

Four Views of Eternal Destiny

(An expanded transcript of an audio presentation)

Eternal Punishment



Annihilation



Abandonment



Full Restoration

C Clifton Jones
Grass Valley, CA
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Preface

This recording and booklet were totally unplanned. I was helping out with worship music in a church in Grass Valley for about ten months, when the pastor invited me to sit in on a “Q and A” session he wanted to have on the subject of the Eternal Destiny of Humanity. He knew I had done a great deal of study in this area and assumed that I could be of some help to answer questions. The discussion opened and proceeded as various people shared ideas and asked some questions. After about fifteen minutes there was a bit of confusion and some drifting in the discussion. So the pastor turned to me and said, “Carl, do you have anything to share?” The only thing I could think of at that moment was to present a range of views that are commonly held by Christians to provide some needed perspective on the subject. I spent about ten minutes doing this and emphasized the importance of being “fair-minded and objective” as we moved further into our discussion. But when I was done there was silence. I think there was an expectation (one I did not expect) to hear which view is the “correct” one.

So this opened the unexpected opportunity for me to carefully share my personal opinion about these views and which views seemed (to me) to be more likely correct, based on my study in the Bible and Church History. Unknown to me, and unplanned by me, someone recorded the whole discussion. When I discovered this I asked for a copy because I was unusually pleased with the overall presentation. I generally do not like my own teaching or writing, knowing how flawed I am compared to so many able writers and teachers that I have encountered in the past. But this presentation, which was really just a “brain-dump” on the subject of Eternal Destinies, turned out to be more complete, clear, and concise than usual. So I transcribed the audio into an electronic text (through an on-line service) that could be edited. This booklet is a result of that transcription and editing. The written form (this booklet) has more information than the recording, simply because I could easily add to it as needed.

I have no reason to believe that this booklet is anything more than the result of a great deal of research and study into this important subject, resulting in a set of honest and genuine conclusions that are just “personal opinions” from one human being among billions. I fully recognize my fallibility and potential for error, so caution on your part is warranted. I only desire to be a good and reliable resource of information about the Bible and Church History, and to assist you in your journey to seek the truth about who God is.

I need to make just one other point of important clarification. Though I feel that my mind was very clear and organized when I did my presentation, it was not in any way some kind of “revelation from God”, or speaking *for* Him in any way

whatsoever. I claim no “ecclesiastical authority” whatsoever and leave such authority to those in our community who genuinely believe they have been “called by God” in some special way to serve people in this manner. And so, if you are a member of (or are a regular attendee of) a local religious assembly, it is suggested that you consult your pastor, priest, rabbi (or other kind of spiritual leader) to get any input they might have for you on this very important subject. However, always do your own study, thinking, praying, and soul-searching when deciding such matters (as Paul encouraged people to do in one of his letters). But it is also good to get good input from those you trust, who are “watching over your soul” (as Peter wrote in one of his letters). They are in your life for a reason, so do not ignore them, or their input.

This presentation took place at *The Church at the Lodge* on October 15th, 2017, in Grass Valley, California. It is only part of a larger discussion that occurred. The audio recording is posted on YouTube at:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zGZLpJ1Mt9c&t=286s>

The audio presentation can also be found (along with a copy of this booklet) on the Resources page of the *God Is Love Fellowship* website at:

<http://godislofefellowship.com/resources.html>

Since this entire presentation was spontaneous and given without any notes or script, it is a little disorganized and has some repetition. But, on a favorable note, what was said was very much from my heart. It was a very genuine and sincere presentation, and it is my hope that it will be of some benefit to those who read this booklet or listen to the audio.

As you will discover by reading this booklet (or listening to the audio), a great deal of effort has been given to genuinely respect all views on this important subject. The goal of preparing and distributing this booklet is to provide factual information. Great effort has been taken to be as accurate and fair as possible in relating facts and other information. If something has been presented that is not true, such error was not intentional nor was it a result of careless or limited study on this subject. A great deal of time and effort, involving many years of in-depth study in both Church History and the New Testament (in the original Greek language) has been done. If the reader has any information as to the inaccuracy of anything presented, such feedback would be appreciated. Or, if opposing views are held and desired to be communicated, this too is very much welcome. Please feel free to contact Carl

Jones, at: carl@godislovefellowship.com, or by texting or calling 530-263-8050. I would love to hear from you! Really! Please enjoy the presentation!

Acknowledgements

I want to thank the following people who took the time to review the initial draft of this booklet and provided excellent and essential feedback in the areas of accuracy, fairness, and clarity that made this booklet much better than it ever could have been otherwise: Bill Rose, Mike Rough, Christine Kirks, Chuck Petch, Dennis Korn, Bobbie Finch, and Bill Kerler.

The views in this booklet do not necessarily reflect the views of the reviewers.

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Introduction

The subject of “eternal destiny” is probably the most important subject anyone can ever consider. The implications are forever and they far out-weigh anything this current life presents to us. Whether or not anyone can actually speak authoritatively about what happens to people when they die, still the gravity and severity of such a staggering topic remains. It is so unpleasant and frightening for most people – even for religious people – that it is hardly ever discussed in any real detail, and certainly not looked at with any real objectivity. It is usually ignored, dealt with in generalizations, laughed off as unimportant, or never discussed while smugly assuming some inherited view to be infallible.

