taking part in that age (*aion*) and in the resurrection from the dead will neither marry nor be given in marriage, (36) and they can no longer die; for they are like the angels. They are God's children, since they are children of the resurrection.

Jesus here speaks of two ages – two *aions*: "this age" – the age (*aion*) that we are now living in; and "that age" – the age (*aion*) that is to come which, according to Jesus above, will only be experienced by "those who are considered worthy of taking part... in the resurrection from the dead." The age to come will officially begin when God creates "a new heaven and a new earth" (see 2Peter 3:13; Revelation 21:1; Isaiah 65:17 and 66:22). There are many other biblical texts which plainly speak of "this age" and "the age to come," for example Matthew 12:32; Mark 10:30; Ephesians 1:21 and Hebrews 6:5.

The apostle Peter incidentally taught that Christians are to be "looking forward" to this age to come (2Peter 3:13). Why? Because the age to come will be a world and universe where "There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away" (Revelation 21:4). The age to come will be *the way God wants it to be* with no more death, crying or pain! This is in contrast to "this age" that we are presently living in. The bible refers to this age as "the present evil age (*aion*)" (Galations 1:4). Why do the scriptures bluntly describe this present age as "evil"? Because this world is not the way God wants it to be – it's marred by death, pain, sin, disease, war, famine, injustice, crime, greed, prejudice, perversion, immorality, etc. These maladies are clear evidence that this age is under the control of Satan who is referred to in scripture as "the god of this age (*aion*)" (2Corinthians 4:4; see also 1John 5:19 and Revelation 12:9). We will look at the nature of "the age to come" in more detail in Chapter Six.

In light of all this information regarding *aionios zoe* it becomes clear that the phrase "eternal life" in its original Hebraic context refers to "age-lasting life" – "the life of the age to come" or "life in the age to come" (Wright 7). Since the age to come is never-ending, "eternal life" (or "everlasting life") is a very sound translation.

This helps explain the seeming conflict between biblical passages which state that Christians *presently have* eternal life and passages which state that eternal life is something that will be granted *in the future*. For example these two passages clearly show that born-again believers presently have eternal life:

JOHN 3:36

Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on him.

1JOHN 5:13

I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life.

These next two texts reveal that eternal life is something to be obtained in the future (at the first resurrection):

TITUS 1:2

a faith and knowledge resting on *the hope of eternal life*, which God, who does not lie, promised before the beginning of time,

TITUS 3:7

so that, having been justified by His grace, we might become heirs having *the hope of eternal life*.

These verses adequately explain that Christians “have eternal life” in the sense that we have “the hope of eternal life.”

Jesus makes it clear in this next passage that eternal life is to be obtained in the age to come:

MARK 10:29-30

“I tell you the truth,” Jesus replied, “no one who has left home or brothers and sisters or mother or father or children or fields for me and the gospel (30) will fail to receive a hundred times as much in this present age (*aion*) (homes, brothers, sisters, mothers, children and fields – and with them persecutions) and in the age (*aion*) to come, eternal life.

As you can see, perpetual life will be granted to faithful Christians “in the age to come.” This is why Jude stated:

JUDE 21

Keep yourselves in God’s love as you *wait* for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ *to bring you to eternal life.*

Christians are waiting for the Lord’s mercy to *bring* them to eternal life.

These four passages explain why the scriptures speak of eternal life as something “promised” to believers (see 2Timothy 1:1 and 1John 2:25) and something believers are “heirs” to (1Peter 3:7). We’re heirs to eternal life but we haven’t inherited it yet.

Understanding that “eternal life” (*aionios zoe*) literally means “perpetual life in the age to come” helps us to make sense of these seemingly conflicting passages. Christians presently have eternal life in the sense that we have the hope of life in the age to come even while we’re still living in this present evil age – we *have* “life in the age to come.” Christians have “the life of the age to come” in the sense that, because our spirits have been reborn and we are in communion with the living God, we are able to manifest “the life of the age to come” to a cold, bloody, sinful age. We can do this because “the life of the age to come” is inside of us. We are ambassadors of the coming age to a dark and dying world. God is in a sense kick-starting “the age to come” through His church on earth who have “the life of the age to come.”

Now that we have a proper understanding of what *aionios zoe* biblically means, let’s read the most popular passage accordingly:

JOHN 3:16

“For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have perpetual life in the age to come.”

God doesn’t want anyone to reap the wages of sin and perish forever; He gave His Son Jesus Christ as a sacrifice for our sins so that we can have the gift of life in the age to come – the age of the new heavens and new earth which will last forever.

Does Aionios Zoe (Eternal Life) Mean “Living Forever”?

I felt it was necessary to go into detail about what exactly “eternal life” means in the scriptures because there are some strange, unbiblical doctrines out there. For instance, I’ve heard it taught that “eternal life” (*aionios zoe*) does not refer to living forever when, in fact, this is exactly what it refers to – living forever in the age to come. The English rendering of *aionios zoe* as “eternal life” (or “everlasting life”) is indeed the best English translation; and this is why English bibles unanimously translate *aionios zoe* as such.

Furthermore, “eternal life” (*aionios zoe*) is used interchangeably with “immortality” in the bible:

ROMANS 2:7

To those who by persistence in doing good *seek* glory, honor and *immortality*, He will give *eternal life.*

“Immortality” in this passage is the Greek word *aphtharsia* (*af-thar-see'-ah*) which simply means “unending existence” (Strong 17) which is another way of saying “living forever.” Notice plainly what the passage states: those who seek immortality will be granted eternal life. “Immortality” and “eternal life” are used interchangeably. Those who seek immortality will be granted immortality, those who seek eternal life will be granted eternal life. (For a more detailed examination of this passage see Chapter Five). This interchangeability is further supported by a previously viewed text:

2TIMOTHY 1:9b-10

This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time, (10) but it has now been revealed through the appearing of our Savior, Christ Jesus, who has destroyed death and has brought life (*zoe*) and immortality (*aphtharsia*) to light through the gospel.

Because *zoe* is used in connection with “immortality” here, we know for certain it’s a reference to *aionios zoe* – eternal life – and not merely to *zoe* (we would naturally assume this because all people and animals have *zoe*, but **eternal** *zoe* is only available through the gospel). With this understanding, note plainly that *eternal life* and *immortality* are used interchangeably in this passage. Until Jesus Christ died for our sins and was raised for our justification, eternal life and immortality were not available to us. Eternal life and immortality are essentially one and the same, they both refer to “unending existence” in the age to come, “perpetual life” in the age to come; the difference is that “immortality” refers to the inherent nature of a person and “eternal life” refers to the result of that person’s inherent nature.

Perhaps the best proof that “eternal life” simply refers to living forever is that it is continually contrasted by such easy-to-understand words as “death” (Romans 6:23), “perish” (John 3:16) and “destruction” (Matthew 7:13-14; Galatians 6:8). Since “eternal life” is repeatedly cited as the express opposite of death and destruction, it can only refer to living forever.

God’s Gift of Eternal Life is the Answer to Humanity’s Quest for Immortality and ‘the Fountain of Youth’

Think about it, what is humanity’s greatest desire – a greater desire than wealth, fame, true love or sexual gratification? From the ancient epic of *Gilgamesh* to Ponce De Leon’s obsessive search for the fountain of youth to our modern-day compulsion to remain youthful-looking as long as possible, humanity is obsessed with the idea of immortality, the idea of living forever. Wise King Solomon reflected on this fact:

ECCLESIASTES 3:10-11

I have seen the burden God has laid on men. (11) He has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the hearts of men; yet they cannot fathom what God has done from beginning to end.

Although everything in all creation, whether living or non-living, is beautiful in its prime – women, men, animals, trees, mountains, buildings – they all ultimately crumble into dust. Everything has its set time but ultimately decays or dies. The bible refers to this as the creation’s “bondage to decay” (Romans 8:21). Yet, in our hearts there is a yearning to live forever, a yearning to never die, a yearning for immortality or “the fountain of youth.” This yearning stems from the fact that we instinctively *know* that we were originally created for immortality, but that our immortality was somehow lost. Our foreparents, Adam and Eve, originally possessed immortality but lost it due to their sin. We therefore have this natural emptiness inside of us, an intense yearning for that which was lost – immortality and communion with God.

This deep yearning is what prompted a young rich man to approach Jesus and ask: “Teacher, what good thing must I do to get eternal life?” (Matthew 19:16). The man was rich and consequently had everything money could buy, but he lacked immortality. He knew he was inherently mortal and doomed to perish one day, despite his great wealth, and this explains why he asked Jesus how he could obtain eternal life. Jesus answered him: “If you want to enter life, obey the commandments” (verse 17). The Lord pointed the rich youth to the Old Testament law because the law is the schoolmaster that ultimately

leads us to Christ, through whom is eternal life. Notice that Jesus didn't contest the man's question, he didn't say, "Young man, you already possess immortality and thus have eternal life." Jesus didn't say this because it's simply not true, instead he explained to him what he had to do to obtain eternal life.

On another occasion an expert in the law asked Jesus a similar question: "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" (Luke 10:25). Like the rich man, the lawyer knew he was mortal and doomed to die one day. He didn't believe he had some "immortal soul;" he thus asked Jesus what he must do to inherit eternal life. And, once again, Jesus didn't contest the man's question. He didn't assure him that he inherently possessed immortality. No, like the rich man, Jesus pointed the lawyer to the law and said, "Do this and *you will live*" (verse 28).

My point is that Christianity at its core is the answer to humanity's age-old quest for immortality. If you're searching for the "fountain of youth," the answer is revealed clearly in the Holy Scriptures which is the revelation of Jesus Christ. Religionists may have obscured this truth over the centuries with their tangled web of life-stifling lies, but the truth is still there, it cannot be quenched: "The wages of sin is death, but *the gift of God is eternal life* in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 6:23).

Biblical Christianity is the true "fountain of youth" that humanity's been seeking since time immemorial.

NOTE: The remainder of this chapter involves an examination of the Greek words *zoe* and *psuche*, both of which are translated as "life" in the scriptures. This examination is only intended for detail-oriented readers; those not interested in such a study are encouraged to skip ahead to Chapter Five.

Does Zoe Refer to 'The God-Kind of Life'?

A popular teaching suggests that the Greek Word *zoe* refers to "the God-kind of life," that it means "eternal life, or God's life" (Hagin 1,9). The only problem with this teaching is its narrow implication that *zoe* **only** refers to "the God-kind of life," and the insinuation that Christians have **already** attained eternal life.

Although we examined *zoe* earlier in this chapter, considering the validity of this teaching gives us an excuse to conduct a more extensive examination here.

We've already deduced that *zoe* simply means "life" – "life in all its manifestations, from the life of God down to the life of the lowest vegetable." Let's observe six different uses of *zoe* in the New Testament:

- 1.) ***Zoe* refers to the temporary life that all people possess as a result of being born of the perishable seed of Adam.** The only life that unbelievers have is this temporal life (*zoe*); to receive eternal life (*zoe*) they must be spiritually born-again of the imperishable seed of Jesus Christ, the second Adam. We've already gone over scriptural support for this earlier in this chapter. We even saw how the Hebrew word *chay*, the Old Testament counterpart to *zoe*, refers to the life of animals.
- 2.) ***Zoe* refers to spiritual life.** What exactly is spiritual life? Human beings are a unit made up of three facets: spirit, mind and body. The part of our being that is aware of God and desires to "connect" with him is our spirit. We can only commune with God through our spirit because, as Jesus stated, "God is spirit" (John 4:24). The problem is that everyone born into this world is born of the perishable seed of Adam and thus naturally inherits the condition of spiritual death. This simply means that a person's spirit is dead to God and cannot do that which it was designed for – commune with God. This explains why Jesus taught that "no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is *born again*" (John 3:3). Jesus made it clear that he was talking about a rebirth of the human spirit (verse 6). When a person accepts the gospel and the Lord Jesus Christ s/he is spiritually reborn as his/her spirit is made alive unto God. As it is written:

ROMANS 8:10

But if Christ is in you, your body is dead because of sin, yet *your spirit is alive* because of righteousness.

Spiritually reborn Christians can actually have a *relationship* with God because their spirit is alive to him. This relationship can only develop based upon the growth of the reborn spirit. In other words, the reborn spirit is born as an infant and must be nourished and trained to reach maturity. This

explains Peter's statement: "Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may *grow up* in your salvation" (1Peter 2:2). Some Christians, unfortunately, never grow up spiritually; they remain spiritual babies throughout their entire Christian walk.

This statement by Jesus is one of only a few New Testament passages wherein *zoe* refers to spiritual life:

JOHN 5:24

"I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life (*zoe*)."

When a person is born-again spiritually he or she passes from a state of spiritual death to a state of spiritual life. Regardless of whether a person is spiritually dead or spiritually alive, it is a *present* state in his or her life. Both spiritual death and spiritual life have natural results: spiritual death ultimately results in eternal death – absolute death with no hope of resurrection in the age to come. Spiritual life ultimately results in eternal life – perpetual life in the age to come. Spiritually reborn Christians have eternal life in them in the sense that they have the seed of eternal life; this seed is spiritual life which ultimately blossoms into eternal life in the age to come. See Appendix B for more biblical details on spiritual life, spiritual death and human nature: spirit, mind and body.

- 3.) ***Zoe* refers to the spiritually born-again believer's new life in Christ.** This usage of *zoe* goes hand and hand with the previous usage and, in fact, could be viewed as synonymous. This is obvious because the very reason a Christian has a new life (*zoe*) in Christ is because of the spiritual life (*zoe*) s/he has as a result of being spiritually born-again. Here are three texts in which *zoe* is used in this manner:

ACTS 5:20

"Go, stand in the temple courts," he said, "and tell the people the full message of this new life (*zoe*)."

ROMANS 6:4

We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life (*zoe*).

EPHESIANS 4:18

They (unbelievers) are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life (*zoe*) of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts.

Zoe in all three of these texts refers to the new life that a born-again Christian experiences as a result of being spiritually alive to God. The teaching that *zoe* refers to "the God-kind of life" best fits this usage of *zoe*. There are a handful of passages in which *zoe* is used in this manner. Christians have "the God-kind of life" simply because their spirits have been born anew and they have communion with the Creator of the universe. They have "the God-kind of life" because they are "new creations" "created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness" (see 2Corinthians 5:17 and Ephesians 4:24). The born-again spirit acts as a kind of sixth sense, tuning them in to God and the realm of the spirit. Unbelievers of course lack this "sixth sense" because they are spiritually dead to God.

- 4.) ***Zoe* refers to life in this present age, as opposed to life in the age to come, which is perpetual.** *Zoe* is biblically used numerous times in this manner. Here are two examples:

LUKE 12:15

Then he said unto them, "Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed: a man's life (*zoe*) does not consist in the abundance of his possessions."

JAMES 4:14b

What is your life (*zoe*)? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes.

As you can see, in both of these texts *zoe* is used in reference to a person's life in this present *temporal* age, as opposed to life in the *everlasting* age to come. The second passage likens life in this present age to a mist that appears for a little while but then disappears.

- 5.) **Zoe refers to eternal life – perpetual life in the age to come.** *Zoe* is most often used in this manner in the New Testament and we've seen numerous examples of this in our study. As already pointed out, believers only *possess* eternal life in the sense that they have the hope of eternal life. Because they have accepted the gospel, they have been spiritually born-again and are reconciled to God. Born-again Christians thus have the hope of perpetual life in the age to come. If believers only presently have the *hope* of eternal life, where is their gift of eternal life now? Who has it? And when do they get it? This next text explains:

COLOSSIANS 3:2-4

Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. (3) For you died, and your life (*zoe*) is now hidden with Christ in God. (4) When Christ, who is your life (*zoe*), appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.

Paul is writing to the Colossian Christians here and he tells them that they have “died.” They died *positionally* in God's eyes when they were spiritually born-again. Consequently, as far as God is concerned, they are dead to the sinful nature and dead to the world. This explains why Paul made the statement, “*I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me*” (Galatians 2:20).

As born-again believers who had accepted the gospel, the Colossians were heirs to God's gift of eternal life, just as Christians are heirs today. This is the major benefit of the gospel, along with reconciliation with our Creator. Notice clearly in verse 3 *where* Paul states the Colossian's gift of eternal life is; he states that it is *with Christ* in heaven. He then tells the Colossians that they can expect to receive this gift *when Christ appears*.

- 6.) **Zoe refers to “the Lamb's book of life” which contains the names of every redeemed person throughout history who is an heir to the gracious gift of eternal life.** A good example of *zoe* used in this manner would be Revelation 21:27.

Now that we understand the six different ways in which *zoe* is used in the New Testament, let's utilize all six of these definitions in one succinct paragraph: Every person born into this world has *life*, the temporal *life* inherited from Adam. Only believers have the hope of eternal *life* because they've been spiritual born-again of the imperishable seed of Jesus Christ, the second Adam; they thus have spiritual *life* and their names are written in the lamb's book of *life*. Spiritual *life* enables a believer to live a new *life* in Christ and ultimately blossoms into eternal *life* in the age to come.

Our conclusion regarding the teaching that *zoe* refers to “the God-kind of life” is that *zoe* can only be defined as such in the handful of passages in which *zoe* refers to a believer's new spiritual life in Christ. To suggest that *zoe* **always** refers to “the God-kind of life” is unscriptural. If this were the case then we would have to absurdly conclude that spiritually dead pagans and animals have this “God-kind of life” just as much as spiritually born-again Christians. The people who teach this may be sincere Christians and may be doing a great work for the Lord, but they're sincerely wrong on this specific issue nevertheless. Needless to say, they should endeavor to be more thorough in their biblical studies.

If we were to accept this teaching that *zoe* **always** refers to “the God-kind of life” it would make nonsense of the scriptures. For instance, remember from the previous section the question that the rich man and lawyer asked Jesus? They both asked Jesus how to obtain eternal life (Matthew 19:16 and Luke 10:25). If we interpret *zoe* to *always* refer to “the God-kind of life” then we would have to translate their question as such: “Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal God-kind of life?” Is this what these men were asking Jesus? *No*, they were simply asking Jesus what they must do to inherit immortality and live forever – physically, mentally and spiritually.

Contrasting Zoe “Life” and Psuche “Life”

There's another biblical word translated as “life” in addition to *zoe*; it is the Greek word *psuche*, which we briefly examined at the beginning of this chapter. What is the difference between *zoe* “life” and *psuche* “life”? Generally speaking, *psuche* refers to the individual life, the living being **itself**, whereas *zoe* refers to the life **of** that being (Vine 368). To understand this difference let's take a look at a statement by Jesus in which he refers to both *psuche* “life” and *zoe* “life”:

JOHN 12:25

“The man who loves his life (*Psuche*) will lose it, while the man who hates his life (*psuche*) in this world will keep it for eternal life (*zoe*).”

Since we already examined the meaning of this passage in Chapter Two, we’ll just focus here on the subtle difference between *psuche* life and *zoe* life. *Psuche* in this text, as you can see, refers to **the** person himself – his very soul or being – and *zoe* in this context refers to the perpetual life **of** the person in the coming age. Understanding this subtle difference helps us to see why *psuche* is often translated as “soul” or “being” as observed earlier in this chapter.

Notice, incidentally, the contrasting fates of the two individuals that Jesus speaks of: The man who “loves his life (*psuche*: soul)” so much that he rejects Christ’s Lordship will end up *losing* it; whereas the man who “hates his life (soul)” to the point of accepting the Lordship of Christ will *keep* it for everlasting life in the age to come.

The fact that the foolish man will literally **lose** his *psuche* (life/soul) is what this study is all about. And this is exactly what Jesus himself solemnly declared:

MATTHEW 10:28

“Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul (*psuche*). Rather, be afraid of the One who can *destroy* both soul (*psuche*) and body in hell.”

Notice that “soul” (*psuche*) is distinguished from “body” in this text. In other words, *psuche* refers to the individual being *as separate from the body*. It’s obvious therefore that *psuche*, in this specific context, refers to the disembodied soul, which would include both mind and spirit. Thus “soul” (mind and spirit) in this passage would refer to the *non-physical* individual life whereas “body” refers to the *physical* individual life. This coincides with the usage of *psuche* in Revelation 20:4 wherein *psuche* refers to the *disembodied* souls of people, and thus to the *non-physical* essence of their being (i.e. mind and spirit).

The reason this is important to bring up is that there are some who erroneously teach that *psuche* **only** refers to physical life (Lindsey 195-196). Yet, we see here clear scriptural evidence that this is simply not the case. It’s true that *psuche* **can** refer to physical life in the bible, for instance Revelation 8:9 wherein *psuche* refers to the life of sea creatures, but *psuche* in this context would technically refer to the life of the creature itself, and not solely to its physical life; regardless, there are only a few such passages. *Psuche* **can** also refer to the *whole* human being, physical and non-physical (e.g. 1Peter 3:20), but more often than not *psuche* refers to the *non-physical* facets of human nature, the mind or mind & spirit (see Appendix B).

Why is this important to bring up in our study? Simply because the people who argue that *psuche* “life” only refers to physical life are advocates of the eternal torture doctrine. The obvious reason they invented this completely unbiblical theory was to “write off” the passages we’ve looked at which clearly state that the person who rejects Christ will “lose his life (*psuche*).” If we take such passages literally and at face value, as we should, they clearly support the view of literal everlasting destruction. Since this is unacceptable to supporters of eternal torture, they had no choice but to come up with this theory that *psuche* refers only to physical life in such passages, but not to the soul, the disembodied being (even though Jesus’ usage of *psuche* in Matthew 10:28 completely dispels this theory). Here’s how we would have to interpret Jesus’ words in John 12:25 (quoted above) if this absurd theory were true: “The man who loves his physical life (*psuche*) will lose it, not his whole life, but only his physical life, his immaterial soul, however, will suffer never-ending conscious torture in the lake of fire.” Is this what Jesus *really* meant to say in this passage? Of course not, the idea is absurd. This is nothing more than a clear-cut case of subtracting the truth and adding to the God-breathed scriptures.

Conclusion on Aionios Zoe – “Eternal life”

As we’ve seen in our study, Paul stated that “*all* men [have] life (*zoe*)” (Acts 17:25). This refers to the temporal life (*zoe*) that God grants all people and is simply attained by being born of the perishable seed of Adam. Thus everyone born into this world has *temporal* life (*zoe*). To receive *eternal*

life (*zoe*), on the other hand, people must be born again of the imperishable seed of Christ, the second Adam (see 1Peter 1:23; Romans 5:16-17 and 1Corinthians 15:45). I've said it before and I'll say it again: this is what the gospel of Christ is all about, and it's all summed up very nicely in the famous simple passage, John 3:16 (a passage that could never be quoted often enough):

JOHN 3:16

“For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.”

Everyone has *zoe*, but only those who believe have *aiônios zoe*.

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CHAPTER FIVE

BIBLICAL ANALYSIS
of Claimed Support Texts for Eternal Torture

Since the bible does not teach the theory that unredeemed human beings possess immortality or the view that ungodly people will suffer eternal torture, the only way adherents of these beliefs can defend themselves is by milking a small number of texts for details which the entire rest of the bible refutes. The purpose of this chapter is to honestly examine these passages. Ironically, as we shall plainly see, a close examination of these texts actually gives further support for literal everlasting destruction.

Daniel 12:2: “... Shame and Everlasting Contempt”

Our first supposed proof text for eternal conscious torment is this passage from Daniel:

DANIEL 12:2-3

Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt. (3) Those who are wise will shine like the brightness of the heavens, and those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever.

This text speaks of two resurrections – the resurrection of the righteous to everlasting life, and the resurrection of the unrighteous to shame and everlasting contempt. Please notice how this text clearly states that *only the righteous will be resurrected to everlasting life*. “Life” here is the Hebrew word *chay* (the equivalent of the Greek *zoe* as shown in Chapter Four) which simply means “living thing” or the state of being “alive” (Vine 138). This is the very same Hebrew word used to describe the “breath of *life*” that God breathed into Adam to animate him (Genesis 2:7) and the “breath of *life*” of animals as well (Genesis 6:17; 7:15,22). This “life” is spoken of in the bible as the express opposite of death (Deuteronomy 30:19; 32:39). My point is that there’s nothing profound or mystical about the word “life” here. It simply refers to life, the state of being alive – the condition of simple conscious existence. According to the above text only one class of humanity, the righteous, will be resurrected unto everlasting life.

What about the class of humanity that is resurrected unto “shame and everlasting contempt?” Well, one thing’s for sure, we know that they are not resurrected for the purpose of being granted life, because only the righteous will be resurrected for this purpose, the text makes this very clear. The resurrection of the unrighteous is a resurrection of shame because they are resurrected for the express purpose of judgment and condemnation. As Jesus declared:

JOHN 5:28-29

“Do not be amazed at this, for a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice, (29) and come out – those who have done good will rise to live, and those who have done evil will rise to be condemned.”

As in the passage from Daniel, we see here that *only the righteous will be resurrected to live*. “Those who have done evil” will be resurrected for the purpose of judgment and condemnation. Condemnation to what? Condemnation to the lake of fire where they will suffer “the second death” (Revelation 20:11-15), which consists of God destroying “both soul and body” (Mathew 10:28). Isaiah 41:11-12 explains that the ungodly will be “shamed and dishonored” in the sense that they “will perish,” “be as nothing, and *non-existent*” (NASB). This is the ultimate shame – to have one’s life judged so worthless and defiled that it must be blotted out of existence and memory.

What about the “contempt” that the unrighteous will suffer which is said to be everlasting? The Hebrew for “contempt” here is *deraown* (*day-raw-one*). Perhaps it will enlighten us to view this very same Hebrew word in another Old Testament passage, which also pertains to the eternal fate of the unrighteous. Here *deraown* is translated as “loathsome.”

ISAIAH 66:22-24

“As the new heavens and new earth that I make will endure before me,” declares the LORD, “so will your name and descendants endure. (23) From one new moon to another, all mankind will come and bow down before me,” says the LORD. (24) “And they will go out and look upon the *dead bodies* of those who rebelled against me; their worm will not die, nor will their fire be quenched, and they will be loathsome (*deraown*) to all mankind.”

According to this text, what will be “loathsome to all mankind?” The *dead bodies* of those who rebelled against the LORD! Notice that these people are dead – all that remains of them are their lifeless “carcasses” (as the KJV states). Just as a grotesque, rotting corpse would be loathsome to you or I, so the proud and wicked people who dared to rebel against the Almighty will be everlastingly loathed and abhorred by the LORD and the righteous.

Would you like further reinforcement that these rebels are indeed dead? Eight verses earlier it states:

ISAIAH 66:16

For with fire and with his sword the LORD will execute judgment upon all men, and many will be those *slain* by the LORD.

This text speaks for itself: On judgment day there will be many “*slain* by the LORD.” The ungodly will be slain, not kept alive and sadistically tormented forever. Their carcasses will be loathsome to all humanity blessed with everlasting life.

(We will examine the phrase “their worm will not die; nor will their fire be quenched” in the forthcoming section on Mark 9:43-48).

Lastly, immediately after informing us of the two classes of resurrections, Daniel 12:3 states how the righteous will “shine like the brightness of the heavens... like the stars forever and ever.” Notice that the text does not go on to share anything about the state of existence of those who are resurrected “to shame and everlasting contempt.” Why? Naturally because they will be “*slain* by the LORD.” They will not be granted everlasting life; consequently, they will have no existence of which to speak. They’ll be dead. They’ll be revolting carcasses – condemned to death for all eternity.

“There will be Weeping and Gnashing of Teeth”

Let’s observe a phrase Jesus used which adherents of the eternal conscious torture theory often cite to support their view:

MATTHEW 13:40-42,49-50

“As the weeds are pulled up and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of the age. (41) The Son of Man will send out his angels, and they will weed out of his kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil. (42) They will throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”

(49) “This is how it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come and separate the wicked from the righteous (50) and throw them into the fiery furnace where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”

The key phrase here that adherents of eternal torment use to support their position is, of course, “there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” The bible shows Jesus using this phrase four other times in Matthew (8:12; 22:13; 24:51 & 25:30) and once in Luke (13:28).

Devotees of never-ending conscious misery seem to think that Jesus was saying, “They will endlessly weep and gnash their teeth in fiery conscious torment forever and ever.” But the fact is that this is *not* what Jesus said. We need to be careful to let a biblical passage speak for itself and resist the temptation to read more into it based upon our doctrinal biases. When we read more into a simple statement like this, as just shown, we become guilty of *adding* to the Word of God (Proverbs 30:6; Revelation 22:18; Deuteronomy 4:2; 12:32).

“Weeping and gnashing of teeth” is simply a solemn reminder that “It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God” (Hebrews 10:31) for God’s enemies will experience “*a fearful expectation* of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God” (Hebrews 10:27).

Regarding the “weeping,” if you were an unrepentant rebel against God, would you not be weeping the day you finally fell into His hands for judgment? And would you not be wailing as you are judged unworthy of living and subsequently cast into a vast fiery furnace? And would you not wail the entire time it takes the fire to consume you – however long that would be? Of course you would. That’s why James warned rich oppressors to weep and wail for fear of God’s coming judgment, referred to as “the day of slaughter,” when fire will devour them (James 5:1-5).

As for “gnashing of teeth,” most of us might think that this is a reference to the experience of pain, but in the bible “gnashing of teeth” describes the wrath of an adversary about to kill his victim – the teeth belong to the tormentor, *not the tormented* (see Job 16:9; Psalm 35:16; 37:12; Lamentations 2:16 and Acts 7:54). Psalm 112 is the only exception. The psalm starts by stating how “Blessed is the man who fears the LORD” (verse 1), and goes on to describe such a person in verses 2-9. The final verse mentions the wicked person by contrast:

PSALM 112:10

The wicked man will see and be vexed, he will gnash his teeth and waste away; the longings of the wicked will come to nothing.

As in the other texts regarding “gnashing of teeth,” the wicked man’s gnashing of teeth is evidently an expression of his fury against the righteous. Yet even while he grinds his teeth in ineffective rage, he wastes away and *comes to nothing*. The phrase *could*, in this one instance, be interpreted as a reference to pain, but the pain clearly does not last forever; the gnashing of teeth ends and the person is ultimately extinguished.

Edward Fudge’s conclusions on “weeping and gnashing of teeth” is well expressed:

In scriptural usage the expression ‘weeping and gnashing of teeth’ seems to indicate two separate activities. The ‘weeping’ reflects the terror of the doomed as they begin to realize that God has rejected them and as they anticipate the execution of his sentence. ‘Gnashing of teeth’ seems to express their bitter rage and enmity toward God, who has sentenced them, and toward the redeemed, who will forever be blessed. The common assumption that ‘weeping and gnashing of teeth’ describes the everlasting agony of souls in conscious torment is the interpretation of a later age and lacks any clear biblical support (*The Fire that Consumes*, 104-105).

Mr. Fudge does a fine job of wrapping up the matter, but let me add this: The reason I quoted the “weeping and gnashing of teeth” passage from Matthew chapter 13 above is because, unlike the other five times this phrase appears, Matthew 13 gives us enough information to properly draw a sound

conclusion. In verse 42 Jesus is **still explaining** *The Parable of the Weeds*, and therefore what he is saying must be interpreted in light of what he has already said. What did he already say? In verse 40 Jesus stated “As the weeds are pulled up and burned in the fire, *so it will be* at the end of the age.” Do weeds burn forever without ever quite burning up? No, they burn for a period of time until they completely burn up. It will be the same way with ungodly people on judgment day.

In addition to this, Jesus describes the lake of fire in verses 42 and 50 as “the fiery furnace.” As we’ve already determined, “fiery furnace” is an unmistakable example of complete incineration. No one can argue with this fact. By adding that “there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth” Jesus is simply describing the miserable way it will be on judgment day. Can you imagine the horrible scene that it will be? The weeping, the wailing, the gnashing of teeth as God’s enemies are cast into the lake of fire and consumed by raging fire? This is the only sound way we can interpret this phrase. After all, if Jesus meant to say that these sinners would perpetually weep and gnash their teeth throughout all eternity, don’t you think he would’ve mentioned it somewhere? Yet, he mentions no such thing. Instead he continually warned against the utter death and destruction of the second death, and backed this up with a multitude of easy-to-understand examples.

‘What about “Outer Darkness” and “Blackest Darkness?”’

In three of the “weeping and gnashing of teeth” texts – Matthew 8:12; 22:13 and 25:30 – Jesus refers to the lake of fire as “outer darkness” (or as the NIV states “outside, into the darkness”). “Outer darkness” is merely one of many names the bible uses for the lake of fire. For example: *Gehenna*, burning sulfur, eternal fire, etc. “Outer darkness” is a fit name for the lake of fire since it is the eternal spiritual realm prepared for the devil and his angels where the light of God’s presence does not shine. When people are damned to “outer darkness” to suffer the second death, there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth, but God will ultimately utterly destroy both soul and body. That’s why the lake of fire is referred to as “the second death” for unredeemed human beings, but *not* the devil and his angels who possess intrinsic unconditional immortality. The nature of the lake of fire is such that it exterminates those that are mortal and torments those that are immortal.

Jude spoke of wicked, godless people as “wandering stars, for whom *blackest darkness* has been reserved forever” (Jude 13). How do we harmonize this statement with the many passages that portray the lake of fire as a gigantic garbage dump where God’s raging fire utterly consumes his human enemies? Obviously “blackest darkness” refers to the state of utter, total oblivion. This is the *blackest*, most extreme darkness imaginable to the human mind – complete obliteration of conscious being in which there is no hope of resurrection or recovery. There is no blacker darkness than this. They “will be as *nothing* and *non-existent*” (Isaiah 41:12 NASB):

OBADIAH 16b (KJV)

...they shall be as though they had not been.

“They Will Go Away to Eternal Punishment”

Let’s look at one of the most frequently cited texts used to support the view of eternal conscious torment:

MATTHEW 25:41,46

“Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.’ ”

(46) “Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life.”

First of all, please notice, once again, that this text plainly declares that *only the righteous will be granted eternal life*. In the previous chapter we saw that “eternal life” (*aionios zoe*) literally refers to perpetual life in the age to come. If *only* the righteous will be granted eternal life in the age to come, then the unrighteous will obviously *not* be granted eternal life in the age to come. The bible is clear about this:

JOHN 3:36

Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on him.

So what does Jesus say will be done with the unrighteous in Matthew 25:41 and 46 above? One thing's for certain, he says nothing at all about eternal conscious life in utter misery; he merely states that they will be cast "into the eternal fire," which is the lake of fire (verse 41), and that this is their "eternal punishment" (verse 46). Please note that Jesus said "eternal punishment" and not "eternal punishing."

The word "punishment" is translated from the Greek word *kolasis* (*kol'-as-is*) which refers to a "penal infliction" (Strong 43) and thus a judicial sentence. Jesus does not say here what exactly the penal infliction will be, only that it will take place in the lake of fire ("the eternal fire") and that the infliction will last forever (that is, take place in the age to come, which lasts forever). Since Jesus doesn't specify here what exactly the penal sentence is, we must therefore turn to the rest of scripture for answers. And we know elsewhere Jesus plainly taught that God would "destroy both soul and body" in the lake of fire (Matthew 10:28) and Paul taught that the ungodly would suffer "everlasting destruction" (2Thessalonians 1:9). Thus the bible is quite clear that the eternal punishment or penal sentence that the unrighteous will be condemned to in the lake of fire is everlasting destruction of soul and body – destruction of the whole person which lasts forever – not eternal punishing.

Let's also consider the fact that the bible uses the word "eternal" to describe the results of an act even when it is clear that the act itself is not of endless duration. For instance, Hebrews 9:12 speaks of the "eternal redemption" which Christ obtained for us; yet no one absurdly supposes that this redemption will be an endless process which will go on through all eternity "because by one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy" (Hebrews 10:14). Also, Hebrews 6:2 speaks of "eternal judgment," yet no one ludicrously claims that the work of judging will go on forever and ever without end. In the very same way the act of punishment need not go on endlessly for the punishment to be eternal. Like eternal redemption and eternal judgment, eternal punishment is eternal in the sense that its results are eternal (McFarland 14).

Some contend that Jesus was teaching eternal conscious torment by describing the lake of fire as "the eternal fire." Yet this is simply a name for, and a description of, the lake of fire which was "prepared for the devil and his angels" as their eternal habitation (verse 41). As pointed out in Chapter Four, these wicked, rebellious angels possess *unconditional* immortality and thus must be exiled to exist *somewhere* for all eternity. What else can God possibly do with such evil, irredeemable creatures that *can never die*?

Furthermore, as we've already seen in Chapter Three, Jude 7 plainly states that Sodom and Gomorrah were overthrown by "eternal fire." Since these cities have long since been completely incinerated, "eternal fire" in this context *must* refer to total destruction which lasts forever, and not to never-ending conscious torment. As already noted, this complete and permanent destruction of Sodom & Gomorrah is a biblical *example* of what will happen to the ungodly when they suffer the second death (2Peter 2:6). So, technically, the phrase "eternal fire" merely refers to destruction which lasts forever when applied to human beings. As always, we must resist the temptation to add our *own* biased interpretation to various biblical phrases and simply let scripture interpret scripture.

Mark 9:43-48

Let's turn to another text which is often cited to prove the eternal conscious torment theory:

MARK 9:43-48

"If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to *enter life* maimed than with two hands to go into hell (*Gehenna*) where the fire never goes out. (45) And if your foot causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to *enter life* crippled than to have two feet and be thrown into hell (*Gehenna*). (47) And if your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out. It is better for you to enter the

kingdom of God with one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into hell (*Gehenna*), (48) where ‘their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched.’ ”¹

The best way to handle this long passage is to examine it point by point and then take it as a whole.

First of all, plainly observe that verses 43 and 45 state that it is better to *enter life* maimed or crippled than to be thrown into “hell” (Greek: *Gehenna*). Verse 47 enlightens us that those who “enter life” will “enter the kingdom of God.” This is in perfect harmony with what we’ve repeatedly witnessed in the scriptures throughout this study: *only the righteous will be granted eternal life* and partake of the kingdom of God in the age to come (i.e. the new Jerusalem and new earth – see Revelation chapter 21).

If only the righteous will “enter life” in the age to come, then the unrighteous, who will be “thrown into *Gehenna*” (the lake of fire), will *not* enter any kind of life at all. No, they will suffer the second death – everlasting destruction of both soul and body – as we have repeatedly observed.

Secondly, notice that all three times Jesus refers to the lake of fire throughout this passage he uses the example of *Gehenna*. As already detailed in Chapter Two, *Gehenna* was the local trash dump & incinerator located right outside the city walls of Jerusalem to the south. Trash, garbage and the carcasses of animals, despised criminals & vanquished enemies were thrown into *Gehenna* for the express purpose of disposal and eradication. Why would Jesus continually use this local trash dump & incinerator as an illustration of the lake of fire? *Because Gehenna was a very certain symbol of destruction which all of his hearers readily understood.* We need to keep this important fact in mind whenever viewing biblical texts that speaks of *Gehenna*. Sadly, most bible readers will miss out on these important facts because **1.)** the English word “hell” disguises the Greek *Gehenna*, and **2.)** they lack any historical knowledge of what *Gehenna* was at the time of Jesus’ earthly ministry.

Keeping the above two points in mind let’s now observe Jesus’ statement in verse 43, “Hell (*Gehenna*), where the fire never goes out.” This was actually true of *Gehenna* – the Valley of Hinnom – as the fires of this city dump were kept constantly burning for the purpose of burning up refuse. But this is also true of the lake of fire of which *Gehenna* is an example. As we’ve already covered, Jesus spoke of the lake of fire as “*the eternal fire* prepared for the devil and his angels” (Matthew 25:41). The LORD had no choice but to prepare such a place after the devil and his angels rebelled against him. Since the devil and his demons possess unconditional immortality and can never die, the lake of fire will be their eternal habitation; but for mortal human beings, the lake of fire will be used as God’s chosen instrument to execute “the second death.” The fire never went out in the constantly smoking Valley of Hinnom (*Gehenna*), but the refuse thrown into it was eradicated – the refuse didn’t ludicrously burn forever. In the same way, the fire in the lake of fire will evidently never go out, but the people cast in it will be completely eradicated.

“*Gehenna, where ‘their Worm Does Not Die’*”

Let’s now examine Jesus’ statement in verse 48: “Hell (*Gehenna*), where ‘their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched.’ ” Despite the obvious ambiguity of the statement, this is one of the major texts cited by adherents of the eternal torment theory to prove their view. Yet, let’s face the facts here: does Jesus say anything in this verse about people being in a state of perpetual, undying torment? No. In fact, if we were to really take this verse literally, then Jesus is evidently teaching on the immortality of worms! The case for the eternal torment theory is pretty sad indeed if its adherents must resort to citing this verse as one of their major proof texts. If the ultimate consequence of sin is as harsh and cruel as everlasting fiery conscious torture, would Jesus Christ, the living Word of God, piddle around making such ambiguous statements? No, he would not fail to clearly spell out the truth regarding such an important subject. That’s why he plainly referred to the lake of fire as *Gehenna* three times in this very passage, because *Gehenna* was a very certain symbol of destruction which backs up his many clear and solemn statements regarding the second death.

You’ll notice that verse 48 is in quotation marks. That’s because Jesus is quoting the very last passage of the book of Isaiah. Although we’ve already viewed this verse in the section on Daniel 12:2,

¹ Verses 44 and 46, which are identical to verse 48, are not found in the best ancient scriptural manuscripts. This explains why modern translations – NIV, NASB, NRSV, etc. – do not include these verses in the main text.

let's go ahead and observe it again (from a different translation), as this is the only way we can properly interpret Jesus' words.

ISAIAH 66:24 (NASB)

“They (the righteous) shall go forth and look on the corpses of the men who have transgressed against me. For their worm shall not die, and their fire shall not be quenched; and they shall be an abhorrence to all mankind.”

“The corpses” refer to the people who have transgressed against the LORD and will be thrown into the lake of fire. Please notice that they are no longer alive. They are dead. They have been destroyed. They are loathsome, ashen, worm-chewed corpses! They will be “an abhorrence to all mankind” just as an ashen, worm-chewed corpse of a despised criminal would be abhorrent to us.

The fact that these transgressors are, in fact, lifeless corpses is backed up by verse 16 of the same chapter, which states that they will be “*slain* by the LORD,” and verse 17, which states that “they will meet their *end*.” The second death is when the ungodly will meet their *end*, not when they’ll meet the beginning of life in never-ending conscious agony.

The Hebrew for “worm” refers to maggots (Strong 123). The unmistakable fact is that the bodies affected by these maggots are dead. This is natural since *maggots exclusively devour dead flesh*, not living creatures. And, it should be added, maggots do not die, they turn into flies.

Being that *Gehenna* was a garbage dump, maggots inevitably bred freely there and preyed upon the filth. When corpses of animals or executed criminals were thrown in, they would either be destroyed by maggots, by the fires that kept constantly burning there, or by a combination of both (Honor 22).

Understanding the unmistakable context of Jesus' quote from Isaiah, as well as the historical facts regarding *Gehenna* help us to properly interpret Jesus' words from Mark 9:43-48.

By *not* rightly dividing the Word of God – that is, being biased and superficial in their “studies” – many misguided hellfire preachers have had a field day with Mark 9:48, drawing up all kinds of bizarre interpretations, including how immortal worms will forever chew on the undying souls of the damned in hell. In response to this, I have a much less ambiguous “worm verse” that I’d like to share, which is also from the book of Isaiah:

ISAIAH 51:8

“For the moth will eat them up like a garment; the worm will devour them like wool. But my righteousness will last forever, my salvation through all generations.”

Just as moths eat or destroy garments, so the ungodly will be destroyed in the lake of fire. Like Mark 9:48, this is undoubtedly a figurative example of everlasting destruction; it is meant to be taken seriously, but not necessarily literally. I doubt, after all, that there will be literal moths or worms in the lake of fire devouring those thrown in. We’ve already deduced from scripture that, literally, the ungodly will be totally consumed by raging fire – both soul and body – when cast into the lake of fire. This will result in the blackest darkness of all – absolute obliteration and extinction of being.

Notice how the everlasting destruction of the ungodly is contrasted with the LORD’s righteousness and salvation which will last *forever*. Those who accept God’s gracious gift of salvation – eternal life – will experience this salvation forever. Those who reject it have no “forever” to look forward to; they will be destroyed like garments devoured by moths or worms. Verses 3,6-8 & 11 also confirm that this is indeed an eschatological text and thus relevant to the eternal fate of ungodly people. Why is it that adherents of the eternal torment theory fail to ever mention this “worm verse”? I’ll tell you why – because it contradicts the religious-traditional position they so dearly embrace.¹

“Gehenna... Where the Fire is Not Quenched”

Let us now consider the latter part of verse 48 where Jesus states, “hell (*Gehenna*)... where the fire is not quenched.” Adherents of eternal torture often attach their *own* meaning to this statement and suggest that it is supportive of their view. Yet, there are multiple references to unquenchable fire

¹ See Appendix A for a more detailed examination of Isaiah 51:8.

throughout the scriptures and *none* of these passages refer to eternal conscious torment but rather to fire that cannot be extinguished or resisted and consumes until nothing is left. See for yourself how evident this is from this text:

JEREMIAH 7:20

Therefore this is what the Sovereign LORD says: “My anger and my wrath will be poured out on this place (Judah), on man and beast, on the trees of the field, and on the fruit of the ground, and it will burn and not be quenched.”

“Burn and not be quenched” in this passage could not possibly refer to burning forever without end. After all, will the trees of the field and the fruit of the ground, as well as the men and beasts of Judah, burn forever?

Here’s another

example from Jeremiah:

JEREMIAH 21:12b, 14

“...my wrath will break out and burn like fire because of the evil you have done – burn with no one to quench it.”

“I will punish you as your deeds deserve,” declares the LORD. “I will kindle a fire in your forests that will consume everything around you.”

We clearly see here that God’s wrath will break out and “burn with no one to quench it” in the sense that it will “consume everything.”

These and many other texts which mention unquenchable fire prove that such phrases simply refer to the irrevocability of God’s judgment and wrath – for when the LORD’s judgment is pronounced and the fire is set to destroy, he will allow nothing to quench it until the consumption is complete (see, for example, Isaiah 34:9-11; Ezekiel 20:47-48; Amos 5:6; Matthew 3:12 and Luke 3:17).

Let us now examine Mark 9:43-48 as a whole. Jesus made very similar comments in Matthew 5:29-30 and 18:8-9. The point Jesus is making in these texts is clear: If we want to enter eternal life we must be careful to cut off things in our present lives that cause us to sin, because the wages of sin is death, and this wage will be meted out in *Gehenna*, the lake of fire, God’s garbage dump & incinerator. More basically, Jesus is simply encouraging us to flee from sin because it will prevent us from entering life, and will, in fact, lead to ultimate extinction. This is a very important matter, but this is all Jesus is essentially saying in these texts. Paul, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, made the same point a bit more succinctly when he declared “For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 6:23).

“There Will Be Wrath and Anger... Trouble and Distress”

This next passage is not often cited in support of eternal torment but it has been thrown at me at least once, so let’s go ahead and take a look at it (we need an excuse to look at it anyway as it is actually a strong proof text for everlasting destruction):

ROMANS 2:6-10,12

God “will give to each person according to what he has done.” (7) **To those who by persistence in doing good, seek glory, honor and immortality, he will give eternal life. (8) But for those who are self-seeking and who reject the truth and follow evil, there will be wrath and anger. (9) There will be trouble and distress for every human being who does evil: first for the Jew, then for the gentile; (10) but glory, honor and peace for everyone who does good: first for the Jew, then for the gentile.**

(12) All who sin apart from the law will also *perish* apart from the law,

Paul starts out this passage by quoting Psalm 62:12 and Proverbs 24:12: On judgment day God will give to each person according to what he or she has done. To those who persistently do good and *seek immortality*, he will grant *eternal life*. Notice clearly that immortality is *not* something that people intrinsically possess, it must be sought. Those who seek it will find it, as Jesus himself said, “seek and you will find” (Matthew 7:7). Once again we clearly see that only one class of people will be granted immortality and eternal life – those who seek immortality and actively practice their faith, that is, the righteous.¹ If only one of the two classes of people will be granted life and immortality, then we know that the other class of people will *not* be granted life and immortality. If these people are not granted life and immortality, it naturally follows that they will be condemned to death. That’s why Paul goes on to state in verse 12 that all who sin apart from the law will also *perish* apart from the law. In fact, right before this passage Paul declares that, according to God’s righteous decree, those who unrepentantly practice sin *deserve death* (1:32).

Paul describes the class of people who will *not* be granted eternal life and immortality, as “self-seeking and who reject the truth and follow evil.” He goes on to declare in verses 8 and 9 what this class of people can expect on judgment day: “...there will be wrath and anger. There will be trouble and distress.” “Wrath and anger” describe the scene from God’s perspective, while “trouble and distress” portray it from the perspective of the ungodly people who will suffer His wrath and anger.

Naturally, adherents of eternal torture would have us believe that God’s “wrath and anger” entails never-ending conscious agony; and this is strengthened, they claim, by the proclamation that the recipients of this wrath and anger will experience “trouble and distress.”

There are two obvious problems with this contention: The first is that it is hermeneutically unsound to take a phrase like “wrath and anger” and add to it our own personal interpretation which just so happens to coincide with our pet beliefs. Secondly, scripture must always be interpreted *by* scripture; this is an interpretational law because God, the author of Holy Scripture, is of one mind.

So what does God’s “wrath and anger” mean according to the bible? The scriptures clearly reveal what results when God’s wrath and anger are poured out:

EZEKIEL 22:31

“So I will pour out my wrath on them (the sinful people of Judah) and *consume them with my fiery anger, bringing down on their own heads all they have done, declares the Sovereign LORD.*”

PSALM 21:8-9

Your hand will lay hold on all your enemies; your right hand will seize your foes. (9) At the time of your appearing you will make them like a fiery furnace. In his wrath the LORD will swallow them up, and his fire will *consume them*.

As you can plainly see, when God’s wrath and anger are finally poured out – after much patience and mercy, I might add – people are utterly consumed and destroyed, not consciously tortured endlessly.

Zephaniah 1:14 - 2:3 informs us about the future “great day of the LORD” and describes this day as “a day of *wrath*” (1:15,18 and 2:2) and “the day of the LORD’s *anger*” (2:2-3). Notice what will result from God’s wrath and anger:

ZEPHANIAH 1:18

“Neither their silver nor their gold will be able to save them on the day of the LORD’s wrath. In the fire of his *jealousy the whole world will be consumed, for he will make a sudden end of all who live on the earth.*”

Verse 15 describes this day of God’s wrath and anger as “a day of *distress*” and “a day of *trouble*” for the people who are subject to His wrath and anger. Of course they’ll experience “trouble

¹ Remember, the “righteous” are simply those people who are *in-right-standing with God* because they’ve let go of their own righteousness in acceptance of God’s “gift of righteousness” through Christ – see Romans 5:17 and 2Corinthians 5:21.

and distress,” but they won’t experience “trouble and distress” continuously forever and ever, as the text clearly shows that God’s wrath and anger will ultimately result in the whole world being *consumed* – bringing “a sudden end to all who live on the earth.”

Because scripture must always be interpreted in light of what the rest of scripture teaches, this helps enlighten us as to exactly what Paul was talking about in Romans 2:8-9 when he stated that there will be wrath and anger, trouble and distress for all those who reject the truth and follow evil.

The second reason we cannot take “there will be wrath and anger... trouble and distress” as a reference to eternal conscious torment is because, as already pointed out, this passage is sandwiched between two crystal clear statements that **1.)** according to God’s righteous decree, sinners “deserve *death*” (1:32), and **2.)** “all who sin apart from the law will also *perish* apart from the law” (2:12). Keep in mind that originally there were no chapter divisions or verse numberings in the epistles; these were added much later for the sake of convenience.

We could sum up Romans 2:6-12 as follows: Only those who “do good” and seek immortality will be granted eternal life. Those who reject the truth and follow evil deserve death and therefore will experience God’s wrath and anger which always results in consumptive perishment – “for all who sin apart from the law will also perish apart from the law.”

“The Smoke of their Torment Rises Forever”

We are left with one last supposed proof text for eternal torture to scrutinize:

REVELATION 14:9-11

“If anyone worships the beast and his image and receives his mark on the forehead or on the hand, (10) he, too, will drink of the wine of God’s fury, which has been poured out full strength into the cup of his wrath. He will be tormented with burning sulfur in the presence of the holy angels and of the lamb (Jesus). (11) And the smoke of their torment rises forever and ever. There is no rest day or night for those who worship the beast or his image, or anyone who receives the mark of his name.”

As you can see, this passage describes the harsh divine judgment that will befall people who choose to worship the beast and receive his mark during the 7-year tribulation period. I admit that a casual reading of this text gives the impression that these people will suffer eternal conscious torment, but this conclusion does not stand up to a thorough biblical analysis. Let me present four solid reasons why we cannot interpret this passage as a reference to eternal conscious torture:

First of all, although this passage might at first glance give the impression that God will sadistically torment people in his presence forever and ever, *it does not say that*. All it states is that these rebellious people will be tormented with burning sulfur and that “*the smoke* of their torment rises forever and ever” – there’s a difference. “Smoke” indicates that they will be burned up and “torment” would refer to the anguish experienced while being burned up. This perfectly coincides with what the Holy Spirit inspired David to write in Psalm 37:20: “But the wicked shall perish... Into smoke they shall vanish away” (NKJV).

We’ve already covered the fact that, when people suffer the second death, conscious suffering will be meted out to each individual as divine justice properly dictates. This makes perfect sense when comparing, say, Jack the Ripper and the friendly pagan guy at work who simply wants nothing to do with the Lord. The pagan guy might experience a split second of pain when raging fire utterly consumes him, but doesn’t a fiend like Jack the Ripper justly deserve a bit more conscious suffering before eternal oblivion? Of course he does. That’s why Jesus said judgment day would be more bearable for some than for others and that some would be punished more severely even though they all suffer the same ultimate fate – literal everlasting destruction. This is actually a comforting aspect of judgment day as every evildoer throughout history who has ever “gotten away” with wicked deeds will have to stand before the true “Supreme Court” and answer for his or her crimes. As Erwin Lutzer aptly puts it: “Every court case ever tried on earth will be reopened; every action and motive will be meticulously inspected and just retribution meted out. In the presence of an all-knowing God there will be no unsolved murders, no unknown child abductor, and no hidden bribe” (107).

In the case of Revelation 14:9-11, this passage is solely referring to those who have chosen to worship the beast and receive his mark during the 7-year tribulation period. This is apparently a very heinous sin to God and therefore these people will be punished very severely.

The second reason we can't take Revelation 14:9-11 as a reference to never-ending conscious torment is because this passage has a "sister text" which uses the very same terminology wherein the meaning can't possibly be mistaken. This sister text is from the Old Testament and is therefore the *foundation* upon which Revelation 14:9-11 rests. Let's go ahead and observe this text:

ISAIAH 34:9-10a

Edom's streams will be turned into pitch, her dust into burning sulfur; her land will become blazing pitch! (10) It will not be quenched night and day; its smoke will rise forever.

Reading this passage we get the strong impression that the kingdom of Edom will burn forever and ever without end *but the entire rest of the chapter renders this interpretation impossible*. The rest of the chapter clearly shows that Edom will become a desolate desert inhabited by owls, jackals and hyenas. Verses 5 & 6 state that the people of Edom will be "totally destroyed" and slaughtered, and Obadiah 10 & 18 back this up, stating that Edom will "be destroyed forever" – consumed by the fire of God's judgment and wrath. Therefore the statement "it will not be quenched night and day; its smoke will rise forever" *cannot* be taken to mean what it might casually seem.

Observe how Isaiah 34:9-10 and Revelation 14:10-11 use the same terminology:

**Her dust (will be turned) into burning sulfur
He will be tormented with burning sulfur**

**Its smoke will rise forever
The smoke of their torment rises forever**

**It will not be quenched night and day
There is no rest day or night**

This proves that the terminology used in Revelation 14:10-11 cannot refer to eternal conscious torment, because just as the entire rest of Isaiah 34 renders this interpretation impossible for Isaiah 34:9-10a, so the entire rest of the bible renders this interpretation impossible for Revelation 14:10-11.

Please notice that Isaiah 34:10 plainly states that Edom will burn and "not be quenched *night and day*." This proves that the phrase "night and day" or "day or night" does not refer to an unending amount of time. The burning sulfur that destroyed Edom was not quenched "night and day" until the entire kingdom was destroyed. Likewise, the wicked people spoken of in Revelation 14:10-11 will have no rest from their torment "day or night" until the burning sulfur totally destroys them. "Burning sulfur" is simply another name for the lake of fire (see Revelation 21:8); so being "tormented with burning sulfur" is a reference to the second death. For further proof, Paul stated that he worked and prayed "night and day" (1Thessalonians 2:9; 3:10), but he did neither non-stop, and both working and praying ceased when he died. Acts 9:24 and Revelation 12:10 give additional support that this phrase refers to a temporary period of time.

The third reason we can't regard Revelation 14:10-11 as a reference to eternal conscious torment is because there are other texts in the very same book of Revelation that also use the same terminology as Revelation 14:10-11, but like Isaiah 34:9-10, these texts also distinctly refer only to complete destruction by fire: Chapter 18 of Revelation deals with the fall of Babylon, which is the result of God's judgment. "Babylon" here prophetically refers to a modern-day city that will be the governmental center of Satan's kingdom on earth. Chapter 18 speaks of "the smoke of her burning" (verses 9 & 18) and of "her torment" (verses 10 & 15), and 19:3 states, "The smoke from her goes up forever and ever." This terminology gives the impression that "Babylon" will be eternally tormented and burn forever and ever, but Revelation 18:8 makes it clear that "She will be consumed by fire" – completely destroyed – just as this entire present earth will also be destroyed (see 2Peter 3:10-11). Thus, the statement "the smoke from her goes up forever and ever" can only refer to complete and final destruction.

These passages, which use the terminology of smoke rising forever, coincide with God's total destruction of Sodom & Gomorrah which is a biblical "example of what is going to happen to the

ungodly” at the second death (2Peter 2:6). In the Genesis account of Sodom & Gomorrah’s destruction, Abraham saw “dense smoke rising from the land, like smoke from a furnace” (19:28).

Fourthly, there’s even further reason why we can’t take Revelation 14:10-11 as a reference to never-ending conscious torture. Notice clearly from this text where the tormenting is taking place: “He will be tormented with burning sulfur *in the presence* of the holy angels and of the lamb. And the smoke of their torment rises forever and ever.” Being tormented with burning sulfur is referring to suffering the second death (again, Revelation 21:8); according to this text this “death” will take place *in the presence of God and his holy angels*. So whether we view “tormented with burning sulfur” as a reference to eternal conscious torture or as a reference to the anguish of being completely burned up, it is certain that, in either case, it will take place in the very presence of God. This presents a problem for the view of eternal conscious torment as it shows a God who sadistically tortures his human enemies in his presence forever and ever. Yet it presents no such problem for the view of everlasting destruction as it shows God present at the second death to judge his human enemies and execute their sentence of total, everlasting extermination by his chosen instrument of fire. As already covered in Chapter One, 2Thessalonians 1:9 states that ungodly people “shall be punished with everlasting destruction *from the presence of the Lord*, and from the glory of his power” (KJV) “and shut out *from the presence of the Lord* and from the majesty of his power” (NIV), *not* tortured in the presence of the Lord forever and ever.

In addition, consider the fact that there are numerous scriptures that plainly show how there shall be no *memory* of the ungodly because the Lord will so thoroughly blot out their names forever and ever (see, for example, Psalm 9:5-7; Isaiah 65:16-17 and Obadiah 16). Needless to say, it will be rather hard to forget about the ungodly if they’re being tormented in the Lord’s presence throughout all eternity. As already examined, Isaiah 66:24 states how the righteous shall “go out and look upon” the carcasses of the damned as worms and fire devour their remains. The faithful will obviously not be able to forget about them *until* they are totally destroyed, so both Isaiah 66:24 and Revelation 14:9-11 cannot be references to never-ending conscious torment.

As you can see, the claim that Revelation 14:10-11 supports the eternal torment theory simply does not stand up to a thorough biblical analysis. This specific case proves that it is a mistake to take one or two scriptural texts in which we read *our own* biased meaning into the terminology, disregard the entire rest of the bible, and try to prove something. It is unsound to do this for *scripture must always interpret scripture*; this is a hermeneutical law. After all, I could easily take one or two scriptural texts and “prove” just about anything; that is, as long as I disregard the entire rest of the bible. For example, I could “prove” that women must remain absolutely silent in the church (1Corinthians 14:33-38; 1Timothy 2:11-14) or that the homosexual lifestyle is okay (2Samuel 1:26). In both of these cases I was able to come up with what appears to be clear scriptural support to prove my point, yet despite how clear these scriptures are *by themselves*, in both cases the entire rest of the bible renders my initial casual interpretation false. Such is the case with Revelation 14:10-11. The terminology used in this text is used elsewhere in scripture and only refers to literal everlasting destruction, not eternal conscious torment. (For further proof of this passage see www.jewishnotgreek.com under “answering critics.”)

‘What about the Rich Man & Lazarus?’

In the previous section I stated that Revelation 14:9-11 was the last proof text for the eternal conscious torment theory that was necessary to examine. Some readers might object that I’ve failed to address the rich man and Lazarus, an often-cited support passage for eternal torment.

This objection refers to Luke 16:19-31 wherein Jesus tells the story of a rich man and poor beggar named Lazarus who die and go to “hell” (verse 23). “Hell” in this text is translated from the Greek word *hades*. Although both the rich man and Lazarus go to *hades* in this story, they each experience diametrical conditions – the rich man is shown to be in a horrible state of torment, whereas the poor beggar is comforted in “Abraham’s bosom.” Jesus’ “punch line” for the story is that some people will not repent and believe even if someone rises from the dead.

It is easy to see why casual bible readers and non-advanced students might suggest that this passage supports the theory of eternal conscious torment. After all, the passage portrays the rich man in hell after death and in an obvious state of torment, but let me explain why this section of scripture is not relevant to the subject of eternal punishment.

As pointed out above, the word “hell” in this passage is the Greek word *hades* (verse 23). *Hades* is equivalent to the Hebrew *sheol* (*sheh-ole*).¹ *Sheol/hades* refers to the intermediate state of the soul between decease and resurrection² and is therefore a *temporary* condition (Vine 286). Since *sheol/hades* does not refer to the lake of fire, it is obviously not relevant to the subject of eternal punishment in the lake of fire, the subject of this study.

There are differing views regarding the precise nature of *sheol/hades*. For instance, is it an actual place where souls exist in conscious torment (or comfort, as was the case with Lazarus)? Is it a well of sleeping souls awaiting resurrection? Or is it simply the condition of death itself (“gravedom”) where souls are extinct and “awaiting” resurrection? *Sheol* appears 66 times in the Old Testament and *hades* appears 10 times in the New Testament. There are numerous other scriptural references to *sheol/hades* as well (e.g. “pit,” etc.). I believe a prayerful, thorough and unbiased examination of these many passages will clearly reveal the biblical truth on the matter and I encourage all to do just such a study. In fact, this is the very purpose of Part II of this book (not contained in this edition).

Regardless of what view one accepts concerning this “intermediate state,” the fact of the matter is that biblical passages referring to *sheol/hades* are not relevant to the subject of eternal punishment – the *everlasting* fate of ungodly people. Needless to say, it is absolutely erroneous to take passages that refer to *sheol/hades* – like Luke 16:19-31 – and teach on eternal punishment. Unfortunately, but to be expected, many adherents of the eternal torment theory habitually use Luke 16:19-31 for this very purpose, no doubt because of their abysmal lack of proof texts. Those who make a practice of this – such as Norman Geisler and Robert Peterson – do so to their own shame (*Discipleship Journal* 32,34; *In Covenant* 10 and *Two Views of Hell* 139).

The bottom line on the matter is this: whether you regard the story of the rich man and Lazarus as a literal teaching or as a symbolic parable, it is not pertinent to the subject of this study, whatever the case. See Appendix B for more biblical details on the nature of *sheol/hades* and also visit my other web site at www.sheol-know.org for more excellent information. .

“Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth”

Taking the story of the rich man and Lazarus and using it as a proof text for never-ending torture (like Bill Wiese does in 23 minutes in hell) is a good example of “unrightly dividing” the scriptures. Let’s view a passage that instructs us on proper scriptural study and interpretation to explain what I mean by this:

2TIMOTHY 2:15 (KJV)

Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.

First of all, notice that we are encouraged to “*study*.” This means that our interpretation of the scriptures should *not* be based on superficial observation, but upon a thorough examination wherein we interpret scripture with scripture. As long as we do this and are honest with the scriptures, letting go of all biases, the truth should be plain to see on any given subject. This is called “rightly dividing the word of truth,” which simply means to handle it correctly (see the NIV translation of this passage).

If it is possible to “rightly divide” the scriptures it is also unfortunately possible to “unrightly divide” them. We’ve seen in this study that a thorough examination of the Holy Scriptures strongly supports the view of everlasting destruction; but a person could very easily “unrightly divide” the scriptures and “prove” that the bible supports eternal torture. All they would have to do is take a handful of texts in which they add their own biased meaning instead of properly allowing scripture to interpret scripture. We’ve seen many examples of this in this very chapter. Another example would be to take a passage and misapply it. This is the case with the story of the rich man and Lazarus. Even if we were to take the story literally it still only refers to the *temporary* state between physical decease and resurrection; it therefore cannot be applied as a reference to the second death which concerns the *eternal* fate of the ungodly.

Needless to say, watch out for those who unrightly divide the scriptures!

¹ See Acts 2:27 which quotes Psalm 16:10, supplanting the Hebrew *sheol* with the Greek *hades*.

² Many theologians believe that *sheol/hades* included blessed souls *only* in periods preceding the ascension of Christ.

Conclusion

This ends our examination of the few texts which adherents of eternal torment cite to support their view. A careful biblical examination has shown that none of these passages actually support their position; as a matter of fact, they actually provide further proof for literal everlasting destruction. Revelation 14:9-11 is their most promising text, but, as we have seen, the terminology contained in this passage is used elsewhere in scripture wherein it clearly refers to literal destruction that lasts forever, not never-ending conscious agony.

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CHAPTER SIX

REFUTING EXTRA-BIBLICAL ARGUMENTS

for Eternal Torture and Against Literal Destruction

In light of the overwhelmingly clear biblical support for literal everlasting destruction, and the lack thereof for eternal conscious torment, adherents of the latter view have had to resort to all sorts of bizarre religious theories and objections. These next two chapters are devoted to looking at these various extra-biblical arguments.

‘Death Means “Separation” ’

Let’s start with the strange theory that death doesn’t really mean death, but “separation.” For example, consider Paul’s unmistakable statement in this previously viewed passage:

ROMANS 6:23

For the wages of sin is death (*thanatos*), but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

As we’ve already seen in Chapter One, “death” here is translated from the Greek word *thanatos* which simply means “death” (Strong 35) – the absence of life or opposite of life, hence, the cessation of conscious existence. The Greek scholar E.W. Bullinger states that *thanatos* refers to “The natural end of life” (207). Although this is simple to understand and commonly understood, adherents of the eternal torment theory “explain” that death in this passage does not really mean death but rather “separation from God.” When you press them for details as to exactly what they mean by “separation from God,” it turns out that what they really mean is never-ending conscious life in fiery torment. Do you see the obvious problem with this theory? Under the guise of “interpretation” they would have us believe that death actually means the *exact opposite* of what it really is! Since “the wages of sin” to them is not really death at all, but immortal life in conscious torment, their definition of death means something entirely opposite to literal death! If this is not a blatant example of subtracting from God’s Word and adding to it, I don’t know what is. This religious theory must be rejected for a number of obvious reasons:

1.) If we take “eternal life” literally, we must also take “death” literally. God clearly declares in Romans 6:23 above, as well as numerous other passages, that the wages of sin is death and that eternal life is a gift to those in right-standing with him. So death is promised as a punishment for ungodly sinners and life is promised as a gift for the righteous. In such a context as this, every law of language and common sense agrees that if we take the promise of life literally we must also take the punishment of death literally. If one is literal then both are literal. If there is to be no real death for sinners there will be no real life for saints (McFarland 25, 27).

Adherents of eternal torment can insist that death only means “separation” all they want, but the simple fact is that the opposite of life is death. What word could better describe the end of life than ‘death’? The only way a person can accept the view of eternal torture is to believe that death does not mean death, that die does not mean die, that destroy does not mean destroy, that perish does not mean perish and that destruction does not mean destruction.

2.) Physical death is death of the body. While most Christians believe the soul (mind and spirit) survives the body, we cannot ignore the biblical fact that “the body without the spirit is *dead*” (James 2:26). The body is not itself separated; it is dead. It no longer has life in it because death is the

opposite of life. Death means death, it's not complicated. *Thanatos*, the Greek word translated as death in Romans 6:23 above, is used most often simply in reference to this death, the first death. For example:

ACTS 23:29

“I found that the accusation had to do with questions about their law, but there was no charge against him (Paul) that deserved death (*thanatos*) or imprisonment.”

The Roman commander speaking in this text is merely attesting that Paul committed no crime worthy of execution or imprisonment. *Thanatos* here simply refers to physical execution – the cessation of physical life. When a person is executed his/her conscious life expires, at least as far as physical life is concerned. Believe it or not, adherents of eternal torture suggest that “death” refers to separation even in this context. Their theory is that death here would refer to separation of the inner being (mind and spirit) from the outer being (body) (Dake 619). According to this theory the Roman commander really meant to say, “There was no charge against Paul that deserved separation of the inner being from the outer being or imprisonment.” Did the Roman commander really mean to say this when he used the word *thanatos*? Of course not, the very idea is ludicrous. The use of *thanatos* here refers to literal physical death, the expiration of conscious life in the body. This is how James 2:26 above defines physical death: the body without the spirit is *dead*, that is, void of conscious life. Whether or not a person's consciousness exists on a spiritual plane after physical death is a separate issue (touched on in Appendix B and thoroughly examined in Part II, the latter not included in this edition).

3.) The same biblical words used in reference to the second death are also used in reference to the death of animals. In his popular lexicon (a dictionary of biblical words), W.E Vine admits that *thanatos* – death – is indeed “the opposite of life,” but then completely contradicts this statement by stating that “it never denotes non-existence” (Vine 149). With all due respect, Mr. Vine would do well to forsake his sectarian bias and honestly dig a little deeper in his biblical studies as the scriptures blatantly disagree with this statement. Consider that the equivalent Hebrew word for death, *maveth* (*maw'veth*),¹ is used in reference to the death of animals in the Old Testament:

ECCLESIASTES 3:19

Man's fate is like that of the animals; the same fate awaits them both: as one dies (*maveth*) so dies (*maveth*) the other.

ECCLESIASTES 10:1

As dead (*maveth*) flies give perfume a bad smell, so a little folly outweighs wisdom and honor.

Would anyone ludicrously argue that the equivalent Hebrew word for death in these texts refers to “separation” or eternal conscious torment? Of course not. Animals and flies which experience death (*thanatos/maveth*) literally die – their life ceases. They of course leave behind a dead, decaying shell, but their conscious life expires. That's what death is. It's plain and simple. This completely disproves Vine's unscholarly theory as animals definitely cease to exist when they die, that is, their conscious life expires. If “death” (*thanatos/maveth*) literally means death when used in reference to animals, why would its definition mysteriously change to something completely different – actually opposite – when applied to human beings? It doesn't, but adherents of the eternal torment theory are forced to interpret the bible in this bizarre manner because of their unbiblical theology (their reasoning is: “If people have an immortal soul, and hence can never actually die, then death can't really mean death when used in reference to people”).

4.) Numerous other biblical words besides *thanatos* describe the second death in strict terms of death and destruction. As we've plainly seen throughout this study, *thanatos* is supported by many other Hebrew and Greek words which are variously translated as “die,” “death,” “destruction,” “destroy” and “perish” in reference to the fate of those cast into the lake of fire. As we have also seen in chapters Two, Three and Four these words are, in turn, backed up by numerous crystal clear *examples* of literal destruction. In light of these facts, even if *thanatos* had a secondary definition of “separation” – which it doesn't – it still would not refer to separation in reference to the second death of human beings.

¹ See 1 Corinthians 15:54-55 which combines quotes from Isaiah 25:8 and Hosea 13:14 supplanting the Hebrew *maveth* with the Greek *thanatos*.

5.) If the fate of ungodly sinners is to be some sort of life or “existence” in undying “separation” from God in utter misery and torment, God would have certainly expressed this somewhere in the bible. He could have easily chosen words to describe damnation in explicit terms of “separation,” “existence in torment” or “perpetual life in misery,” but He did not do this. Instead, as we’ve clearly seen, He consistently chose words that have for their general, usual or basic meaning “die,” “death,” “destruction,” “destroy,” “perish,” “consume” and “burn up.” God couldn’t possibly use a better choice of words to describe literal death. He also made sure to back up all these unmistakable words with a multitude of easy-to-understand examples of literal death and incineration.

Consider also that if *thanatos* really means “separation” then why should English bible translators even bother translating *thanatos* as “death” at all (which they all unanimously do)? Why not rather universally translate it as “separation”? Wouldn’t doing such simplify matters and spare us all a lot of confusion? The obvious reason bible translators do not do this is because *thanatos* literally means death, the opposite of life, and therefore non-existence or, we could say, the state of non-being. Death is not a different form of life; it is the opposite of life. Thus the first death, which is physical death, refers *at least* to non-existence in the physical realm; and the second death – which entails the everlasting destruction of soul and body – refers to absolute non-existence with no hope of resurrection.

6.) “Death” and “separation” are two completely different words in Hebrew and Greek, just as they are in English; these words have different meanings. The Hebrew *badal* (*baw-dal*) and the Greek *chorizo* (*kho-rid’zo*) are two Old and New Testament words for “separation” (see, for example, Isaiah 59:2 and Romans 8:35,39). If the wages of sin is not really death, but separation, then God would have used these Hebrew and Greek words to describe the ultimate wages of sin. For example, Romans 6:23 would read, “For the wages of sin is separation (*chorizo*)” and Ezekiel 18:4 would read, “The soul who sins will separate (*badal*).” But does the bible teach this anywhere? No, “the wages of sin is *death*” and “the soul who sins will *die*” (NASB).

It is true that one of the results of sin is separation from God (Isaiah 59:2). This is spiritual death, which simply means that one’s spirit is dead to God. Those who are spiritually dead cannot have a relationship with God because God *is spirit*, and those who worship and know him can only do so *in spirit* and in truth (see John 4:24). That’s why Jesus taught that we need to have a spiritual rebirth in order to know God (John 3:3-6). Jesus experienced separation from the Father when he bore our sins on the cross. He even cried out, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Matthew 27:46). He also experienced severe suffering when he was crucified. While it was horrible for Jesus to experience this separation and suffering, it ended in death. The penalty Jesus paid for our sins was separation from God, temporary suffering, followed by death. This was an example of the second death to all humanity. Those who are already separated from God (i.e. spiritually dead) and reject His offer of reconciliation can likewise expect suffering that ends in death on judgment day.

The bottom line is that the second death is consistently described in terms of literal death and utter destruction in the bible, not “separation.” We’ve seen this throughout our study.

7.) As already briefly stated, **to suggest that death means something entirely opposite of its actual definition is nothing more than a blatant case of subtracting from God's Word and adding to it.** In this specific case adherents of eternal torment subtract the word “death” (*thanatos*) from the numerous passages which describe the wages of sin strictly in terms of literal death, and supplant it with “eternal life in separation from God” – a definition that is, once again, completely opposite to the actual definition of death. This practice is all done under the noble mask of “interpretation,” but notice how the bible strictly condemns this practice:

DEUTERONOMY 4:2

Do not add to what I command you and do not subtract from it, but keep the commands of the LORD your God that I give you.

PROVERBS 30:5-6

Every word of God is flawless;... (6) Do not add to his words or he will rebuke you and prove you a liar.

REVELATION 22:18-19

I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds anything, God will add to him the plagues described in this book. (19) And if anyone takes words

away from this book of prophecy, God will take away from him his share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book.

As you can plainly see, it's a grave offense in God's eyes to subtract from his Word and add to it something else. As it states in the Proverb text above: the God-breathed scriptures are *flawless*. There's simply *no reason* to make any changes. But adherents of the eternal torment view are guilty of this very transgression in regards to the bible's repeated declaration that the wages of sin is death.

8.) The scriptural arguments above are certainly proof enough that 'death' simply means death in the bible not "separation," but a comparison of New Testament words for "death," "perish," "destruction," etc. to other well-known Greek writings of the same general period offers additional support.

For example, Plato argued that the human soul is immortal and can never die or cease to exist. What Greek words did Plato use to express this denial? He used the exact Greek words that Paul used to describe the everlasting destruction of unbelievers in the New Testament: Plato taught that the human soul would not die (*apothnesko*), Paul taught that it could die (e.g. Romans 8:13); Plato taught that the human soul would never experience death (*thanatos*), Paul taught that it could experience death (e.g. James 5:20); Plato taught that the human soul would not suffer destruction (*apoleia* and *olethros*), Paul taught that it could suffer destruction (e.g. 2Peter 3:7 and 2Thessalonians 1:9).

Plato used these various Greek words to describe absolute extinction of being, not separation of being. Since Paul used these very same words to describe the eternal fate of those who reject God's message of reconciliation in Christ, we must conclude that he too was referring to absolute extinction of being (Constable 42).

Furthermore, there were people in Paul's era who adhered to universal extinction, that is, they believed that when people died they simply ceased to exist, with no hope of resurrection for either the righteous or unrighteous. The Epicureans were Greeks who advocated this view and the Sadducees were Jews who supported it. What words did these sects use to express their belief in absolute extinction of conscious life? Why, the very same Greek words used in the New Testament to describe the everlasting destruction of the ungodly (Constable 48).

So, death simply meant death in uninspired writings – the cessation of life – just as it does in the biblical scriptures.

In light of these eight reasons, we have no recourse but to take God at his Word and conclude that the second death will be a literal death – utter, awful, complete and final. The religious theory that death means "separation" must be categorically rejected.

'What About Spiritual Death?'

This next objection goes hand in hand with the objection just examined. Under the guise of "interpretation" many sincere Christian people add the word "spiritual" to the numerous plain statements which promise death to unrepentant sinners. For instance, these people believe Romans 6:23 should read: "For the wages of sin is *spiritual* death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ our Lord." They would then translate spiritual death here to mean eternal "separation of man from God because of sin" (Dake 619). The obvious problem with doing such is that *none* of the multitude of biblical texts which promise death and destruction as the ultimate wage of sin contain this word "spiritual."

God wrote the bible through men by the Holy Spirit (2Peter 1:20-21; 2Timothy 3:16). The bible is truly "God's Word." If He really meant to say "spiritual death" in all the many passages we've looked at throughout this study, then He would have surely said so. I don't think the Almighty needs our help in writing a book, do you?

Actually, *adding* the word "spiritual" to the many passages which simply promise death to unrepentant sinners is another case of adding to God's word and subtracting what it really says. Once again, this practice is a serious offense in God's eyes.

As briefly mentioned in the previous section, spiritual death is indeed a legitimate doctrine. To understand what spiritual death is we must understand that it is the spiritual side of human nature that actually "connects" with God. Thus spiritual death simply means that the spirit of a person is dead to

God, that is, the capacity of his/her spirit to unite or commune with God is dead. “Original sin”¹ is the reason this capacity does not exist. In order for a person’s spirit to unite with God he or she has to be spiritually born again. This explains why Jesus taught that our spirit must be born again for us to “see the kingdom of God” (John 3:3-6).

So spiritual death is a *present* state of the non-Christian. This is why Paul described the Ephesians as “dead in transgressions” before their spiritual re-birth (Ephesians 2:5). The second death, by contrast, is a *future event* entailing the complete destruction of soul and body in hell. Spiritual death ultimately results in the second death, which is an absolute death described in the bible as “everlasting destruction.”

All the texts that we’ve examined in this study apply to the second death – a future event. None of them refer to spiritual death, which is a present state in the non-believer’s life.

For a more detailed biblical examination of human nature and spiritual death see Appendix B.

‘When you Burn Something, It Simply Changes Form’

H. Buis comments on how adherents of literal everlasting destruction place great emphasis on the fact that the figure of “fire” is used in the bible to describe the second death, “and fire, they point out, always destroys... But the fact is that when you burn something it is not annihilated, it simply changes form” (Buis 125). I guess what Mr. Buis is trying to say is that when, say, a log is burned up, it *technically* isn’t wiped out from existence, it turns to smoke vapors and ashes. While this is true, the simple fact is that *the log itself is destroyed* – it no longer exists. The smoke vapors and ashes are merely the *remains* of the log.

The same is true when God “destroys both soul and body in hell (*Gehenna*).” In regards to the body, when it is destroyed the remains will simply return to the dust from which it came (Genesis 3:19; Psalm 146:4). As for the soul, no one knows from what spiritual materials God creates a soul but, whatever it is, when the soul is destroyed it will return to such. The simple fact is that *the soul is destroyed*, just like the log above. This is regardless of what materials it reverts to after its destruction.

Incidentally, in light of the creation text, Genesis 2:7, which states that the soul and body are animated by a “breath of life” from God, some might wonder what happens to this “breath of life” when the soul is destroyed. Well, according to this creation text, it is the breath of life from God which makes the soul “a *living* soul.” When the soul is destroyed, the breath of life simply returns to God who gave it (see Ecclesiastes 12:7; Psalm 146:4; Job 34:14-15; 1Maccabees 2:62-63). Naturally, a soul without God’s animating breath of life is a *dead* soul. See Appendix B for details on this issue.

Throughout this study we have seen that the only words biblically used to describe the destruction of soul and body in hell (*Gehenna*) are “die,” “death,” “destruction,” “destroy,” “perish,” “consume,” and “burn up.” The meaning of these terms can easily be comprehended by mongoloids; we need not all become advanced physicists to understand their plain meaning.

Let me emphasize that literal destruction is not the belief that the *remains* of body and soul cease to exist when people suffer the second death; it is the belief that their conscious life expires. The conscious life of their being is what is annihilated not whatever substances God uses to create their being.

The simple fact is that God is the **Creator** of all things, including human beings; and whatever he *creates* he can just as easily *de-create*, that is, destroy.² Why do religionists find this simple concept so difficult to grasp?

‘Torment is Not Torture’

You may have noticed in this study that I regularly refer to the view of eternal torment as eternal *torture*. Both references obviously apply to the same position – that of never-ending conscious suffering.