But to the degree that the destiny of people can be known and understood through reason, experience, and some form or revelation from God, it should be explored to the satisfaction of each person ... all of whom know very well that sooner or later they will inevitably face the reality that awaits them. But even more importantly, we are wise to pursue an understanding of this important subject because no matter which conclusion we draw, it include serious consequences. For example, if we conclude that God will eternally punish people who sin and do not believe, we severely fail our fellow human beings if we do not warn them of such a terrible fate -- with all our strength and might! Is it not that important? Is there anything else more important in life? On the other hand, if it is true that God is loving and merciful and has already saved (or will eventually save) all people, then we need to be very careful before accusing God of the worst possible thing we could ever imagine (never-ending torment!) without clear and convincing proof. Does not the Creator of all beings deserve the “benefit of the doubt” when He claims such perfection and high moral standard for himself?

Steve Gregg in the Forward of his excellent book, *Hell: Three Christian Views* put it this way:

“What kind of God do Christians worship? That is the question most crucial to the church and her message, and is, essentially, the matter explored in this book. The question of hell is necessarily central to this inquiry, since a person’s character is revealed as much (if not more) by how he treats his enemies as it is in his conduct toward his friends. Jesus was clear in teaching how His disciples should treat their enemies. He said that we should love them, bless them, and do good to them, so that we could be as merciful as God is (Luke 6:27–28, 35–36).”

So, my sincere hope is that this modest and “far less than perfect” booklet (and audio presentation) will be of some help to you as you think through who God is and what kinds of eternal destiny for you and all those around you are reasonable ... and maybe even just possible! But remember, whatever you decide, your decision is a “very sacred trust” between you and your Creator, and no one else!

Audio Transcript (Expanded)

Different Views of Eternal Destiny

Traditionally, there are three views within Christianity concerning eternal destiny ... that is, “what happens to people after they die”. These are: Damnation, Annihilation, and Restoration. But there are two additional views that can be added to give a more complete spectrum of views. One is Abandonment, and it fits between Annihilation and Restoration. The other additional view emerges by dividing Restoration into two sub-views: Eventual Restoration and Immediate Restoration.

The first view is Damnation, or perhaps a more respectful title would be “Eternal Punishment”. In this view some people will go to hell forever where they are eternally tormented. This is, for sure, the worst possible thing you can ever imagine happening to anyone and is the most extreme of all the views. John MacArthur, Chuck Swindoll, along with most Protestants and Roman Catholics hold this view today. However, some Roman Catholics (like Richard Rohr) seem to have broken with their church on this subject and present a much more positive view. As you will discover, the Early Church Fathers predominately did *not* hold this view. However, some of the early Latin Church Fathers (like Tertullian) did hold it. Augustine also held the Eternal Punishment view, and he too was a Latin Church Father, but he came later in church history around 400 AD.

The next possible view – one that is commonly held by both theologians and many regular people -- is Annihilation. This view holds that some people will eventually be “annihilated” by God, and that by doing so it is an act of mercy on His part. John Stott, great and well-known Bible teacher holds this view. So do Seventh-Day Adventists, Clark Pinnock and Edward Fudge. Some Early Church Fathers (like Irenaeus, who was a Greek Church Father) may have held this view.

A third possible view could be called “Abandonment.” C.S. Lewis seemed to hold this view and wrote a book about it called *The Great Divorce*. In his book he describes a bus ride from hell to heaven. This is, of course, just fiction; but Lewis wrote many fiction books in order to teach spiritual principles – just as he did with *The Chronicles of Narnia*. In this bus ride to heaven from hell, people can visit and even stay there if they want to, but most choose not to stay because they prefer hell over heaven. As a result, they get back on the bus and go back to hell. The book ends with people getting farther and farther away from each other because they can't stand each other and they end up in outer darkness and isolation. But the idea here for

Lewis is that God is not the direct cause of their torment and invites all to come to heaven, any time they want even after death, because God is always there for them. However, God “abandons” these people to their own choice of hell over heaven. Well-known theologian F.F. Bruce also aligned himself with this view.

Now, in comparison, *Abandonment* is a lot less extreme than *Annihilation*, and *Annihilation* is a lot less extreme than *Eternal Punishment*. And keep in mind that *Eternal Punishment* is the idea of God placing people in a metaphysical location (called hell) and inflicting pain and agony on them forever as “pure retribution” for their sin and/or unbelief. It is a place where God never lets up on punishment, and a place where there is no “restoring purpose” whatsoever. Instead, their sin and/or unbelief is “re-tributed” to them (retribution) forever. This view is a very extreme conclusion about what God might do to unbelievers and/or sinners. It is so extreme that it seems right that anyone holding this view should take the time to make sure there is really good evidence for it before “tagging” God with the worst possible thing anyone can imagine! Can you think of something worse than never-ending torment and agony, from which you can never escape, even if you repent? If so, please let me know. I cannot!