Norman Geisler, a staunch adherent of eternal torment, objects to this practice of using torment and torture interchangeably. His contention is that hell, the lake of fire, is indeed a place of torment, but

¹ The doctrine of “original sin” suggests that humanity’s fallen nature – our inclination to commit sin – was naturally passed on to all of us by our primeval parents, Adam and Eve.

² The only exception to this, as already pointed out in Chapter Four, would be beings that willingly accept God’s gift of intrinsic immortality, such as all angelic beings. This will include redeemed human beings *after* their resurrection unto eternal life – see Luke 20:34-36.

it is not a torture chamber for “unlike torture, which is inflicted from without against one’s will, torment is self-inflicted” (Geisler 34¹). This is utter nonsense and completely unbiblical.

I have no idea where Geisler got this definition for torment (that it is always self-inflicted), but it certainly wasn’t from the bible. For example, Revelation 11:10 mentions how two prophets “tormented those who live on the earth.” The torment spoken of here is not self-inflicted at all; it comes from an outside source. Also, consider the fact that the King James Version and the New International Version both use “torment” and “torture” interchangeably. See for yourself by simply looking up these texts in *both* versions: Matthew 8:29, Mark 5:7 and Revelation 9:5.

Obviously Geisler has a problem with the word “torture” being used to describe his belief in the never-ending conscious misery of unredeemed people. The reason I use the word “torture” to describe this belief is to honestly expose it for what it really is. Let’s be truthful and candid enough to call a spade a spade!

Consider this simple illustration: If I took a man, tied him to a chair, and *tormented* him for five minutes with a lighter, would this not be a form of *torture*? Of course it would. Subjecting a person to torment *is* torture. How much more so the prospect of subjecting a person to *everlasting* fiery conscious torment?

But Geisler argues that eternal torment in the lake of fire is *self-inflicted*, living with the consequences of one’s bad choices, therefore it’s not torture. This argument is more unbiblical mumbo jumbo. In Chapter One we firmly established from scripture that God Himself is going to forever *destroy* people who choose sin and reject his gift of salvation. Regardless of what “destroy” really means – whether literal destruction or eternal torment – the fact is that it is God Himself who is doing the destroying (or *authorizing* the destroying). Therefore everlasting destruction is not self-inflicted at all; it is executed by God himself as the just consequences for a person’s bad choices.

This is actually a merciful action on God’s part. How so? If a person unrepentantly rebels against God and makes himself or herself miserable through sin (usually spreading misery to others as well), the kindest, most merciful thing God could do is to let such a person die. Then this stubborn, foolish person would be unable to bring further misery to his/her self or others.

Why does Geisler have such a problem with the word “torture” as a descriptive term for his belief in never-ending conscious torment? What has compelled him to create his own personal and unbiblical definition for “torment” (i.e. that it is only self-inflicted)? The answer to both these questions is obvious and offers proof that the idea of eternal torment is indeed a profoundly disturbing concept which naturally offends our God-given moral and judicial instincts: The only way Geisler and like-minded people can accept this idea and live with themselves is by convincing themselves that their good, loving God is not the one carrying out or authorizing this sadistic sentence.

Is Endless Torture Better than Merciful Death?

Let’s observe another one of Geisler’s arguments in defense of eternal torture:

Annihilation would demean both the love of God and the nature of human beings as free moral creatures. It would be as if God said to them, “I will allow you to be free only if you do what I say. If you don’t, then I will snuff out your very freedom and existence!” This would be like a father telling his son he wanted him to be a doctor, but when the son chose to be a park ranger the father shot him. Eternal suffering is eternal testimony to the freedom and dignity of humans, even unrepentant humans (22²).

There are a number of problems with Geisler’s argument. First of all, he states that the view of literal destruction (which he refers to as “annihilation”) snuffs out the very freedom of people. Is he ludicrously trying to convince us that locking people in a colossal chamber of endless torments *is* freedom? Need I say more?

Secondly, Geisler’s parable of the son who goes against his father’s wishes by deciding to be a ranger instead of a doctor is completely unfitting. The son is supposed to represent a rebellious sinner worthy of eternal damnation. Since when is simply deciding on an occupation an evil thing? How can

¹ From *Everything You Wanted to Know about Hell*.

² From *Christian Apologetics*.

this be comparable to a person whom the Almighty justly deems worthy of eternal death? Rejecting God's gift of reconciliation and eternal life in favor of sin bears absolutely no resemblance to merely choosing an occupation. Also, the symbolism of God as a father who damns his son simply because the son chooses an occupation against his wishes is wholly inappropriate. For one thing our Heavenly Father is an *absolute* authority whereas earthly fathers have very *limited* authority. They certainly have the right to advise and influence their children on their occupational choices but they certainly don't have the authority to assign them an occupation and kill them if they refuse. I could elaborate but it's not worth the bother.

Thirdly, notice that Geisler fails to apply his little parable to the traditional notion of eternal misery. Disregarding the inappropriate symbolism, let's go ahead and do this for him here:

If the doctrine of eternal suffering were true it would be like a father telling his son he wanted him to be a doctor, but when the son chose to be a park ranger the father locked him in a large oven and subjected him to ceaseless torture day and night. The father was sure to never allow his son to sleep or mercifully die, he made sure to keep him alive and awake enough to always feel the painful torment and cry out in agony, year after year, decade after decade, century after century, on and on and on and on.

Why did Geisler fail to fairly share his parable in this manner? If he can apply the story to the view of literal destruction it's only right that he should apply it to eternal torture as well. The obvious reason he failed to do this is because it exposes his belief as the sham that it is.

Now, once again, I completely reject the symbolism of this story; our Almighty Creator should not be compared to a father who savagely punishes his son because the son simply decides on an occupation against his will. But, supposing the symbolism is valid and just, which scenario is more sadistic – to mercifully execute or to torture endlessly? Which scenario is the depth of human perversion? Executing a person is a severe enough punishment, but to ceaselessly torture a person is horribly twisted and repulsive – moral degeneracy of the lowest depth. This is regardless of how guilty the individual is.

Lastly, Geisler is attempting to prove that subjecting people to never-ending conscious torment is more just and moral than putting them to death. *Eternal torture is better than merciful death?* I find it hard to believe that anyone would even *attempt* to convince people of this.

'Hell is Where You Can Do Your Own Thing – Forever'

Let's examine Geisler's most ridiculous argument in defense of never-ending torment, albeit you'll be hard-pressed to find any torment or suffering in this description of damnation:

One of the reasons there's a hell is because God is so loving that He won't force people to do anything against their will... He loves people so much that He will say to them, "You don't want to worship me? You don't want to praise me? You don't want to come to my place? Do your own thing." In other words, hell is a place where people can do their own thing forever.

How's this for a completely watered-down version of the traditional concept of damnation? If people are truly free to "do their own thing" in the lake of fire, as Geisler suggests, then they'd at *least* have to have as much freedom as they do here on earth. So basically we're talking about a life very similar to the life we know of on earth with the exceptions that God and death will be of no concern. So hell according to Geisler is doing whatever you want forever without ever having to worry about God, judgment, aging or dying. This sounds like a pagan paradise more than anything else. If Christians described damnation to people like this do you think they'd ever care to get saved? No, they'd more likely get excited about going to hell and having a never-ending party with their buddies (which is how many non-Christians joke about the notion of eternal damnation). Jesus solemnly declared that hell is a terrifying reality and that we should fear God who has the authority to cast us there:

LUKE 12:4-5

“I tell you, my friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body and after that can do no more. (5) But I will show you whom you should fear: Fear Him who, after the killing of the body, has power to throw you into hell (*Gehenna*). Yes, I tell you, fear Him.”

Geisler’s idea that hell is a place where people can do their own thing forever doesn’t remotely fit the solemn biblical warnings of the second death, in fact, his belief makes an utter absurdity of it. To illustrate, let’s interpret Jesus’ statement in verse 5 according to Geisler’s view:

“Fear Him who, after the killing of the body, has power to throw you into hell where you’ll be free to do whatever you want for all eternity. Yes, I tell you, fear Him.”

It simply makes no sense to fear God if his ultimate punishment for sinners is to merely allow them to do their own thing forever. Do you see how ridiculously off-track people can get when they veer from the plain truth of God’s Word? What utter heresy!

One might argue that I’m taking Geisler too literal here, but if he doesn’t really believe this is an accurate description of damnation then why would he teach it? This is especially so considering he made the statement on a television program that would reach millions of people – A&E’s *Mysteries of the Bible* segment “Heaven and Hell.” Watch the program yourself and you’ll see that he’s absolutely serious. Geisler does go on to briefly mention the torment that people will endure while “doing their own thing forever” but, as previously pointed out, his idea of torment is merely living with the consequences of one’s bad choices.

Geisler is naturally forced to come up with unbiblical mumbo jumbo like this because the traditional concept of never-ending conscious torment is so monstrously evil he has no other choice. When theologians have to resort to such ridiculous and unscriptural arguments in this manner it’s a sure sign that a doctrine is in its death throes. Our study on the nature of the second death has clearly shown that this fantastical image of damnation is completely foreign to the scriptures.

‘A Human Being is a Spirit, and a Spirit, By Definition, Cannot Die’

Some oppose literal destruction by resorting to the reasoning that people are spiritual beings, and “By definition, a spirit cannot die. A spirit is an immortal being” (Robertson 72).

You’ll notice that anyone who makes such an argument will fail to quote any biblical passages to support this definition. That’s because there are none. Nor does a standard English dictionary support this definition. The *Funk and Wagnalls* dictionary defines ‘spirit’ as “A supernatural and immaterial being.” A spirit is an immaterial being, that’s all. This certainly doesn’t mean an immaterial being is unable to die.

It’s as simple as this: Whatever creature God gives life to he can bring death to. Whatever he creates he can also de-create. The human mind or disembodied soul did not always exist; it was created by God out of immaterial substances and given consciousness by God’s “breath of life.” And the simple fact is that whatever is created can be de-created, that is, destroyed. If God justly decides that a human being is worthy of death – soul and body – he certainly has the power to do it, after all, he’s the One who created human beings. Jesus Christ Himself declared that this is exactly what God will do to people on judgment day when they’re cast into the lake of fire (Matthew 10:28).

The exception would be creatures who willingly accept God’s gift of unconditional immortality, specifically the devil and his angels. God will one day grant unconditional immortality to people, but only those who have been redeemed through spiritual rebirth in Christ. Such people will have “the right to the tree of life” and live forever (see Revelation 22:14,19 and 2:7). As for unredeemed human beings, God refuses to grant such people this right because they’d have to exist forever in a miserable fallen state, like the fallen angels. Needless to say, unconditional immortality as such would be a curse. This is why, after Adam sinned and spiritually died, God said: “He must not be allowed to reach out his hand and take also from the tree of life and eat, *and live forever*” (Genesis 3:22). God therefore denied Adam access to the tree of life (verses 23-24). See Chapter Four for more details on this matter.

Human beings presently have yet to attain unconditional immortality and therefore are mercifully subject to literal death and destruction as justly deemed by the Almighty.

‘Cults Teach Everlasting Destruction – It Just Doesn’t Look Good’

Some have opposed the view of everlasting destruction on the grounds that it is adhered to (in one form or another) by various cult/borderline cult groups like the Jehovah’s Witnesses, the Seventh-Day Adventists¹, Christadelphians and the Armstrongite sects.² Some of my Christian friends, who openly admit that literal everlasting destruction seems to be biblical, have pointed out that this “just doesn’t look good.”

I would counter that the view of everlasting destruction is so blatantly obvious in scripture that anyone who has a high regard for God’s Word and is not blinded by religious tradition is able to plainly see it. In other words, these groups adhere to everlasting destruction *simply because they know how to read*.

God is not prejudiced with knowledge and truth. *Whoever* humbly, honestly and diligently seeks knowledge and truth will find it, regardless of what sectarian tag they prefer to go by. Such groups as these have been able to clearly see the biblical validity of literal everlasting destruction because they have decided to step outside the blinding influence of religious tradition. Once this is done, the truth is plain to see for anyone who is literate.

The bottom line is that it is not a fair or valid argument to oppose a view simply because it is adhered to by a group that one objects to. The groups mentioned above, and similar such sects, have a high regard for scripture. Consequently, *we all* naturally agree with them on some things (e.g. adultery is a sin, etc.). Are we wrong on these issues simply because these objectionable groups adhere to them too? Should we reject what the bible clearly teaches on these issues merely because these objectionable groups agree? Of course not. The argument simply holds no water.

Adherents of never-ending conscious torture obviously resort to such weak arguments because of the abysmal lack of biblical support for their position. Their goal is to divert attention from the scriptural facts. The argument is therefore nothing more than an avoidance tactic with the implication that people who believe in literal destruction are “guilty by association.” This is fine as long as we understand that guilt by association works both ways. We could ludicrously argue, for instance, that since adherents of eternal torture believe in the immortality of human souls, and pagan religions and philosophies believe the same thing, then supporters of eternal torture are pagans. Or we could argue that since false religions like Islam believe in eternal torture, then Christians who believe in eternal torture are false religionists as well. Need I go on?

Furthermore, we lose credibility with members of cultic organizations like the Jehovah’s Witnesses and Christadelphians because of our official adherence to such doctrines as the immortality of the soul and eternal torture. Since members of such groups usually know the bible fairly well, it is impossible to ever convince them of these doctrines because they’re not taught in the bible. These people naturally reason that if we are wrong on these important issues, we’re likely wrong on other doctrinal matters as well. We thus close the door on rescuing them from the cults (or borderline cults) they’re trapped in.

It goes without saying that members of cultic or borderline cultic organizations will be more open to authentic Christianity if we humbly admit that Christian tradition has grievously erred in regards to the immortality of the soul and eternal torture.

‘You Should Forget All this Deep Stuff and Just Preach the Gospel, Feed the Poor, etc.’

Some people, after seeing how thoroughly the subject matter is dealt with in this study, have criticized that I should quit spending so much time “rocking the boat” with all this deep theology and just simply concentrate on preaching the gospel, feeding the poor and other such noble works.

¹ Although the Seventh-Day Adventists are indeed a legitimate evangelical sect, many consider them a “borderline cult” because of their legalistic views regarding the Saturday Sabbath and Old Testament dietary laws, as well as their rigid allegiance to the prophetess Ellen White and their “all or nothing” mentality.

² Herbert W. Armstrong founded the Worldwide Church of God, a sect that was legalistic, exclusive and adhered to various strange doctrines (like Anglo-Israelism). In the mid-90’s, about ten years after Armstrong’s death, this group reformed to a more orthodox perspective, but there are numerous groups that splintered off – some adhering to Armstrong’s teachings (e.g. the Philadelphia Church of God) and some not (e.g. the United Church of God). The reformed group (the one that puts out *The Plain Truth*) decided *not* to officially adapt the eternal torture doctrine; they instead left the issue open, urging Christians to biblically seek the matter out for themselves and draw their own conclusions.

First of all, I'm not sharing "deep" theology. My teaching is no deeper than what, say, Galatians 6:8 plainly states: "The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction; the one who sows to please the spirit from the spirit will reap eternal life." On the contrary, as we have witnessed, it is the proponents of eternal torture that pervert this easy-to-understand subject with ludicrous theological mumbo jumbo.

As for the specific argument, people who resort to this kind of reasoning usually do so because they've become upset in view of the overwhelming evidence for literal everlasting destruction and the consequent realization that it may be true. In fact, the evidence might even intimidate them. It's understandable that they initially become upset like this because religious beliefs are often very dear to people and it can understandably be discomfiting for them to discover that the way they've *always* believed something may in fact be false. Unable to properly defend their long-held position they resort to this kind of avoid-the-issue argument.

Yet, regardless of what spurs on such a contention, let's go ahead and consider if there's any validity to it: Should we just focus on preaching the gospel, giving to the poor and similar noble works and forget the thorough study of the scriptures? – Forget about what is true and what is heresy? – Cop a tame air of false humility and not risk disrupting the dead, unbiblical waters of religious tradition? *Never.*

God wants his children to lead balanced lives led by his Spirit. Such acts as sharing the gospel and feeding the poor are indeed commendable services in God's kingdom, but this does not make other practices any less commendable. In regards to having a thorough knowledge of the scriptures and the willingness to boldly refute error, doing such is praised throughout the bible. For instance, Apollos is extolled as "a learned man, with a thorough knowledge of the scriptures" who "vigorously refuted the Jews in public debate, proving from the Scriptures that Jesus was the Christ" (Acts 18:24, 28).

It must be understood that the body of Christ is a *group* of people, with each person doing his or her part for the furthering of God's kingdom on earth. God may call one person to work in a soup kitchen – in which case she would naturally have to sacrifice hours of her time daily to feeding the poor. Another person He may call to be a teacher of the scriptures – in which case he would have to sacrifice hours of his time regularly for the serious study of God's Word (after all, one can't very well teach the scriptures if s/he hasn't spent ample time thoroughly studying them).

Yet, even in such cases as this where God specifically calls a person to do something according to his/her talents, He still expects the individual to lead a balanced life as led by his Spirit. For instance, those who work in soup kitchens should regularly set aside time for reading the scriptures; and those called to be teachers should be willing to evangelize or give to the poor as the Spirit leads.

The key, once again, is balance. As commendable as evangelizing and feeding the poor are, Christians have countless other obligations they have to juggle – work for a living, raise kids, love spouses, clean house, maintain schooling, bathe, do yard work, eat, sleep, keep fit – the list goes on and on. The idea that a Christian must spend time 24-7 on the streets evangelizing and feeding the poor in order to be a good Christian is ridiculous, not to mention unhealthy.

Hardcore street evangelizing is not the only way to share the gospel anyway, nor is it necessarily the most effective way. Christians should maintain a spirit of evangelism in their daily lives, sharing the gospel as the Spirit leads. Neither is working in a soup kitchen the only way to feed/give to the poor; Christians can give directly to people in their daily lives as the Spirit leads or indirectly by supporting ministries that regularly help the poor. The latter examples happen to be my usual practice.

'What About "You Will Spend Eternity in Either Heaven or Hell"??'

We've all heard the religious expression which goes something like this: "You will spend eternity in either heaven or hell." I hear it all the time in one form or another. Some of you may be surprised to know that this expression is not found anywhere in the bible. Although I'm sure the people who use the expression for evangelical purposes are sincere and have good intentions, they're sincerely wrong nevertheless. If you disagree, I challenge you to find such a passage anywhere in scripture.

Regarding the latter assertion, that ungodly people will "spend eternity in hell," we've already thoroughly covered this issue and have determined that foolish people who stubbornly reject God's gift of reconciliation and eternal life in favor of following sin will literally be destroyed – both body and soul – in the lake of fire ("hell"). If these people are executed in this manner, they can't very well "spend

eternity” anywhere, can they? We’ve plainly observed that life and immortality are *only available through the gospel* (2Timothy 1:10). Since people who reject the gospel lack eternal life and immortality, how could they possibly *spend* eternity anywhere? The bible plainly states that “whoever rejects the Son *will not see life*” (John 3:36). People can not very well spend time anywhere if they lack life itself.

As for the former assertion, although many Christians believe that Jesus died for them so that they may “spend eternity in heaven,” this is simply not so. This expression, and similar such expressions, can be heard quite often in Christian circles. Once again, I’m sure the people who use this expression are good, sincere folks who love the LORD, but the simple fact is that they are sincerely wrong. The truth is that Jesus died so that we may have eternal life. Eternal life is forever. Forever is a long, long time. So the question must be raised: What does the bible specifically teach regarding where partakers of this eternal life will spend it? Will we sprout wings and sit on a cloud playing a harp for all eternity? Will we have to sit through a never-ending church service? No, the bible is very clear on this issue:

Revelation 20:4-6 shows that after the *first* resurrection in which all believers will be blessed with an immortal, glorified body, we will reign with Christ *on earth* for a thousand years. After this the white throne judgment of all unredeemed people will take place (Revelation 20:11-15) and then God will create a new earth (21:1-4), which should simply be interpreted as a renovated version of our present earth minus, of course, the stain of sin, death and decay.

On this new earth our Creator will establish the new Jerusalem which will come “down out of heaven from God” This is **specifically stated three times** in scripture: Revelation 21:2,10 and 3:12.

We’ve all heard the gates of heaven described as “the pearly gates,” yet in the bible this is actually a description of the twelve gates of *the new Jerusalem* which, once again, will be established **on the new earth** for all eternity (by all means, look up Revelation 21:21 for yourself and observe how the text describes the pearly gates of the new Jerusalem). This is the eternal home of all who partake of God’s gift of eternal life, not heaven. As it is written:

MATTHEW 5:5

“Blessed are the meek for *they will inherit the earth.*”

PSALM 37:29

The righteous will inherit the land (i.e. the new earth) and *dwell in it forever.*

As you can plainly see, the redeemed of the LORD – described here as “the meek” and “the righteous” – will inherit the new *earth* and *dwell in it forever*. Notice clearly that nothing is said about “spending eternity in heaven.” That’s because God did not create heaven – the spiritual dimension where God’s throne is located – for human beings. He created the earth for human beings to inhabit; this would naturally include the whole universe in which the earth resides. As it is written:

PSALM 115:16

The highest heavens belongs to the LORD, but the earth he has given to man.

This passage makes it clear that the earth was created for and given to humanity, not heaven. Heaven belongs to God.

In 2Peter 3:13, Peter states that Christians are to be “looking forward to a new heaven and *new earth, the home of righteousness.*” Notice that we’re not looking forward to God’s heaven as our eternal home, but the new earth and universe. The “new heaven” in this passage *cannot* be a reference to the spiritual dimension where God’s throne is located because God’s heaven is, and always has been, perfect and has no need to be made new. Often the term “heaven” (or “heavens”) is used in the bible simply in reference to the skies and universe – for example, Psalm 19:1, 57:10 and Isaiah 40:22. The spiritual dimension where God’s throne is located is described in 2Corinthians 12:2 as “the *third* heaven.” My point is that we must be careful to “rightly divide” the scriptures in order to properly determine which “heaven” a passage is contextually referring to.¹ In the case of 2Peter 3:13, “new heaven” refers to the

¹ If the *third* heaven is where God’s throne is located, and the *first* heaven is the physical universe, the *second* heaven would have to be the spiritual dimension encompassing the earth (and space) where the devil and his angels dwell – see Ephesians 6:12 and Isaiah 24:21 for verification. This is elaborated in Part II (not contained in this edition).

universe and no doubt the “heavenly realms” wherein dwell the “spiritual forces of evil” as well – see footnote.

Allow me to point out that the new Jerusalem is a *really* big and unimaginably glorious city – 1400 miles long, wide and high! (See Revelation 21:9-27). This magnificent city and the new earth will *only be our home base*. We’ll be able to explore the vast unfathomable reaches of the new universe. One thing’s for sure: “No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him” (1Corinthians 2:9).

After the new Jerusalem is established on the new earth, Revelation 21:3 states, “Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God.” Since this text states that the dwelling of God will be with humanity on the new earth, some describe this as “heaven on earth.” I don’t think there’s a problem with this phrase, though it would be more accurate to say that *the kingdom* of heaven will be established on earth. Yet one rarely hears it spoken of this way, most ministers seem content to misleadingly preach that Christians will “spend eternity in heaven.” In any case, the scriptures do *not* say that heaven comes down to the new earth along with the new Jerusalem, but rather that the new Jerusalem comes down *out of heaven*.

The bottom line on the matter is this: Jesus didn’t die for us so that we might “spend eternity in heaven,” he died for us so that we might have eternal life; and those who have eternal life will “inherit the earth and dwell in it forever;” this also includes the new universe. As the bible plainly teaches “we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the *home* of righteousness.”

I realize that when many people use the term ‘heaven’ in the context of “spending eternity in heaven” they’re *actually* referring to the new earth and universe. This is fine, but the bible itself never defines the new earth and universe as “heaven.” More importantly, when most people hear the word “heaven” they automatically picture an ethereal spirit realm with clouds, blue skies and angels playing harps; no one pictures a magnificent and tangible new earth and universe. Because of this it’s simply bad communication to refer to it as “heaven.” Christians must be careful to use terminology that properly reflects the truth of Holy Scripture because one of the most important duties of a Christian is to *accurately* communicate God’s Word. This is why Paul instructed Timothy to “Watch [his] life and *doctrine* closely” (1Timothy 4:16).

In summary, the expression “You will spend eternity in either heaven or hell” is not supported by the bible. The people who habitually use this phrase do not have an accurate understanding of the subject. There’s no need to resort to such clichéd, religious expressions when we can just simply quote what the bible plainly states about the two separate destinies of the righteous and unrighteous, such as Matthew 7:13-14; John 3:16; Romans 6:23 and 8:13.

Since the remaining extra-biblical objections to literal destruction pertain to Judeo-Christian history we’ll address them in the next chapter.

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CHAPTER SEVEN

EXTRA-BIBLICAL ARGUMENTS II: Exploring Judeo-Christian History

Because adherents of eternal torment have a difficult time finding legitimate *biblical* support for their position they naturally resort to extra-biblical arguments based on tradition and Judeo-Christian history. This chapter is devoted to exploring Judeo-Christian history to see if there is any validity to these contentions. Let's start with...

The Augustinian Corruption of Christendom¹

At the end of the previous chapter we discovered that the popular saying “you will spend eternity in either heaven or hell” does not match the biblical descriptions of eternal life and damnation. How did Christendom lose the exciting biblical picture of a tangible new earth and new universe and replace it with the unscriptural picture of an ethereal spirit realm where we'll float around on clouds playing harps forever? How did the church come to officially adopt the unbiblical doctrines of the immortal soul and eternal torture? These unfortunate errors can be traced to one of the most influential theologians in Christian history: Augustine of Hippo, who lived from 354-430 AD. Augustine is hailed by many Christians today as “the father of orthodoxy.”

Saint Augustine, as he is commonly referred to, was strongly influenced by Greek philosophy. According to this philosophy the physical universe, including the human body, was considered evil. This negative outlook was diametrically opposed to the Hebrew view of creation as revealed in the Holy Scriptures. According to the bible and Hebrew thought the world and the universe were created “good” (see Genesis 1:31), and even though this goodness was corrupted by humanity's sin (Isaiah 24:5-6) the creation still reflects God's glory to some extent (Psalms 19:1). Ultimately, the creation will one day be redeemed and renovated by its Creator as shown in Romans 8:18-23 and Revelation 21:1-4.

The Gnostic heresy that Jesus was a spirit being who never took on human flesh and therefore never experienced physical death can be traced to Hellenistic gentiles who accepted the gospel – their Greek mindset immediately came into conflict with fundamental Judeo-Christian teachings. They naturally wondered “How could God's divine Son be encased in a body which is evil?” Because they viewed the physical universe as evil, they could not accept the bible's clear teaching that Jesus Christ became embodied in flesh. They thus developed the Gnostic heresy which is strongly denounced in scripture. For instance, 1John 4:1-2 instructs us to test the legitimacy of fellow Christians by whether or not they are willing to confess “that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh.”

Augustine was not a Gnostic, but the influence of Greek philosophy prevented him from accepting what the bible plainly taught regarding the nature of eternal life. For example, the biblical teaching that saints will spend eternity in glorified bodies on a literal new earth in a tangible new universe was a blasphemous concept to his Greek mindset. He solved this problem by spiritualizing what the bible plainly taught, suggesting that biblical references like “the new Jerusalem” and “the new earth” are merely symbolic language for heaven.

Augustine's goal was to Hellenize what the scriptures taught regarding the nature of eternal life, and he was quite successful as his views were officially accepted by the Council of Ephesus in 431 AD. Augustine's teachings are thus adhered to by most professing Christians today, both Catholic and Protestant, despite what the bible plainly teaches. This means that most of present-day Christendom teaches Greek philosophy rather than the Word of God when it comes to the subjects of human nature, eternal life and the second death. Allow me to add, however, that this is thankfully changing as more and more Christians discover the truth of God's Word on these important issues and boldly proclaim it.

In light of Augustine's corruptive impact on Christendom I consider him a “father of error” more than anything else. Why has the church so exalted this mere man to the point that we are willing to

¹ Information in this section compiled from David Reagan's *What Happens When You Die?*

reject clear biblical teaching in favor of his erroneous views? If Christendom insists on hailing someone as the “father of orthodoxy” why not Jesus Christ himself or the apostle Paul? What a testimony to the formidable, blinding force of religious tradition and indoctrination!

Augustine’s Advocacy of Eternal Torture Made It Unquestioned Orthodoxy

Having a Greek mindset, Augustine also naturally adhered to the belief that the human soul is immortal and can never cease to exist; he was consequently a strong proponent of the eternal torment doctrine.

There were theologians prior to Augustine who embraced the idea of eternal torture, such as Tertullian (160-220 AD) whose support of the theory of never-ending torment was naturally based on his zealous belief in the immortality of the soul. He was so influenced by pagan Greek philosophy that he would quote Plato in his writings: “I may use, therefore, the opinion of a Plato when he declares, ‘Every soul is immortal.’ ”(Tertullian, 3).

Athenagorus (127-190 AD), a Platonic philosopher who converted to Christianity, was the first Christian writer to expressly deny the literal everlasting destruction of the ungodly. Needless to say, his conclusion was not based on scripture but upon the pagan teaching that he learned earlier as a Greek philosopher, the idea that every human being possesses an immortal soul which can never die. This belief infiltrated Christianity soon after the time of the apostolic fathers when “the apologists” converted from Greek philosophy; converts from Hellenistic Judaism also contributed to the proliferation of this teaching.

It was Augustine, however, who systemized and popularized the view of eternal torture and caused it to become the official doctrine of the Roman church (Buis, 61). One might understandably wonder how God could allow such false doctrines as this and the immortal soul to become imbedded in the collective Christian mindset, yet God had nothing to do with “allowing” these unbiblical beliefs to infiltrate Christendom; these doctrines stem from the very first satanic lie recorded in the bible as disclosed in Chapter Four. After the compilation of the New Testament canon, the Roman church increasingly deviated from Holy Scripture in the following generations. When people willingly disregard the authority of God’s Word in favor of the word of human religion there’s nothing God can do to stop the resulting apostasy (except inspire a reformation, which ultimately came to pass a thousand years later).

We must realize that the body of Christ was threatened by false teachers right from the very beginning. In the 1st century *before* all the books of the New Testament were even written the churches in Galatia had turned to a counterfeit gospel (see Galatians 1:6-8) and Peter, by the Holy Spirit, plainly warned of false teachers and their destructive heresies (2Peter 2:1-2). Augustine’s unscriptural views were not officially adapted by the Roman church until the 5th century – *almost 400 hundred years later*. In the ensuing years eternal torment became unquestioned orthodoxy even though Augustine himself rightly implored, “Do not follow my writings as Holy Scripture. When you find in Holy Scripture anything you did not believe before, believe it without doubt; but in my writings, you should hold nothing for certain.” (Boice, 22¹).

Unfortunately Augustine’s own advice could not seriously be taken because the Church in Rome adapted the absurd view that it was dangerous for the common person to read the scriptures without benefit of clergy. They decided that only scholars and educated clergy should have direct personal access to the God-breathed scriptures. The Roman church thus kept the bible from the common people by outlawing vernacular versions as the Holy Scriptures were only available in Hebrew, Greek and Latin during the medieval era, or Middle Ages.² This period roughly extended from 476 to 1485 AD and is known as the Dark Ages because it was an era of cultural stagnation; progression halted and truth was stifled as knowledge generally became dormant. Since the doctrines of the immortal soul and eternal torture were official teachings of the Roman church, it was a crime of heresy to disagree. Yet it would have been hard for the common people to disagree with these doctrines regardless because they didn’t even have access to bibles in their own language, not to mention most were illiterate. Furthermore, bibles in any language were hard to come by since they had to be copied by hand; the printing press was not invented until the mid-15th century.

¹ From Augustine’s *Preface to the Treatise on the Trinity* as quoted by Boice.

² ‘Medieval’ is from the Latin *medium aevum*, meaning “middle ages.”

Despite all this, it's fairly certain that there were many people throughout this long period – literate people that had access to the scriptures – who denied the immortality of the soul and eternal torture. We naturally assume this because literal destruction is so blatantly taught in scripture. Such people, however, would have been criminally charged with heresy and their writings destroyed; it would be naïve to think otherwise because the sad, simple fact is that history is written by those who rule, and the Roman church reigned throughout the Dark Ages.

‘Why Didn’t the Protestant Reformers Reject Eternal Torture?’

Augustine’s advice to follow what the scriptures truly taught above all else was not taken en masse until the Protestant Reformation of the 16th century. The Renaissance, French for “rebirth,” paved the way for this Reformation, thus ending the dark millenium of dormancy. The Protestants based their reforms on the principle of *sola scriptura*, that all judgments of doctrine and practice must be based on the plain teachings of scripture. Regarding the subject at hand, it’s interesting to note that Martin Luther himself, the very father of the Reformation, spoke of the philosophical arguments for the immortal soul as “monstrous fables that form part of the Roman dunghill of decretals [i.e. decrees]” (Petavel 255).

The Anabaptists were the most radical of the reformers and thus the most severely persecuted; they looked to the scriptures as their authority and tended to discard all that they could not find expressly stated in them. Desiring to return to the more primitive Christianity of the first century, they rejected much more of what came through the Roman church than did the Lutherans and the Reformed. They believed in church gatherings involving only those who had experienced the new birth, rather than of the community at large. The Anabaptists, which included the Mennonites, the Amish and the Hutterites, contributed to the emergence or development of the Baptists, Independants and Quakers (Latourette 778-79, 785).

Many Anabaptists believed that the ungodly would ultimately perish in hell and cease to exist. John Calvin, second only to Luther as a Reformation leader, harshly opposed the Anabaptists on this matter and advocated his support for the traditional views of the immortal soul and eternal torture. Luther, not wanting to cause division over doctrines he considered less than major, kept quiet in light of Calvin’s vehement stance. Thus the doctrines of the immortal soul and eternal torment crossed the pivotal point of the Reformation as part of fundamental Protestant beliefs (Fudge/Peterson 193-195). Consequently, despite the fact that both of these beliefs are clearly unbiblical, the majority of Christians today continue to blindly regard them as unquestionable “orthodoxy.”

There is good news, however: As more and more Christians reject erroneous tradition and truly accept biblical authority, everlasting destruction will naturally become the “orthodox” position. Religious tradition and denominational allegiance are indeed powerful forces, but the Christian community has slowly and increasingly opened up to the biblical view of literal destruction since the Reformation. (See Chapter Nine for an examination of orthodoxy and traditionalism).

Eternal Torture Was Not Always the Orthodox View

Adherents of eternal torture often emphasize that their belief is the “orthodox” view, that is, the historically established and generally accepted view, yet this has only been true since the beginning of the above-mentioned medieval era.

The orthodox view of both the Jews in the Old Testament period and the Christians of the New Testament period was literal everlasting destruction. This is obvious because every person used of God to write the Holy Scriptures adhered to everlasting destruction. This was the commonly accepted position of believers in these eras. Thus the view of everlasting destruction is as old as the earliest Old Testament scriptures.

Some folks, evidently not believing the scriptures are themselves adequate, may request evidence from uninspired writings outside the biblical canon. Aside from the bible itself, the doctrine of literal destruction can be traced back to biblical times. It can be found, for instance, in the writings of Justin Martyr (114-165 AD) who taught that human souls are mortal and that the ungodly will suffer only as long as God wills and then pass out of existence. Literal destruction can also be found in the Didache, a 2nd century Christian handbook, which speaks of “two ways” – the way of “life” and the way of “death,” plainly stating that the ungodly will ultimately perish. Even the great Rabbi Hillel, who lived

about the same time as Jesus, taught that most unrepentant sinners would be literally and eternally destroyed, though he did maintain that one extreme class of sinners would suffer “to ages of ages,” yet even this does not indicate perpetuity (Reagan 6¹).

The Writers of the Dead Sea Scrolls Adhered to Everlasting Destruction

Another good example would be the writers of the Dead Sea Scrolls who lived in Qumran by the Dead Sea and were believed to be Essenes; the Essenes were a sect of Jews that left Jerusalem because they believed the priests of the temple were corrupted by Rome. They wanted to stay pure and keep Torah² pure, so they moved to the desolate Dead Sea area. This is the group spoken of as the “Sons of Light” in historical writings. Many maintain that John the Baptist lived and studied with them in preparation for his ministry; it is also believed that Jesus himself studied with them. Sometime between 200 BC and the destruction of the temple in 70 AD the Qumran brotherhood wrote and transcribed many documents, including the Hebrew scriptures; these documents were discovered in the mid-20th century and are presently referred to as the Dead Sea Scrolls.

It is clear from these scrolls that the Qumranites adhered to everlasting destruction, not eternal torture:

1QS 4:13-14

... And all the ages of their generations they (the ungodly) shall spend in bitter weeping and harsh evils in the abysses of darkness until their destruction, without there being a remnant or survivor among them.

The Qumran brotherhood obviously believed that eternal damnation will consist of a time of suffering – described as “bitter weeping” – that would ultimately end in utter destruction. The word “until” indicates there will be a change – destruction would *bring an end* to the bitter weeping. To reinforce that “destruction” literally means destruction, the passage ends by making it clear that there would be no remnant or survivor of those damned to the “abysses of darkness” (i.e. the lake of fire). The only possible way there could be no remnant or survivor is if they all eventually ceased to exist, after all, people that live forever in torment would still be surviving.

There is much more evidence from the Dead Sea Scrolls that the writers of these documents clearly believed eternal damnation consists of temporary suffering that ends in literal death just as it is plainly taught throughout the Old Testament.

Needless to say, the fact that the Qumranites believed unrepentant sinners would ultimately cease to exist is a crushing blow to the position of eternal torture. This is especially so considering the likelihood that Jesus and John the Baptist studied under them.

The Orthodox Jewish View of Damnation at the Time of Christ

In light of the above information we could safely conclude that everlasting destruction was not only the biblical view at the time of Christ, which is all that really matters, but the orthodox “Jewish view” as well. By “orthodox” I mean historically established beliefs that are generally accepted as true. In other words, everlasting destruction was the conventional Jewish view of damnation. I add this in response to the outdated argument that Jesus endorsed never-ending torment because it was “the Jewish view” at the time of his earthly ministry. The present evidence proves this theory false.

Of course Jesus was never concerned about Jewish orthodoxy during his earthly ministry. He didn’t care which doctrines were established or popular. In fact, he didn’t care that everlasting destruction was the orthodox Jewish view. He simply taught what the Hebraic scriptures taught; and these scriptures clearly support literal destruction. (See Appendix A for additional Old Testament support for everlasting destruction not included in the main body of this study).

It should be pointed out that there were actually over *seventy sects* of Judaism at the time of Christ, including Sadducees, Pharisees, Zealots, Scribes, Herodians and Samaritans, all of which are

¹ From *The Nature of Hell*.

² Or Pentateuch – the law of Moses as contained in the first five books of the Old Testament.

mentioned in the New Testament. In light of this, the content of proper Jewish orthodoxy becomes somewhat debatable because these different groups naturally stressed different beliefs as vital, just as different Christian sects do today. Each group had their own version of fundamental doctrines. So to suggest there was a *single* “Jewish view” is silly. There was, however, a single *scriptural* view, and that is what Jesus plainly preached.

The Sadducees and Pharisees Beliefs Regarding Eternal Damnation

Besides the Qumran brotherhood, the Sadducees also adhered to literal destruction, albeit a quite different version; they believed that when people died, they would be literally dead forever, with no future resurrection for either the righteous or the unrighteous.¹ This belief is known as universal extinction. They didn’t believe in angels or demons either (see Acts 23:8).

Although the Sadducees were definitely wrong in denying both the resurrection and the existence of angelic beings, their adherence to universal extinction proves that there were *whole groups* of organized Jews who rejected the teachings of the immortal soul and eternal conscious torment, not to mention they supported literal everlasting destruction in some form.

It’s interesting to note, as pointed out in the previous chapter, that the very words the Sadducees used to describe their belief in universal extinction (“death,” “perish,” “destruction,” “destroy,” etc.) are the *same* words used in the bible to describe the second death. Why should we assume these simple words have a completely different meaning today? Only because of the tangled web of religious lies, that’s why.

As for the Pharisees, a sect that emerged from obscurity after the Maccabean revolt in 164 BC, the scriptures themselves don’t reveal anything about their official view of damnation, but it is contended that this sect advocated eternal torment because they believed in the immortality of the soul. It really doesn’t matter since nothing good is ever said about the Pharisees in the bible. Jesus continually conflicted with this sect; he called them names, rebuked them and spoke badly of them (see, for example, Matthew 5:20; 23:13,15,25,28,33). In fact, Jesus commanded his followers to “Leave them; they are blind guides” (Matthew 15:12-14) and plainly warned of their false teachings in Matthew 16:11-12; Jesus was talking about the Pharisees’ *teachings* in this particular passage, their *doctrines*, not their hypocrisy. Jesus no doubt agreed with the Pharisees on quite a few doctrinal issues, but eternal torture was certainly not one of them.

The apostle Paul was formerly a radical Pharisee named Saul who zealously persecuted the early church – imprisoning disciples, voicing murderous threats and approving of their executions (see Acts 7:58; 8:1; 9:1,13-14,21). But Jesus appeared to Saul and commanded him to leave this sect of blind guides. Years after his conversion and enlightenment, Paul referred to his pharisaic past as “rubbish,” “refuse” and “dung” (see Philippians 3:4-8 KJV/Amplified). By “rubbish” Paul was referring to all the hypocrisy, lifeless tradition and false teachings of the Pharisees, including the doctrine of eternal torture.