So I'm just giving you the spectrum of views here. So far, we have considered *Eternal Punishment*, which is never-ending torment, inflicted by God as *pure retribution* for sin with no restoring purpose whatsoever. This view is clearly worse than the other two views of *Annihilation* (“I will snuff you out”), or *Abandonment* (“I've given up on you”). Instead, *Eternal Punishment* is “I'm going to punish you ... forever”! And so, the possible views so far are: *Eternal Punishment*, *Annihilation*, and *Abandonment*. But there are two more possibilities in this spectrum of views.

The fourth view is one sub-view of *Full Restoration* and it could be called “*Eventual Restoration*.” Karl Barth, N.T. Wright, Paul Young (author of *The Shack*), and Rob Bell (author of *Love Wins*) are just a few in the modern era that hold various versions of *Full Restoration*. But also, The Early Church Fathers, who lived right after the time of Christ and the Apostles, predominantly held some form of *Full Restoration*. Most of them (but not all) taught, for about three-hundred years, that God would bring a very severe process of restoration upon unbelievers and/or sinners after they die. They saw this as something that goes beyond what can happen in this life and that God's goal is always full reconciliation with himself, instead of *Abandoning*, *Annihilating*, or *Eternally Punishing*. These early Christians believed His ultimate goal is to restore unbelievers and/or sinners by doing whatever it takes. After all, He's got plenty of time; He's got plenty of power; He's got plenty of “desire for all men to be saved.” Is this not what Scripture says about God? Salvation of all people is clearly His desire! He is “not willing that any perish, and for all to come to

repentance.” Does that desire in God change when people die? Does he, all of a sudden, become a different God – one who changes? Not a chance!

Eventual Restoration is what most Early Church Fathers seemed to argue concerning who God is and what they expected Him to do – that is, prior to about 500 AD when the Catholic Church really started to dominate. These early Christians believed that some kind of “fire-refining process” was the process that God would use to eventually restore all humanity. And they had confidence that, although this process is very severe, it is also a “fire in the age to come” (or “punishment in the age to come”) as they called it, as opposed to some kind of never-ending fire and punishment.

Most modern-day bibles translate such passages in the NT as “eternal punishment” or “eternal fire.” But it turns out that the English word “eternal” that is commonly translated from the Greek, is actually the Greek word “age” (and Greek is the language the NT was written in). The word “age” is not the same as the word “eternal.” There is another Greek word that does mean “eternal” and the writers of the New Testament mostly avoided this word. Jesus avoided this word “eternal” completely, even though He was well-aware that this word existed! Paul uses this word “eternal” only once in Romans to describe the “eternal power of God.” Jude also uses it once in his letter to describe the “eternal chains” holding the fallen angels until the day of judgement. But elsewhere in the New Testament writings, the word “age” is used, and it means literally “an indefinite time period.” It can be a very long or very short time period (an “age”), but not usually eternal. However, when this word “age” is used with God, it makes sense to translate it as “eternal” to represent the never-ending aspect of God’s “age” or time period. But this seems to be the only legitimate exception.

So, the Early Church Fathers viewed “eternal punishment” and “eternal fire” as age-long punishment and age-long fire, or perhaps, the fire and punishment “of the age to come.” This idea is found often in their writings. It is also interesting that these early Christians never, even once, included the idea of eternal punishment in their creeds. You can go look at the church creeds for the first 500 years and it is never included. Keep in mind that these Creeds were a “once in a generation” official meeting of the whole Christian Church (both Eastern/Greek and Western/Latin counterparts). The purpose of a creed was to establish what the Christian Church universally believed. Yet they never included anything in there about Eternal Punishment. They left it out! Eternal Punishment was not an “absolute truth” for them, whereas other beliefs clearly were included in their creeds. (See *The Creeds of the Christian Church* in the Additional Resources section at the end of this booklet).

However, they did believe that God would bring judgment “in the age to come.” But most of them pretty much believed that God was going to eventually restore all humanity, simply because He came to save it, and that this is what a “savior” does!

There is also a fifth possible view that is also a Full Restoration view. This view could be called “Immediate Restoration.” It is the belief that the moment we die, anyone, (Jeffrey Dahmer, Hitler, Charles Manson, whoever), will be healed and fully reconciled to God (as He promised He would eventually do in the New Testament). We are, all of us human beings, messed up to some degree. Our sin and failing has ruined us in so many ways, and in this fifth view the moment we die the “old man” (old person that we are in this life) also dies. The New Testament refers to the contrast between the “new man” and “old man” (new person/old person). But that old person in us has been condemned, and the “new person” that we are in Jesus (something that He brought about on the cross) lives forever! But we deal with both (the new and old person) right now in life. In his letter to believers in Rome, Paul writes, “I want to do what I don't want to do, and I can't do what I know I should do,” and so he experienced an internal struggle between his old and new person. So do all of us today! It's in our old person that we are *outside* of Jesus, while struggling with the new person that we are *in* Jesus. We all experience this. But the idea here is that the moment we die ... our “old person” dies too, no matter who we are or how sinful we have been! The new person that we are in Jesus (by dying with Him and rising with him) will live on in “newness of life” when we too, someday, are also raised from the dead.