I point out these obvious biblical facts because there are some who argue that the Pharisees adhered to proper Jewish orthodoxy and that Jesus doctrinally agreed with them on everything. Frankly, anyone who believes this doesn’t read his/her bible. Jesus warned of the Pharisee’s false teachings, called them blind guides and commanded his hearers to leave them; seriously, what more proof do we need to understand that Jesus didn’t believe the Pharisees represented proper Hebrew theology?

Greek Influence in the 400 Years between the Old and New Testaments

Since everlasting destruction is plainly taught throughout the Hebraic scriptures and was the orthodox view in Old Testament times, some may wonder where certain Jews came up with the perverse view of eternal torment.

There is a 400-year gap between the latest Old Testament books and the earliest New Testament books. This is often referred to as “the 400 silent years” because God did not speak through scripture prophecy during this time. Within a century after Malachi, the last book of the Old Testament, Alexander the Great conquered most of the world from the Greek perspective. Palestine, the home of the Jews, was among these conquered lands. Greek culture and philosophy inevitable spread to these lands

¹ The fact that the Sadducees didn’t believe in the resurrection of the righteous unto eternal life explains their namesake – they were “sad, you see?”

and Greek became the common language linking peoples scattered since the time of the infamous tower of Babel (see Genesis 11:1-9).

Thus the foreign notions of Greek philosophy were introduced to Hebrew culture, in particular the Platonic theory of the immortal soul.¹ Some Jews intermixed this belief with their theology even though God repeatedly warned them to remain separate & pure from other nations and not to be corrupted by foreign beliefs & practices (see, for example, Deuteronomy 7:1-6; 29:24-28; Psalm 106:35-42 and Ezekiel 20:18-21). Since the Hebraic scriptures plainly teach that ungodly people would suffer eternal damnation (e.g. Daniel 12:2), the Jews who embraced the pagan theory of the immortal soul naturally concluded that such damnation must refer to eternal conscious suffering; after all, if people possess immortal souls they cannot literally die. Of course not all Jews accepted these pagan notions; many remained faithful to God's warnings to remain separate and pure, like the Qumranites and John the Baptist.

The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha

The Apocrypha consists of fourteen books written between 300 BC and New Testament times and reveal the increasing impact of Hellenistic ideas on Judaism. These books are considered uninspired by non-Hellenistic Jews and Protestants; in other words they are not God-breathed like the Holy Scriptures (2Timothy 3:16).

In all the works of the Apocrypha the book of Judith contains the only express reference to eternal conscious torment (16:17). The rest of the Apocrypha overwhelmingly mirrors the clear teachings of the Hebraic scriptures on eternal damnation as plainly shown in this study.

The Pseudepigrapha consists of other uninspired works of the same approximate time period. Some passages in these books, like the Apocryphal passage in Judith, seem to support never-ending torment, but references to eternal damnation in the Pseudepigrapha overwhelmingly reflect the clear teachings of the Hebrew scriptures – that the ungodly would ultimately perish, never to be seen again.

These uninspired works from the intertestamental period are just that, uninspired. The range of opinion in these writings is a reflection of the seventy-plus sects of Judaism at the time of Christ. As previously pointed out, it would be absurd to presume there was a single “Jewish view” at this time. We can, however, assume there was an “orthodox” Jewish view, or widely accepted view. As already determined, literal everlasting destruction was the orthodox Jewish view of damnation and only those who embraced the pagan notion of the immortal soul disagreed with it.

It goes without saying that examining uninspired historical works can be interesting and informative but it offers mixed results. The simple fact is that people disagreed in the past just as they do today. It's fine to *examine* uninspired writings, but we certainly shouldn't *rely* on them. Our emphasis must not be on *fallible* writings but upon the *infallible* word of God. After all, too much emphasis on what is fallible ultimately reduces the importance of what is infallible (Griesmeyer 2:4-5). Let us not make the same mistake as the Pharisees who were rebuked by Jesus because they placed tradition above Holy Scripture:

MARK 7:13

“Thus you nullify the word of God by your tradition that you have handed down. And you do many things like that.”

When we place tradition above the God-breathed scriptures we strip God's Word of its power and authority. Unfortunately many Christians today are guilty of this transgression.

Needless to say, since both literal destruction and eternal torture can be traced back to the intertestamental period, we have no choice but to simply take the Old Testament at face value on the subject of eternal damnation and turn to the New Testament for verification.

God's View is the Only View that Matters

¹ In his youth Alexander was tutored by Aristotle, who was himself a student of Plato, the originator of the immortal soul theory.

The focus of this study has been on the God-breathed Judeo-Christian scriptures. The obvious reason for this is because, when it comes down to it, the only view that really matters is God's. Human viewpoints can be erroneous, that is, people can be wrong. People also tend to change their minds. Not to mention *varying* people naturally have *varying* points of view (with each individual's view usually biased toward the official position of whatever group he or she belongs to). This is in contrast to God's Word and His very nature, as it is written:

ROMANS 3:4a

Let God be true and every man a liar.

1SAMUEL 15:29

“He who is the Glory of Israel does not lie or change his mind; he is not a man that he should change his mind.”

ISAIAH 55:8-9

“For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,” declares the LORD.

(9) “As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.”

Since the bible is “God-breathed” (2Timothy 3:16) and “never had it's origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit” (2Peter 1:21), it's of vital importance that we *base* our studies and beliefs on what God's Word plainly and consistently teaches.

As mentioned above, there are usually many human points of view on any given subject. In regards to the nature of the second death, all the many human viewpoints can be designated under three basic positions: **1.)** Literal everlasting destruction, **2.)** Eternal conscious torture, or **3.)** Universalism, the belief that all people will eventually be saved (we'll examine this position in the next chapter). Judeo-Christian believers throughout history have adhered to one of these three positions, yet the bible, as God's certain and reliable Word, can only possibly teach one of these views. There is, after all, only *one* truth or *one* ultimate reality, not three.¹ This study has proven that God's Word plainly and consistently supports the view of literal destruction. Thus, regardless of which position people have adhered to at any given time in history, and regardless of which view is considered the “orthodox” view (presently or at any point in history), the God-breathed scriptures of the Old and New Testaments clearly and consistently reveal what Judeo-Christian believers are *supposed* to believe.

‘How Could So Many be Wrong for So Long?’

So, as Christian history has turned out, from at least the time of Augustine (A.D. 354-430) most Christian leaders have believed and taught that God will keep unredeemed people alive in the lake of fire (“hell”) so they can suffer eternal conscious agony in a way that somehow relates to that of pain inflicted by fire. Because of this view's longstanding status it is often referred to today as “the traditional view.”

In light of this, some raise the question: How could so many be wrong for so long? This question has already been indirectly raised and partially answered, yet it warrants our direct attention and a more complete answer here.

The question is legitimate but it is rooted in human pride. As Norman McFarland so aptly put it, “No doctrine is proven true by the fact that many learned, devout and sincere people have believed it for many years. If it did Protestantism would never have come to be, for it was only by breaking with the ‘many, so learned, devout and sincere,’ and declaring that they had been wrong for many centuries, that Protestantism was born.” Let us remember that almost every Christian group had its beginning in a rebellion against the status quo (McFarland 31).

¹ Please don't get me wrong here, all three of these positions have valid points and may, in fact, be accurate in *some* ways. For instance, the view of eternal torment is true in the sense that the fallen angels will evidently be condemned to living forever in a miserable fallen state, but God understandably did not want such a fate to befall humanity (see Genesis 3:22-24); and the view of universalism may be true as far as the *likelihood* of post-mortem evangelization or inclusivism (see next chapter). Regardless, my point is that only *one* of these three positions on human damnation is ultimately true.

Martin Luther, the father of the Protestant Reformation, was just one person, but that didn't make the scriptural truths that he uncovered and boldly proclaimed untrue. Luther understood that the truth is never determined by a popular vote, but rather by what the bible plainly and consistently teaches. As long as Christians are thorough, honest, proper and unbiased with the scriptures, the truth will always be evident.

Let's all keep brushed up on our Christian history and keep in mind the loins from which every Protestant group has sprung: the Dark Age, religious, unbiblical Roman church.¹ Since the Reformation, the Holy Spirit has been slowly and patiently purifying the body of Christ from all the false doctrinal and practical baggage that it has been carrying. With each wave of restoration the Holy Spirit would raise up a prominent leader, or leaders, who would spark a reviving movement that would ultimately give birth to a denomination (or denominations). For instance, Martin Luther and Lutheranism, John Calvin and Presbyterianism, John Wesley and Methodism, John Clarke & Roger Williams and the (American) Baptists, William Miller and the Adventists,² Charles Parham & William Seymour and the Pentecostal movement, Eudorus Bell and the Assemblies of God, E.W. Kenyon & Kenneth Hagin and the Charismatic faith movement, etc.³ Let the worldwide body of Christ not proudly think for a second that the Holy Spirit is finished purifying and restoring it, that the church has arrived to some state of perfection – flawless in doctrine and practice. Christendom still needs a lot of work; there's much room for growth. The Reformation *must* continue!

In light of the uncontestable flawed nature of the church in general, it's obvious that Christian beliefs cannot be based upon what the majority of Christians believe simply because the majority believe it. As an example, consider the fact that most conservative Christians in nineteenth-century America defended slavery on the grounds that it was the biblical, traditional and popular view (!!). Although the majority believed this, they were obviously quite wrong in their interpretation of scripture.

So, popularity is *not* a legitimate test in determining sound Christian teaching. Doctrinal beliefs must be based first and foremost on what scripture plainly teaches. Uninspired writings and historical tradition are certainly legitimate *secondary* sources to consider, but scripture is the *first* and *final* authority.

This has been the basis for this study on eternal punishment; and what we have concluded is that the bible clearly and literally teaches that God will justly, but mercifully execute ungodly people in the lake of fire, not subject them to eternal conscious torment. This execution or "second death" will include conscious suffering, meted out as divine justice requires for each individual, but any such suffering will not be sadistically unending.

This all explains why we should not necessarily believe what the majority believes simply because the majority believes it, but we are still left with the question: If the view of everlasting destruction is what the bible plainly and literally teaches, why have the majority of Christians adhered to the view of eternal conscious torment? In other words, how could so many be wrong for so long?

There are a number of reasons for this:

Foundational adherence to the immortal soul theory. We've already covered this reason in Chapter Three. Obviously if a person foundationally adheres to the theory of the immortal soul – the belief that human beings, once created, can never cease to exist – s/he would naturally fail to take literal the many texts which plainly state that ungodly people will "die," experience "death," be "destroyed," "perish," suffer "destruction," be "consumed" and "burn up" like weeds, etc. We have seen in our study that this belief is completely unbiblical and can be traced back to the first lie recorded in scripture (Genesis 3:4). This lie entered Christian thought early on after the biblical period through contact with Platonic theory (Crim 212).

¹ I don't want to be mistaken here, I'm not anti-Catholic, I'm pro-Jesus, but the undeniable fact is that the medieval Roman church was in an utter state of apostasy. Only blind sectarians would argue otherwise.

² The Adventist revival of the mid 19th century was a legitimate evangelical movement led by William Miller. Where Miller went wrong was to *specify* a date of Jesus' second coming (advent). When the Lord failed to appear the movement largely collapsed in disillusionment; but a few Adventist groups ultimately formed from this revival, including the Seventh-Day Adventists, by far the largest. William Miller, incidentally, lived and died as a supporter of the eternal torture doctrine.

³ Staunch sectarians from varying perspectives may get upset (naturally) for my inclusion here of groups they find objectionable, but I'm not necessarily endorsing any of them or suggesting that their varying teachings and practices are right. I'm just pointing out that these leaders and groups are the result of legitimate restorative waves of the Holy Spirit. I'm personally a loyal non-sectarian and thus multi-denominational by nature. I therefore consider all of these folks my Christian brothers and sisters and would be blessed and honored to fellowship, worship, pray and study God's Word with any of them (that is, as long as they're living for the Lord, so to speak).

Religious tradition. The powerful, influential force of religious tradition is another reason why so many have been wrong for so long.

Though scriptural support for the traditional view of eternal conscious torment is weak and objections to it are strong, religious tradition is indeed a formidable force in swaying people to adhere to the eternal torture view *despite* what scripture has always clearly taught on the subject. Think about it, until printing advancements enabled the common person to personally study the scriptures from the 16th through 18th centuries, the official teachings of the church had to be blindly accepted as true. Consequently, Augustine's Hellenistic views regarding life after death have been deeply ingrained into the Christian psyche – decade after decade, generation after generation, century after century. It's no wonder that when people think of "hell" they automatically assume it refers to never-ending agony in fiery torments.

Yet, the question arises again, what is to be the Christian's final basis for determining the validity of a belief – religious tradition or what the bible clearly teaches?

Let us remember, as mentioned in Chapter One, that Christians are clearly not opposed in principle to correcting traditional beliefs or practices based on biblical authority because they have done so regularly in the past; the doctrine of double predestination and the practice of selling indulgences are two examples. Thus we are not in a position to oppose challenging and scripturally reevaluating the doctrine of eternal torture just because it's an old religious tradition.

Denominational allegiance. Allegiance to one's denomination¹ or preferred group is another obvious reason why so many have been wrong for so long. Denominational allegiance naturally fosters sectarian bias, that is, partiality towards the official teachings of one's own sect. Most church ministers and Christians in general, regardless of what denomination they're a part of, claim they submit to the bible as the final, irrefutable authority on all doctrinal issues and Christian practices, yet usually what they really submit to is their denomination's *interpretation* of the bible. Consequently, regardless of what the bible really teaches on any given subject, they're likely going to adhere to and teach whatever it is that their denomination's doctrinal handbook teaches on the subject.

The people within each denomination are pressured to adhere to the teachings of their respective founder or founders who are often idealized almost to the point of infallibility (in regards to both doctrine and character). Merely questioning an established doctrine is met with resistance, and anyone who actually takes a stand against an established doctrine – regardless of whether s/he is right or wrong – is likely to be shunned or branded a heretic. For instance, regarding the subject of this study, *The Catholic Encyclopedia* states: "The church expressly teaches the eternity of the pains of hell [i.e. eternal conscious torture] as a truth of faith which *no one* can deny or call into question without manifest heresy" (article on "Hell," 209). Naturally no one wants to be shunned, excommunicated or branded a divisive heretic; so, whether people are conscious of it or not, there is much social pressure to be loyal to one's denomination regardless of what the bible truly teaches.

Job security. This reason obviously goes hand in hand with denominational allegiance. Christian ministers are naturally pressured to conform to the doctrinal parameters set by the organized ministry (denomination) which they have credentials and/or position with. If they fail to conform, their credentials and/or position are likely to be revoked. Would this not naturally hinder a minister's honest scriptural search for truth? And, in the event that the minister was able to discover a scriptural truth that differed with his/her denomination's official stance, would this not hinder him/her from publicly admitting the truth and teaching it? Of course it would. This was the case with an actual Saskatoon pastor who anonymously wrote to a Christian magazine that he couldn't preach literal everlasting destruction because he feared losing his job.

The story of Martin Luther is a good example of the serious price that a person might have to pay for boldly disagreeing with the official positions of one's denomination. When Luther publicly spoke out against a number of his denomination's doctrines and practices, he lost his job and credentials, was branded a heretic and banished to live in hiding, his books were burned and Pope Hadrian VI declared him to be the antichrist.

So, as you can see, even though the bible clearly and literally supports the view of everlasting destruction from Genesis to Revelation, most ministers feel – whether consciously or subconsciously –

¹ My definition for "denomination" here refers to any organized ministry that has its own school of theology for training and licensing aspiring ministers. This would naturally include many organizations which claim to be "non-denominational."

that they just plain have too much to lose by publicly changing their view. No one, after all, wants to jeopardize their “bread & butter.”

The indoctrination cycle. This reason goes hand in hand with the previous reasons. The beliefs of the general Christian populace are largely determined by the Christian clergy who teach them. In other words, common believers are indoctrinated by the pastors and teachers of whatever church they attend. If such people feel called to ministry, they will likely attend the very same (or similar) seminary which their pastors attended and receive the very same (or similar) indoctrination their pastors received years before. They will then go out into the community and teach the very same doctrines they were taught by their pastors and seminary professors. Thus the indoctrination cycle spins ‘round and ‘round. Because of the formidable power of religious tradition, denominational allegiance and job security, lay persons aspiring to be ministers will rarely question their indoctrination.

Pride. Pride is another reason that explains why so many have been wrong for so long on the issue of human damnation. Humility is the antithesis of pride. One characteristic of humility is a teachable spirit. In other words, a humble person is teachable, *open* to the truth and *willing* to change in light of that truth. A humble person realizes that it’s impossible to ever “know it all” and is well aware of the fact that “the more you know the more you don’t know.” A proud person, on the other hand, is void of this virtuous trait. A person who is proud isn’t even open to the *possibility* of being wrong, let alone actually changing because he or she has been proven wrong.

Christian ministers are susceptible to pride because of their education, their position of authority and the honor that goes with such a position. They’re used to having all the answers and “knowledge puffs up” (1Corinthians 8:1). As a result, they’re naturally resistant to changing their view on an issue they’ve publicly taught as gospel truth for years.

The saddest aspect of pride is that it blinds people from seeing the truth. If they’re blinded from the truth, the truth *cannot* set them free (John 8:31-32). This was the case with the Pharisees and Sadducees, the Hebrew religious leaders at the time of Christ’s earthly ministry, whom Jesus often corrected. Jesus is the Truth, the living Word of God (John 1:1; 14:6); he naturally gave them the proper interpretation of the scriptures. Unfortunately, they were so blinded by their pride and indoctrination that they couldn’t see the truth, let alone accept it. Not only so, but they also became hostile and sought to kill Jesus. This testifies to how extremely blind in their pride they had become: the very scriptures they diligently studied and claimed to know and follow testified that Jesus Christ was the Messiah, but here the Son of God was in their very midst and they couldn’t perceive it (see John 5:39-40). One notable exception was the Pharisee Nicodemus. Despite his religious indoctrination, Nicodemus had a humble, teachable heart and was therefore open and willing to hear what Jesus had to say; and the scriptures imply that he ultimately became a Christian (John 3:1-21; 7:50-52; 19:38-42).

To sum this all up, despite the fact that the bible clearly and literally teaches the doctrine of literal everlasting destruction from Genesis to Revelation, sincere Christians have been hindered from perceiving or admitting it for so long because of these six powerful reasons: **1.)** Foundational adherence to an unbiblical view of human nature (i.e. the immortal soul), **2.)** Religious tradition, **3.)** Denominational allegiance, **4.)** Job security, **5.)** The indoctrination cycle, and **6.)** Pride. Let’s pray for the worldwide body of Christ to be liberated from these extra-biblical influences which stifle the truth and hold people in bondage to false doctrines.

Many Christians are Now Rejecting Eternal Torture in Favor of Everlasting Destruction

I am happy to report that more and more biblically faithful Christians are realizing and accepting the view of literal everlasting destruction. For example, early in 1996 the Anglican Church changed their official stance to everlasting destruction, describing the idea of eternal punishment in hell as “annihilation for all who reject the love of God.” Also, John Stott, popular Christian author and leader of British evangelicals, had this to say about eternal punishment in a book in which he dialogued with David Edwards on various issues:

“I am hesitant to have written these things, partly because I have a great respect for longstanding tradition which claims to be a true interpretation of scripture, and do not lightly set

it aside, and partly because the unity of the worldwide evangelical constituency [i.e. denominational allegiance] has always meant much to me. But the issue is too important to suppress, and I am grateful to you [David Edwards] for challenging me to declare my present mind. I plead for frank dialogue among evangelicals on the basis of scripture. I also believe that the ultimate annihilation of the wicked should at least be accepted as a legitimate, biblically founded alternative to their theory of eternal conscious torment” (Essentials 319-320).

Simply scan the internet for further proof that an increasing number of Christians are accepting the view of everlasting destruction. More and more Christian websites are proclaiming the biblical truth of literal destruction. One good example is David Reagan of *Lamb & Lion Ministries* who puts out the excellent *Lamplighter* periodical.

On A&E's *Mysteries of the Bible* segment “Heaven and Hell” Thomas Rausch, a Catholic priest and theology professor, openly admitted that literal everlasting destruction is the most sensible view on eternal damnation:

“I’ve often wondered what heaven would be like. We won’t be sitting around on little white clouds with harps like the cartoons in *The New Yorker*. One theological way of thinking about it is to say that heaven and hell are not really parallel concepts, that God raises the just to life and those who die in their sins simply cease to exist – and that makes a lot of sense to me.”

As mentioned in the previous section, the *Catholic Encyclopedia* states that eternal torture in hell is an official Catholic doctrine, and anyone who disagrees with it is a guilty of heresy. When a leader in the Catholic Church is willing to publicly advocate the view of everlasting destruction, disregarding his denomination’s official stance and the charge of heresy, we can be assured literal destruction is gaining greater awareness and acceptance.

This growing support for literal destruction will no doubt inspire an increasing number of Christians from all perspectives to seriously and honestly re-evaluate the biblical evidence. Because the scriptural support for everlasting destruction is so overwhelmingly clear, consistent and colossal, I am confident that such people will be persuaded to embrace this position.

There is, of course, a price for doing this. Staunch adherents of eternal torture will tend to slander those who abandon their view as heretics and liberals who rely on emotion and disregard the bible. The obvious reason they do this is because it’s easier to label people than to legitimately respond to the hard facts of scripture; slandering people as such is therefore nothing more than an avoidance tactic. Yet they couldn’t be further from the truth. High respect for the God-breathed scriptures, instead of orthodox tradition, is the main reason the view of literal destruction is gaining acceptance. Adherents of this view are often so thoroughly devoted to scripture that they are willing to make a bold stand against the comfortable majority view. After all, it’s easy to be an adherent of eternal torture since this has been the accepted doctrine of the church for centuries. On the other hand, to object to eternal torture in light of the plain teaching of scripture one must boldly be willing to leave his or her “comfort zone” and deal with the inevitable consequences.

Conclusion

These last two chapters have been devoted to examining arguments for eternal torture and against literal destruction that are not based on scriptural proof texts. These arguments are the *very best* supporters of eternal torment have been able to come up with to defend their doctrine and, as we have seen, none of them legitimately prove eternal torture or disprove literal destruction.

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CHAPTER EIGHT

MORALITY & JUSTICE

and Other Issues Related to Damnation

Although the most important reason for rejecting the notion of eternal conscious torture is simply because the bible does not teach it, there are of course other strong arguments in opposition to it. Not the least being that it is utterly repulsive to the instinctive moral and judicial senses of any human being that possesses an inkling of compassion.

Eternal Conscious Torture: Immoral and Unjust

As mentioned in Chapter One, the idea of God subjecting his human enemies to never-ending conscious agony would make Him morally worse than Hitler. After all, Hitler may have diabolically tortured, burned and gassed to death millions of people, but he at least ultimately allowed them to perish. By contrast, the doctrine of perpetual agony suggests that, even though God has the power to mercifully execute people cast into hell, He will instead choose to sadistically keep them alive, with no merciful pause or end to their torment. This is outrageously immoral.

As far as justice goes, tell me, what sin or lifestyle of sin could possibly deserve never-ending conscious torment? Is it not plain that *finite* sins committed in time and space cannot possibly deserve *infinite* punishing? Such a perverse sentence goes completely against God's Old Testament equalitarian standard of justice – an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth (see Exodus 21:24 and Leviticus 24:20). In the past some have argued that an unredeemed person's sins are worthy of infinite punishing (i.e. eternal torture) because they are committed against an infinite majesty. This argument may have been remotely plausible in more class-conscious times, like the medieval era, but it simply will not work today. Think about it, do we base the severity of punishment on the honor of the victim – as if murdering a governor is worse than murdering a janitor? Of course not. No judge today would determine the degree of punishment based on the honor of the victim (Pinnock 151-152).

The scriptures declare that God is perfectly just (Deuteronomy 32:4) and will punish every sinful person that rebels against him according to his/her degree of guilt, but his morality and justice forbids him from exacting a more extreme punishment than the one he Himself declared – that is, death. Job's friends, Eliphaz and Elihu, rightly argued, "Can a mortal be more just than God? Can a man be more pure than His Maker?" "Far be it from God to do evil, from the Almighty to do wrong" (Job 4:17; 34:10). It is impossible for a mortal human being to be more just or moral than God, yet which of us, unless utterly debased, would consider torturing even a dog in fire for ten seconds, let alone for all eternity?

John McKee, a supporter of eternal torture, honestly admits that everlasting suffering is an unpleasant idea, but argues that "we simply do not reject something because our flesh does not like it. On the contrary, what we humanly do not like is what is usually true" (3). McKee is arguing here that the very reason we should *not* reject eternal torture is because we instinctively have a strong aversion to it. According to this insane line of reasoning sexual molestation of children would be good because we instinctively consider it repulsive and perverted. Also, McKee is suggesting that it is our *flesh* that does not like the notion of eternal torture when in reality it is our God-given sense of morality and justice that has an aversion to it. We all naturally possess this sense of morality and justice because we've been created in the likeness of God Himself. Our God-given instincts and logical reasoning tell us that never-ending conscious torment for temporal disobedience does not make sense; thus every attempt to justify eternal torture falls hopelessly short (Griesmeyer 13:3).

The bottom line is that this sadistic doctrine of perpetual conscious suffering is absolutely inconsistent with the just, loving, moral character of our Almighty Creator as revealed in the bible. It would be inhumane *not* to question such a glaringly immoral and unjust belief. To the unbeliever, a loving God that endlessly tortures people is appalling and ludicrous; Christianity is made out to be a

mockery because of this. It is such an obvious contradiction and falsehood that it turns many people off to Christianity altogether (ibid.). Supporters of eternal torture insist that this belief encourages people to convert to Christianity, but the reverse is actually true.

The whole matter is resolved by the view of everlasting destruction, which holds that the second death is both punitive and consumptive. Condemned people who sinfully reject God's love in Christ are cast into *Gehenna* primarily for the purpose of eradication. They chose sin, and *Gehenna*, the lake of fire, is where they will reap the unfortunate wages of their choice – death. Yes, there will be a period of suffering as divine justice properly dictates for each individual – perhaps a split second, perhaps longer – but any such suffering will mercifully end in the ultimate just punishment, namely everlasting total extermination with no hope of resurrection.

Eternal Conscious Torture: the Ultimate Evil

The idea of never-ending conscious agony is so completely revolting to our instinctive moral and judicial senses that we could fittingly call it the ultimate evil. If we're honest about the matter, this is exactly what it is. After all, is it possible to come up with a worse notion than perpetual fiery conscious misery – with no merciful respite or end to the suffering? The mere idea is so disturbing that it makes it a very hard subject to discuss calmly. How can anyone with an ounce of human compassion contemplate the idea dispassionately when the view of ceaseless torture is so profoundly disturbing?

Because of its disturbing nature, many Christians naturally struggle with the doctrine of eternal torment. It even provokes some to doubt the infallibility of the God-breathed scriptures. Others have attempted to modify the belief a bit. They have revised it from the diabolic impression of tormenting physical and mental agony in literal flames for all eternity to a more metaphorical and ambiguous impression, that of never-ending mental anguish from loss and “eternal separation from God.”

As already pointed out in Chapter One, this modification is no “improvement” at all. Whether unending physical and mental pain in literal flames or equally grievous perpetual mental anguish because of loss and separation, the notion is exactly the same – never-ending conscious torture with no merciful pause or end. The idea is equally sadistic and evil. Those of us who have experience with severe depression know this all too well. The only improvement this reform may offer is that it no doubt helps the evangelistic efforts of those who adhere to this view – being that eternal “separation from God” is a rather vague and unthreatening notion.

How our Almighty Creator ultimately deals with those people who choose sin and reject his gift of reconciliation speaks volumes. It tells us a lot about His character: Is he just, fair and merciful in his judgment or unjust, merciless and sadistic? This is immensely important because how we *perceive* the God we worship will naturally reflect *in* us. If we have an improper understanding of God's character (based on the unjust and merciless way he ultimately condemns his human enemies), it will in turn have a detrimental affect upon our own character. The reason this is so is because people are always naturally transformed into the likeness of that which they worship, idolize or idealize. This psychological principle has a biblical basis:

PSALM 115:2-8

Why do the nations say, “Where is their God?”

(3) Our God is in heaven; He does whatever pleases Him.

(4) But their idols are silver and gold, made by the hands of men.

(5) They have mouths, but cannot speak, eyes, but they cannot see;

(6) they have ears, but cannot hear, noses, but they cannot smell;

(7) they have hands, but cannot feel, feet, but they cannot walk; nor can they utter a sound with their throats.

(8) Those who make them will be like them, and so will all who trust in them.

The text is saying that those who worship literal idols will become just as spiritually deaf, dumb and blind as idols. Most people today will not worship literal idols; but they have other “idols,” and they are naturally transformed into their likeness. For instance, the person who idolizes money will become the embodiment of greed and materialism; the juvenile who idolizes a self-destructive pop star will naturally start to acquire self-destructive tendencies, etc., etc.

Most Christians today only nominally adhere to the teaching of everlasting torture. They adhere to it only because it remains in the doctrinal books, not necessarily because they have a strong conviction about it. They naturally tend to ignore the subject because they are secretly ashamed of it and this, once again, explains the mysterious silence on the issue in most Christian circles. Since such people don't really perceive the God they worship as an eternal torturer this diabolic belief has no real detrimental effect on their character.

But what of those who *staunchly* support the belief of never-ending conscious punishing? I don't think it's possible to be a strong proponent of this immoral, unjust doctrine without it having a seriously negative impact on one's character. Why? Because, once again, people are naturally transformed into the likeness of that which they worship. If they strongly believe their God will cruelly subject His human enemies to merciless unending torture, then they will themselves start to transform into this image of monstrous heartlessness.

I am reminded of this talk show which showed a group of religious "Christians" screaming at people in a department store parking lot. Waving their bibles, they were shouting lines like "You're all going to hell!" (Of course what they really meant by this was "You're all gonna be tortured forever and ever!") Needless to say, they looked like hideous fiends, and to think that such people actually believe they're obediently doing God's will. *What deception.*

I can't help but be a mite suspect of the character of those who *unswervingly* defend the eternal torture doctrine. I'm talking about those who are so rigidly staunch about the subject that they respond to the view of literal everlasting destruction with a deathly scowl – the type that would go as far as to shun, slander and excommunicate adherents of everlasting destruction (that is, if it were in their power to do so). Sure, we could chalk this up to their blind adherence to religious tradition, etc. (as noted in the previous chapter), but the overwhelming clear biblical evidence for literal destruction should at least compel these people to openly admit that the eternal torture doctrine *might* not be true. You would expect them to at least admit that everlasting destruction is a viable *alternative* to their eternal conscious torture.

What I'm getting at is that never-ending torment is such a fiendish notion that it can only originate from the dark recesses of the flesh, the carnal side of the human psyche. I say this because the flesh is the cesspool that gives birth to every perverted, ungodly, sadistic, hateful human thought. Have you seen some of the many ghastly portraits from medieval times which attempted to depict eternal torture in hell? This was apparently one of the favorite artistic subjects of the Dark Ages and the artists evidently put a lot of thought and imagination into their depictions (needless to say, these people had *way* too much time on their hands). I am reminded of one particularly repugnant piece that portrayed naked people being devoured by a colossal demonic beast and coming out its hind end. *This is flesh – perversion of the lowest depth!* I find it hard to comprehend that a godly Christian would dare to suggest that God is not only the creator of such a disgusting environment but that he's the One who mercilessly condemns people to perpetually experience it without relief as well. (See Appendix B for a biblical examination of the flesh and human nature).

I personally believe that these people who staunchly support eternal torture – these folks who almost seem to relish the idea of human beings consciously roasting in agony for all eternity and who become ridiculously irate when a fellow Christian rejects such a ghastly view (even though based upon a thorough biblical analysis) – I believe that such people have given reign to their flesh in this one area. Their very character must be questioned; it has somehow become warped and perverted. I say this because they would zealously do everything in their power to oppose supporters of everlasting destruction. Some go as far as to teach that adherents of literal destruction aren't even saved, that they aren't fellow brothers and sisters in the Lord. Such people have such a sinister, repulsive, hostile air to them that I wouldn't doubt that, if this was the Inquisition era of medieval infamy, they would not hesitate to put to death or torture adherents of everlasting destruction (!!).

These are strong words, I know, but in view of the facts it's obvious that something went severely wrong with these people's spiritual development somewhere along the line. I seriously can't help but pity their spouses and children.

Child-Killing and Abortion – Justifiable Crimes to Escape the Ultimate Evil?!!

With this realization that eternal conscious torment is indeed the ultimate evil, this would make *any* measure to help others escape it justifiable – even committing a “lesser” evil to do so. For instance, we know God does not hold children accountable until they reach the age of accountability. Before the age of accountability children are spiritually alive; after the age of accountability they’re spiritually dead (Paul seems to have been implying this in Romans 7:9). Thus if children die before the age of accountability they are guaranteed salvation unto eternal life because God will not hold them accountable for their sins. If we interpret eternal damnation to mean never-ending conscious torture, then we’d actually be doing children a favor by killing them before they reach the age of accountability, because we’d be guaranteeing their rescue from unending conscious agony, the ultimate evil. This is, of course, in light of the fact that most theologians believe that the *majority* of people will be damned (based upon texts like Matthew 7:13-14), so the odds are against people born into this world escaping condemnation to hell. In light of all this, murdering a child – unquestionably an evil act – essentially becomes a merciful and virtuous act because it would insure the child’s rescue from the ultimate evil, living forever in torturous misery. It therefore comes as no surprise that there have been actual cases where parents, heavily indoctrinated by the theology of eternal torture, have killed their children, believing it was for their good (!!). This is potent testimony to how destructive this warped theology can be if truly taken seriously.

We could say the same of abortion. In most Christian circles abortion is considered a great evil in society today, but the view of eternal torture would actually make abortion a virtuous act. After all, killing a child in the womb would guarantee his/her salvation from perpetual existence in utter agony.

In fact, unending conscious agony is such an outrageously evil concept that it would be better not to have children at all. Why give birth to children if the odds are they will end up living forever in perpetual torture? Better to not even take the risk.

One might suggest that the very same arguments could be used in opposition to the view of everlasting destruction. Not really. According to the view of literal everlasting destruction everyone is blessed with a certain number of years of life and given the choice to accept or reject God’s gracious gift of reconciliation and eternal life through Jesus Christ. If they stubbornly choose to reject God, then He has no choice but to justly-but-mercifully eradicate them from existence, for “the wages of sin is death.” Even if this is unfortunately the case, these people at least enjoyed a certain amount of years of life to live as they freely chose. It could thus never be argued that life was not worth living for them. Permanently eradicating people from existence is indeed severe – and people should contemplate the ultimate consequence of their sin very seriously – but it is by no means the ultimate evil. In fact, as already pointed out, it is both a just and merciful measure on God’s part.

Universalism – Will All Be Saved Eventually?

The religious traditional teaching that hell refers to never-ending fiery conscious torture has naturally given birth to the doctrine of universalism, also known as universal restoration or restorationism. Universalism teaches that *all people* will eventually be saved – even evil, ungodly people. Evidently, universalists believe such people will go through some kind of purging process before acquiring eternal life. Universalists who claim to adhere to the teachings of scripture suggest that the purpose of the lake of fire is not to torment or consume, but to purge people of evil in preparation to receiving eternal life. They base their belief in universal salvation on a smattering of biblical texts, such as:

1CORINTHIANS 15:22

For as in Adam *all* die, so in Christ *all* will be made alive.

2CORINTHIANS 5:19a

that God was reconciling *the world* to Himself in Christ, *not counting men’s sins against them.*

1TIMOTHY 4:10b

... God, who is the Savior of *all* men, and especially of those who believe.

Universalism is an appealing notion in *some* ways, but it goes against the clear teachings of scripture. We've seen throughout this study that the bible plainly indicates two possible destinies for humankind: life or death, salvation or destruction. The idea that people cast into the lake of fire will eventually be purged of their sins and receive eternal life would make utter nonsense of the scriptures. Let's consider a few examples:

What the bible states:

“Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it.”

-- Matthew 7:13-14

How we'd have to interpret this text if universalism is true:

“Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it (though they'll ultimately be purified and blessed with eternal life). But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it (yet everyone else will eventually find it too).”

What the bible states:

“Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell (*Gehenna*).”
– Matthew 10:28

How we'd have to interpret this text if universalism is true:

“Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell (*Gehenna*) but will eventually restore these people and grant them eternal life.”

What the bible states:

“Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on him.” – John 3:36

How we'd have to interpret this text if universalism is true:

“Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on him – but he'll eventually receive eternal life too.”

What the bible states:

“for a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear His voice and come out – those who have done good will rise to live, and those who have done evil will rise to be condemned.”
– John 5:28-29

How we'd have to interpret this text if universalism is true:

“for a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear His voice and come out – those who have done good will rise to live, and those who have done evil will rise to be condemned, but the latter will eventually rise to live as well.”

What the bible states:

The one who sows to please the sinful nature from that nature will reap destruction; the one who sows to please the spirit, from the spirit will reap eternal life.
– Galatians 6:8

How we'd have to interpret this text if universalism is true:

The one who sows to please the sinful nature from that nature will reap destruction, but will eventually be restored and granted eternal life; the one who sows to please the spirit, from the spirit will reap eternal life.

What the bible states:

There is only one Lawgiver and Judge, the One who is able to save and destroy.

– James 4:12a

How we'd have to interpret this text if universalism is true:

There is only one Lawgiver and Judge, the One who is able to save and destroy (but He will ultimately restore and redeem those whom He destroys and grant them eternal life).

I could go on and on here. As you can plainly see, the notion of universal salvation renders the scriptures utterly nonsensical.

Certainly, as 1 Timothy 2:4 points out, God “wants *all* men to be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth,” in fact this is the very reason *why* this section of scripture encourages believers to offer prayers for “everyone” (see verse 1); but what can God do if people freely choose to reject his offer of reconciliation and eternal life in favor of “sin, which leads to death” (Romans 6:16)? I've heard the question: Since God is all-powerful could He create a stone so big that he couldn't move it? The answer is *yes*, the human heart.

The reason all people can't be saved is simply because God respects our freewill choices. He did not create robots, so he can't force people to choose reconciliation and receive eternal life. People who reject God in favor of sin are openly choosing destruction, the wages of sin. So God will ultimately accommodate them. Their fate is really *self*-destruction – or suicide – because God is only giving them what their freewill actions justly deserve. Will He enjoy this? Of course not, he doesn't want “anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance” (2 Peter 3:9).

Another argument that universalists make is that the English words “eternal” and “everlasting” are translated from the Greek word *aionios* which more properly means “age-lasting,” they contend therefore that “eternal punishment” and “everlasting destruction” refer more specifically to ‘punishment that lasts an age’ and ‘destruction that lasts an age.’ Their point is that the punishment and destruction of the ungodly may indeed last an eon of time, but it certainly won't last forever and ever. They are right about *aionios* (see Chapter Four) but there are two obvious problems with this argument: **1.)** “The age to come” spoken of in the bible (e.g. Mark 10:29-30) is a *perpetual* age and therefore God's age-lasting punishment of utter destruction will last perpetually. **2.)** God's age-lasting punishment of age-lasting destruction is always spoken of *in direct contrast* to the age-lasting life that God will grant the righteous (e.g. Matthew 25:46), since the age-lasting life that God grants the righteous is eternal we must properly conclude that the age-lasting destruction of the ungodly will be just as eternal.

There's no getting around it, universalism is simply incompatible with clear biblical teaching and is therefore not a valid option to consider.

Yet universalism is a popular view held by a growing number of Christians throughout the world. What spurs so many to embrace this erroneous view? The answer is obvious:

For various reasons most of these people have overlooked the doctrine of literal everlasting destruction. Because of religious tradition they naturally assume two things: **1.)** that people can never cease to exist because they have “immortal souls,” and **2.)** that “hell” *must* refer to never-ending fiery conscious torment. The latter assumption, as already covered, is the ultimate evil – the worst conceivable concept. It is so profoundly disturbing that these people feel they must reject the idea of eternal damnation altogether. Once the idea of hell is discarded the only option left for them is universalism. The problem with this is that, in accepting universalism, these people are rejecting the authority of God's Word, which clearly teaches that many are doomed to be cast into the lake of fire to suffer the second death. Rejecting the authority of the Holy Scriptures can lead to nothing but spiritual degeneration and apostasy.

Literal everlasting destruction is the sound medium between the two extremes of eternal torture and universalism. Eternal torture is ridiculously too severe, yet universalism is ridiculously too lenient. Eternal torture is sadistic, immoral and unjust, yet universalism suggests that people can do whatever evil they want and still ultimately be blessed with everlasting life and reconciliation. This would of course make universalism unjust as well. Both these extremes should be rejected in favor of everlasting destruction – the balanced, acceptable, reasonable and scriptural view on the matter.

Those who adhere to universal salvation should be commended for their great love of all people and their bold opposition to the sadistic notion of eternal torture, but their deviation from the clear teachings of scripture cannot be condoned. Their overemphasis on love has caused them to become unbalanced in their overview of Holy Scripture; it clouds their understanding of freewill and the true

hideousness of evil and rebellion. Far fewer Christians would revert to the apostasy of universalism if they would simply do two things: **1.)** research the biblical authenticity of literal everlasting destruction which maintains that those who “*reject* the Son will not see life” (why would Jesus even say this if *no one* would reject him?), and **2.)** consider the *possibility* of post-mortem evangelization and inclusivism...