Fortunately, the old person has been condemned, and such condemnation by God in this situation is a good thing. When God condemns, He condemns what is bad -- He condemns the destructive sin in us. And, He causes us to become a new person through the death and resurrection of Jesus. When He died, we died. And when He rose from the dead, so did we! We were raised into “newness of life!” This is what Jesus did for us. We are a new person. In this fifth view (the *Immediate Restoration* view), the moment Hitler or anybody else dies, that old person is gone. The new person is the only thing that lives on. And even in the book of Revelation which references the “lake of fire” -- what gets thrown into it? Death and Hades! These are thrown in there to be burned up. And, as you may recall, it also says that “anybody whose name is not written in the book of life” gets thrown in there too. And here is the problem with this verse – not actually a problem, but a fact. It does not say how many will be thrown into the lake of fire. John never tells us how many. It could be 90 percent. it could be 30 percent, or it could be zero! Keep in mind that we all have a “new name” and so, perhaps, only the “old man” with the old name is destroyed. But either way, we need to be really careful reading into verses things we expect, rather than just reading what is there. We know that death and Hades are

thrown into the lake of fire, but we do not know *how many* people, for *how long*, and for *what purpose* are thrown there. We also do not know how literal or how figurative this “lake of fire: is, especially in light of the highly symbolic nature of the book of Revelation and all the other clearly figurative descriptions that are presented in the Book of Revelation (like the beast with seven heads and ten horns coming up out of the ocean; or Jesus using a sword in His mouth to slay the nations; or the one-thousand-mile cubed city of “New Jerusalem” coming down out of the sky)!

The point is that we need to be very careful to not make verses say *more* than they actually say ... but, at the same time, we must let them say *everything* that they do say! I was taught this by Howard Hendricks, a well-known teacher at Dallas Seminary where I attended and graduated. We need to acknowledge everything that is in the Bible, every verse, everything that is written there ... but nothing more! Don't leave anything out, but don't add anything either! So, we all need to be very careful. We tend to want to bring our own “narrative” into the Bible. I do it too, and so does everyone else. And so, let's let the Bible say everything it does ... but no more.

An Objective Posture

So these are the five main views of what happens to people when they die. These are all commonly held views. I personally, as a teacher and as a Christian, publicly recognize and acknowledge all five views as legitimate, biblical, and reasonable (from our common human point of view). The reason that I discipline myself to do this is that I also realize that everyone has a mind that thinks, the ability to reason (as granted by God), has their own experience and upbringing that is important, and that every person is entitled to believe the Holy Spirit is speaking to them as much as anyone else does ... including me. So I see other views equal with mine in meaning, purpose, and value because we are all on the same human level before God as people of faith.

And so, I discipline myself to acknowledge these different views that are held by very good people (and I named some people at the beginning of this booklet), who study the Bible and love God as much as (or perhaps more than) I do! Many of them, for example, are convinced that “true justice” demands that God punish people forever for sinning and/or not believing. But, of course, this depends on what “justice” really means, and why Jesus died. Which sins did Jesus not take away when He was on the cross? Can we name even one sin, by anyone, that He didn't take away? Was He selective? Did He fail in some way? Was this “taking away” only potential and not actual? You may remember that it was John (the Baptizer)

who said that Jesus is “the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world”? Notice that John did not write “sins” (plural), but sin (singular)! Jesus is the Lamb of God who takes away the *sin* of the world. He took care of the sin problem for the whole world. Everyone! If He did not ... then what did Jesus *actually* accomplish?

And the Apostle John, in his first letter, calls Jesus the “satisfaction toward God concerning our sins ... and not just for our sins only, but for the sins of the whole world!” Could it be any clearer? So we have these very universal declarations (and there are many more) of what God did for all humanity through Jesus on the cross. And we would expect God to be “universal” (and not limited) in what He does because He, Himself, is universal in all aspects of His being. How universal is God in His creation? How universal is He in His power? How universal is His love, His mercy, His grace ... and yes even in His judgment and condemnation? Does God have limits? Does He ever stop short in some way? How universal is His knowledge? God is a universal God! He doesn't do things partially. And when He comes to save the world, is it unreasonable to expect Him to save universally and completely? Is saving all humanity inconsistent with who He is, and who we know Him to be throughout the revelation of Himself in the Bible?

The spectrum of views above have been given to demonstrate that there are very good people, who are honorable people, who believe with all their heart that their view is the right view. And so, I honor their view because I am not their “spiritual policeman,” and as a fallible human being I know I *can* be the one who is wrong. Their belief, mine, and yours is a very sacred thing between each of us and God. Just this past week I emailed a friend who was frustrated with my view and told me he was going to believe his own view on this subject. But instead of objecting and trying to talk him out of it (assuming I was right and he was wrong), I encouraged him to believe as he honestly felt he should. I said “you need to believe whatever you sincerely believe in your heart before God. That is the right thing for you to do, so go do that and don't change your belief unless you feel you should before God!” So, we all need to go have our own discussion with God on this. People don't necessarily need to listen to me, or anybody else, but we all need to go get things sorted out with God. That's what I had to do, and that's what everyone needs to do.