Post-Mortem Evangelization – Can a Person Be Saved After Death?

Post-mortem evangelization is the belief that people will have an opportunity after death to accept the gospel of Christ and receive eternal life; this view is also known as divine perseverance. The obvious difference between this belief and universalism is that post-mortem evangelization does not advocate that all humanity will be saved, only that those who qualify will have an opportunity to hear, understand and accept the gospel after death when they are resurrected for judgment. This would include all the people throughout history who were never really exposed to the gospel or, for legitimate reasons, never truly understood it.

There are many Christians who believe in post-mortem evangelization and many who at least suspect that it might be true; there are also whole sects that officially adhere to it, such as the United Church of God. This belief is appealing and makes sense in a way. For instance, I didn't get saved until I was 20 years old, but what if I had died in a car wreck when I was 18? In such an event would there have been no hope for me? Or what about the old man that gets born-again at the age of 75 after living an entire life of ungodliness in contrast to the courageous 19 year-old soldier who goes off to die in battle and never gets the opportunity to accept the gospel? It seems quite unfair that the old man had 75 years to receive the gospel, whereas the 19 year-old barely had time at all.

Or what about the millions of people who never truly accepted the message of reconciliation because they were force-fed a religionized, faulty version of the gospel, or rejected it because of the hypocritical medium through which it was delivered? For instance, the gospel came to many peoples around the world with the baggage of imperialism. How open would you or I be to the gospel if it came to us in this manner?

These are tough theological questions indeed and it would no doubt take an *entire book* to properly address them. This is not such a book, this is a study on the nature of eternal damnation, but let me share just a few honest thoughts on the matter...

Most people who reject the idea of post-mortem evangelization quote Hebrews 9:27: “Just as man is destined to die once, and after that to face the judgment, so Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many people.” All this text states is that every person is destined to die and be judged. Who's to say that this judgment will not include an opportunity to accept the gospel – particularly people who never really had a chance to do so?

Let's consider the book of Revelation's account of the great white throne judgment; this is the judgment in which all unbelievers throughout history will be resurrected to face. Notice what it says:

REVELATION 20:12-15

And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books. (13) The sea gave up the dead that were in it, and death and hades gave up the dead that were in them, and each person was judged according to what he had done. (14) Then death and hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death. (15) If anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.

Every spiritually dead person throughout history will be resurrected to appear before the throne of God for judgment. Each person's life will be reviewed and judged accordingly. The text ends by stating that “If anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.” We have to admit that the passage leaves some measure of mystery. It does not say that *everyone* will be thrown into the lake of fire, only that a person will be cast there *if* his or her name is not found in the book of life.

Inclusivism and Restrictivism

The two other prominent views concerning the unevangelized are *inclusivism* and *restrictivism*.

Inclusivism¹ is very similar to post-mortem evangelization in that it attempts to solve the very same troubling questions, yet unlike post-mortem evangelization, inclusivism rejects the idea of an offer of salvation *after* death. Inclusivism suggests rather that, although there will indeed be a post-mortem encounter with Christ for the unevangelized, it will only include those people who exercised faith in God as He was made known to them through creational revelation and providence (see Psalm 19:1-4 and Romans 1:19-20); this encounter will be to confirm their faith and introduce them to their Savior, not to evangelize them. In other words, unreached people may be saved if they respond in faith to God based on the light they have. Romans 2:14-16 seems to support this as it states that non-Christians, who do not have biblical revelation, have the requirements of God's law written on their hearts; their consciences will therefore bear witness to *excuse* or *defend* them on judgment day. I should add here that inclusivists maintain that, whether people have creational or biblical revelation, it is the same Holy Spirit that draws them to God, so the unevangelized who receive salvation are not "saving themselves" as some would criticize.

As you can see, post-mortem evangelization and inclusivism are quite similar beliefs; they are strongly related and distinguished by a very thin line. Adherents to post-mortem evangelization would argue, for instance, that having an encounter with Christ after death *is* evangelization, even though inclusivists contend that such people are *already* saved; they could also argue that the people who qualify for evangelization after death are, in fact, those who respond in faith to the limited revelation they have.

Restrictivism, as the name implies, is the belief that it is absolutely necessary to know about the work of Christ and exercise faith before one dies in order to be saved; hence, God does not provide salvation to those who fail to hear the gospel and respond in faith before they die. Although restrictivism was advocated by Augustine and is therefore the traditionally prominent view, it should be pointed out that both post-mortem evangelization and inclusivism are not new in terms of Christian history; each view has an impressive list of adherents throughout the church age.

Although I personally reject a *strict* take on restrictivism and believe that God will offer salvation to qualifying unevangelized people, it would be counterproductive to get bogged down in such weighty matters. Best to just faithfully share the gospel, pray and encourage people to accept God's gracious gift of reconciliation and eternal life, the sooner the better.

One thing is fairly certain though: If a person has sufficient understanding and opportunity to accept the gospel *before* death, and foolishly doesn't, I wouldn't bank on God offering him or her any further opportunity *after* death.

Another certainty is this:

PSALM 97:2b

righteousness and justice are the foundation of His throne.

PSALM 98:9

...for He comes to judge the earth. He will judge the world in righteousness and the peoples with equity.

When God makes His ultimate judgment on people we can be absolutely certain that His judgment will be righteous and just. *This is His very nature*. The verse states that He will judge people with equity. This means He will be completely fair, ethical and impartial. Christians should simply do their "job" and leave the rest in God's capable hands. When people concernedly ask about their departed unsaved loved ones, Christians can confidently assure them that they are in the hands of a just, loving God; and leave it at that.

'What about Purgatory?'

¹ Please do not confuse inclusivism with Carlton Pearson's doctrine of inclusion, as they are two separate beliefs. Pearson's "gospel of inclusion" is a form of universalism (i.e. *all* will ultimately be saved), inclusivism is not.

Whereas post-mortem evangelization and inclusivism concern the *unevangelized* after death, purgatory concerns the *evangelized* after deace; in particular those who die with unconfessed sins. This would naturally include “backslidden” Christians – people who were at one time legitimately born-again spiritually, but for some reason settled into a lifestyle of carnality or ignorance of God.

Purgatory is an official teaching of Catholicism. It concerns the purification of persons after death and before their resurrection unto eternal life. These people, according to Catholics, must be *purged* of their sins, hence the term “purgatory.” There are a lot of myths amongst Protestants concerning the Catholic concept of purgatory, myths that I myself believed until I did a little research to discover what Catholics *themselves* say they believe on the subject. For instance, many Protestants think that purgatory is an actual *place* in the spiritual realm and that it takes *time* for people to be purged of their sins. Yet, Catholic James Akin informs that the Catholic church does not insist that these notions are necessarily true. Akin stresses that there are three points that his church insists on regarding purgatory: **1.)** that there is a purification of sins after deace for qualifying believers, **2.)** that this purging involves some type of discomfort or pain, and **3.)** that God assists those in this purification in response to the actions of people who are alive. Akin also strongly stresses that purgatory should not be understood as a place where people go if they are not bad enough for damnation and not good enough for eternal life in the new heavens and new earth. This wrongly gives the impression, says Akin, that purgatory is some type of middle destiny rather than a temporary phenomenon (1,7). The notion that purgatory is an actual place and a middle destiny between *hades* and heaven can be traced to Dante Alighieri’s *Divine Comedy* from the early 14th century. Dante’s poem, although clearly an *allegory* of an *imaginary* journey through *hades*, purgatory and heaven essentially became accepted as literal truth, despite what scripture plainly teaches.

I’m not bringing the subject of purgatory up to encourage people to adopt Catholic theology.¹ I’m bringing it up because there are some biblical passages that relate to this concept of purgatory and they need to be examined because people inevitably wonder if these texts are connected to the subject of eternal damnation.

The bible teaches that a spiritually born-again Christian is given the “gift of righteousness” through Christ (Romans 5:17; 2Corinthians 5:21). Because of this gift of righteousness the believer becomes “righteous” in God’s sight or, we could say, in-right-standing with God. If the believer happens to sin, he or she would no longer be “righteous.” We have biblical instructions for when this inevitably occurs: “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and *purify us from all unrighteousness*” (1John 1:9).

According to this text, if we confess our sins (admit and repent of them) God will faithfully forgive us and *purify us from all unrighteousness*. If God purifies us from *all* unrighteousness we’ll obviously be *righteous* again, that is, in-right-standing with him.

Now here’s the point: What if a legitimate born-again believer dies with unconfessed sin in his or her life? Because the sin was never confessed it would not have been forgiven. The believer would *not* therefore be purified from all unrighteousness. Consequently, he or she would have to be purified of this unrighteousness sometime after he or she dies. This is essentially what the notion of purgatory is about.

The Judgment Seat of Christ (the Judgment of Believers)

Our *confessed* sins are, once again, forgiven by the Lord; this means that God dismisses them – i.e. the penalty for these sins is canceled and he treats us as if we never committed them. *Unconfessed* sins, on the other hand, must ultimately be dealt with and judged for the bible makes it clear that our Creator will hold us accountable for what we do or don’t do in this present age:

2CORINTHIANS 5:10-11a

For we (Christians) must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.

(11) Since then, we know what it is to *fear the Lord*, we try to persuade men.

¹ Although if Catholic theology is *biblical* we should by all means adopt it.

This text plainly shows that all believers will be judged for how they lived their lives. They will receive what is “due” them for what they did while in the body – whether good *or bad*.

The judgment seat of Christ is the judgment that believers must experience; spiritually alive Christians will not be evaluated at the great white throne judgment, as this judgment only concerns spiritually dead people. The purpose of the judgment seat of Christ is obviously not to determine who will be granted eternal life, as all spiritually born-again believers rightfully possess such. The purpose of this judgment is to acknowledge and reward Christians for the good things they did while in the body and to rebuke and penalize them for the bad. This would include both sins of *commission* and sins of *omission*, as well as an appraisal of their works. A sin of commission is something that we *do* like committing adultery. A sin of omission involves something that we *did not do* that we should have done; for instance, if God prompts a lady to give a poor person \$100 and she doesn’t do it, or if God calls a lawyer into full-time ministry and he ignores the call. These are sins of omission.

There’s something in the above text that we need to take note of: After stating Christians will receive what is due them for the good or bad things they did, the apostle Paul then states in verse 11: “Since then, we know what it is to *fear the Lord*.” The King James Version translates this as “Knowing therefore *the terror of the Lord*.” This statement would make absolutely no sense if people just receive rewards at the judgment seat of Christ (as I’ve heard quite a few ministers teach). Knowing that Christians will be held accountable for the bad things they do in this life can inspire some healthy “terror.” For those of us who are Christians, it’s spiritually healthy to regularly remind ourselves that we will one day stand before the throne of God Himself and give an accounting of our lives. The fear of the Lord truly inspires holy (pure) living.

The fact that sins not dealt with in this age must be dealt with in the age to come is *implied* by Jesus’ statement:

MATTHEW 12:32

“Anyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man (Jesus) will be forgiven, but anyone who speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, *either in this age or the age to come*.”

The implication here is that some sins – sins not dealt with and forgiven in *this age* – must be dealt with and forgiven in *the age to come*. We will be held accountable to these sins at the judgment seat of Christ, penalized and ultimately forgiven. This does not in any way mean that the sufferings of Christ were insufficient to save us. All of our sins that are “under the blood” are forgiven; it’s the sins that are *not* “under the blood” when we die that must be dealt with at the judgment seat of Christ.

The judgment seat of Christ will also include an examination of our works. Some legitimate Christians tend to be rather lazy and disinterested in the kingdom of God; they consequently produce little or no “works” for the advancement of God’s kingdom in this life. Such an absence of works will be viewed as sins of omission. For the rest of us, however, our works will be examined and tested at the judgment seat of Christ.

In this passage the apostle Paul addresses the fact that a minister’s work will be judged:

1CORINTHIANS 3:12-15

If any man (i.e. Christian minister) builds on this foundation (of Jesus Christ) using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, (13) his work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each man’s work. (14) If what he has built survives, he will receive his reward. (15) If it is burned up, he will suffer loss; he himself will be saved, but only as one escaping through the flames.

This passage contextually refers to a pastor’s work of building a church congregation, that is, a group of Christian disciples (see verses 6-10 for verification). The foundation that the minister builds on is the foundation of salvation through Christ. The pastor can build on this foundation with gold, silver and costly stones or with wood, hay and straw. “Gold, silver and costly stones” is a metaphor for sound biblical doctrine and Christ-like leadership, whereas “wood, hay and straw” represents unsound doctrine and ineffective or abusive leadership.

At the judgment seat of Christ every minister’s work will be tested by fire. If what they have built survives they will be rewarded. The only works that will survive this test of fire is “gold, silver and costly stones.” If the ministers’ works are “wood, hay and straw” these works will be burned up, they

won't lose their salvation but they will certainly "suffer loss." This clearly indicates that even though it is technically their works that will be tested and burned up, these ministers will personally *feel* pain or discomfort as a result.

What about abusive pastors and teachers who administer "wood, hay and straw" to such a harmful degree that it severely damages people, even driving some *away* from the Lord, in effect destroying their Christian faith? Paul answers this question with the very next verse:

1CORINTHIANS 3:16

Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit lives in you? (17) If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him; for God's temple is sacred and you are that temple.

This is a sobering warning for all Christian ministers. Paul makes it clear that every believer is "God's temple;" every Christian is a sacred temple in which the Holy Spirit dwells. Verse 17 solemnly declares that God will destroy any person who destroys this temple. The context is referring to pastors and teachers who destroy Christians with their "wood, hay and straw," which, again, represent unbiblical doctrine and abusive actions. Many have used verse 17 to preach against smoking and alcohol abuse but the context is plainly referring to ministers whose teachings and actions cause people to fall away from God, in effect destroying God's temple.

We all know what Paul's talking about here. Jim Jones is a perfect example of a supposed Christian minister whose work ultimately destroyed naïve believers and could therefore properly be categorized as "wood, hay and straw." David Koresh is another fitting example. These are just two well-known extreme cases; there are no doubt less extreme cases in your local area.

Notice what verse 17 plainly states God will do to such a pastor or teacher whose work destroys people: "*God will destroy him.*" This means that God will cut the abusive, hypocritical minister off from salvation and cast him into the lake of fire where he will "destroy both soul and body." Please note that God will *destroy* such persons, eradicate them from existence, not subject them to never-ending conscious torture. This is further support for the view of literal destruction.

Although this passage from 1Corinthians 3 contextually refers to the testing of the work of pastors and teachers, we can apply it to *all Christians* because every believer is called to serve the Lord on this earth, even though the vast majority are not called to pastoral/teaching ministry. Each Christian will have works that God calls him or her to do and these works will be appraised at the judgment seat of Christ. For example, God will call Christians to witness to certain people in their lives; this work will ultimately be tested at the judgment seat of Christ. Their motives will be evaluated: Did they witness to these people because they love them as God loves them or did they witness to them to fulfill an evangelistic quota or to appear pious? Needless to say, works produced from fleshly motives are "wood, hay and straw" and will be burned up.

Jesus taught a parable that coincides with Paul's teaching from 1Corinthians 3:

LUKE 12:42-48

"Who then is the faithful and wise manager, whom the master puts in charge of his servants to give them their food allowance at the proper time? (43) It will be good for that servant whom the master finds doing so when he returns. (44) I tell you the truth, he will put him in charge of all his possessions. (45) But suppose the servant says to himself, 'My master is taking a long time in coming,' and he then begins to beat the menservants and maidservants and to eat and drink and get drunk. (46) The master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he is not aware of. *He will cut him to pieces and assign him a place with the unbelievers.*"

(47) "That servant who knows his master's will and does not get ready or does not do what his master wants *will be beaten with many blows.* (48) But the one who does not know and does things deserving punishment *will be beaten with few blows.* From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked."

The "master" in this story is an obvious reference to Jesus. He goes away and puts a "manager" in charge of his "servants" until his return. The "manager" refers to Christian ministers (apostles, pastors, teachers, etc.) whom Jesus puts in charge of common believers, referred to as "servants." The

master (Jesus) instructs the manager (Christian minister) to be sure to properly feed and take care of his servants (common believers) until his eventual return. One of the primary tasks of a Christian minister is to “feed” the people under his care a proper scriptural diet so that they can spiritually mature and learn to walk in newness of life (see 1Peter 2:2; Ephesians 4:11-15 and Hebrews 5:12-13). In verses 43-44 Jesus states that the minister who does this will be rewarded. Jesus then brings up those ministers who will be penalized for their “wood, hay and straw” in verses 45-48.

Verse 45 clearly portrays an abusive minister who damages those under his “care” (not to mention indulges in gluttony and drunkenness). Verse 46 solemnly declares that such a minister will be “cut to pieces” and cast away like an unbeliever.

Matthew tells the same story but adds that Jesus “shall cut him in pieces and assign him a place with the hypocrites; weeping shall be there and the gnashing of teeth (Matthew 24:51 NASB). We’ve already examined the scriptural meaning of the phrase “weeping and gnashing of teeth” in Chapter Five so let’s focus on the first portion of this verse. Being “cut to pieces” no doubt refers to severe flogging. After this punishment is inflicted he will be cast away to where all unbelievers and hypocrites (pretenders) are disposed of – the lake of fire; and we know from our study that when people are cast into the lake of fire “raging fire will... *consume* the enemies of God” (Hebrews 10:26-27). This coincides perfectly with what Paul said would happen to abusive, false “ministers:” God will *destroy* them.

In verses 47-48 Jesus states that some “servants” will be beaten with many blows and some with few blows based upon their level of spiritual maturity and awareness. Jesus refers to these people as “servants” and not hypocrites, as is the case with the abusive minister mentioned in verses 45-46. So Jesus is talking about legitimate Christians who will be judged and penalized at the judgment seat of Christ. We can confidently conclude this because only believing Christians can be referred to as Christ’s “servants,” not unbelievers. The abusive minister in verse 45 is initially referred to as a “servant” but is exposed as a “hypocrite,” which literally means “actor” (Strong 74). So we’re talking about a person that is only *pretending* to be a servant of Christ. He’s a fake. This person may have *begun* as a legitimate Christian servant but somehow became corrupt over time (position, power, pride, money, lust, etc. can easily corrupt any of us and cause us to fall away from the Lord if we’re not careful).

Whether the servant is punished with many blows or few blows, the fact is that this punishment is of a *limited duration*. The words “many” and “few” are not specific, but both certainly indicate a limit to the “blows.” In other words, no one will sadistically suffer “many blows without end throughout all eternity.” Consequently, even if we were to misapply this passage to the eternal damnation of unbelievers, it still would not support never-ending torment.

Our conclusion on purgatory and the judgment seat of Christ is this: the notion of purgatory is only true in the sense that every believer must appear at the judgment seat of Christ to receive what is due him or her for the things done in this life, whether good or bad. They will be rewarded for the good and held accountable for the bad. All sins repented of in this life will have already been dismissed and therefore will not be judged. Any punishment deserved will be of a purging nature and of limited duration. All are assured the resurrection unto eternal life, excepting the base few exposed as hypocrites.

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CHAPTER NINE

THE TRUE LITERAL VIEW on Eternal Damnation

There's an excellent book on the subject of this study titled "Two Views of Hell" by Edward Fudge and Robert Peterson. The view of everlasting destruction is presented by Fudge and he does a great job as his case rests totally on scripture, which, of course, is the proper way a defense of any Christian doctrine should be conducted. Peterson, on the other hand, defends the view of eternal conscious torture by beginning "with eleven theologians who support his view and ending with rationalistic arguments involving human creeds. Sandwiched between is his appeal to ten passages of scripture, most of which he interprets by quoting uninspired theologians," as Mr. Fudge points out (202). Peterson naturally resorts to such an approach because his position lacks any real biblical basis.

Methodology: Sola Scriptura, Literalizing and Letting Scripture Interpret Scripture

Like Mr. Fudge, I've focused our attention in this study almost exclusively on what the bible itself literally teaches on the subject. Even when addressing various religious theories in Chapter Six, I had us turn to the God-breathed scriptures for verification. Isn't this what really matters, what the bible itself plainly teaches? This is in faithful adherence to the aforementioned principle of *sola scriptura*, which is Latin for "by scripture alone." Scripture itself must be our *final authority* when judging any Christian doctrine or practice. This does not mean that sources outside the bible cannot be considered, only that the Holy Scriptures must be our *first* and *final* authority. "Scripture above all" or "scripture first" (*prima scriptura*) would perhaps be a more accurate name for this theological principle (Olson 54).

A commitment to *sola scriptura* would be useless if we did not have concrete guidelines by which to properly interpret the scriptures. Therefore those committed to *sola scriptura* must adhere to two interpretational laws, as I do in this study: **1.)** Literalizing rather than spiritualizing, that is, taking the bible literally wherein it is at all possible, if symbolic or typical language is used then looking for the literal truth it intends to convey. This is an important law because if we were to take everything literally in the bible there would be contradictions. Yet since the scriptures are God-breathed (2Timothy 3:16) the bible cannot contradict itself; therefore some texts must be symbolic. This is no problem because it should *never be difficult* to determine if a passage or phrase is symbolic, that is, as long as one has a thorough and unbiased knowledge of the scriptures. And **2.)** Allowing scripture to interpret scripture. In other words, the best interpreter of the bible is the bible itself. This rule is based on the belief that the One who inspired Holy Scripture is of one mind; thus the meaning of a passage *cannot* be out of sync with what the rest of scripture teaches. Let's consider, for example, Paul's declaration that those who reject the truth will suffer "everlasting destruction" (2Thessalonians 1:9). What exactly does "everlasting destruction" mean? The entire rest of the bible makes it clear that this is to be taken as a literal destruction so complete and final that it lasts forever with no hope of resurrection or restoration.

Bypassing the Quagmire of Religion

Although we briefly considered uninspired writings in Judeo-Christian history in Chapter Seven, we found that they are inconclusive. As pointed out in that chapter, it's okay to *examine* uninspired writings but we must not *rely* on them. It was also pointed out that there were over *seventy* schools of Hebrew thought at the time of Jesus – seventy plus sects of Judaism. In the scriptures Jesus plainly declared that two of the sects, the Pharisees and Sadducees, adhered to false doctrine (see Matthew 16:11-12).

My point is, why get entangled in the opinions of various past and present Judeo-Christian leaders, however godly and sincere, when we can just go straight to the God-breathed scriptures for answers? Why needlessly get bogged down in the quagmire of human-made religion when we can go directly to *the original source* of all Judeo-Christian religion? Let us accept the simple fact that no man or woman of God, no organization or denomination has a patent on truth – no matter how greatly used of God (or *not* used of God if such is the case). Remember, every Christian ministry *specializes* in various areas and is therefore *ignorant* in some areas. That's why God raises up a multitude of ministries – so that the worldwide body of Christ may be well-nourished by a *balanced* spiritual diet from a *variety* of callings and anointings (not that every ministry is legitimate, of course). The same principle is common with doctors and musicians: A foot doctor likely knows very little about brain surgery and a guitarist may have little penchant for singing or playing drums. Let us never forget the fact that **those who**

transfer knowledge are also capable of transferring error. Only Jesus Christ, the living Word of God, is truth (John 1:1; 14:6). The *living* Word is no longer with us, he's at the right hand of the Father, but we have the *written* Word of God. Let us therefore be faithful to go to God's written Word in our search for truth. Let us seek the help of the Holy Spirit who will "guide [us] into all truth" (John 16:13). Let us make sure that our study is thorough, honest and unbiased, and let us be sure to always interpret scripture with scripture. When we are faithful to do this the truth will be plain to see as this very study exemplifies.

Sure, in researching for this book I was careful to expose myself to virtually every branch of Judeo-Christian religion, past and present, to find out what they believe regarding eternal damnation and why. Chapters Five, Six and Seven are devoted to presenting the very best scriptural and non-scriptural arguments of those who support eternal torture; and, as we have clearly seen, none of their contentions stand up to an unbiased study based upon the principles of *sola scriptura*, literalizing and interpreting scripture with scripture. Aside from the material in these chapters I see no reason to bog readers down in endless religious theorizing from time immemorial. Holy Scripture is the basis of all Judeo-Christian teachings and practices.

This is the very reason why the Protestant reformers of the 16th century decided to base their reforms on the principle of *sola scriptura*. The Roman church had religiously degenerated over the centuries; as a result many truths were lost sight of or perverted. Consequently, much ritual, tradition and human religion were added to the original scriptural base. It came to the point where there was little, if any, life or truth in the Roman church. By the early 16th century the time was ripe for a colossal reformation to break out. Something had to happen to provoke people to get back to the proper scriptural foundation, and that something was the Reformation. But, as mentioned in Chapter Seven, the church worldwide came out of this great Reformation with a lot of false doctrinal baggage. The Holy Spirit has been doing quite a bit of housecleaning in the last 500 years, to say the least, but he's by no means finished. The worldwide invisible church¹ still needs a lot of work.

The bottom line is that scripture speaks for itself and it certainly has in this study.

There's nothing more purifying or liberating than to simply read the God-breathed scriptures. I believe at least 50% of our scriptural intake should be from just reading the bible itself – the straight Word of God – with no commentary. And I think it helps to switch translations from time to time. As we do this, the truth will start to dawn in our hearts as the Holy Spirit "guides [us] into all truth." The truth will indeed set us free as Jesus said (John 8:31-32).

When we *only* expose ourselves to various preferred teachers, sects and mindsets – never reading the pure scriptures themselves – we will naturally become somewhat tainted, biased and sectarian, even brainwashed. Needless to say, this is a very closed-minded and narrow-minded condition, not to mention life-stifling and growth-stultifying. Some unfortunately come to the point where the plain truth of scripture can no longer even penetrate their indoctrination. I am reminded of a Christian friend who diligently exposes himself to the various teachings of a specific Christian movement. This is all well and fine but one day he admitted to me that he *never* reads the bible itself, the straight scriptures. My heart sank. He's a serious candidate for an impenetrable brainwashing.

All I can say is *thank God for the purifying and liberating power of his Word² and his wondrous Holy Spirit who faithfully guides us into all truth!*

The Five Theological Method Traits of the Noble Bereans

One might inquire if there's any biblical support for the methodology adhered to in this study as just described. Certainly, just turn to the book of Acts and the historical account of Paul introducing the gospel message to the people of Berea:

ACTS 17:10-12

As soon as it was night, the brothers sent Paul and Silas away to Berea. On arriving there, they went to the Jewish synagogue. (11) Now the Bereans were of more noble character than the

¹ The "worldwide invisible church" includes all true spiritually born-again believers regardless of human-made sectarian boundaries. God is concerned with the condition of a person's heart, not with what tag he or she chooses to go by (e.g. "Baptist," "Charismatic," "Catholic," "Evangelical," etc.). After all, labels can be wrong. Just for example, if I put a label of "corn" on a can of beans it wouldn't make the beans a can of corn (!).

² God's Word is essentially liberating; that's why it's described as "the perfect law of liberty" (James 1:25; 2:12 KJV)

Thessalonians, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true. (12) Many of the Jews believed, as did also a number of prominent Greek women and many Greek men.

We observe in verse 11 that the Holy Spirit commends the Bereans for being “of more noble character.” The word “noble” means “having excellence and characterized by superior qualities.” What was so noble about the Bereans? This passage reveals five traits that marked them as having superior character in God’s eyes:

- 1.) The first trait is that **their allegiance was to God’s Word first and foremost**; hence, when Paul came to them with the “good news” of the gospel they used the scriptures as a gauge for determining whether or not his teaching was true. Paul’s gospel message was not orthodox at all; in fact, it was completely new and unorthodox to the Bereans. If the Bereans had consulted the Judaic orthodoxy of that time or took a popular vote they would have no doubt rejected Paul’s teaching *before* even looking into it.
- 2.) The second trait is that **they were *already* familiar with the scriptures**. We know this because people can only use the scriptures as a gauge for determining truth if they are *already* adequately familiar with them. The only way to get familiar with the scriptures is to set apart time regularly for systematic bible reading, study and prayer.
- 3.) The third trait is that **they were open**. The Bereans already knew the scriptures and were no doubt comfortable with a set theology, but that didn’t hinder them from being open to what Paul had to say *even though what he taught was different and unorthodox*. In fact, it states that “they received the message *with great eagerness*” – and this was *before* they even determined whether or not Paul’s teaching was true. You see, as godly people dedicated to finding the truth, the Bereans were eager to hear any scriptural teaching that could possibly increase their knowledge & understanding and bring them closer to God. It takes true humility to be open like this because, by being open, we’re acknowledging that we may not be entirely accurate in our present understanding (Proverbs 30:2-3). Someone might argue that being open-minded will make us vulnerable to false teaching (this is perhaps why so many Christians tend to be closed-minded); but if we adhere to the above first two traits we can be open-minded without fear, just like the Bereans, because the scriptural truth will always filter out what isn’t true, that is, as long as we adhere to the next trait...
- 4.) Notice that the Bereans “examined the scriptures *every day* to see if what Paul said was true.” This reveals the fourth trait: **They were sure to do a *thorough, unbiased* examination of the scriptures, not a superficial or biased one**. They wanted to make sure that they properly interpreted the bible (2Timothy 2:15) for they understood that a person can “prove” just about anything through a superficial “study.” It took them days of careful examination to draw a confident conclusion concerning Paul’s teaching. Likewise, we need to realize and be prepared that it may take us days, weeks or even months or years of careful study to draw a well-informed conclusion on a specific scriptural issue.¹
- 5.) Lastly, as verified in verse 12, **the Bereans were willing to change their view in light of the biblical truth**. This is commendable for it is one thing to be open and realize what the bible truly teaches, it’s quite another to actually be willing to publicly change one’s view or practice in light of that realization. But, one might ask, doesn’t God bless everyone who boldly follows his Word? Certainly, but often there are negative consequences for doing such. For instance, someone who follows God’s Word may lose his or her job, lose relationships, be excommunicated from his/her church/denomination, be branded a heretic, and, in severe cases, be harassed, imprisoned or killed. The aforementioned Martin Luther is a good example. Or how about people today in Islamic countries who convert to Christianity? Or, closer to home, how about people in America today who get “disfellowshipped” from churches/denominations for openly disagreeing with their pastor or their church’s official doctrines (I’m not talking about quarrelsome troublemakers here, but rather fruit-bearing people that honestly have legitimate scriptural disagreements); this happens more often than one might think.

The Bereans were noble because they were not dead-set in their present understanding. They had a high respect for God’s Word. They weren’t in bondage to a certain theology like so many

¹ The only reason a study would take years is because it sometimes takes that long for the truth to penetrate the stubborn, multifold layers of religious indoctrination (i.e. brainwashing).

“fundamentalist” Christians today. They were open to new insights, to spiritual growth and understanding. They were humble enough to admit that their present understanding of truth could be further honed and sharpened. They had such a high respect for God’s Word that, if someone legitimately corrected them and showed them the way more accurately, they were *eagerly* willing to embrace it. This is the antithesis of the religious spirit.

Apollos Was Humble and Open Enough to Learn “More Accurately”

Let’s briefly look at another biblical example of Christians who nobly adhered to this “by scripture alone” principle:

ACTS 18:24-26

Meanwhile, a Jew named Apollos, a native of Alexandria, came to Ephesus. He was a learned man, with a thorough knowledge of the scriptures. (25) He had been instructed in the way of the Lord, and he spoke with great fervor and taught about Jesus accurately, though he knew only the baptism of John. (26) He began to speak boldly in the synagogue. When Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they invited him to their home and explained to him the way of God more adequately (or “more accurately” according to the NASB).

Here we have a man, Apollos, who had a thorough understanding of God’s Word and taught about Jesus as accurately as he could in relation to the knowledge and understanding he had; he was faithful to what he presently knew and understood. After Priscilla and Aquila met him they explained to him the scriptures “more accurately.”

Because Apollos had the same noble spirit as that of the Bereans he was receptive to being taught the way of God more adequately. Verse 28 shows how he went on to vigorously refute “the Jews in public debate, proving from the scriptures that Jesus was the Christ.”

Apollos truly adhered to the principle of *sola scriptura*: Not only were his teachings based upon “proving from the scriptures,” but he himself was willing to be taught by the very same principle. In other words, not only could he dish it out, he could take it too.

Sadly, you’ll find too few Christians today who truly possess the same noble spirit as that of Apollos, Priscilla, Aquila and the Bereans. Many Christians are too proud, stubborn and closed-minded to be taught “more accurately;” they seem to only be interested in touting the doctrines of their pastor/church/denomination or what they view as unquestionable “orthodoxy.”

The Problems with Orthodoxy and Traditionalism

Which brings us to the notion of orthodoxy. Orthodoxy literally means “correct opinion” and refers to historically established beliefs judged to be essential to Christian truth. A couple examples of orthodox Christian beliefs would be the inerrancy of the God-breathed scriptures and the necessity of spiritual rebirth for salvation.

There’s nothing wrong with this idea of orthodoxy as long as the beliefs said to be orthodox are legitimately biblical, as is the case with the above two examples, the problem arises when what we claim to be orthodox is not actually scriptural. A good example of this would be the doctrines of the immortal soul and eternal torture, which are supported by Augustinian tradition but not the bible. If we teach Christian disciples that these doctrines are unquestionable orthodoxy they will naturally study the scriptures with this in mind. Their study will then be tainted and biased by blind adherence to these supposed orthodox beliefs; in other words, they’ll read the scriptures *pre-supposing* these notions to be true, not freely or at face value, as they should.

When one studies the bible free of such presuppositions, taking it at face value, as we have in this study, it doesn’t take long to see that everlasting destruction is the true biblical view.

My point is that what we determine to be orthodox Christian beliefs must be clearly and consistently taught in scripture. In other words, if a doctrine is truly orthodox – that is, a “correct opinion” essential to Christian truth – it should not be necessary to engage in bizarre theological mumbo jumbo to prove its scriptural authenticity, as is the case with the eternal torture doctrine. As we’ve seen in this study, the only way religionists can support eternal torment is by trying to convince us that the

bible doesn't really mean what it so clearly says: e.g. death doesn't mean death, destruction doesn't mean destruction, perish doesn't mean perish, destroy doesn't mean destroy, consume doesn't mean consume, etc. The only way adherents of eternal torture can prove their belief is by convincing us that each of these words mean the exact opposite of its literal definition.

By contrast, to prove everlasting destruction one doesn't have to resort to such nonsensical twisting of the scriptures. Literal destruction can be proven simply by freely reading the bible unhindered by foreign presuppositions.

How did false doctrines like the immortal soul and eternal torture come to be considered Christian orthodoxy when they are so clearly unscriptural? The reason is because there is another basis *besides* Holy Scripture used to determine the content of orthodoxy, and that is tradition. When people speak of Christian tradition they're usually referring to religious literature, creeds and councils from the Patristic Age, or "late antiquity," which extended from the fourth to the eighth centuries. As mentioned in Chapter Seven, the most prominent and influential "church father" of this era is Augustine of Hippo (354-430). Christian tradition is derived from other eras as well, including the later medieval, Reformation and post-Reformation eras. The very fact that Christian tradition is historically cumulative testifies that the worldwide invisible church is in an ongoing state of reform; in other words, Christendom is not in bondage to historical tradition.

What's the difference between tradition and traditionalism? I've heard it said that *tradition* is the living faith of the dead, whereas *traditionalism* is the dead faith of the living. That's a good way of putting it because there's nothing *living* about traditionalism; it's dead religiosity. What exactly is traditionalism? It is the tendency to place tradition on the same authoritative plane as scripture; actually it places tradition *over* scripture since how a traditionalist simply reads God's Word is *determined by* tradition. Hence, traditionalism is the perverse bent to hold Holy Scripture in bondage to tradition.

Protestants have historically regarded traditional doctrines and practices not directly supported by the bible to be optional at best, and often erroneous. The reason for this is threefold: **1.)** Jesus contradicted tradition but never scripture, **2.)** the Reformation experience is based on the principle of *sola scriptura*, the idea that Holy Scripture must be our first and final authority, not tradition, and **3.)** since the church must be "reformed and always reforming," treating extra-biblical expressions of truth as equal with scripture naturally inhibits continuing (and necessary) reform. Yet to hear some ministers teach today you would think that tradition is the irrefutable authoritative interpretation of God's Word. Hank Hanegraff, for instance, makes constant references to "orthodoxy" rather than scripture itself – so much so it's sickening. The problem with this tendency is that **1.)** it stifles biblical truth by exalting human beliefs to the same authoritative level as Holy Scripture, and **2.)** it perpetuates religious myths by preventing healthy reform in the church through simple appeal to God's Word.

Religious tradition is certainly a legitimate extra-biblical source to consider when determining the authenticity of Christian doctrines and practices; in this sense it gets a vote but it does not hold the power of veto as does scripture itself. Let's be humble enough to admit that Christendom still needs a lot of work; the Holy Spirit is still at work amongst God's people, guiding them to biblical truths that may possibly correct Augustinian, medieval, Reformation and post-Reformation beliefs and practices. Staunch traditionalists will argue that such an open-minded and adventurous attitude will open up a Pandora's box of heretical new teachings and insights but Christendom has nothing to fear if, as pointed out earlier in this chapter, its allegiance is to the Holy Scriptures as the first and final authority. God's perfect Word is perfectly able to determine what is true and filter out what is false.

There are some other problems with orthodoxy and traditionalism that we need to consider:

First of all, just because a belief is considered orthodox today does not necessarily mean that it was orthodox in biblical times (the era in which both testaments were written). As shown in Chapter Seven, literal everlasting destruction was not only the scriptural view in biblical times but also the orthodox view. Only when pagan Greek ideas, specifically the teaching of the immortal soul, infiltrated Palestine and Judeo-Christian culture did the doctrine of eternal torment emerge and gain increasing acceptance.

Another problem is that Christianity is split into many sects and none of these groups unanimously agree on which beliefs actually constitute the content of orthodoxy, and no consensus is likely to come soon because different groups stress different beliefs as vital based on which traditions they deem legitimate. For example, the Protestant belief of "salvation by faith alone" is indeed a part of Reformation orthodoxy but it is absent from Augustinian and medieval tradition. Likewise, John Wesley's post-Reformation doctrine of entire sanctification in a moment is absent from the "Great

Tradition.” A more modern example would be speaking in tongues or “praying in the spirit” as a form of prayer to supplement ordinary prayer in one’s own language; this belief is fundamental to pentecostal/charismatic Christians (even though it is not a part of the Great Tradition), but many evangelicals claim that such spiritual gifts passed away when the biblical canon was completed; this belief is, in fact, orthodox to *them*.¹

Another problem with the idea of orthodoxy is the impression that the older a teaching is the more reliable it is. Yet, since when does the mere passage of time give greater credence to a doctrine? A lie sixteen centuries ago is still a lie today. For example, just because Saint Augustine advocated eternal torture in 400 AD does not make it anymore true today. If we’re going to base the validity of doctrines on their age, then literal everlasting destruction is the true view of damnation because it is taught throughout the Hebraic scriptures as this study has clearly shown; and was, in fact, the orthodox view at the time of Christ (see Appendix A for additional support for literal destruction from the Hebrew bible [i.e. the Old Testament]).

Adherents of eternal torture apparently want to go back to that “old time religion” of the 19th and early 20th centuries, no doubt because they believe eternal torment was a fundamental part of Christianity of that era, and strict traditionalists would have us go back to that “old time religion” of the creeds and councils. Yet, if we *really* want that “old time religion,” let’s go all the way back to the teachings of Jesus Christ, the biblical apostles and the Old Testament saints. Let’s have that *real* old time religion, amen? This entire study is based on this.

Of course the biggest problem with orthodoxy and traditionalism is that no where in the bible are we encouraged to determine the veracity of doctrines by whether or not they are considered orthodox or traditional. What scripture itself clearly and consistently teaches is to be our gauge in determining what is true and what is not true; in other words, scripture is to be our *final authority* when judging the validity of Christian doctrines and practices, not orthodoxy or tradition. We should certainly value and take into consideration traditional expressions of truth from all eras of church history, but traditional beliefs – no matter how imbedded in our collective psyche – must remain open to correction and revision in light of the plain teaching of Holy Scripture. Doctrinal debates should be engaged over scripture and prayer not dismissed with a pharisaical appeal to religious tradition. As Martin Luther is believed to have said, “Unless I am convinced by Scripture and plain reason – I do not accept the authority of popes and councils for they have contradicted each other – my conscience is captive to the Word of God... Here I stand, I cannot do otherwise.”

Needless to say, when a new teaching or idea appears, Christians should first and finally ask, “What saith the scriptures?” not “What saith orthodoxy?” or “Is it consistent with tradition?”

Everlasting Destruction: the True Literal View

By faithfully adhering to this “by scripture alone” principle in our study on damnation, as well as adherence to a literal interpretation of the bible in which scripture is interpreted by scripture, we have discovered that the bible clearly, literally and thoroughly supports the view of everlasting destruction. God will justly-but-mercifully utterly destroy rebellious people who reject Him and choose sin, not subject them to never-ending existence in conscious agony.

What’s strange is that adherents of eternal torture have long touted their position as “the literal view.” Yet, as we have seen, everlasting destruction is the true literal view regarding the second death because it takes literally all the many Greek and Hebrew words that describe the eternal fate of sinful people with such unmistakable words as “die,” “death,” “destruction,” “destroy” and “perish.” It also takes literally the imagery of *Gehenna* (“hell”) as a lake of fire or “fiery furnace” which consumes all the people thrown into it (e.g. Hebrews 10:27). Fire, of course, is one of the most destructive forces known to humankind. Linking all these facts together points to no other conclusion but complete and final destruction.