But while we are doing this (and all of us have different views), we also need to love other people in this process. We need to put that kind of love above the doctrines and teachings in which we differ. People are very passionate about their views, and that's OK. I give them love and acceptance and tolerance. And when I say this, I am not being wishy-washy. Instead, I am leaving judgment, correction, and “go figure it out and learn what's right and wrong” between each person and God. That's where it belongs. It does not belong between you and me and God, where I try to jump in

there and correct you. Right? Nor should you do this to me. So this is why I have given this spectrum of views on this subject. As far as I'm concerned, they all have a biblical, historical, and rational basis... at least from a human point of view.

A Subjective Opinion

But now I will take off my “teacher hat” and put on my “personal opinion hat.” I have many personal opinions and beliefs ... and that's all they are. No big deal – everyone has opinions, and everyone is fully and equally entitled to their beliefs before God. Aren't they? But these five views just presented, have (in my opinion) a spectrum of likelihood based on the Bible, Church History, reason, and personal experience. To me, the most likely correct view is that of *Immediate Restoration* of all humanity to God. As I look at Church History and as I look at all scripture in context, the character and moral excellence of God just reeks with the idea of a God that wants to (and will) save! In my opinion, the Biblical evidence in favor of and supporting an idea of Eternal Punishment by God ... is weak, at best. And, in fact, it seems *really* weak! I just don't see a lot in the Bible that clearly and convincingly supports the idea of never-ending punishment by God. When we read the Bible the way we've been taught (which we all do), we tend to read into it what we already believe, rather than to allow the Bible to shape and define our beliefs. To the casual observer (and even to some seasoned ones), it may appear that there are tons of verses in the Bible about eternal punishment. But this really is not the case. For sure, there are some that can be taken in this way. Jesus's presentation on “the sheep and the goats” is one of these. The “lake of fire” in the book of Revelation and the parable of “the rich man and Lazarus” are two others. But when you look at these verses and refuse to make them say anything more than they actually do, all of a sudden the case for God being a “never-ending punisher” becomes really small.

And this conclusion is only underscored when considering the Early Church Fathers who lived way back right after the time of Jesus and His Apostles onward until about 500 AD. The teachers of these early Christians were the Apostles themselves (along with teachers who were taught by Apostles), all passing the truth along. There wasn't any gap in time. These early Christians were born into families where their parents and grandparents knew or remembered the Apostles and other teachers of that era. They learned from them. Some of these grandparents would even be among those who remembered Jesus dying on the cross and rising from the dead. Their parents and grandparents would surely pass on what was passed on to them! These Early Church Fathers were not far, in time, from Jesus and His Apostles. Additionally, they shared the same Greek language, which was the language of the New Testament. They also shared the same Greek culture and mindset of those contemporary with the First Century era of Jesus. Most of the eastern part of the

Mediterranean was Greek speaking (as a result of Alexander the Great conquering the western world prior to that day). It was predominately Greek – language, culture, and location.

In contrast, Rome was in the western part of the Mediterranean and had a Latin language, culture, and mindset. So, there was an Eastern/Greek realm of Christianity and there was an Western/Latin realm. And these two were distinct parts of Christianity for about a thousand years after Jesus. But this Western part of Christianity, with its Latin language and culture, also had a “Roman mindset.” As one historian has accurately stated, “Rome is an *attitude* and *state of mind*, more than anything else.” And this Roman mindset, with its power-hungry, domineering attitude (much different from Eastern Christianity) is what rose up in the western Roman Catholic Church that emerged in about 500 AD. The Eastern/Greek part of the church, in contrast, predominately held the idea of full restoration by God and not eternal punishment, unlike the Western/Latin church of Rome. And remember, in those early creeds the Early Church together (East and West) never mentioned eternal punishment. The Counsels of Nicaea, Constantinople, Chalcedon – none of those early creeds, for the first 500 years, ever mentioned anything about eternal punishment. They just said there will be a judgment day and a resurrection from the dead. (See *The Creeds of the Christian Church* in the Additional Resources section at the end of this booklet).

So this Eastern realm of the church was Greek speaking, Greek culture, and Greek even in location. When you look at the Mediterranean region, where Paul wrote all his letters of the New Testament, they were written to churches located in the Eastern realm: Corinth, Galicia (modern-day Turkey), Ephesus, Philippi, Thessalonica, Colossi, etc. These are all located from Greece over to Palestine, and from Galicia (Turkey) down to Alexandria (Egypt). Only one letter was written to the western church – Paul’s letter to Rome. It is unique, in this way. For sure it is an important letter, but a unique one in its orientation. Additionally, the “seven churches” written to in the book of Revelation, were all located in the Eastern realm of the Mediterranean! In fact, all of these seven letters were to churches located just in Galicia! (See *Mediterranean Maps* at the end of this booklet). Prior to about 500 AD, the Western church was not the dominant church. At that time, the Christian church was divided into five equally governed regions called the Pentarchy (five-rule). Four of them were Greek speaking, Greek culture, Greek language churches, and they were equal to the fifth, Latin church in Rome. But the church overall (especially the Greek/Eastern church) predominately believed that God would eventually reconcile all humanity to himself. They believed that the Savior is just that -- a savior -- and that as a result He will bring restoration to all. It wasn't till about 500 AD, that the Roman Catholic Church (the Roman/Latin based church with

a Latin Bible), emerged and became dominant. This happened over many centuries of struggles against the Eastern/Greek church, which ended in about 1000 AD with a split between the East and West into two separate churches. But it was during these middle ages that the Roman Catholic Church began to incorporate the idea of God eternally punishing people. These are very interesting and important facts ... are they not?

The Meaning of Grace

So ... there are about five views, but there is one view (Eternal Punishment) that is dominate in both Roman Catholic and Protestant churches today. This includes evangelical churches (of which I have been a part of all my life), Presbyterian, Lutheran, and most other churches including Charismatic churches. Pretty much all of them hold Eternal Punishment as their official position on this subject. They believe that God, in order to be “just,” *must* eternally punish “someone” for sin and/or unbelief. They believe this because the sins committed were against an infinite and eternal God who cannot just ignore them. Well, as it turned out, “somebody” was indeed punished for sin Jesus! But not by God! God was not the “punisher” ... sin was. God is the savior and sin is the enemy that destroys. God’s clear desire is that all people be saved. This is why Jesus took away the sin (not sins, plural) of the world. He took care of the sin problem. “One sacrifice for sin for all time,” writes the author of Hebrews.

The big question here is the central question. It's not so much what some bad guy did and how he should pay for it. We all do bad things. And some people do really bad things. They shoot people, and then shoot themselves (as we witnessed on TV recently), and yes that is really bad and evil. Evil people should be punished because what they do is wrong. But they also *need* to be healed and saved from sin and themselves ... not from God. They *need* to be forgiven. Does the need of sinners matter to God or is he only interested in retribution? So the big question is: Who saves us and what saves us? It can only be one of two things; there are only two possibilities. One possibility is that salvation is one-hundred percent, absolutely, completely, done and finished by God through Jesus. That's one possibility. The other possibility is everything else! -- 99.9% , 87% , 23% or just 5% -- all are something less than 100% . In all of these cases, *almost* everything that needs to be done has actually been done to save us. But not everything! In this view of salvation God leaves us one little teeny-weenie thing to do (believe) to be saved. But if we don't believe, or can't, then we are still lost! This means Jesus didn't *actually* accomplish anything on the cross. His atoning work was only *potential*! If people still have to do one little thing to keep from going to hell and be saved, then Jesus didn't secure the salvation of one single person. In this second possibility, no one is

saved by Jesus *alone* because there is still something that has to be done by us to secure it!

The only salvation that really is “salvation” is that which God alone does for humanity. This is what “grace” is all about --- God saving people, completely and totally, and by no doing of our own. Grace means God saving people 100 percent, no matter what they do or say. And why does God save anyone? Simply because they *need* to be saved! Right? In fact we all, in one sense, “deserve” to be saved simply because we are sinners and in *need* of salvation. Is there any better qualification or deserving possible? In a way, we have all “earned” salvation by our *need* to be saved, but we have not earned it by any merit on our part. So the real issue isn't whether somebody has done enough, or believed enough, because this has nothing to do with God's saving work, which is by His grace alone. It is His work, through Jesus on the cross, on our behalf. He did this long before we were even born, and He did this without even asking us. He just did it because He loves us! How could He do anything less? (See *The Plan* at the end of this booklet for a good summary of God's plan of salvation for His world.)

An Illustration of Drowning

Here is an illustration of God's kind of salvation. Imagine a bunch of teenagers, who have been drinking and are out in the middle of a lake. They built a flaky little raft and went way out in the middle lake, the raft is sinking, and it's way too far to swim to shore. They are, for sure, going to drown! They're cocky, drunk, and feeling invincible. Then Jesus pulls up in a boat. He tells them they are going to drown and invites them to get into the boat. But in their arrogance and pride, they yell back, “Get out of here old man. We don't need no stinking savior.” So what is Jesus going to do? He knows they can't swim to shore and He knows they will drown, even though they do not believe this to be true. So will Jesus say, “good luck, you get what you deserve,” turn the boat around and go to shore? Does He say, “if you don't turn to me, I'm out of here. I'm not saving you unless you do something”? Are you kidding? Of course not ... even though that is exactly what many people would do!

Does Jesus throw them life preservers and say, “I am doing my part. You need to swallow your pride and grab on... and then I will save you”? And if they stay cocky and stubborn and self-deceived, does Jesus then say, “Bye bye, I tried to save you, it's on you now”? Heck no! (Perhaps... Hell No!) Not this Jesus! Here is what He does: He jumps in the water, He fights the current, He gets wet right along with them ... He joins them in their lost state and becomes one of them! And we are just like these cocky kids who are full of themselves, drowning and needing a savior. In fact, those cocky kids who say, “We don't need your help, old man!”, would also drown

Jesus if He did jump in to save them (in their anger before they themselves go down). And so in the same way, we also as a human race killed (drowned) Jesus when He came to save us, by crucifying Him on a cross. We killed the Savior who loved us, came into this world to be one with us, and saved us from our own self-destruction. This is what the “incarnation” is all about and why the Early Church Fathers were so big on this action of “God becoming human.” Jesus totally identified Himself with the human race, acting as the “second Adam,” and totally representing all humanity (just as the original Adam did as the first human being). What happened to that first Adam also happened to us – we fell into ruin with him. But also, what happened to the second (and final) Adam, Jesus, also happened to us – when He died, we died; and when He rose from the dead, so did we!