¹ I personally believe spiritual gifts never “passed away” and are definitely available to the body of Christ today. The reason they are dormant in much of Christendom today is precisely because of this unscriptural teaching that miracles stopped at the end of the first century when the last apostle died. This is a prime example of the church being robbed of God’s blessing and power due to blind adherence to religious tradition or “orthodoxy.” Thankfully, as always, the truth shall set us free.

So adherents of eternal conscious misery can tout their view as “the literal view” all they want, but the truth is that it is not, and never was, the literal view. Anyone who rightly honors the bible’s plain and literal teaching, will concede that the doctrine of everlasting destruction is the true literal view.

‘Traditionalist’ or ‘Eternal Torturist’?

If you read other literature on the subject of eternal damnation you’ll notice that adherents of eternal torture have dubbed themselves “traditionalists,” evidently because their position is the religious traditional view. Those who adhere to everlasting destruction are usually referred to as “conditionalists” because of their belief that immortality is conditional based upon one’s acceptance of God’s gift of eternal life. The latter label I can understand because “conditionalist” informs others of what such a person believes (although I’d personally prefer something more plainly descriptive like “literal destructionist,” “extinctionist” or something similar); but the name “traditionalist” for a person that adheres to eternal torture is completely unfitting. Allow me to explain:

I myself am a “traditionalist” in regards to many Christian doctrines; in other words, I believe many traditional teachings are quite biblically sound. However, because I reject the idea that ungodly people will be condemned to eternal conscious torture, based upon what the scriptures literally and consistently teach, I *apparently* cannot be a “traditionalist.” Yet, if an adherent of eternal torture rejects every traditional belief, yet accepts the view that God will condemn ungodly people to ceaseless conscious agony, it’s okay for them to be called a “traditionalist.” Do you see the problem here?

Furthermore, “traditionalist” is just plain too generic of a label. The question is automatically raised: “Traditionalist” in what way? “Traditionalist” doesn’t tell anybody that the person embraces the view of eternal torture.

I suspect the reason adherents of eternal torture like to be called “traditionalists” is because it sounds so noble. It gives the impression that they are righteously faithful to age-old Christian truth (actually the opposite is true, they are perpetuators of age-old pagan-religious lies). Regardless of the opposing subject or the legitimacy of the opposing argument, the “traditionalist” will subconsciously be perceived as a stately defender of the faith.

I suspect also that adherents of eternal torture like the name “traditionalist” because it successfully diverts people from focusing on the perverse doctrine they support. What’s the problem? Are they ashamed of their belief? If not, then why don’t they accept a fitting name that describes exactly what they believe?

As mentioned before, I have no problem being referred to as a “literal destructionist.” I don’t even mind the name “annihilationist” if that’s what people want to call me. I have no problem with these tags because they describe exactly what I believe regarding eternal damnation, they fittingly describe what I *am* because I believe conscious life will ultimately be annihilated when people suffer the second death. So why don’t adherents of eternal torture label themselves accordingly? Since they believe God will condemn a vast number of people to never-ending conscious torment, they should have no problem being referred to as “eternal torturists” or “eternal tormentists.” What’s wrong with this? Isn’t this what they *really* believe when you back them up against a wall?

You’ll notice that I haven’t once referred to adherents of eternal torture as “traditionalists” in this study. The reason is because I simply refuse to give such a noble name to a supporter of such a perverse and unbiblical teaching.

The bottom line is this: If it’s a spade then call it a spade. If people staunchly adhere to the doctrine of eternal torture then they should accept the fitting name of “eternal torturist” or something equally descriptive. These people need to quit hiding behind noble tags that disguise what they really believe.

My Background – I Used to Believe in Eternal Torture

I grew up in a family that was virtually non-religious. Although my mother was a church-going Episcopalian I only went to church with her a handful of times and the basics of Christianity were never explained to me. Needless to say my knowledge of the bible and Christianity was next to nothing. My only understanding of hell came from comics, books, television and movies where it was portrayed as a devil-ruled subterranean torture chamber for sinful people. I naturally assumed this was what the bible

taught on the subject as well. I got saved in March of 1984 and the Christians and churches I've since been involved with were mostly of the charismatic-evangelical perspective.¹ In fact, I belonged to a large charismatic-evangelical church *for ten years* from 1986-1996. Most charismatic and evangelical Christians, if you're not aware, adhere to the doctrine of eternal torture (although this has been thankfully changing in recent years as the word continues to get out). My point is that all through my Christian formative years I was pastored and taught by supporters of eternal torture. I bought, read and listened to *countless* books and teaching tapes from this perspective. Because of what I was taught and because of religious tradition I naturally assumed the bible taught that unrepentant sinners would be condemned to never-ending conscious torture after they die. I assumed that eternal torture was a biblical teaching and therefore believed it and spread the word. In fact, I wrote and recorded a song called "Hell Is For Real, Hell Is Forever" on my multi-track home recorder in 1985. You can't beat that for support of eternal torture!

It's important that I bring up my background so that no one accuses me of being an ex-Jehovah's Witness or that I was somehow poisoned by Adventist theology (or otherwise).

So how did I come to reject the view of eternal torture? Well, even though I engulfed countless books, tapes and sermons from the charismatic-evangelical perspective, at any given time at least 60% of my scriptural intake was from simply reading the bible. I always jotted down notes on various subjects from my readings, including hell, and I started to notice a consistency from Genesis to Revelation regarding the subject of eternal damnation. I was intrigued and dug deeper. I sought the Lord diligently for knowledge and understanding on the subject. I noticed that the wages of sin was simply death, that the ungodly would die, that both their soul and body would be destroyed, that they would burn up like weeds, trees, branches and chaff, that they would be condemned to the second death and suffer everlasting destruction, etc, etc. This was all in contrast to the "life" that was to be given to those who accept and obey the gospel.

Needless to say the truth slowly started to dawn on me. The pure water of the Word of God gradually cleansed and liberated me from the misguided teachings on eternal damnation I kept hearing and reading about in my "camp." Sure, like any studied Christian I had at some point become aware that the Adventists, Armstrongites and Jehovah's Witnesses² adhered to everlasting destruction in some form, but as any other Christian from my perspective I didn't give much time or credence to their teachings (they were, after all, considered false cults or borderline cults). It was the Word of God itself and the enlightening power of the Holy Spirit that set me free.

By the early 1990's I had become absolutely convinced of what the scriptures *really* taught regarding eternal damnation. I *knew* that I couldn't be the only one that saw this so-obvious truth in scripture. I *knew* there had to be others. So I prayed that the Lord would bring me into contact with such people. It wasn't until 1993 that I actually read a book from the evangelical perspective that supported everlasting destruction. I've since acquired many more. And today, with the internet, I've come to realize that there are a *vast number* of Christians – Charismatic, Evangelical, Catholic, Mainline, Messianic Jewish, etc. – all over the world that adhere to literal everlasting destruction. There are people worldwide that see the very same truths that the Holy Spirit showed me. It's just comforting to know you're not alone.

I encourage readers to watch A&E's *Mysteries of the Bible* segment on "Heaven and Hell" (1996). As noted in Chapter Seven, a Catholic priest admits in this program that everlasting destruction is the most sensible view on eternal damnation (!!) and a theology professor shares the truth about *Gehenna* ("hell") as disclosed in Chapter Two. (You can also see the staunch fundamentalist Norman Geisler, whose best arguments for eternal torment are analyzed in Chapter Six).

So, to sum this up, even though my background involves *years* of indoctrination by supporters of eternal torture, the scriptural truth was *still* able to set me free because I had "the Berean spirit" – I was open to the truth, willing to diligently dig for the truth in reliance upon the Holy Spirit's faithful guidance, and willing to change my beliefs in light of the truths I discovered.

¹ Evangelical churches emphasize the classical Protestant doctrines of salvation, the church and the authority of the scriptures with stress on a personal experience of God's grace, usually referred to as the new birth or conversion. Charismatic Christians are simply evangelicals that stress baptism in the Spirit and spiritual gifts (e.g. prophecy, etc.).

² See the brief footnote commentaries on these groups in Chapter Six if you are unfamiliar with them.

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CHAPTER TEN

CONCLUSION: Will God Torture People Forever?

As pointed out a couple of times in this study already, the doctrine of eternal torture is the silent subject of the Christian church. This is strange especially when considering the importance of the issue of eternal damnation – it literally deals with the eternal fate of *masses* of humanity. Yet you won't hear many Christians bring it up. If you do, you aren't likely to hear much elaboration on it. You could almost say it's a taboo subject. My impression is that most Christians secretly wish this hideous teaching were not part of their Christian doctrine but they keep from parting with it because they've been *taught* that the scriptures adamantly teach it. Not to mention they are pressured to unquestioningly believe whatever their pastor or denomination officially affirms as true. The express purpose of this study is to plainly show people that the scriptures do not teach this perverse belief and never have.

What Adherents of Eternal Torture REALLY Believe John 3:16 Says

As pointed out earlier in this study the eternal torture doctrine is often covered up by various code words and phrases. Proponents of this view teach that unrepentant sinners will “perish” or be “destroyed” even though they really mean no such thing. Another favorite cover-up phrase is that unrepentant sinners will be “eternally separated from God.” This is a nice and vague expression. Yet, none of these code words or phrases even remotely suggest what adherents of eternal torture *really* mean by such language – never-ending conscious torment with no merciful pause or end to the suffering.

To illustrate what I'm getting at, let's consider one of the most popular verses of the bible:

JOHN 3:16

“For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.”

We frequently see or hear this passage on billboards, in magazines, on the radio, at sports events, in tracts, etc. What's strange is that adherents of eternal torment deny what this passage literally teaches. In fact, they argue that “perish” in this text means something completely opposite to what perish actually means.

Just for a moment let's put aside these misleading code words and quote this popular passage the way proponents of eternal torture actually interpret it:

JOHN 3:16

“For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not be tortured forever in hell but go to heaven.”

This is what adherents of eternal torture *really* believe this passage says. Yes, when we disregard all their misleading code words this is what they *honestly* believe! Can you imagine this beloved evangelical passage, written as such, plastered on billboards, magazines, tracts, etc. everywhere? Can you imagine seeing it on a banister or in the crowd at the next Superbowl? Why not? This is what they *really* believe it says.

When the light of blatant truth exposes the lie like this, we see how fiendish and ludicrous it really is.

John 3:16 happens to be my favorite passage in the bible. I adhere to it wholeheartedly and completely. It plainly states the most important truths of the bible: **1.)** God loves us. **2.)** He doesn't want *any* of us to perish, which is the ultimate wage of sin. **3.)** He therefore made a great sacrifice – the death of His Son – to set us free from sin and its ultimate consequence. And **4.)** he did this in order to grant us

the gracious gift of eternal life. This is *all* I'm saying in this study in a nutshell. Why have religionists made such easy-to-understand and beautiful truths as this so complicated, hideous and ludicrous?

Will God Torture People Forever?

Will God torture people forever? – This is what I really wanted to call this book. I decided not to, however, because I figured the average person would consider it too extreme of a title and be turned off. But is it too extreme? I believe the question “*Will God torture people forever?*” rips through all the lies and niceties and gets straight to the heart of the issue of damnation.

As already pointed out in Chapter One, many adherents of eternal torture object to what this blunt question implies because they argue that people “choose hell.” I often hear this clichéd statement. Evidently, according to their reasoning, God has absolutely nothing to do with people going to hell – the lake of fire – or what they will experience there.

Actually “hell” is just another code word for adherents of eternal torture. Whenever they use the word “hell” what they really mean is eternal conscious torture with no merciful pause or end to the suffering. So when they adamantly state that “People *choose* hell,” what they really mean is “People choose never-ending fiery conscious agony.” What utter ridiculousness.

It is true, however, that people *choose sin*, that is, they choose to rebel against the righteous will of their Maker. And, as the bible makes repeatedly clear, the wages of sin is death. So people choose sin, which ultimately leads to death, and God is the supreme authority and judge who must ultimately carry out this sentence. As scripture declares:

JAMES 4:12a

There is only one Lawgiver and Judge, the one who is able to save and destroy,

When it comes down to it, God is ultimately either going to *save* people – grant them eternal life – or *destroy* them – extinguish them from existence. Because God is the supreme authority and giver of life he therefore has the right to take life away, if He must. His ultimate decision to take a person's life is based upon that person's choices. God's moral nature never changes (Hebrews 13:8; James 1:17); His plain statement to the Israelites, “I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now *choose* life,” (Deuteronomy 30:19b) is His ultimate proposition to all humanity as well. This explains why we see this bottom-line proposition all over the bible: for example, Matthew 7:13-14, John 3:16, Romans 6:23, Romans 8:13, Galatians 6:8, etc. If people freely choose to rebel against God and His righteous way, then they are freely choosing to be cursed by Him and condemned to death. This reveals how much respect God has for our free moral agency – whatever choices we make He's going to honor.

This helps us to understand Jesus' straightforward and solemn statement:

MATTHEW 10:28

“Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell.”

Those who choose to fear God and receive His gift of reconciliation will be blessed with eternal life (“life in the age to come”). Those who foolishly refuse will be mercifully executed in the lake of fire, God's incinerator.

So to answer the question, *Will God torture people forever?* The answer is no. Such an idea is utterly repulsive to the moral, just nature of the Almighty. Literal death is the wage of sin, and He will justly-but-mercifully issue out this wage on judgment day – if He must.

God of course doesn't want anyone to perish like this. As it is written:

EZEKIEL 18:31-32

“Rid yourselves of all the offenses you have committed, and get a new heart and a new spirit. Why will you die, O house of Israel? For I take no pleasure in the death of anyone, declares the Sovereign LORD. Repent and live!”

God is talking to His people Israel here, but this passage reveals His heart on the matter – *He doesn't want anyone to perish*. This is repeated in reference to all humanity:

2PETER 3:7-9

By the same word the present heavens and earth are reserved for fire, being kept for *the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men*.

(8) But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. (9) The Lord is not slow in keeping His promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, *not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance*.

God's will on the matter is clear: He desires all humanity to repent and be blessed with eternal life. Those who foolishly choose selfishness and rebellion will suffer the destruction of the second death.

If you are not sure that Jesus Christ is "the way, the truth and the life" as he claimed in John 14:6, then I encourage you to honestly and humbly seek it out. As the LORD declared in Jeremiah 29:13-14a: " 'You will seek me and find when you seek me with all your heart. *I will be found by you,*' declares the LORD." God will reveal Himself to those who sincerely seek Him.

Conclusion

This study concludes that the doctrine of eternal conscious torture is a sadistic teaching completely foreign to the bible. It stems from a satanic lie, is founded on a pagan view of human nature (i.e. the immortal soul which even God cannot destroy) and is perpetuated by religious tradition. It is a horrible stain on Christianity and a blasphemy to the just, merciful name of the Almighty.

Some may criticize that I've come across too strong in this writing, others may argue that I'm overly repetitive with major points and scripture citations, still others will object to my habit of illustrating the absurdity of eternal torture by quoting plain bible passages the way adherents of this belief *really* interpret them; but this error is so deeply embedded in the psyche of the church and our culture that it's going to take such an approach to wake us up to biblical reality.

The doctrine of eternal torture is simply a gross mistake in the history of Christendom. Being in any way tolerant of this error is unacceptable. We need to quit mindlessly believing unbiblical doctrines that misguided ministers continue to peddle generation after generation and let the scriptural facts speak for themselves. It's time for Christians of all persuasions everywhere to stand up and boldly proclaim the biblical truth about everlasting destruction. Yes, this *must* be proclaimed in a spirit of love and compassion, with *much patience* in face of the closed-minded stubbornness of religionists and traditionalists; and, no, it's not an issue to break fellowship over (even though staunch advocates of eternal torment are likely to do this). As we faithfully proclaim what the Judeo-Christian scriptures plainly teach on human damnation the truth will expose the hideous lie that the church has so wrongly embraced for so long. The doctrine of eternal torture needs to finally be put to rest in favor of what the bible has always clearly taught regarding human damnation – *everlasting literal destruction with no hope of restoration or resurrection*.

Let those of us who have "ears to hear" and understand this clear biblical truth strive for the same bold spirit as that of the great abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison:

"I am in earnest – I will not equivocate – I will not excuse – I will not retreat a single inch – and I will be heard."

~ *The Liberator*, January 1831

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APPENDIX A

ADDITIONAL HEBRAIC TEXTS

on Everlasting Destruction

The scriptural support for everlasting destruction is so immense that I actually had to limit what I included in the main body of this study. I feel I've provided more than enough evidence and that, to include more, would be at the risk of boring (and possibly losing) readers.

This appendix contains additional Old Testament support for the reader who desires such.

“The Way of the Wicked Will Perish”

Let's start with a passage from the first Psalm. The first three verses of this Psalm speak of how blessed a righteous person is ending with the statement, “whatever he does prospers.” Verse 4 contrasts the ungodly:

PSALM 1:4-6

Not so the Wicked! They are like chaff that the wind blows away.

(5) Therefore *the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous.*

(6) For the LORD watches over the way of the righteous, but *the way of the wicked will perish.*

Verse 4 observes that ungodly people are like chaff which the wind ultimately blows away; the next verse states that they “will not stand in the judgment;” and verse 6 concludes that their way “will *perish*.”

Sounds pretty conclusive to me. No mention is made whatsoever of these people ending up existing forever in a state of conscious agonizing torture. No, they will be like chaff blown away, they will not stand on judgment day, and they will indeed perish.

There's no reason *not* to assume that “the judgment” spoken of in verse 5 refers to God's final judgment. This judgment is, after all, the one judgment that every evil person throughout history will have to face. People may “get away” with evil deeds and crimes on this earth, but they can't elude God's great white throne judgment. The outcome of this judgment, according to this passage, is that the ungodly will perish.

“Do Homage to the Son, Lest... You Perish in the Way”

Let's turn our attention to the second Psalm:

PSALM 2:11-12 (NASB)

Worship the LORD with reverence, and rejoice with trembling.

(12) Do homage to the Son, lest he become angry, and you *perish* in the way.

For his wrath may soon be kindled.

How blessed are all who take refuge in him!

Here again we see the godly contrasted with the ungodly. Those who reverently choose to worship and serve the LORD are said to be blessed (verse 11 and end of verse 12), whereas those who refuse to give homage to the Son will ultimately “*perish* in the way.”

There's no reason we shouldn't take this passage in an absolute sense – those who refuse to acknowledge Jesus Christ as Lord will ultimately perish.

Those who would insist that the text only refers to this present life, and hence is not applicable to the second death, have two problems to contend with: **1.)** There are multitudes of ungodly people who refuse to “do homage to the Son” and yet live to a ripe old age, just like many godly people who “do homage to the Son.” Insisting the passage only refers to this present life would make it out to be a lie. **And 2.)** Those who insist the text only refers to this present life are forced to translate it as such:

PSALM 2:12a

Do homage to the Son, lest he become angry, and you perish in the way (but then you’ll be resurrected to live forever and ever in fiery conscious agonizing torment).

This illustrates the sheer ludicrousness of this belief. Proponents of eternal torture would rarely spell it out like this, but this is what they *really* believe (!!).

“Evil Will Slay the Wicked”

Let’s turn to another Psalm text:

PSALM 34:21-22

Evil will slay the wicked; the foes of the righteous will be condemned.

(22) The LORD redeems his servants; no one will be condemned who takes refuge in him.

We observe here a contrast between the righteous who take refuge in the LORD, and the ungodly who forsake him and follow evil.

Verse 21 solemnly declares a biblical absolute: “*Evil will slay the wicked.*” The passage then goes on to say that such people will be condemned. Condemned to what? Condemned to death, of course. Isn’t that what the wages of sin is? So this passage is simply a reinforcement of the biblical and universal law: “The wages of sin is death.”

We observe here that evil will *slay* the wicked. Evil will always ultimately bring about the death of a person if they stubbornly and unrepentantly choose to follow it. Notice that there is no ludicrous mention of evil causing the wicked to suffer never-ending fiery conscious torment.

Opponents of everlasting destruction would contest that this passage is referring to life in this present age and thus to the first death only, not to the second death. Yet, as is the case with the text in the previous section, if we accept this interpretation then this biblical passage is a colossal lie. Think about it: people have been living quite long lives “getting away” with evil all throughout history. Death didn’t overtake them till they were well into their old age (which is the ultimate destiny of everyone – righteous or wicked).

There is no problem, however, when we regard the passage in an absolute sense. Even though many people seem to “get away” with evil and live long, prosperous lives, God will call them to account on judgment day. There’s no escape – those who choose evil will reap the wages of their ways on judgment day. Our just Creator will dispose of them in the lake of fire and eradicate them from existence and memory. “Evil will slay the wicked” is an absolute truth.

But let’s assume for a moment that the view of eternal torment is valid and that this passage is not meant in an absolute sense, only referring to this present earthly life. Applying the same technique used in the previous section, here’s how we would have to properly read this text if this were so:

PSALM 34:21a

Evil will slay the wicked (but then they’ll be resurrected on judgment day and have to live forever in fiery conscious agony – with never a split second of relief);

Those who adhere to eternal torture would have us believe that this is what the bible really teaches (even though they understandably try to keep quiet about such sadistic details). Not only is this utterly ridiculous as plainly shown, but it’s a clear case of adding to the Word of God.

“All the Wicked He Will Destroy”

Let's observe a couple of other Psalm texts:

PSALM 94:23

He will repay them (evildoers) for their sins and destroy them for their wickedness; the LORD our God will destroy them.

PSALM 145:20

The LORD watches over all who love Him, but all the wicked He will destroy.

The first text states that God will always justly repay evildoers for their sins. And how exactly will God ultimately repay stubborn, unrepentant sinners? It clearly states that he will *destroy* them. The second text also emphasizes this. And, once again, there's mysteriously no mention whatsoever of God sadistically preserving these people so they can live forever in fiery conscious agony. No, God mercifully ends their suffering – and the suffering they naturally bring upon others – by mercifully wiping them out of existence. The wages of sin is death and God will justly, yet mercifully, execute this sentence on all stubborn, unrepentant evildoers.

Another point I'd like to emphasize about these passages is they plainly state that God Himself will ultimately destroy the unrighteous. As we observed in Chapter One: "There is only one lawgiver and judge, the One (God) who is able to *save* and *destroy*" (James 4:12). God is either going to save people who accept his loving salvation or destroy those who foolishly reject it. Jehovah (*YaHWeH*) is the ultimate authority and giver of life, and he alone has the right to take life away – if he must. As Hebrews 10:31 solemnly declares: "It is a dreadful thing to fall *into the hands of the living God*."

Because I adhere to the view of everlasting destruction I have no problem declaring these plain scriptural facts – God is going to destroy the wicked, that's all there is to it; it's both a just and merciful sentence. People who adhere to the view of eternal torture, on the other hand, have a real problem with this.

The obvious reason they have a problem is because they don't believe "destroy" literally means destroy; their theology compels them to interpret destroy to mean "eternal (life in) separation from God in perpetual conscious misery." In light of this they understandably have quite a hard time with scriptures which declare that God Himself is going to destroy the ungodly, like the two passages above. As a result, we regularly hear all kinds of weak clichéd statements like "God doesn't condemn people to hell – people choose hell." This simply isn't biblically accurate. As we've clearly seen throughout this study, people choose sin, and because the wages of sin is death, God will condemn such people to *Gehenna* (hell) and eradicate them from existence.

As for those who would contend that these passages are referring to the first death and not to the second death, review the previous sections of this appendix.

"He Who Pursues Evil Goes to His Death"

Turning to the book of Proverbs, let's examine a passage we briefly looked at in Chapter One. We'll view it here in both the New International Version and the New Revised Standard Version, which is a literal word-for-word translation (the NIV is more of a thought-for-thought translation):

PROVERBS 11:19

The truly righteous man attains life, but he who pursues evil goes to his death.

PROVERBS 11:19 (NRSV)

Whoever is steadfast in righteousness will live, but whoever pursues evil will die.

The text is pretty unmistakable: the righteous person will attain life whereas the ungodly person will ultimately die. These are the two polar opposites as illustrated in Chapter One – life for the righteous, death for the unrighteous.

The only reason I bring this passage up again is because some theologians may scoff at my application of this verse in the absolute sense, arguing that the text only applies to the Israelites who were subject to the blessings and curses of Old Testament law. One of the curses of this law was

premature death for unrepentant sinfulness (see Deuteronomy 28:15-68). Thus some would contend that the text technically refers to earthly death not eternal death, and only historically to the Israelites subject to the penalties of Old Testament Law.

If this is the case then the passage has absolutely no relevance to us today. In fact, from the standpoint of our earthly life today the passage is a lie because many righteous people die prematurely while many evil people live to a ripe old age. The passage therefore has validity to us today only if we regard it in the absolute sense: the righteous will attain everlasting life, whereas the ungodly will die.

The text is actually a double reference. We'll look at the biblical law of double reference shortly when we examine passages from the book of Isaiah (the section after the next). How exactly is this passage a double reference? Proverbs 11:19 was applicable in an earthly sense to the Israelites subject to Old Testament law, but it has also *always been applicable to all people in an absolute sense*. Today, in New Testament times, we can only regard this text in the absolute sense: those who choose to pursue evil will ultimately *die* – they will be eradicated from existence, for such is the ultimate wage of sin. Whether or not they live a long life on this earth is irrelevant.

“There will be No Future for the Evil Man”

Let's look at another important passage from Proverbs:

PROVERBS 24:20 (NASB)

For there will be no future for the evil man; the lamp of the wicked will be put out.

We observe here an absolute truth: *there will be no future* for those who choose to follow evil. As a flame is snuffed out in a lamp, so will the very life of an evil person ultimately be put out.

“No future” means just that – no future – no future whatsoever. This would include a miserable future separate from God experiencing fiery conscious torments forever and ever.

At the risk of being redundant, let's imagine how this passage would read if this bizarre belief were true. It would read something like this: “For there will indeed be a future for the evil man; the lamp of the wicked will *not* be put out as they will live forever and ever in flaming conscious misery.” Not only is this utterly absurd, it's not even remotely close to what the original text plainly states. Yet those who adhere to this perverse teaching would have us believe that this is what the bible actually teaches. Fortunately, the bible says what it means and means what it says. Let's put confidence in the Word of God not the word of human religion. Amen?

“Those Who Forsake the LORD Will Perish... Like a Garden Without Water”

Let's now focus our attention on various support texts for literal everlasting destruction from the book of Isaiah, as well as a few other prophetic books.

It's important here that I point out a notable quality of these prophetic books. The Old Testament prophets often seem to speak as if there is no such thing as time. Perhaps this is because with God there *is* no time; He always has been and always will be. Consider, for example, the first two chapters of Isaiah: The prophet jumps from the restoration of Jerusalem to the millennium and the new earth. From a warning to the inhabitants of Jerusalem of impending judgment, he jumps to a warning of God's day of judgment upon the entire world (see 2:12-22). What was about to happen in Jerusalem was just a foreshadowing of what will happen to the whole earth. Just as Jerusalem was restored, so the earth will be restored after God's day of reckoning. This prophetic tendency is theologically referred to as the law of double reference.

Let's start with this passage from the first chapter of Isaiah which features the LORD strictly warning those who would choose to rebel against him:

ISAIAH 1:28,30-31

**“But rebels and sinners will both be broken and those who forsake the LORD will perish.
(30) You will be *like* an oak with fading leaves, *like* a garden without water.**

(31) The mighty man will become tinder and his work a spark; both will burn together with no one to quench the fire.”

Notice in verse 28 that rebels, sinners and those who forsake the LORD *will perish*. They will not suffer never-ending conscious torture; they will perish.

Verse 30 follows up this unmistakable declaration with an easy-to-understand illustration, stating that they will be like an oak with fading leaves or like a garden without water. What happens to a garden that no longer gets any water? *It dies*.

Lastly, in verse 31 the ungodly are likened to tinder which will be set ablaze by their own fruitless, wicked works. No one will be able to quench or put out the fire – the fire will destroy them completely. In Chapter Five we discovered that “unquenchable fire” refers to the irrevocability of God’s judgment and wrath – for when the LORD’s judgment is pronounced and the fire is set to destroy, he will allow nothing to quench it until all is consumed.

What happens to tinder that is set ablaze? Does it burn up or does it burn forever without ever quite burning up? *It burns up* of course.

Some may wonder if this text is applicable to our study. Is it a reference to the second death; and, if so, how do we know?

To answer, chapter one of Isaiah is a prophecy against the people of Judah and Jerusalem who have rebelled against the LORD and have refused to repent (verse 4). God mercifully offered them forgiveness if they would consent and obey, but he promised they would fall by the sword if they didn’t mend their ways (verses 18-20). We know from biblical history that they didn’t heed Isaiah’s warning and thus eventually suffered a holocaust at the hands of Nebuchadnezzar.

In verse 26, God promised after his judgment that he would restore Jerusalem and it would be known as “the City of Righteousness, the Faithful City.” This promise does not have its fulfillment until *at least* the millennial reign of Christ, which is somewhat described in Isaiah 2:1-4. More likely it is a reference to the New Jerusalem, the eternal city, which will be established on the new earth after judgment day (Isaiah 66:22; Revelation 21:1-4) which takes place right after the millennial reign of Christ.

In either case, this proves that the remaining verses in Isaiah are definitely eschatological in nature, that is, they specifically deal with the final end of humankind and of the world. Thus verses 28-31 are indeed references to the second death – the ultimate, eternal fate of all “those who forsake the LORD.”

What will happen to them? They will perish like an unwatered garden; they will completely burn up like tinder with no one to stop it. Once again there’s positively no hint of eternal conscious torment in this passage whatsoever.

“The LORD Will Destroy Both Soul and Body”

In this study I’ve repeatedly cited Matthew 10:28 because it is the clearest, most descriptive and definitive text in the bible regarding the everlasting fate of those who reject God’s love in Christ. If a person is going to teach on the subject of eternal punishment in the lake of fire – the second death – he or she must not neglect to cite this vital passage. Let’s review this text:

MATTHEW 10:28

“Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell (*Gehenna*).”

This proclamation by Jesus that the LORD will “destroy both soul and body” is not an isolated scriptural statement. The very same phrase is used in the book of Isaiah, which is likely where Jesus borrowed it since he studied and taught from the Hebraic texts:

ISAIAH 10:17-18 (NRSV)

The Light of Israel will become a fire and his Holy One a flame; and it will burn and devour his thorns and briars in one day.

(18) The glory of his forest and his fruitful land, *the LORD will destroy both soul and body, and it will be as when an invalid wastes away.*

Although this section of Isaiah is addressing God's judgment on the Assyrians, it's likely that verses 17 and 18 are a foreshadowing of God's future judgment on all humanity that rejects him, i.e. the second death. This is apparent for a number of reasons: First of all, there's only one other scriptural text which proclaims that the LORD will "destroy both soul and body," and that's Jesus' statement in Matthew 10:28 above. Jesus' whole point in this text is that we should not fear people because, when one person kills another, the resulting death is only temporary; God has the power to resurrect anyone. By contrast, when God "destroys both soul and body" in the lake of fire, it is a death from which there is utterly no hope of resurrection or recovery. The second death is an "*everlasting* destruction" as Paul said – an obliteration so complete that even the memory of the ungodly rebel is wiped out. Secondly, as already pointed out, Isaiah and the other Old Testament prophets are wont to jump from a present happening to a completely different (usually futuristic) event. For example, in chapter 14 Isaiah very clearly jumps from God's judgment against the king of Babylon to the judgment of Satan himself. In Isaiah 10:17-18 he is obviously jumping to God's judgment on all humanity, the second death, because, once again, this judgment entails the LORD "destroying both soul and body" in the lake of fire as Jesus makes clear in Matthew 10:28. Thirdly, the phrase in verse 17, "(God) will burn and devour ('consume' in the KJV) his thorns and briars in one day" perfectly coincides with Hebrews 6:8 which contextually refers to people who have stubbornly and unrepentantly fallen away from the LORD:

HEBREWS 6:8

But land that produces thorns and thistles ("briars" in the KJV) is worthless and is in danger of being cursed. In the end it will be burned.

We of course know what happens to thorns and briars when burned – they go up in smoke. This is a solemn warning to sinful rebels of the reality of the second death wherein God will destroy both soul and body in the lake of fire.

The bottom line on Isaiah 10:17-18 is that Isaiah uses the easy-to-understand example of thorns and briars being utterly consumed by fire in direct connection with the phrase "the LORD will *destroy* both soul and body." The Hebrew word translated as "destroy" here is *kalah* (*kaw-law'*) which simply means "to end – to cease, be finished, perish" (Strong 55). The obvious conclusion we must draw is that when God destroys the ungodly in the lake of fire, they will be as utterly destroyed as thorns and briars consumed by fire. Isaiah then backs this up with the statement "and it will be as when an invalid (a sick man) wastes away." What happens to sickly people who are wasting away? They ultimately *perish*; they don't perpetually suffer conscious torture.

"The Ruthless Will Vanish, the Mockers Will Disappear"

In Isaiah chapter 29 we observe a clear reference to the time of "the new heavens and new earth:"

ISAIAH 29:17-20

In a very short time, will not Lebanon be turned into a fertile field and the fertile field seem like a forest?

(18) In that day the deaf will hear the words of the scroll, and out of gloom and darkness the eyes of the blind will see.

(19) Once more the humble will rejoice in the LORD; the needy will rejoice in the Holy One of Israel.

(20) The ruthless will vanish, the mockers will disappear, and all who have an eye for evil will be cut down.

When God creates a new earth (which will most likely simply be a renovation of our present earth) the desert lands will bloom and blossom, deaf people will be able to hear, the blind will see and

the poor will no longer be needy. This obviously can't be referring to this present evil age, so it must be referring to either the era of the millenium or, more likely, the era of "the new heavens and new earth."

Notice what this text declares will become of evil, ruthless mockers at this time: they will *vanish, disappear* and be *cut down*.

Once again, there is mysteriously no mention of the ungodly perpetually writhing in pain in fiery conscious torment. Once again, all we observe is language of complete destruction and obliteration.

"The Breath of the LORD, Like a Stream of Burning Sulfur, Sets It Ablaze"

We see another double reference in this passage from Isaiah:

ISAIAH 30:33

Topheth (i.e. Gehenna) has long been prepared; it has been made ready for the king. Its fire pit has been made deep and wide, with an abundance of fire and wood; the breath of the LORD, like a stream of burning sulfur sets it ablaze.

"Topheth" (*toe' pheth*), if you remember from Chapter Two, is another name for *Gehenna*, the Hinnom Valley located outside the Southwest walls of Jerusalem, which Jesus used as an example of the lake of fire (see Jeremiah 7:30-34 and 19:2-13). As you can see from this text, Jesus got this great example for the second death right out of the Old Testament scriptures.

Topheth literally means "a place to be spat on or abhorred." The ravine earned its infamy because it was the site of infant sacrifices to the pagan god Molech during the reigns of Ahaz and Manasseh, the worst of Judah's kings (2Kings 16:3; 21:6).

The Text states that "*Topheth* has long been prepared; it has been made ready for the king." Verses 31 and 32 make it clear that this prophecy of doom refers to God's judgment on the Assyrians and their king, Sennacherib.

Seven chapters later Isaiah records the historical account of what happened to the Assyrian army when God's judgment fell:

ISAIAH 37:36

Then the angel of the LORD went out and put to death a hundred and eighty-five thousand men in the Assyrian camp. When the people got up the next morning – there were all the dead bodies!

185,000 carcasses – that's a lot of dead bodies! Instead of letting these corpses lie in the desert as vulture bait, many believe that righteous King Hezekiah of Judah used *Topheth – Gehenna* – as a gigantic funeral pyre to dispose of the bodies. Isaiah 30:33 above appears to support this belief. Interestingly, this passage plainly states that *Topheth/Gehenna* was specifically prepared for the Assyrian king, Sennacherib. Yet, King Sennacherib was not executed when the angel of the LORD put to death the 185,000 Assyrians. According to Isaiah 37:37-38 Sennacherib escaped and returned to Nineveh, the Assyrian capital, where his own sons slew him.

Nineveh is located *500 miles* Northeast of Jerusalem, so we can rightly assume that Sennacherib's body was never brought back to Jerusalem to be disposed of in *Gehenna* with the other 185,000 corpses.

But we *do* know that when Sennacherib is resurrected to face the great white throne judgment (Revelation 20:11-15) that he will *then* be condemned to the destruction in the lake of fire, of which *Topheth/Gehenna* is a biblical type.

My point is that Isaiah prophesied God's word in 30:33 declaring that *Gehenna* was prepared specifically for King Sennacherib. Yet, Sennacherib successfully escaped to Nineveh. If we understand Isaiah 30:33 *only* as a reference to the earthly *Gehenna*, then it would appear that Isaiah's prophecy was inaccurate – that God's word failed to come to pass. However, when we properly understand Isaiah 30:33 as a double reference – a reference to both the earthly *Gehenna* and the lake of fire – then we see that Isaiah's prophecy is quite accurate and will indeed come to pass on judgment day.

Indeed, in light of all these facts, Isaiah 30:33 is *primarily* a reference to the lake of fire, since it plainly states, once again, that *Gehenna* was prepared and made ready for King Sennacherib specifically;

and Sennacherib we know will not experience the fires of *Gehenna* until his resurrection, judgment and subsequent disposal there.

With the understanding that Isaiah 30:33 is primarily a reference to the lake of fire, notice what is said about it:

ISAIAH 30:33c

the breath of the LORD, like a stream of burning sulfur sets it ablaze.

This is no doubt figurative speech, but we read here that the lake of fire is set ablaze by the very breath of the LORD, which is likened to “a stream of burning sulfur.”

“Burning sulfur” (or “brimstone” in many other English translations), as we have seen in the main body of this study, is another name for the lake of fire. Observe for yourself:

REVELATION 21:8

But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars – their place will be in the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death.

Proud, unrepentantly sinful people who reject reconciliation and eternal life will wind up in God’s disposal dump and eradicating incinerator, the lake of fire. It is plainly described in this passage as “the second death” because it is where God will “destroy both soul and body.”

When God’s judgment fell on Sodom and Gomorrah – a biblical type of the second death – the scriptures state that “the LORD rained down *burning sulfur*” on them (Genesis 19:24). When God’s judgment fell on Edom the scriptures state that “Edom’s streams will be turned into pitch, her dust into *burning sulfur*: her land will become blazing pitch!” (Isaiah 34:9). The end result of these “burning sulfur” judgments was complete eradication from existence. Both Sodom & Gomorrah and Edom became desolate desert landscapes.

These are historical examples of what happens to foolish people when they rebel against the Almighty. Anyone with common sense will draw the conclusion that when people experience God’s wrath on judgment day and are condemned to “the fiery lake of *burning sulfur*” they will suffer the same fate. God’s nature never changes (see James 1:17 and Malachi 3:6).

As for the breath of the LORD figuratively described as “a stream of burning sulfur” that sets *Gehenna* ablaze, this is just further evidence that it is God Himself who’s going to destroy the ungodly in *Gehenna*.

“Like Cut Thornbushes They Will be Set Ablaze”

Chapter 33 of Isaiah details the future coming of Christ and the establishment of his kingdom. For instance, the king in verse 17 whom we will see “in his beauty” is an obvious reference to Jesus.

Isaiah also foretold in verse 21 that, at some point in the future, Jerusalem will be a place of “broad rivers and streams” unlike that historically or presently in Jerusalem; it is stated that no boats or ships shall sail these waters. What exactly Isaiah was talking about is debatable, but we do know that the new Jerusalem, which will come down from heaven to earth after the millennium, is described in Revelation 22:1 as having a “river of the water of Life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God.” This is likely one of the rivers Isaiah was talking about and it explains why there will be no boats on it.

In verse 24, Isaiah also prophesies that there would be *no more* ill people in Jerusalem (“Zion”) and that *everyone* living there would be forgiven of sin. Biblically, we definitely know that this will not come to pass *until* the new Jerusalem is established on the new earth when “there will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away” (Revelation 21:4).

It is within this eschatological context that our next text is contained:

ISAIAH 33:10-14

“Now will I arise,” says the LORD. “Now will I be exalted; now will I be lifted up.

(11) “You conceive chaff, you give birth to straw; your breath is a fire that consumes you.

(12) **“The people will be burned as if to lime; *like cut thornbushes they will be set ablaze.***

(13) **“You who are far away, hear what I have done; you who are near, acknowledge my power!”**

(14) **The sinners in Zion are terrified; trembling grips the godless: “Who of us can dwell with the consuming fire? Who of us can dwell with everlasting burning?”**

When God arrives on the scene to deal with the ungodly, his mercy will end and his wrathful judgment will begin. In verse 11 we see that ungodly people’s attempts to protect themselves will be as useless as conceiving chaff or giving birth to straw. Their own breath – which is no doubt a reference to their fruitless works or sins (see the previously examined Isaiah 1:31) – is likened to a fire that will *consume* them.

Once again, we see a perfectly clear biblical statement that those who reject God will be consumed by fire, not perpetually tormented by fire. God is going to justly but mercifully put them to death; this is, after all, the biblical wage of sin.

To help us completely understand this plain statement, the very next verse gives an easy-to-understand natural example which likens the ungodly to thornbushes: The ungodly will be consumed by fire just like thornbushes set ablaze. I don’t like to raise the same obvious question again and again, but what happens to thornbushes when set ablaze? The fire engulfs them and they burn up – they’re consumed and wiped out of existence.