So yes, Jesus is the kind of savior who jumps into the drowning water with us, says “go ahead and drown me because I know that when I am drowning I am also drowning with all of you, and it is my way of becoming one with you in your dying.” In fact, Jesus did not just die *with* us, and *for* us ... but also *AS* us! When He died, we died. It was all of us on that cross dying. But also, after Jesus drowns (dies on the cross), He also comes up out of the water (raises from the dead) and walks ashore, and says, “What's happened to me in rising from the dead is going to happen to you too! It's going to happen to you because it happened to me, and because I'm victorious over death (drowning). And now I'm announcing this salvation to you and all people, so that you can hear about what I have done and believe it.” Jesus does not throw us a life preserver and say “I'm offering you salvation.” He jumps in and saves us ... simply because He is a savior and loves us. This is what a real savior does!

The Meaning of God's “Gift”

When people talk about salvation being a “free gift,” they talk as if it is a little package that can be put on the table in front of someone and say, “Here is your free gift from me. You can just let it sit there, or you can pick it up and open it. But it's only a real gift for you *if* you receive it.” But that's not the kind of gift God gave us in Jesus. He didn't give us an item or object that can be placed on a table. His free gift is an action – He *did something* for us. He joined us, died *with* us, *for* us, and *as* us. Then He rose from the dead and took all of us with Him into newness of life. He didn't ask anyone, He just did it. That's the free gift – an action on our behalf. The gift is that He did something for us – it is not something He *offers* us. And so the

Gospel (the *Good News*) goes out as an “announcement” of the birth, death, and resurrection of Jesus. It is a *declaration* of what He did and accomplished. The only “offer” in this announcement to invite us to accept, acknowledge, believe, and receive what Jesus has *already* accomplished and finished for us has humans, created in His own image. But even if we refuse this offer and do not believe, this does not change the fact of what Jesus did and completed on our behalf ... forever. Our response to this good news announcement is only that – a response. There is no earning or merit in our act of believing, whatsoever! None! All of the saving action was done by God for us in the Person of Jesus. Many people confuse believing with “doing something that earns favor with God,” and therefore gets God right with us. But, actually, when we believe we get right with God in our mind and our heart and in our life. When we respond this way, nothing changes in God because He is already right with us through what He did in Jesus on the cross of Calvary. We alone changed, not God. This is the real meaning of “faith.” Our faith is very important, and exercising it changes our life completely – but it earns us absolutely nothing with God.

Think about the moment when a person believes. It doesn't change how God feels about them. Right? What He did for them, He did on the cross 2000 years ago and has nothing to do with their belief today. Because when we believe what He *already* did for us in our place (100% by His grace alone, something that we didn't earn when we believed), our life changes and we are “born again” (as Jesus calls it). We feel brand new, we have a new perspective on life, and we live for Jesus because we realize that He *already* saved us. But understand that in all of these wonderful results of believing the Good News message (the Gospel), such belief has no effect on what He did for us, or on God himself!. It is only an “unmerited response” on our part. I hope you see how this works. That's my take on it, while wearing my “personal opinion hat.” It is just my personal opinion and belief. But I am far from alone. Many Christians, today and in Church History (like Luther) believed that faith is an *unmerited action* on our part and that God’s act of salvation is a free gift by His grace alone.

Why People Reject Ultimate Restoration

But when I put my “teacher hat” back on, I have to say that there are about five different views on this subject. There are Bible verses that support all views, and people argue back and forth on this all the time. They always have, and I suppose they always will. But here is something I want to leave with you. We need to bring down the fighting about all this stuff. I am so sick of it. Seriously! Fighting, arguing, anger, labeling, censoring are all common-place, even among Christians. I have been the target of such things over my lifetime, and I have (shamefully) done such things

to others in years gone by. But I am now tired of it in my old age. Please just spend some time reading Church History and some of it will make you sick. It is so sad. Everyone was calling everyone who disagreed with them a “heretic”, upping the bar of requirement and claiming that they *alone* have the true revelation and correct view from God. “We are right. We are the true and official church,” they all claim. Knock it off guys! It's pathetic. It's ok to have your view and believe it with passion, but respect other believers also. For example, whatever you believe about justice – that is your call. I may have a different view than another, but that's ok. We all have reasons for why we believe what we do. Is not one person's reasons as good as another's? Must we play “truth policeman” for everyone else ... or will we leave all this up to God, where it belongs?

My point is that I choose to genuinely respect other views, even though I may disagree, simply because we all have equal rights to hold our views (for whatever reasons) as fellow humans before God. I have a good friend who I just talked to recently at the coffee shop, and He is adamant that he has the right view. I wish he could come to a kind, tolerant, and respectful conclusion like this one. But he doesn't, and perhaps he can't. This is an interesting thing about people. We all tend to not want to hear anything different because we already have our opinion on a subject ... especially in religion. But I often ask them, “Aren't you interested, at least, in looking into the idea that God has already saved everyone? Is it so unlike Him to do this? Is it not God-like to save everybody?” And so I have friends who believe some of their loved ones are currently in hell, being tormented, and that their spouses and others they love (who are still living) are destined to go there also. All this is of great sorrow and stress to them, and they seem to hate it, and yet they do nothing to even listen and consider the alternative view about a loving God who saves all humanity by His grace alone, simply because He loves His fallen world that needs to be saved!