God Himself is the One speaking in this text; is he giving us misleading examples or did he mean what he said? The obvious answer is that God meant exactly what he said – the ungodly will be totally consumed by fire just like thornbushes set ablaze.

‘What About “Who of Us Can Dwell With the Consuming Fire/Everlasting Burning?” ’

Despite the overwhelming clarity of the above passage, there are some who contend that verse 14 is a reference to everlasting conscious torment. Let’s view the text again along with its following verses:

ISAIAH 33:14-16a

The sinners in Zion are terrified; trembling grips the godless: “Who of us can dwell with the consuming fire? Who of us can dwell with the everlasting burning?”

(15) He who walks righteously and speaks what is right, who rejects gain from extortion and keeps his hand from accepting bribes, who stops his ears against plots of murder and shuts his eyes against contemplating evil –

(16) This is the man who will dwell on the heights, whose refuge will be the mountain fortress.

Seriously, unless a person lacks reading comprehension I can’t see how anyone could possibly interpret verse 14 as a reference to eternal conscious torment. Anyone who does so is desperately grasping for straws.

“Consuming fire” and “everlasting burning” in verse 14 are references to God Himself. God is regularly described in the bible as a consuming fire (e.g. Deuteronomy 4:24; Hebrews 12:29, etc.). Isaiah himself describes God twice in this manner previously in his book (see Isaiah 30:27,30).

Why does the bible describe God this way? No doubt it is a reference to the fire of God’s eternal holiness – a fire which always destroys whatever is not pure. For instance, the very same fire that sanctified the alter destroyed Nadab and Abihu for their irreverence (Leviticus 9:23-10:3).

With this understanding, let’s examine the text: In verse 14 Isaiah asks who can dwell eternally with God, the consuming fire? Verses 15 and 16 answer the question, plainly stating that only the righteous – those who are in right-standing with God – can dwell with Him eternally.

The ungodly can’t dwell with God forever because the purifying fire of His eternal holiness would utterly consume them like thornbushes set ablaze.

“All Men Are Grass”

Let's observe an enlightening passage regarding human nature:

ISAIAH 40:6-8

A voice says, "Cry out." And I said, "What shall I say?" "All men are grass and all their glory is like the flowers of the field.

(7) The grass withers and the flowers fall, because the breath of the LORD blows on them. Surely the people are grass.

(8) The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of God stands forever.

People are likened to grass and flowers here, which ultimately wither and die; this is spoken of in direct contrast to the word of God which stands forever. This is just further evidence of how the bible clearly describes human nature as mortal – subject to death and extinction.

Notice that nothing is said anywhere about some part of human beings being immortal and undying. That's because, apart from God's gift of eternal life, there is no "immortal soul." The idea is nothing more than a human-invented religious myth.

The ungodly are like grass that withers. The LORD God will blow on them and they will perish – forever.

"Those Who War with You Will Be As Nothing, and Non-Existent"

In the next chapter of Isaiah we find a powerful blow to the teachings of the immortal soul and eternal conscious torture:

ISAIAH 41:11-12 (NASB)

"Behold, all those who are angered at you will be shamed and dishonored;

Those who contend with you will be as nothing, and will perish.

(12) You will seek those who quarrel with you, but will not find them.

Those who war with you will be as nothing, and non-existent."

God Himself is speaking in this passage and plainly declares what will happen to the enemies of his people: they "will perish," "be as nothing" and become "non-existent." The New King James Version says they will "be as a non-existent thing."

Notice plainly that God does *not* say, "Those who war with you will physically die and then suffer eternal conscious torture forever and ever." No, they will perish and become non-existent. There is absolutely no mention of spending eternity writhing in fiery conscious torment.

"The Sovereign LORD Will Put You to Death"

Let's look at another passage from Isaiah:

ISAIAH 50:11

But now, all you who light fires and provide yourselves with flaming torches, go walk in the light of your fires and of the torches you have set ablaze. This is what you shall receive from my hand: You will lie down in torment.

The passage refers to those people who have stubbornly decided that they want nothing to do with God. So God says to them: "This is what you shall receive from me: You will lie down in torment."

It's easy to see how adherents of eternal torture might be tempted to claim that this passage supports their belief. Yet all this verse states is that God's enemies will lie down in torment; it does not specify how long this torment will last or to what intensity it will be experienced. Complying with the hermeneutical law that scripture must always interpret scripture, let's skip ahead to another passage from Isaiah that will help us properly understand the text:

ISAIAH 65:11a-15b

“But as for you who forsake the LORD...

(12) *I will destine you for the sword, and you will all bend down for the slaughter; for I called but you did not answer, I spoke but you did not listen. You did evil in my sight and chose what displeases me.*”

(13) Therefore this is what the Sovereign LORD says: “My servants will eat, but you will go hungry; my servants will drink, but you will go thirsty; My servants will rejoice, but you will be put to shame;

(14) My servants will sing out of the joy of their hearts, but you will cry out from anguish of heart and wail in brokenness of spirit.

(15) You will leave your name to my chosen ones as a curse; *the Sovereign LORD will put you to death.*

Verses 13 & 14 state that, when God judges his enemies, they will go hungry & thirsty and be put to shame; they will cry out and wail in anguish. If this was all we were to read we might assume that these people will suffer this torment forever, perpetually wailing and crying out, but these verses are sandwiched between two crystal clear texts which state that they will be put to death. Verse 12 plainly states that they are destined for the sword and will all bend down for the *slaughter*; and verse 15 wraps the entire passage up clearly stating that the LORD will put these ungodly fools to *death*.

So we conclude that there is indeed an amount of anguish to be experienced when suffering God’s judgment, but that it will justly and mercifully end in death. God, once again, is the ultimate authority and giver of life, He therefore has the right to take life away, if he must. Those who forsake the LORD and follow evil are destined for destruction – literal, utter and absolute.

“The Moth Will Eat Them Up Like a Garment”

Isaiah 51:3-11 is another eschatological text which gives a good example of the everlasting destruction of the ungodly. Let’s examine the key verses within this passage:

ISAIAH 51:3,6-8,11

(3) The LORD will surely comfort Zion (Jerusalem) and will look with compassion on all her ruins; *he will make her deserts like Eden, her wastelands like the garden of the LORD. Joy and gladness will be found in her, thanksgiving and the sound of singing.*

(6) “Lift up your eyes to the heavens, look at the earth beneath; *the heavens will vanish like smoke, the earth will wear out like a garment* and its inhabitants die like flies. But my salvation will last forever, my righteousness will never fail.

(7) “Hear me, you who know what is right, my people who have my law in your hearts: Do not fear the reproach of men or be terrified by their insults.

(8) “*For the moth will eat them up like a garment; the worm will devour them like wool. But my righteousness will last forever, my salvation through all generations.*”

(11) The ransomed of the LORD will return. They will enter Zion (Jerusalem) with singing; *everlasting joy will crown their heads. Gladness and joy will overtake them, and sorrow and sighing will flee away.*

This passage speaks of a time when “the heavens will vanish like smoke” and “the earth will wear out like a garment” (verse 6). This will make way for the new heavens and new earth (Revelation 21:1-3) when God will make Israel’s “deserts like Eden” and “her wastelands like the garden of the LORD” (verse 3). Thus “the ransomed of the LORD” will enter their eternal city, the new Jerusalem on the new earthly paradise, with singing and “everlasting joy” (verse 11). “Sorrow and sighing will flee away” as God “will wipe away every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning, crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away” (Revelation 21:4).

Within this eschatological context, verse 8 reveals the eternal fate of the ungodly:

ISAIAH 51:8

“For the moth will eat them up like a garment; the worm will devour them like wool. But my righteousness will last forever, my salvation through all generations.”

We've already examined this text in Chapter Five, but it bears repeating: Just as moths eat up or destroy garments, so the ungodly will be destroyed in the lake of fire. This is a figurative example of everlasting destruction; it is meant to be taken seriously, but not literally. After all, I seriously doubt there will be literal moths in the lake of fire devouring those thrown in. We've already deduced from scripture that, literally, the ungodly will be totally consumed by raging fire – both soul and body – when thrown into the lake of fire.

Notice how the everlasting destruction of the ungodly is contrasted with the LORD's righteousness and salvation which will last *forever*. Those who accept God's gracious gift of eternal life will experience this salvation forever. Those who reject it have no "forever" to look forward to; they will be destroyed like garments devoured by moths.

Sometimes it's just as important to point out what the bible does *not* say as it is to point out what it does say. In this case notice that the text does *not* say that worms will chew on the damned forever as they exist perpetually in conscious torment. I bring this up because many supporters of eternal torment ludicrously teach this.

Let's also focus on verse 6, albeit from a different translation:

ISAIAH 51:6 (Amplified)

“Lift up your eyes to the heavens, and look upon the earth beneath; for the heavens shall be dissolved and vanish away like smoke, and the earth shall wax old (i.e. wear out) like a garment, and they that dwell therein shall die in like manner [like gnats]. But my salvation shall be forever, and my righteousness and justice [and faithfully fulfilled promise] shall not be abolished.”

We see here that, at the end of this present evil age, the heavens (i.e. the atmosphere and universe) shall be utterly *dissolved* and *vanish like smoke* and that this present earth shall wear out (in preparation for the *new* earth, naturally). The text then points out that the earth's inhabitants shall “*die in like manner.*” Obviously the ultimate fate of the unrighteous is the same as that of the present elements – complete destruction by fire. Their fate, once again, is contrasted with God's salvation and righteousness which are said to be “forever” and shall never “be abolished.”

Some may contend that this text is solely referring to the death of earth's living inhabitants at the end of the age and therefore is not relevant to the *second* death. Please understand that Jesus plainly taught in Matthew 25:31-46 that ungodly people still alive at the end of Armageddon will suffer the second death at the pre-millennial judgment of Christ (otherwise known as the judgment of living nations). Let me stress, once again, that these ungodly people will be wiped out of existence just as the present heavens are utterly dissolved. Absolutely no mention is made that these people shall be resurrected for the purpose of suffering *never-ending conscious torture*. Again, it's sometimes important to point out what the bible does *not* say.

“He Will Bring Judgment on All Mankind and Put the Wicked to the Sword”

Let's briefly turn our attention to a passage in Jeremiah:

JEREMIAH 25:31,33a

(31) **“The tumult will resound to the ends of the earth, for the LORD will bring charges against the nations; he will bring judgment on all mankind and put the wicked to the sword,” declares the LORD.**

(33) **At that time those slain by the LORD will be everywhere – from one end of the earth to the other.**

In chapter 25 of Jeremiah the prophet jumps from a promise of imminent judgment upon the known world of Jeremiah's day to the coming judgment upon the entire world of our day. God's judgment of the known world through Nebuchadnezzar was just a foreshadowing of the final judgment of the entire world through Jesus Christ.

The text refers to Jesus' second coming at the end of the tribulation period. In the battle of Armageddon the antichrist and his followers will assemble to fight Jesus and his army. Jesus will make

short work of the kings of the earth and their armies – killing them with “a sword that comes out of his mouth” (see Revelation 19:15,21). This is no doubt symbolic of the fact that Jesus will kill them with just a word. Those slain will become a feast for the fowls of the air (see Revelation 19:17-18,21 and Matthew 24:27-28).

The pre-millennial judgment of Christ, which entails the second death, will occur right after these events (as mentioned in the previous section, see Matthew 25:31-46).

Regardless of whether or not the above passage includes the second death, we can conclude this: God’s judgment will fall on “*all mankind*,” he will “*put the wicked to the sword*,” and those “*slain by the LORD*” will be everywhere – *from one end of the earth to the other*.”

This is just further evidence that God’s judgment results in *death* – the just wages of sin.

“The LORD Has Given Full Vent to His Wrath”

The last text we’ll examine is from the book of Lamentations.

Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, Jeremiah tearfully wrote Lamentations as he viewed “God’s city” – Jerusalem – after its destruction by the Babylonians in 587 BC. The temple of the LORD was burned down along with every important building (see Jeremiah 52:13).

This destruction was actually the result of God’s judgment. He used the Babylonians as instruments of his judgment upon his stubbornly disobedient people.

It is with this understanding that we read our text:

LAMENTATIONS 4:11

The LORD has given full vent to his wrath; he has poured out his fierce anger. He kindled a fire in Zion (Jerusalem) that consumed her foundations.

We see here a specific case of God giving “full vent to his wrath” and pouring out “his fierce anger” upon the city of Jerusalem. The result: a city consumed by fire.

My point is that God’s character is unchanging (see, for example, Psalm 102:25-27; Malachi 3:6 and Hebrews 13:8). If the full vent of God’s wrath in 587 BC is a fire that consumes, we can pretty confidently conclude that ungodly people will experience the same on judgment day when they suffer the full vent of his wrath then. This is, in fact, exactly what the bible declares:

HEBREWS 10:26-27

If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sins is left, (27) but only a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God.

Could God possibly make it any clearer than this passage? God is patient and merciful; he doesn’t want anyone to perish. But those who choose to make themselves enemies of the Living God will suffer His wrath on judgment day – raging fire will consume them. They will be utterly obliterated from existence and memory, as this study has repeatedly shown.

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APPENDIX B

THE NATURE OF HUMAN BEINGS: Spirit, Mind & Body

In Chapter Four we briefly looked at the subject of human nature. This appendix is for readers who desire to dig deeper in their biblical studies on the subject.

There has been much debate in the church on the subject of human nature. Some teach that human beings are essentially a dichotomy (two-part) consisting of the inner person – soul/spirit – and the outer person – body. Others maintain that we are a trichotomy (three-part) consisting of two separate inner facets – spirit and soul (i.e. mind) – and an outer facet – body. Others insist that people are essentially one psychosomatic unit by nature and therefore terms that the bible uses, such as “soul,” “spirit,” “mind,” “body” or “heart,” are simply different ways of looking at one person (Milne 121).

One popular description of human nature that I hear often today is “man is a spirit that possesses a soul and lives in a body.” Although this description isn’t entirely biblically accurate, it is a workable description as long as we understand that “soul” in this context refers to the mind.

Most of the confusion over the subject of human nature can be traced to two problems: **1.)** Lack of depth in biblical studies, and **2.)** A narrow view of the Hebrew and Greek words for “soul,” “spirit,” etc. The purpose of this appendix is to see what the bible has always clearly taught on the subject and avoid these two interpretational ruts. In doing this, the scriptural truth should be plain to see.

Human Beings are “Living Souls”

Naturally the best place to start our study on human nature is “the creation text;” this is the passage in the first book of the bible which describes *exactly* how God created human beings:

GENESIS 2:7 (KJV)

And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul (*nephesh*).

GENESIS 2:7 (NIV)

The LORD God formed the man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life and the man became a living being (*nephesh*).

We see here that God created the human body out of “the dust of the earth”¹ breathed into it “the breath of life” and so man became “a living soul” (KJV) or “living being” (NIV). The Hebrew word for “soul” or “being” is *nephesh* (*neh-fesh*). We know that *nephesh* is equivalent to the Greek *psuche* (*psoo-khay*) because when this creation text is partially quoted in 2Corinthians 15:45 *nephesh* is translated by the Greek word *psuche*. The Greek *psuche* is incidentally where we get such English words as psychology, psychiatry, psychic and psyche.

This foundational text plainly states that human beings are *living souls*. Biblically, “Soul” (*nephesh/psuche*) in its *broadest* sense refers to the *entire* human person. We *are* living souls. We see this clearly in such texts as these:

GENESIS 46:26a (KJV)

All the souls (*nephesh*) that came with Jacob into Egypt, which came out of his loins, besides Jacob’s sons’ wives, all the souls (*nephesh*) were threescore and six.

¹ It is a scientific fact that the human body is made up of the same essential chemical elements that are in the soil. Interestingly, humanity did not discover this until recent times, but the Creator revealed it here thousands of years ago.

“Souls” in this text simply refers to *the people* that accompanied Jacob to Egypt. The New International Version translates *nephesh* in this passage as “those” and “persons” respectively.

JOSHUA 10:28 (KJV)

And that day Joshua took Makkedah, and smote it with the edge of the sword, and the king thereof he utterly destroyed, them, and all the souls (*nephesh*) that were therein; he let none remain:

“Souls” here likewise simply refers to *the people* that Joshua and his troops slew. The NIV translates *nephesh* in this passage as “everyone.”

In both these examples, and numerous other passages, it is clear that “soul” does not refer to the immaterial facet of human beings, as “soul” is traditionally understood, but rather to the *whole person*. It’s understandable why the average bible reader would fail to see this because in most translations *nephesh* is not translated as “souls” in such passages as these, but as “those,” “persons,” “everyone,” “people,” etc.

Following are a couple examples from the New International Version where *nephesh* is translated as “people:”

GENESIS 12:5b

... and the people (*nephesh*) they had acquired in Haran,

JEREMIAH 52:30b

There were 4,600 people (*nephesh*) in all.

And here is an example from the New Testament wherein *psuche*, the Greek equivalent to *nephesh*, is translated as “people:”

1PETER 3:20b

In it only a few people (*psuche*), eight in all, were saved...

Once again we see that “soul” (*nephesh/psuche*) in its broadest sense clearly refers to the *whole person*, the *whole human being* – spirit, mind and body. When *nephesh/psuche* is used in this broad sense “being” is perhaps the best translation. This is why the NIV translators decided to translate *nephesh* as “being” in the creation text, Genesis 2:7, above – the first man was a “living *being*.”

The Human Being (Soul): Spirit, Mind & Body

According to scripture human beings (souls) have three facets – spirit, mind and body. This will become clear as our study progresses. All three of these facets are interconnected though not necessarily inseparable. God designed these facets to function as one unit. The Hebrew and Greek words for “soul” – *nephesh* and *psuche* – can refer to *any one* of these three facets depending upon the context of the passage.

Let’s start with passages wherein *nephesh* – “soul” – refers specifically to the *body*:

LEVITICUS 21:11a

“He (the high priest) must not enter a place where there is a dead body (*nephesh*).”

NUMBERS 19:11

“Whoever touches the dead body (*nephesh*) of anyone will be unclean for seven days.”

The Hebrew word *nephesh* in these passages refers to the body, but not to mind or spirit. This is obvious because a dead body possesses neither mind nor spirit. There are many other such examples in the bible.

Nephesh/psuche – “soul” – can also refer specifically to the human mind. The mind itself has three facets: volition (will), emotion (feeling), and reason (thinking). The mind is the decision-making center of our being. Here are a couple examples of *nephesh/psuche* used in reference to the *mind*:

1CHRONICLES 28:9a,b

“And you, my son Solomon, acknowledge the God of your father, and serve Him with wholehearted devotion and with a willing mind (*nephesh*), for the LORD searches every heart and understands every motive behind the thoughts.

ACTS 14:2

But the Jews who refused to believe stirred up the Gentiles and poisoned their minds (*psuche*) against the brothers.

The first text speaks of Solomon’s “willing mind.” We know for certain that *nephesh* here refers to the mind because the mind is the center of volition and will. It is the mind that makes *willful decisions*.

The second passage speaks of the Jews who poisoned the minds of the gentiles. We know that *psuche* in this text refers to the mind because the Jews obviously corrupted the *reasoning* faculties of the Gentiles so they would make a *willful decision* to reject the gospel.

Nephesh/psuche – “soul” – can also refer specifically to the human *spirit*:

LUKE 1:46-47

And Mary said: “My soul (*psuche*) glorifies the Lord (47) and my spirit (*pneuma*) rejoices in God my savior.”

This is an example of a type of Hebrew poetry, synthetic parallelism, wherein the second part of the passage explains or adds something to the first. In this case Mary states that her “soul” – *psuche* – glorifies the Lord (verse 46). Exactly what part of her being glorifies the Lord? Verse 47 specifies that it is her spirit that rejoices in Him. Thus “soul” – *psuche* – a broad term for the whole human being, refers here specifically to the spirit. Likewise *nephesh* is translated as “spirit” five times in the Old Testament in the New International Version.

“Soul” Used in Reference to the Entire Immaterial Being – Mind & Spirit

The Hebrew and Greek words *nephesh* and *psuche* at times refer to *both* mind and spirit – the *entire* immaterial being as *separate* from the body:

1KINGS 17:21 (KJV)

And he (Elijah) stretched himself upon the (dead) child three times, and cried unto the LORD, and said, O LORD my God, I pray thee, let this child’s soul (*nephesh*) come into him again.

Elijah is praying to God here that the boy’s immaterial being (“soul”) – mind and spirit – return to his dead body. Our whole immaterial being – mind and spirit – is our life force, our very life. It is the mind and spirit that gives life to a fleshly body that would otherwise be dead. This is why the New International Version translates Elijah’s prayer as “O my God, let this boy’s life (*nephesh*) return to him.”

Here are a few other examples of *nephesh/psuche* used in reference to the entire immaterial being as separate from the physical body:

PSALM 31:9

Be merciful to me, O LORD, for I am in distress; my eyes grow weak with sorrow, my soul (*nephesh*) and body with grief.

ISAIAH 10:18 (NRSV)

The glory of his forest and his fruitful land the LORD will destroy, both soul (*nephesh*) and body, and it will be as when an invalid wastes away.

MATTHEW 10:28

“Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul (*psuche*) and body in hell.”

All three of these passages describe human nature as decidedly two separate parts – “soul and body” – non-physical and physical – immaterial and material. “Soul” in such cases clearly refers to the *whole* immaterial being, both mind and spirit.

Perhaps the best proof that *nephesh/psuche* can refer to the entire immaterial being is found in the book of Revelation wherein *disembodied* saints are described as “souls” (*psuche*) in John’s vision:

REVELATION 6:9-10

When he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls (*psuche*) of those who had been slain because of the word of God and the testimony they had maintained. (10) They called out in a loud voice, “How long, Sovereign Lord, holy and true, until you judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood?”

REVELATION 20:4a,b

I saw thrones on which were seated those who had been given authority to judge. And I saw the souls (*psuche*) of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony for Jesus and because of the word of God.

Whether these passages are literal or symbolic isn’t important to our study. What’s important is that *psuche* (“souls”) is the biblical word used to describe *disembodied* people. It therefore refers to their *entire* immaterial being, both mind and spirit.

The fact that “soul” – *nephesh/psuche* – can refer to either the mind or spirit in certain passages, and to *both* mind & spirit in others, explains the seeming interchangeability of these terms in scripture.

The Narrow View of “Soul” Must Be Rejected

To properly understand what the bible teaches about human nature, the narrow view of the term “soul” (*nephesh/psuche*) must be rejected. I say this because many ministers and theologians give the impression that “soul” *only* refers to the mind or that it *only* refers to the immaterial part of human beings. We’ve just seen clear biblical proof that both of these views are narrow and erroneous. To recap our study, “soul” (*nephesh/psuche*) in its broadest sense refers to the *entire* human being. Depending on its context it can also refer specifically to each one of the three facets of human nature – body, mind or spirit. It can also refer to the entire immaterial being – mind and spirit. Thus the views that *nephesh/psuche* **only** refer to the mind or **only** refer to mind and spirit are only true in certain contexts.

Let’s consider, for instance, Paul’s statement here:

1THESSALONIANS 5:23

May God Himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul (*psuche*) and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Even though *psuche* – “soul” – in its broadest sense refers to the entire human person, in this context it obviously refers to the mind. We know this because spirit, mind and body are the three interconnecting facets of human nature. Thus *psuche* **must** refer to the mind in this text.

Or consider this passage:

HEBREWS 5:12

For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul (*psuche*) and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.

It's obvious here that "soul" refers to the mind because spirit and mind can be "divided" but spirit and the *whole person* cannot be divided since the whole person naturally *includes* the spirit. A person that lacks a spirit is no longer a whole person.

The Struggle of the Mind between Flesh and Spirit

In 1Thessalonians 5:23 above Paul, by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, describes human nature as having three basic facets – spirit, mind and body. Let's observe further support and elaboration in Paul's inspired letter to the Romans:

ROMANS 7:18-23 (NRSV)

For I know that nothing good dwells within me, that is, in my flesh. I can will what is right, but I cannot do it. (19) For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do. (20) Now If I do what I do not want, it is no longer I that do it, but sin that dwells within me.

(21) So I find it to be a law that when I want to do what is good, evil lies close at hand. (22) For I delight in the law of God in my inmost self (i.e. spirit), (23) but I see in my members another law *at war* with the law of my mind, making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members.

Paul speaks of three facets of human nature in this passage. In verse 18 he mentions his "flesh" (or "sinful nature" in the NIV) and states that "nothing good dwells within" it.

In verse 22 he mentions his "inmost self" and states that this part of his being delights in God's law. Paul is speaking of his spirit here; this will be made obvious in a moment.

In verse 23 he mentions his "mind" and the "war" that it is fighting. The precise nature of this "war" is made clearer just a few verses later:¹

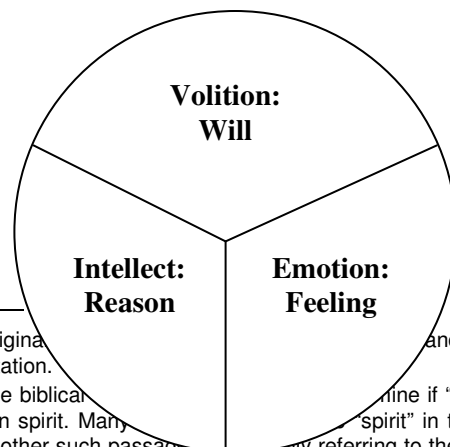
ROMANS 8:5-6 (NRSV)

For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the spirit² set their minds on the things of the spirit. (6) To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the spirit is life and peace.

These divinely inspired words reveal two truths: **1.)** That there are three basic facets to human nature – flesh, mind and spirit, and **2.)** That the mind is caught in a struggle between the other two opposing facets – flesh and spirit. This is the "war" Paul is talking about in verse 23 above.

What exactly is the mind? The mind is our center of being. The Greek for "mind" is *nous* (*noo*) meaning "The intellect, i.e. the mind (divine or human; in thought, feeling or will)" (Strong 50). This definition reveals the previously mentioned three facets of the human mind: volition (will), intellect (reason) and emotion (feeling):

The Human Mind



¹ Please keep in mind that Paul's original divisions were added centuries later for convenience in scriptural study and citation.

² Since there is no capitalization in the biblical text, I will use "spirit" and "spirit" interchangeably. I will use "spirit" to refer to the Holy Spirit and "spirit" to refer to the human spirit. Many scholars believe that "spirit" should be capitalized, in reference to the Holy Spirit, or *not* capitalized, in reference to the human spirit. Many scholars believe that "spirit" in these passages and some do not (for example The New English Bible). I believe these passages (and other such passages) are referring to the human spirit and therefore "spirit" should not be capitalized. This will be made clearer as our study progresses. In a way it makes no significant difference since our born-again human spirit is indwelt and led by the Holy Spirit.

Since the mind is the center of volition and will, it is the mind that *decides* whether to live according to the flesh or according to the spirit as the above text plainly points out.

What exactly are flesh and spirit? The flesh and spirit, once again, are the opposing facets of our being. In Romans 7:18 above Paul describes the flesh as the part of his being where “nothing good dwells.” In verse 22 he describes his spirit as the side of him that delights in God’s laws. We could thus define flesh and spirit as follows: The “flesh” is that part of our being that veers toward what is negative, destructive and carnal. The “spirit” is that part of us that inclines toward what is positive, productive and godly.

These contrasting facets of our being are repeatedly mentioned in scripture:

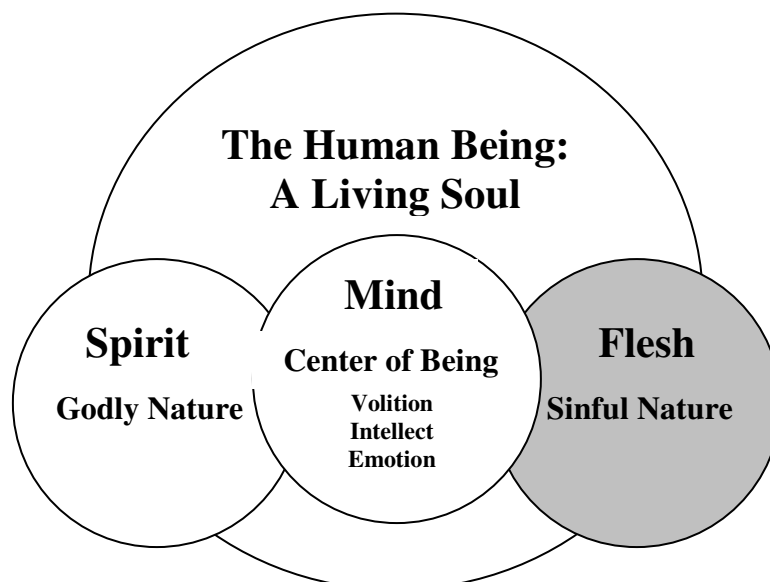
MATTHEW 26:41 (NKJV)

“Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.

GALATIANS 5:16-17 (NKJV)

I say then: Walk in the spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh. (17) For the flesh lusts against the spirit, and spirit against the flesh; and these are *contrary to one another*, so that you do not do the things that you wish.

It’s interesting to note that the father of psychoanalysis, Sigmund Freud, was able to discover these three basic facets of human nature through his studies. The mind is roughly comparable to Freud’s “ego;” likewise the flesh coincides with his “id;” and the spirit corresponds to the “superego.” Pointing this out may help readers who are familiar with psychological theories to better understand the biblical model of human nature – spirit, mind and body. I just find it fascinating that, with little or no biblical knowledge, Freud was able to discover these three basic facets of human nature through sheer scientific analysis. I am reminded of M. Scott Peck, the psychiatrist and bestselling author, who converted to Christianity not long after publishing his first book, *The Road Less Traveled*, at the age of 43. Peck said that one of the main factors in his decision to accept Christianity was the bible’s brutally honest and accurate depiction of human nature, as illustrated here:



With this understanding that *the human being is a living soul consisting of spirit, mind and body*, let us take a closer look at the two opposing facets of human nature – flesh and spirit.

Body (Soma) and Flesh (Sarx)

The biblical Greek for “body” is *soma* (e.g. 1Corinthians 6:19). This word *can* also refer metaphorically to the sinful nature:

ROMANS 6:6

For we know that the old self was crucified with him so that the body (*soma*) of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin.

The Greek word for “flesh” is *sarx*. Although *sarx* is most frequently used in the bible in reference to the literal flesh of a person (e.g. John 6:6), it is often figuratively used in reference to the sinful nature. In such cases the New International Version understandably translates *sarx* as “sinful nature:”

ROMANS 7:18

I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature (*sarx*). For I have the desire to do good, but I cannot carry it out.

GALATIANS 5:19-21

The acts of the sinful nature (*sarx*) are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; (20) idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions (21) and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.

Both of these examples clearly show *sarx* – “flesh” – being used as a metaphor for our carnal, sinful nature. In the first text Paul states that “nothing good lives in” his *sarx*. He’s obviously not talking about his body here. Likewise the second text reveals the various sinful manifestations of the *sarx*.

Because *sarx* – “flesh” – plainly refers to the sinful nature in such cases, I use “flesh” and “sinful nature” interchangeably throughout this study.

Soma (body) and *sarx* (flesh) seem to be very closely related in scripture:

COLOSSIANS 2:11 (NASB)

And in him (Christ) you were also circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, in the removal of the body (*soma*) of the flesh (*sarx*) by the circumcision of Christ.

Soma (body) and *sarx* (flesh) are so closely related in this passage that the NIV translators decided to translate them *both* simply as “sinful nature:”

COLOSSIANS 2:11 (NIV)

In him you were also circumcised in the putting off of the sinful nature (*soma/sarx*),¹ not with a circumcision done by the hands of men but with the circumcision done by Christ.

The conclusion we draw from this biblical information is this: Although body and flesh are not technically one and the same, it’s obvious that the flesh – the sinful nature – is most closely related to the body rather than mind and spirit. In fact, the bible tends to use body and flesh interchangeably. Because of this I will do the same in this study.

The Human Spirit

Even though the flesh is most closely related to the body in scripture, we know that it is somehow interwoven with the mind and spirit as well. We know this for certain because, if the sin nature were merely a condition of the body, then physical death would be the ultimate and absolute solution to

¹ The NIV translators would *technically* say that their decision in this specific text was to *not* translate *soma* and simply render *sarx* as “sinful nature.”

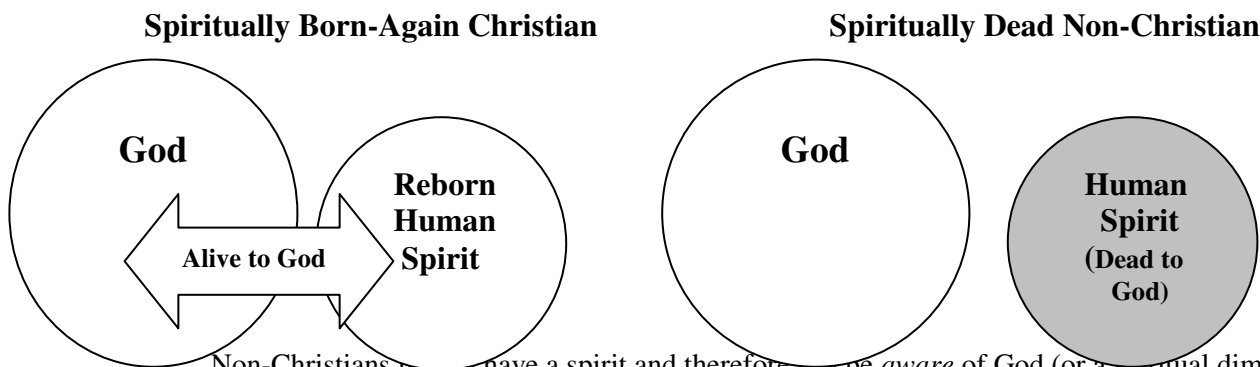
humanity's sin problem. Needless to say, this would render Christ's death for humanity's sins quite pointless.

Because the flesh is somehow interwoven with the mind and spirit, Jesus taught that the first step in solving our sin problem is to have a spiritual rebirth. The human spirit must be born-again. Once the spirit is born-again and becomes a "new creation" the mind needs to be "renewed" and trained so that it submits its will, intellect and emotions to the spirit and not to the flesh. This is the second step. The third and final step to solving the sin problem is to receive a new imperishable glorified body.

Yet, before we get into all that, let's define specifically what the human spirit is and what it desires to do.

The biblical Greek word for "spirit" is *pneuma* (*pn̄yoo'-mah*) which corresponds to the Hebrew *ruwach* (*roo'-ahk*). We've already seen in scripture that the human spirit is that part of our being that "delights in God's law." It is that part of our nature that inclines toward what is positive, productive and godly. We could also add that the human spirit is that facet of our being that is aware of a spiritual dimension to reality and thus naturally attempts to "connect" with that dimension. Only this spiritual side to our being can know of God and desire to connect with Him because, as Jesus stated, "God is spirit" (John 4:24). Since the flesh is our "sinful nature," we could properly regard our spirit as our "godly nature."

Both the non-Christian and the spiritually born-again Christian have a human spirit. The difference is that the non-Christian is spiritually *dead* to God, whereas the born-again Christian is spiritually *alive* to God. Because born-again Christians are spiritually alive to God they can have a *relationship* with Him, but because non-Christians are spiritually dead to God it is impossible for them to have a relationship with Him.



Non-Christians ~~must~~ have a spirit and therefore can be *aware* of God (or a spiritual dimension) and desire to "connect" with God (or the spiritual dimension) but they *cannot* connect with Him and have a relationship unless they are spiritually born-again. This universal attempt by humanity to connect with God (or a spiritual dimension) explains the existence of the world's numerous religions. Because we have a spiritual side to our being, human beings are, as a race, incurably religious.

The difference between religion and biblical Christianity is that religion is humanity's attempt to connect with God, whereas Christianity is God connecting with humanity. Religion is *humanity's way*, but biblical Christianity is *God's way*. Although it is certainly commendable that religious people are aware of a spiritual dimension to reality, and are attempting to connect with it (as they understand it), their attempt to connect with the Creator ultimately fails because they are spiritually dead to Him. It is therefore, once again, impossible for them to have a relationship with Him.

The Human Spirit must be "Born Again" in Order to Connect With God

Biblical Christianity teaches that, in order to successfully connect with God and have a relationship with Him we need to be spiritually born-again. As Jesus plainly taught:

JOHN 3:3,5-6

"I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again."

(5) "I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit. (6) Flesh gives birth to flesh, but Spirit gives birth to spirit."

Jesus makes it clear in verse 3 that, in order to have a relationship with God, we must be born again. In verse 6 he clarifies specifically what kind of rebirth we need – a *spiritual* rebirth. When a person is spiritually born again the Holy Spirit gives birth to a new human spirit – the spiritual facet of his or her being is born anew! This is the “new creation” that Paul writes about:

2CORINTHIANS 5:17

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come.

“New Creation” in the Greek literally means “a new species of being which never existed before.” The born again spirit is “God’s workmanship” (Ephesians 2:10) “created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness” (Ephesians 4:24). The very character of the new born-again spirit is righteous and holy, just as God is righteous and holy. When the apostle Paul spoke of the “treasure in jars of clay” that he and other born-again believers have, he was referring to the new born-again spirit which is housed in the body or “jar of clay” (2Corinthians 4:7).

The Mind Needs Renewed – Trained to Live by the New Born-Again Spirit

Once a person’s spirit is born anew something has to be done with the mind and body, the two remaining facets of the human soul:

ROMANS 12:1-2

Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God – this is your spiritual act of worship. (2) Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is – his good, pleasing and perfect will.

EPHESIANS 4:22-24

You were taught with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self (flesh), which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; (23) *to be made new in the attitude of your minds*; (24) and to put on the new self (born-again spirit) created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.

After a person is spiritually born again, his or her body needs to be offered to God as a “living sacrifice.” This means that we make a conscious decision to no longer offer the parts of our body to sin as instruments of unrighteousness but to God’s service as instruments of righteousness (Romans 6:13,19). This simply means we turn away (i.e. repent) from behaviors that God informs us are unproductive, negative or wrong and start putting into practice positive and productive behaviors approved of Him. Repentance should never be viewed as a negative action as it essentially means “to change for the better.”

As far as the mind is concerned, it needs to be “renewed.” As we are faithful and diligent to “be made new in the attitude of our minds” we will start to be “transformed.” “Transformed” is the Greek word *metamorphoo* (*met-amor-fo’-oh*) which means “to change into another form.” This is obviously where we get our English word metamorphosis. Just as an ugly worm-like caterpillar is transformed in its cocoon and emerges as a beautiful butterfly, so a wondrous metamorphosis will take place in our lives as we renew our minds.

The second passage above shows how to successfully do this: we put off the “old self” – the flesh – by stop setting our minds on this carnal side of our being. Instead we put on the “new self” – the born-again spirit “created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness” – by training our minds to live according to our born-again spirit:

ROMANS 8:5-6

Those who live according to the sinful nature have their minds set on what that nature desires; but those who live in accordance with the spirit have their minds set on what the spirit desires. (6) ...the mind controlled by the spirit is life and peace.

There's so much life, energy and peace when we train our minds to live according to our new born-again spirits! When we successfully learn to do this the born-again spirit acts as a sort of "sixth sense," tuning us in to God and enabling us to perceive reality from the "divine viewpoint." People who are spiritually dead are limited to their five senses and thus can only perceive reality from the "human viewpoint" (sadly, this is also true of many legitimately born-again Christians who fail to train their minds to live according to their new born-again spirits). Intimate knowledge of God *can only be attained through this sixth sense*. With this understanding it becomes increasingly clear why Jesus stressed that we must be spiritually born again to "see the kingdom of God."

It should be every Christian's goal and desire to be spirit-ruled; unfortunately many never adequately learn to do this. They instead settle to be body-ruled Christians, thus cutting themselves off from the divine viewpoint and *limiting* themselves to the human viewpoint. A more common name for this is "carnal Christian." Many such Christians become so hardened in heart by their sin that they naturally become hostile toward God and Christianity. As it is written:

ROMANS 8:7-8

The sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so. (8) Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God.

Some body-ruled Christians become so hardened in heart by their sin that they end up denying Christ (!). This is the ultimate result of unrepentant and deceptive sin – it destroys your relationship with God. This is spiritual death – being dead to God. This is why it is written: "The mind set on the flesh is *death*" (Romans 8:6a NIV footnote).

It should be pointed out that it takes *time* and *effort* to properly train the mind to habitually live according to the new born-again spirit. Most Christians will naturally need help from more mature brothers and sisters to learn to do this. In fact, the very reason God appoints and anoints spiritually mature believers to ministerial positions (e.g. pastor, teacher, etc.) is so that believers might be encouraged and equipped to successfully discern and fulfill God's will for their lives (see Ephesians 4:11-15).

The Positive Nature of the Flesh when Properly Submitted to the Spirit

Allow me to add one important detail on this matter: When the mind is properly controlled by the spirit (which is, in turn, led by the indwelling Holy Spirit) the carnal appetites and inclinations of the flesh actually become a positive force in a person's life. This is naturally because the body is properly submitted to the spirit-led mind.

To illustrate, let's take the sexual appetites of the flesh. If, in our mind, we *choose* to be body-ruled, the sexual appetite can be quite destructive. For instance, unbridled sexual lust can lead us into fornication, adultery and perversion resulting in broken relationships, broken families, illegitimate children, horrible diseases and even death. Yet when we *choose* to allow our mind to be spirit-led, our natural sexuality becomes a very positive and productive force in our lives. There's nothing inherently wrong, for example, with the God-given male sex drive; the sex drive, submitted to the spirit, will compel a man to find a suitable wife, physically love her and produce children.

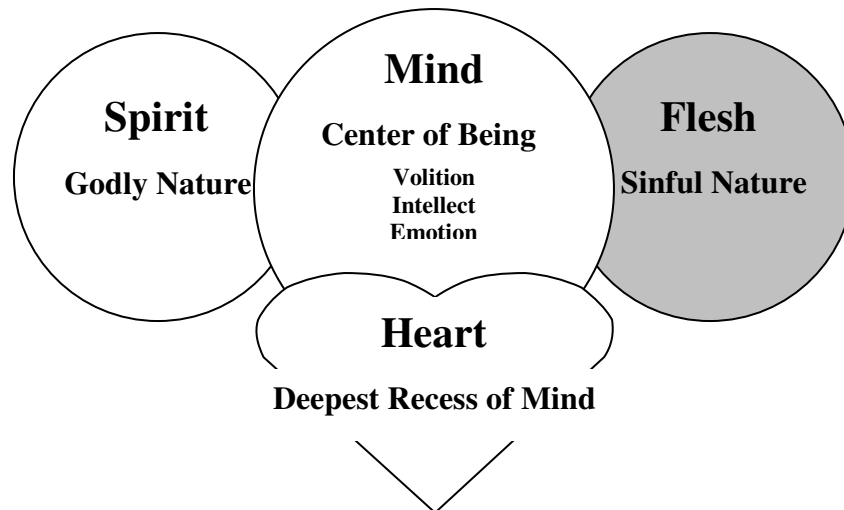
Another good example would be anger. Anger stems from our carnal nature. We all realize that uncontrolled anger can be quite destructive, even provoking people to murder. Yet, when we *choose* to allow our minds to be spirit-led rather than body-led, our anger can be utilized for righteous and productive purposes, rather than childish temper tantrums. A mother's anger over drunk driving is a fitting example; her anger, properly submitted to the spirit, will compel her to seek social justice. Or consider the biblical example of Jesus when he, in righteous anger, got out a whip (!) and drove everyone out of the temple – overturning tables, scattering coins and yelling (see John 2:13-17). Needless to say the common assumption that a good Christian must be a spineless doormat for other people is a lie.

The Heart: The Deepest Recess of the Mind

Many scriptural passages speak of the human “heart” (e.g. Mark 7:6, 21). What exactly is the heart? And how does it fit into the biblical model of spirit, mind and body?

The Greek word for “heart” is *kardia* (*kar-dee’-ah*), which is where we get the English ‘cardiac.’ Like the English word “heart,” *kardia* literally refers to the blood-pumping organ but figuratively refers to the deepest thoughts or feelings of a person’s **being** or **mind** (Strong 39). E.W. Bullinger describes the heart as “the **seat and center** of man’s personal life in which the distinctive character of the human manifests itself” (362). The heart could therefore best be described as the deepest recess of the mind, the center of our being. It is *part* of the mind, but specifically refers to the deepest, most central part.

What’s in our heart is determined by whether our mind has decided to live by the flesh or by the spirit. Jesus said, “The good man brings good things out of the good stored up in his heart, and the evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in his heart. For out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks” (Luke 6:45). If we, in our mind, decide to dwell on carnal thoughts, then carnal, negative, destructive things will naturally store up in our heart. If, on the other hand, we dwell on spiritual thoughts, then good, positive, productive things will store up in our heart.



The bottom line is *we* decide what’s stored up in our heart depending on whether we live by the flesh or spirit.

I think it’s important to point out that carnal and crazy thoughts will at times flash through our mind; this *does not* mean that such thoughts are stemming from our heart. Having carnal and crazy thoughts flash through our mind is natural to the human experience; in other words, if we’re human, it will happen. Sometimes we may even be bombarded with such thoughts. These thoughts may originate from the flesh, unclean spirits, ungodly people, the environment we’re exposed to, or otherwise, but just because such thoughts flash through our mind does not mean they’re in our heart. These thoughts *are not you*, and *are not originating from your heart*; but they can become *you* if you allow them to get lodged in your heart by dwelling on them and giving them life. Such thoughts should just be ignored or, if that doesn’t work, taken “captive” and made “obedient to Christ,” the Word of God (see 2Corinthians 10:3-5). Otherwise they will become a weed with the potential of growing into a big, ugly tree of destructive bad fruit (e.g. bitterness, immorality, frustration, sloth, depression, etc.).

The Resurrection Body: Imperishable, Glorified, Powerful & Spiritual

Even the most matured spirit-led Christian will fail to reach perfection as long as he or she dwells within a perishable flesh and blood body. Absolute escape from the sin nature will not be complete until the resurrection wherein God’s people will receive a new imperishable, glorified, powerful and spiritual body:

1CORINTHIANS 15:35,42b-44

(35) But someone will ask, “How are the dead raised? With what *kind of body* will they come?”

(42b) The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable; (43) it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; (44) it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body.

This passage describes the new bodies that born-again Christians will receive at the *first* resurrection – the resurrection of the righteous unto eternal life (see Chapter Four). It should be emphasized that this passage contextually *only refers to spiritually born-again believers*, not to spiritually dead pagans. The latter will of course be resurrected *later* in order to be judged and “If anyone’s name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire” (Revelation 20:11-15).

One of the best benefits of this new body will be that it will not have a flesh or sin nature. Granting us such new bodies is God’s final measure in our obtaining freedom from sin. The power of sin and death will be “swallowed up in victory” (1Corinthians 15:54-57)!

The above text describes these new bodies as imperishable, glorified, powerful and spiritual in nature. We obviously know what “imperishable” means – our new bodies will never die (i.e. we will possess unconditional immortality); but what exactly do these other descriptive words mean? We of course don’t have all the answers since we presently “see through a glass darkly,” but to take a peek at how wondrous it will be in our new bodies, all we have to do is observe what the bible says regarding Jesus *after* his resurrection. After all, we’re going to receive the exact same type of resurrection body as he did. In light of this sound reasoning we’ll evidently be able to walk through locked doors (John 20:26), instantly appear out of nowhere (Luke 24:36-37) and disappear (24:31). With this understanding we’ll no doubt be able to take instant “quantum leaps” to anywhere on the new earth or new universe – including planets and galaxies millions of light-years away. I personally find this extremely invigorating and excitedly look forward to it (unlike the traditional boring concept of living on a cloud forever playing a harp).

Spiritual Death Leads to Absolute Death (i.e. The Second Death)

The strongest scriptural proof that a non-Christian is spiritually dead to God and the born-again Christian is spiritually alive to God can be found in this passage:

ROMANS 8:9-10

You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ. (10) But if Christ is in you, your body is dead because of sin, yet your spirit is alive because of righteousness.

The key statement for our subject is verse 10: “If Christ is in you... your spirit is alive”. The obvious implication is that, if the human spirit of a spiritually born-again Christian is *alive*, the human spirit of a non-Christian must be dead.

As mentioned in Chapter Six spiritual death is a *present* state in the non-Christian’s life. They *are* spiritually dead to God and this explains why Paul described the Ephesian & Colossian believers as being “*dead* in their sins” before they accepted the Lord (see Ephesians 2:1; Colossians 2:13). These believers were spiritually dead before their born-again experience. This is in contrast to all the many scriptural texts examined in this study which clearly state that the second death – the literal destruction of soul and body in hell – is an experience that will take place *in the future*. In other words, the second death is not a present state but a future experience that will eventually occur, but only if the individual fails to reconcile with God and receive his gracious gift of eternal life.

We see this contrast between spiritual death and the second death in Romans 8:10 and 8:13. Romans 8:10 (above) clearly implies, once again, that the spirit of a non-Christian is presently dead. Notice what Paul states about the second death a mere three verses later:

ROMANS 8:13

For if you live according to the sinful nature you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live.

Do you see the clear contrast between spiritual death and the second death here? Paul states that people who choose to live according to the flesh, *will* eventually have to reap the wages of their actions and die. This is the second death – absolute destruction of soul and body in hell. This, again, is a future event, not a present state.

The bottom line is that spiritual death ultimately results in absolute death. That’s why God sent His Son so that “whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16).

Can Non-Christians Live by Their Un-Regenerated Human Spirit?

The material we’ve been covering brings up an interesting question: Can a person who is spiritually dead to God train his/her mind to live according to his/her (unregenerated) human spirit? Absolutely, and this explains the many non-Christian people we run into regularly who display quite noble characteristics even though their spirit is dead to God.

We have to remember that Adam didn’t eat of the tree of the knowledge of evil; he ate of the tree of the knowledge *of good and evil* (see Genesis 2:17 and 3:11-12). The entire human race, as Adam’s descendants, therefore possesses the capacity for both good and evil. Yet, even though we have the capacity for good, Adam passed on to us a sin nature (flesh) – the carnal proclivity to rebel against good (i.e. God’s righteous laws). As already determined, this sinful nature is largely a condition of the body, but is somehow interwoven with the mind and spirit as well. Our spirit is thus rendered dead to God – incapable of connecting with our Creator, unless it is born-again of the Holy Spirit.

Because Adam ate of the tree of the knowledge of both good and evil, most people who are not spiritually born-again are a mishmash of spiritual and carnal qualities – that is, they possess both good and bad traits.¹ Only a relatively small number could be designated as wholly wicked; and even they no doubt have *some* good qualities. (Although I sometimes wonder how “good” people would be if there were no human laws to keep them in check²).

As mentioned, we regularly come across non-Christian individuals who are quite highly developed in character; even though they’re technically dead to God, they appear to be humble, intelligent, loving, positive, moral, compassionate, etc. Such people have somehow trained their minds to live according to their spirit which, even though is dead to God and thus in dire need of regeneration, is *still* the facet of their being that inclines toward what is positive, productive and godly, as opposed to the flesh which veers toward negativity and destruction.

There’s always some training or discipline that enables people to do this. It could simply be the result of how they were raised, in which case they were *trained* by their parents or guardians to be loving and moral. It could also be the result of their exposure and submission to various “disciplines,” for example, religion, meditation, martial arts and positive philosophies. Such disciplines could be considered good in that they inspire people to be the best that they can be, yet they ultimately fail to solve the sin problem and reconcile us to our Creator. For this reason they have the *potential* for serious spiritual harm as such disciplines can delude people into thinking they can become right with God by their own efforts or works. This notion is rooted in human pride and arrogance – sins the LORD “hates” (Proverbs 8:13).

The message of the bible is that humankind is cursed with a sin nature and a spirit that is dead to God. Thus no amount of human effort to attain righteousness can adequately remove our sinfulness and reconcile us to Him. Although it is certainly commendable that a person makes a conscious decision to live by his/her spirit, in a sense *it’s all flesh* to God because the sin nature has tainted the human spirit and rendered it dead. It is utterly incapable of doing what it was originally designed to do. Theologians refer to this as “total depravity;” not that human beings are as bad as we could possibly be, but that we are unable to contribute to our salvation in any way because we are spiritually dead in our fallen condition.

It should be added here that there is a danger in attempting to live out of the un-regenerated spirit. Anyone who does so will naturally become increasingly in tune with the spiritual realm. The

¹ Spiritually born-again Christians are also a mishmash of both good and bad traits. I’m not suggesting otherwise, but our subject *here* is the individual who is *not* spiritually born-again.

² After all, if people don’t fear God’s law, the only law they have left to fear is human law; but if there’s no human law to constrain them they would naturally have *nothing* to fear. Needless to say, this would be the ultimate test of character.

problem with this is that there are both good and evil spirits. If a person's spirit is dead to God it naturally stands to reason that the spiritual realm they are more prone to get in tune with would be *not of God*. Unless intercessory prayer is made on their behalf, releasing the Holy Spirit to draw them to God, they are vulnerable to the deception and misleading of unclean spirits. This is how false religions and philosophies develop. Their message is always the same: there's *another way* to God besides the gospel of reconciliation through Christ. Perhaps the ultimate satanic deception is that humankind can somehow attain righteousness apart from God's gift of righteousness in Christ. As already pointed out, this notion – that we can be good without God, that we don't need our Creator – is rooted in human pride. Thus the human attempt to be righteous apart from God is but a fleshly stench to the all-knowing God who knows the secrets and motivations of the heart.

The popular message of the day is that there are many paths to God, none superior to any other, so what I'm teaching here will be rejected by those who embrace the spirit of this age. The bottom line on this issue is that God loves the whole world and has provided a way to spiritual regeneration, reconciliation and eternal life. Let's be wise and go with *God's way* (biblical, Spirit-led Christianity), and reject *our way* (religion). Amen folks?

So, to answer the question, can spiritually un-regenerated persons learn to live out of their human spirit and consequently produce good works and develop in character? Certainly, but it's all flesh to God because whatever discipline they follow ultimately fails to heal their sinful condition and reconcile them to Him. This is "total depravity."

"Spirit" and "the Breath of Life"

In our study we've determined that the human spirit is the facet of human nature that is opposed to the flesh; it is the part of our being that compels us toward what is positive & godly and inspires our desire to connect with our Creator. It should be pointed out that in certain contexts 'spirit' refers to "the breath of life." The breath of life could also be referred to as the spirit of life because "breath" is translated from the exact same Hebrew and Greek words for "spirit" – *ruwach* (Hebrew) and *pneuma* (Greek).

The breath of life describes the human spirit on the most basic level as separate from mind and body: The human spirit is essentially a breath of life from God. As such, the breath of life is *not* our being; it is the life force from God that gives consciousness to our being. In other words, the very reason we have consciousness is *because* of the breath of life, but the breath of life is not our consciousness.

We could draw a parallel to the human body. The body is the facet of human nature that enables our being to dwell in the physical realm. It is indeed a part of our being, but it is not our consciousness, rather it enables our consciousness to dwell in the physical realm. Separate from spirit and mind, the body is just a carcass, a slab of nonliving flesh. This is what the body is on the most basic level *separate* from spirit and mind. Likewise, *separate* from mind and body, the human spirit is simply a breath of life from God.

We've discovered from the scriptures that the mind is the center of our being. Our mind has the power of will and therefore makes decisions. The mind is also the emotional and intellectual seat of our being; we therefore feel and reason with our mind.

The breath of life gives consciousness to our mind, the center of our being. The breath of life, or spirit of life, could thus be described as the animating spiritual life force from God. You see, our being consists of material and immaterial facets, physical and non-physical. Our *immaterial* being is our mind (disembodied soul). We could describe the mind as *spiritual* in nature and substance. Our *spiritual* being (mind) requires a *spiritual* breath of life to live just as our *physical* being requires a *physical* breath of life to live. In fact, "breath of life" often refers simultaneously to *both* spiritual and physical breath in the scriptures. This will be made clear as our study continues.

The scriptures reveal that animals have a breath of life just as human beings do. We could therefore say that animals have a spirit, yet only in the sense that they have a breath of life. They certainly do not have a spirit in the sense that they possess a godly nature. The human being, as God's highest order of living creature on earth was created in God's image. Our spiritual makeup therefore prompts a desire to connect and commune with God and drives us toward goodness and productivity. The human spirit is endowed with this "godly nature." This is a fact whether the spirit is born-again or

not. All the passages we've looked at so far in our study on the human spirit refer to this godly nature (e.g. Matthew 26:41). The passages we will now address refer to the breath of life.

Two words are used for 'breath' in the phrase "breath of life." The Hebrew word *ruwach* which corresponds to the Greek *pneuma*, and the Hebrew word *neshamah* (*nesh-aw-maw'*). *Neshamah*, like *ruwach/pneuma*, can refer to "breath," "wind" or "spirit."¹ So *ruwach/pneuma* and *neshamah* are basically interchangeable words. Let's turn to Genesis 7 to observe biblical support for this:

GENESIS 7:15

Pairs of all creatures that have the breath (*ruwach*) of life in them came to Noah and entered the ark.

GENESIS 7:22-23

Everything on dry land that had the breath (*neshamah*) of life in its nostrils died. (23) Every living thing on the face of the earth was wiped out; men and animals... Only Noah was left, and those with him in the ark.

The first text refers to the animals that accompanied Noah to his ark. They had "the breath of life." The second text refers to every living thing on earth that had "the breath of life" – human and animal – that died as a result of the flood. This is plain evidence that *ruwach* and *neshamah* are used interchangeably in the bible.

These two texts clearly show that animals as well as humans have the breath of life. This proves that the breath of life cannot be a reference to the human spirit's "godly nature" because the animal spirit possesses no such nature. This is what distinguishes animalkind from humankind: the human spirit, which is created in the image of God, possesses a godly nature whereas the animal spirit is merely a breath of life, an animating life force from the Creator. Because the human spirit is endowed with a godly nature, people possess an inherent inclination toward goodness, productivity and godliness; which is contrasted by the carnal nature, the inclination toward destruction, negativity and evil.

Animals of course have neither a spirit (godly nature) or flesh (sinful nature). Animals are instinctual creatures which live and act purely on instinct. Their actions are therefore neither good nor evil, unlike human beings. In Chapter Four we saw scriptural proof that the same Hebrew and Greek words for "soul" (*nephesh/psuche*) are used in reference to animals in the bible. Biblical translators usually render *nephesh/psuche* as "creature(s)" or "thing" in such cases (see for example Genesis 1:20,24 and Revelation 8:9 & 16:3). In these contexts "soul" (*nephesh/psuche*) must be defined in its broadest sense as "a living being." Like humans, animals are living beings or living souls, but unlike humans they lack both a spiritual dimension and carnal dimension. In other words, animals are living souls but they do not have a spirit or flesh, a godly nature or sinful nature. Because they lack the higher spiritual dimension inherent to people, animals are unaware of the existence of God and lack the ability or desire to commune with Him.

Thus whenever the Hebrew word for "spirit" – *ruwach* – is used in reference to animals in the scriptures we know it *always* refers to the breath of life, the animating life-force of the Almighty that enables them to live. This is the extent and limit of their spiritual dimension. Let's observe support for this:

GENESIS 6:17

"I (God) am going to bring floodwaters on the earth to destroy all life under the heavens, every creature (*nephesh*) that has the breath (*ruwach*) of life in it. Everything on earth will perish."

This text describes both animals and humans as *nephesh* ("creatures") which is the Hebrew word for "soul;" and then goes on to state that these creatures (souls) have the "breath of life." "Breath" here is the Hebrew word for 'spirit,' *ruwach*. Since *ruwach* is used in reference to both animals and humans we know it refers to the breath of life, the animating life force from the Almighty that sustains all living creatures, and not to what we understand as the human spirit's godly nature, the human inclination toward goodness and godliness. Animals, once again, do not have a spirit as such. Keep in mind that "breath" in this text simultaneously refers to physical breath.

¹ Although *neshamah* rarely refers to the human spirit's godly nature, it does so in Proverbs 20:27.

All this is made clear in this next text from Psalm 104, which contextually is referring to animals of all kinds (see verses 17-25) and, in fact, includes human beings as well (verse 23):

PSALM 104:29b-30a (NASB)

Thou (God) dost take away their spirit (*ruwach*), they expire.

And return to their dust.

(30) Thou dost send forth thy spirit (*ruwach*), they are created;

This text plainly shows that all animals are created by a *ruwach* from God (verse 30) and expire when God takes this *ruwach* away.¹ Animals do not have a spirit in the sense of a godly nature as humans do, but both animals and humans have a spirit in the sense of a breath of life that animates and sustains them; and that's what *ruwach* in this text is referring to. This is why most other translations do not translate *ruwach* in this passage (verse 29) as "spirit" but as "breath" (see for example the NIV, KJV and NRSV).

Let's observe another text:

ECCLESIASTES 3:19

Man's fate is like that of the animals; the same fate awaits them both: As one dies so dies the other. All have the same breath (*ruwach*); man has no advantage over the animal. Everything is meaningless.

This is a very enlightening text. It states that both humans and animals have "the same *ruwach*." While there is the possibility that *ruwach* in this text is referring to mere physical breath, we will see momentarily why this conclusion must be ruled out. *Ruwach* here, again, refers to the breath of life – the animating spiritual life force from God – and not to what we understand as the human spirit's godly nature. This is obvious for two reasons: **1.)** The text plainly states that both humans and animals have the same *ruwach*. Since animals don't have a spirit (*ruwach*) in the sense that humans have a spirit (*ruwach*), *ruwach* in this passage must refer to the breath (*ruwach*) of life because we know from other texts that both humans and animals are sustained by a "breath of life." **2.)** Notice that the text states that both humans and animals have "the *same ruwach*." All creatures have the *same* animating life force from the Almighty – the same spiritual breath (*ruwach*) of life. This *ruwach* of life is a depersonalized life force. In other words, it is the spiritual life *force* that gives life to the person, but is not itself *the* person; it gives consciousness to the being but is not the consciousness of the being. It's comparable to electricity that lights up a lamp: The electricity enables the lamp to have light, but the electricity is not the lamp's light. Furthermore, when the lamp is unplugged and loses its source of electricity, its light expires. The same is true in regards to God's breath (*ruwach*) of life; as the aforementioned Psalm states, "Thou (God) dost take away their spirit (*ruwach*), they **expire**" (104:29 NASB).

Two verses later, in Ecclesiastes 3:21, the writer of the book speculates on where the spirit of a person and the spirit of an animal go after death: "Who knows if the spirit (*ruwach*) of man rises upward and if the spirit (*ruwach*) of the animal goes down into the earth?" It's once again obvious that *ruwach* refers to the breath of life and this is why the NASB translates *ruwach* as "breath" in this passage (even though most others translate it as "spirit"). This text gives evidence that the writer is not referring to mere physical oxygen – in both this passage and verse 19 above – since it would be ludicrous to argue whether oxygen "rises upward" or "goes down into the earth." What exactly is the writer trying to express by this question? He's simply pointing out that, from a purely natural viewpoint ("under the sun"), human beings appear to be little different than the animals. In reality, however, the human soul, unlike the animal soul, is created in the image of its Creator and thus possesses a higher spiritual dimension enabling us to be aware of our Creator and desire to commune with Him.

"The Breath of Life" – The Animating Spiritual Life Force from God

¹ Many translations translate *ruwach* in verse 30 as "Spirit" (capitalized) giving the impression that the verse refers to God's Spirit; but let's remember that there is no capitalization in the original Hebrew. With this understanding it becomes clear that *ruwach* in verse 30 refers to the same *ruwach* referred to in verse 29, that is, the breath of life – the spiritual animating life force of the Almighty. See the NRSV rendition of this text and the accompanying footnote for support.

Continuing our study on the breath of life, let's turn to "the creation text" again to observe how the breath of life figures into God's creation of human beings:

GENESIS 2:7

The LORD formed the man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath (*neshamah*) of life, and the man became a living being (*nephesh*: "soul").

We see here that God formed the body of man out of the essential chemical elements of the earth and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life and thus he became "a living soul." Earlier in this appendix we saw that *nephesh*, the Hebrew word for "being" or "soul," can refer more specifically to the body. You see, a body *without* the breath of life is a dead soul (*nephesh*), but, as seen above, a body *with* the breath of life is a living soul (*nephesh*). It's quite obvious that it is the breath of life – God's spiritual life force – which animates the mind or soul and enables us to actually live (the body, once again, is merely the facet of human nature that enables us to function in the physical realm). Elihu makes this clear:

JOB 34:14-15

"If it were His intention and He withdrew His spirit (*ruwach*) and breath (*neshamah*), (15) all mankind would perish together and man would return to the dust."¹

We see here, first of all, further proof that *ruwach* and *neshamah* are used interchangeably; although in this specific passage *ruwach* would refer to God's **spiritual** breath, or animating life force, and *neshamah* would refer to **physical** breath. God's spiritual breath of life animates the mind (disembodied soul) which in turn animates the body; and the body is physically sustained by physical breath. The *ruwach* breath of life could be viewed as the spiritual counterpart to the physical *neshamah* breath of life. Just as our physical body needs air to live and function, so our disembodied soul – our mind – needs spiritual breath to live and function. Just as physical breath is not a person; neither is spiritual breath a person.

The Greek and Hebrew scholar, W.E. Vine, helps us to understand this relation between the breath of life, the disembodied soul (mind) and the body: "The **spirit** may be recognized as *the life principle* bestowed on man by God, the **soul** as the resulting life constituted in the individual, the **body** being the material organism animated by **soul** and **spirit**" (Vine 589²). Keep in mind that when Vine refers to "spirit" he's referring to the breath of life and when he refers to "soul" he's referring to the mind.

Secondly, we see further proof that if God withdrew His breath of life all humanity would perish and our bodies would decay back to dust.

We see this evident in this Psalm text:

PSALM 146:3-4

Do not put your trust in princes, in mortal men, who cannot save.

(4) When their spirit (*ruwach*) departs, they return to the ground; on that very day their plans come to nothing.

Ruwach ("spirit") here refers to the breath of life. When the breath of life departs, the human body merely decays into the ground.

At Death the Breath of Life Merely Goes Back to God

¹ Elihu's words are reliable, as he is either a type of Christ or possibly a theophany, a visible manifestation of Christ (a good example of a theophany would be the commander of the LORD's army that appeared in Joshua 5:13-15). The biblical support for this is as follows: **1.)** Elihu claimed to be "perfect in knowledge" (36:4) whereas only the LORD is "perfect in knowledge" (37:16); the Lord, as well as Job and his three friends, would have certainly rebuked Elihu for this seemingly arrogant statement if in fact it were not true; **2.)** Elihu's questioning rebuke to Job in 37:14-23 coincides perfectly with the LORD's questioning rebuke to Job in chapters 38-41; **3.)** God rebuked Job because he "spoke words without knowledge" (38:1-2), as did Elihu (35:16); **4.)** Job would not or could not respond to Elihu's rebuke (as he was sure to do with each of his three friends); **5.)** God rebuked Job (38:1-3; 40:1-2; chaps. 38-41) and his three friends – Eliphaz, Zophar and Bildad (42:7-9) – for their error, but He *never* rebukes or even mentions Elihu. Apparently Elihu was right and just in God's eyes; **6.)** Like Christ, Elihu acted as the mediator between God and man: Elihu spoke *after* Job and his three friends and *before* God (mediating between the two); **7.)** Elihu righteously showed no partiality and refused to flatter (32:21).

² Emboldening and italics mine.

So what happens to the breath of life when a person (or animal) dies? It merely goes back to God from whence it came. As it is written:

ECCLESIASTES 12:6-7

Remember Him (God) – before the silver cord is severed, or the golden bowl is broken; before the pitcher is shattered at the spring, or the wheel broken at the well,

(7) and the dust returns to the ground it came from, and the spirit (*ruwach*) returns to God who gave it.

Verse 6 uses various metaphors to encourage us to think of our Creator before death inevitably overtakes us. Verse 7 then simply explains what happens to the human body and the breath of life when we die. The breath of life, once again, is the spiritual life force from God that animates the human being and makes it a *living* soul. The breath of life gives life to the mind/spirit in the human body. When a person dies this depersonalized life force merely returns to the Creator who gave it. This is further proof that the breath of life is not just physical oxygen. When people die their physical breath will simply return to the atmosphere; there's no need for it to return to God. Yet when we understand that the breath of life is a spiritual breath, an animating life force from God, it then makes sense that it returns to its source.

The fact that the breath of life returns to God is evident in Elihu's previously quoted statement: "If it were His intention and He withdrew His spirit and breath all mankind would perish together and man would return to the dust" (Job 34:14-15). The statement "If God *withdrew* His spirit and breath" clearly implies that the breath of life will simply return to God who gave it.

Sheol/Hades: The Intermediate State between Death and Resurrection

Visit www.sheol-know.org for more complete information

If, at death, the body returns to the ground and the breath of life (spirit) returns to God, what happens to the mind, the disembodied soul? The bible makes it clear that the soul goes to *sheol* at death. *Sheol* is the Hebrew equivalent to the Greek *hades*.¹ We touched on this subject briefly in Chapter Three and Chapter Five, but what exactly is *sheol/hades*? James Strong, the popular Hebrew and Greek scholar, defines *sheol/hades* as "the world of the dead" (Strong 111); it refers to the condition or state of the soul *between* physical decease and resurrection and is thus referred to as "the intermediate state" by theologians. Whatever the precise state of the disembodied soul is in *sheol/hades*, it should be emphasized that it is a *temporary* condition. Every soul will ultimately be resurrected to stand before God and be judged (see Revelation 20:13). The subject of this study is the *final, permanent* state of the damned and therefore "the intermediate state" is not pertinent to our subject since it is merely a temporary condition.

Still, since the subject has come up in our study on human nature, I think we should briefly address it and consider the two prominent views regarding its precise nature. Yet, before we do, it should be noted that the bible clearly shows that *sheol/hades* refers to the condition of *both* righteous and unrighteous souls intermediate between physical death and resurrection. Most theologians however believe that *sheol/hades* contained righteous souls only *before* the ascension of Christ, suggesting that when Jesus rose from *sheol/hades* righteous souls rose with him (they cite Ephesians 4:8, Revelation 6:9-10 and 7:14-15 as proof texts).

The reason most Christians don't realize that *sheol/hades* refers to the condition of *both* righteous and unrighteous souls, at least in Old Testament times, is because of an interesting translation "cover up:" The policy of the King James Version translators was to translate *sheol* as "hell" *only when the text referred to unrighteous souls* (e.g. Psalm 9:17); when the text referred to righteous souls, they translated *sheol* as "grave" (e.g. Genesis 37:35). Needless to say, this gives the impression to the common English reader that *sheol/hades* only refers to the condition of wicked souls between death and resurrection. It should be added that subsequent versions have corrected this translation error, in fact, many adhere to the policy of leaving *sheol/hades* untranslated (e.g. NRSV, NASB and NEB).

¹ See Acts 2:27 which quotes Psalm 16:10 wherein the Greek *hades* supplants the Hebrew *sheol*.

Let's observe the two prominent views regarding the precise nature of *sheol/hades*:

1.) *Sheol/hades* is a place where unrighteous souls go to immediately after death and consciously suffer constant torment until their resurrection on judgment day. According to this view, the disembodied souls of pagans who died hundreds or thousands of years ago have been in a constant state of torture ever since *even though they haven't even been judged yet*. The only proof text for this position is Jesus' story about "The Rich Man and Lazarus" from Luke 16:19-31. This story is about a rich man and poor beggar, Lazarus, who die and go to *sheol/hades* ("hell") where they experience highly contrasting conscious states – the rich man suffers constant torment while Lazarus enjoys comfort in "Abraham's Bosom." Adherents of this position insist that this story should be taken literally and that the rich man and Lazarus are actual historical figures. They insist that every other reference to *sheol/hades* in the bible must be interpreted (or ignored) in light of this literal interpretation of Jesus' story.

2.) *Sheol/hades* is merely the condition of death itself where souls are dead ("sleeping") and "awaiting" resurrection. Those who adhere to this view contend that there are *countless* biblical texts which support it. For example, the bible describes *sheol/hades* as a state where souls cannot remember or praise God (Psalm 6:5; Isaiah 38:18); it is a state of silence (Psalm 31:17-18; 115:17; 94:17); it is a state likened unto "sleep" (Psalm 13:3; Job 3:13; Matthew 9:24); and it is a state where souls "know nothing" because there is "no work or thought or wisdom in *sheol*" (Ecclesiastes 9:5,10 NRSV). Psalm 49:14-15 even states that sheep go to *sheol*; sheep of course do not go to a place of conscious torture when they die, but they do enter into non-existence, the state of death. This all agrees with Revelation 20:5 which plainly states that dead souls in *sheol/hades* "did not come to life" until their resurrection after the thousand-year reign of Christ on earth. If they "did not come to life" until their Judgment Day (as shown in Revelation 20:11-15) then that obviously means that they were *dead* until then. This is in complete harmony with Jesus' simple proclamation that Martha's brother was *dead*, which he referred to as sleep (John 11:11-14); Jesus didn't say *anything* about Martha's brother consciously hanging out in some nether realm with Abraham, which would be the case if we take his story about the rich man and Lazarus literally. Adherents of this view that *sheol/hades* is merely the condition of death contend that this story of the rich man and Lazarus is obviously a parable, a symbolic story, and not a historical account. They contend that since Jesus "did not say anything to them without using a parable" (Matthew 13:34b) this story must be a parable; and this is clear from its usage of symbolic language like "the beggar died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom" (KJV). Abraham's literal bosom turned to dust centuries earlier, not to mention there would hardly be enough room in his chest cavity to contain Lazarus, so this is clearly a symbolic statement; and if this statement is symbolic it stands to reason that the rest of the story is symbolic as well.

This second view, that *sheol/hades* is the condition of death itself, would make sense of the Psalmist's statement:

PSALM 146:4 (KJV)

His breath goeth forth, he (his body) returneth to his earth; in that very day *his thoughts perish*.

This passage makes it clear that, at death, when the body returns to the dust and the breath of life returns to God, a person's very thoughts perish, that is, the person's consciousness ends. This agrees with Solomon's statement that there is "no thought" in *sheol/hades* because those who are dead "know nothing" (Ecclesiastes 9:5,10). This makes sense when we understand that it is God's breath of life that actually animates our being (i.e. soul); the spirit of life grants us consciousness and enables us to live. If this spiritual force that animates our being leaves us and returns to God then our being and consciousness will naturally die. The "remains" of the soul (mind) would go to *sheol/hades*, the condition of death itself. *Sheol/hades* could thus be viewed as a sort of mass graveyard for the remains of the soul – the common grave of humankind, which we could refer to it as "gravedom." Notice, incidentally, that the above Psalm text says absolutely nothing about the disembodied soul of the unrighteous going to a place of conscious torment when they die. On the contrary, it plainly states that their "*thoughts perish*" – their very consciousness expires; this is the most literal and accurate English translation of the text.

One might understandably inquire: If the bible doesn't really teach that *sheol/hades* is a place where souls are held in a state of conscious torment until their resurrection, how did this belief become

the orthodox view of Christendom? Aside from the obvious reason that our forefathers failed to adhere to a thorough and honest examination of the scriptures, I attribute this error to two influential factors: the influence of Greek mythology and the influence of Catholic mythology. According to pagan Greek mythology, Hades (also called Pluto) is the God of the underworld where most souls endure a lethargic and empty existence while some are tormented by hideous winged spirits called Erinyes (Scott 148). Greek mythology and philosophy slowly crept into the Judeo-Christian mindset and became intermixed with biblical truths. This was the foundation upon which Dante Alighieri's *Divine Comedy* was built in the early 14th century. This famous poem is an allegorical narration of Dante's imaginary journey through *hades*, purgatory and heaven. Dante's detailed descriptions of *hades*, although plainly unscriptural and fantastical in nature were essentially accepted as truth by the medieval Roman church. Likewise, in our present era, Mary K. Baxter's unscriptural and fantastical "divine" visions of *hades* are embraced by numerous people. Thus many sincere Christians today adhere to a mythological view of *sheol/hades* rather than a purely scriptural view.

All this information about *sheol/hades* is likely to provoke many questions. The very purpose of Part II of this study (not contained in this edition) is to answer such questions through a thorough biblical examination of the subject

The Greek Pneuma Used in Reference to the Breath of Life

Getting back to "the breath of life," some readers may feel that I've gone into this issue a little too deeply; but it's important for us to understand that the Hebrew and Greek words for "spirit" (*ruwach* and *pneuma*) can refer to either the human spirit or the breath of life in biblical passages pertaining to human nature. The passage and context will determine which of these *ruwach* and *pneuma* refer to. If we assume that *ruwach* and *pneuma* always refer to the human spirit, the part of human nature that is opposed to the flesh, then the scriptures can become very confusing. For instance, we would have to conclude that animals have a spirit just like humans have a spirit. Yet, we must understand that when God inspired people to write the scriptures by his Holy Spirit (2Peter 1:20-21) he was limited to flawed human language. No human language is an exact science. Language is indeed a wondrous human creation, but it often makes little sense. We saw proof of this earlier in this appendix when we observed that the Hebrew word for "soul," *nephesh*, can refer to a dead body, a living whole person (spirit, mind and body), or the immaterial facet of human nature (mind or mind & spirit). To further confuse the issue *nephesh* most often refers to "life" in the bible. Needless to say, the definition of *nephesh* depends upon the passage and its context. So it is with the Hebrew and Greek words for "spirit."

Let us now turn our attention to the New Testament and observe occasions where the Greek *pneuma* obviously refers to the breath of life and not to the human spirit.

The following verse from Revelation is talking about God's anointed two witnesses who were killed by "the beast" and laid dead in the street for three and a half days:

REVELATION 11:11

But after three and a half days a breath (*pneuma*) of life from God entered them, and they stood on their feet, and terror struck those who saw them.

Pneuma, the Greek word translated as "breath" here, obviously refers to the breath of life – God's animating life force – and not to the human spirit as described earlier in this appendix. The breath of life animates the mind and spirit, the disembodied soul, which in turn animates the body. The way this text describes how God resurrects these two people coincides with how he created Adam (Genesis 2:7) and how he miraculously brought to life a bunch of dry bones and flesh in Ezekiel 37:1-14 (this was a vision that the LORD gave to Ezekiel).

Pneuma likely refers to the breath of life in this popular passage as well:

JAMES 2:26

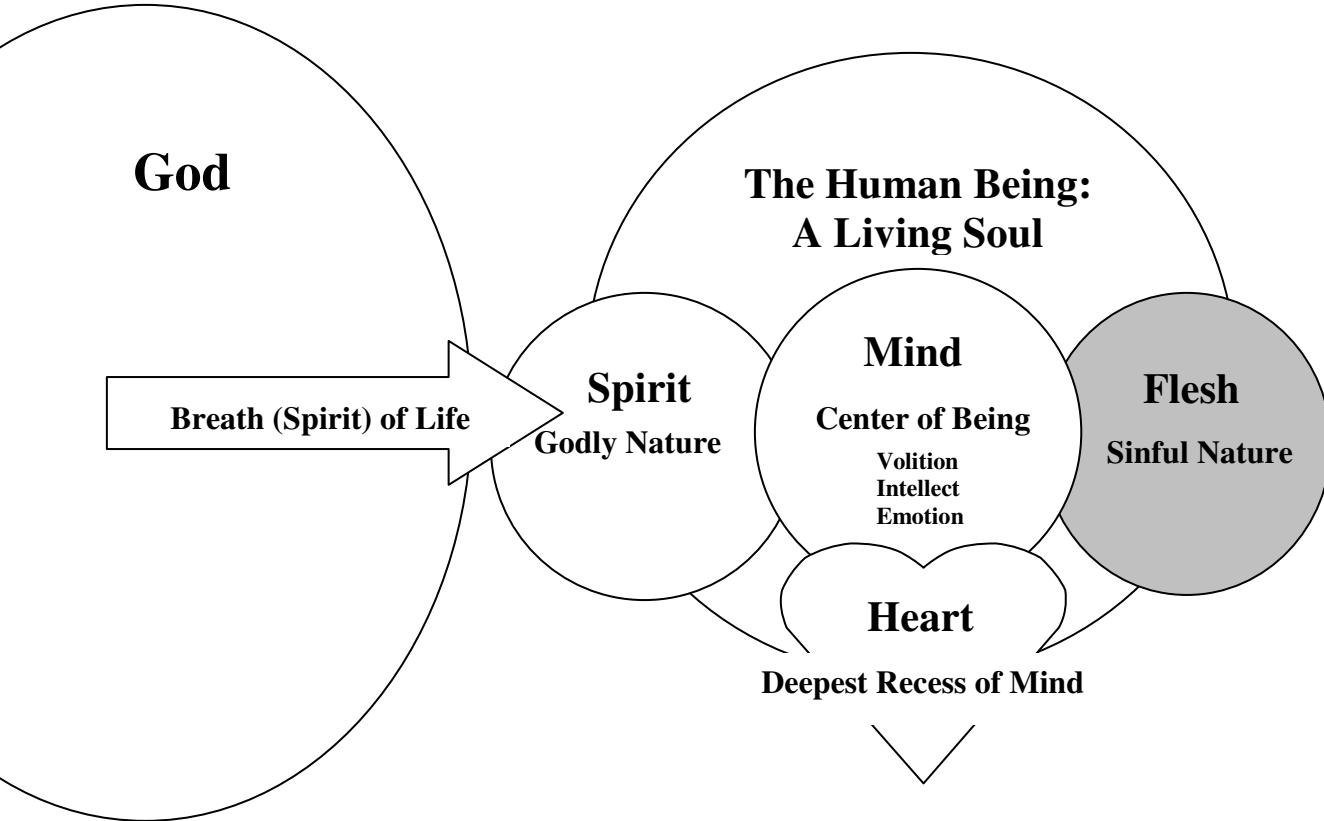
As the body without the spirit (*pneuma*) is dead, so faith without works is dead.

In light of the above-cited texts, it makes sense to regard *pneuma* in this passage as a reference to the breath of life – the animating life force from God. If it is not a reference to the breath of life then

we would have to conclude that *pneuma* here refers to the *entire* immaterial facet of human nature, mind and spirit (this is W. E. Vine’s interpretation [593]). It makes little difference however, as it is God’s breath of life that animates this immaterial facet of human nature which, in turn, animates the body.

Conclusion: The Biblical Definition of Human Nature

In light of all the scriptural facts we have examined, human nature could best be defined as such: ***The human being is a living soul consisting of spirit, mind and body animated by a breath of life from God.*** Here is an illustration of this definition:



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And for those who are curious and ask, Do aborted babies go to hell? Know that aborted babies do NOT suffer after death. Jesus said, "Let the little children come unto me." He would not change His mind now.

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