And here is why I think they cannot bring themselves to even look into such wonderful Good News (news that really is *good* news!) If they are totally convinced (no matter why) that “God saving all humanity” (including their loved ones) cannot, or is not, true ... then they cannot stand the idea of being told that there is this kind of hope in God, when they know there really isn't. So, this message becomes nothing but “false hope,” and the fear of embracing it and then finding out it is not true (which is what they believe will happen), is too great of a risk for them. So they remain “safely in their state of despair” about their loved ones, knowing they are avoiding an even bigger disappointment and even greater pain than they now experience by even looking into something “too good to be true.” But in response, I always tell them, “If it is too good to be true ... it is so good, it has to be God!” But how sad, that the God they know, love, and trust, is in their mind so puny He cannot

even accomplish His mission of saving the world – a mission that Jesus clearly had in mind as His own mission. However, when they turn away and refuse to even look into this wonderful truth about who God is, I just love them to pieces and I try to literally “love the hell out of them.” But I do so with a very high respect for their beliefs, whatever they are, and let God take it from there. And in doing so, my constant prayer concerning myself is, “Please Lord, if I am the one who is wrong, and if I have misunderstood or misrepresented you in any way ... please show me!”

A Personal Reflection

But as for me, I don't see things as I once did. I changed because I was compelled by Scripture to do so. And, Early Church history was also of great help to me. One very important thing I learned – something that totally changed my perspective on all of this (and again, this all came from looking at *all* that the Bible teaches in its full context, without taking away from it or adding to it) – what I learned was that God is not our enemy... sin is! He loves us. He is *for* us. He is our savior *from* sin. Sin is the enemy! Jesus did not come to save us from a vengeful, retributive God, full of wrath. No! He came to save us from sin that destroys us. We have it backwards. Many Christians seriously believe that Jesus came to “save us from God.” They believe God is angry, wrathful, and already plans to automatically send sinners and/or unbelievers to never-ending suffering and agony in hell unless they do something to alleviate themselves from this fate (by believing). And, since they believe we have sinned against an infinite God, they also believe that the punishment therefore must also be infinite. Augustine originated this idea in his book called *City of God*. But this idea became later developed in the middle ages by Anselm. ... This is today known as “Penal Substitution Atonement,” and it did not originate from the Bible! PSA is the belief that (by sinning) we have “robbed God of His honor” and now we are indebted to him. And therefore the only way God can get His honor back is by inflicting pain and agony on us as an act of “justice.” Thus, he sent Jesus, his innocent son, to come and be the target of God’s anger against us, and inflicted eternal torment and pain on Jesus instead of us, even though Jesus was a totally innocent man! Is this even rational or “just” in any sense of the word?

But instead, I believe that God (in the person of Jesus) loves us more than we will ever know, and says, “Sin is killing you. It's the enemy. I came and did something about this sin of yours that is killing you. And I've announced to the world what I have done in the Good News of my salvation, by grace alone and not by any works on your part ... not even your work of faith! I did it all for you.” This is why Jesus said, “Come all of you who labor and bear a heavy load, and I will give you rest.” He wants everyone to come to him so He can put His loving arms around us, love us, and keep us safe from sin in every way possible. But if we don't come to Him,

and our response is, “nobody's gonna save me” (like those cocky, drowning kids), He still loves us and wants the very best for us and will eventually fully save us because His love never fails. That is what love does! Isn't that great? God loves you, even if you hate him. That's great too! Even if you don't like Him and are mad at him, He still loves you and always will ... because He never changes!

The Anger of God

One more thing, when God gets angry (and He does!), it's a good thing. Think about it. You have probably had kids. My dad got angry with me, and do you know what motivated Him to be angry with me? His love! The opposite of love is not anger, it's not even hatred ... it's complacency! Even hatred has its place. God hates sin simply because it destroys us. And he's angry about it. Good for you God! (There would be something lacking in God if He did not hate sin and be angry about it!) Paul wrote in his letter to believers in Rome that “the anger of God is (present tense) revealed against the sin and lack of god-likeness in us.” Notice that God's anger is *not* against us, but against our sin. Sin is our enemy, not God! God is rightly angry about sin because it's destroying us. And since He is angry, He *must* do something about our sin problem. And ... He *has* done something about it ... in Jesus! He solved the sin problem for the human race. Jesus is “the lamb of God who takes away the sin (not sins) of the world.” And so, this is what judgement is. God judged us as needing a savior. And He condemned sin in our lives. This is all good because God only does what is good. Everything He does has a good purpose, even judgment and condemnation. Please, God, condemn sin in us all you want -- condemn that sinful, foolish, “old person” in us, and renew, reconcile, and restore this “new person” in us that you have created through Jesus!

Does Anyone Really Believe Eternal Punishment?

Grace is the key to this wonderful “good news” message. Do you see how this all fits together? But, admittedly, what I am giving you is a presentation emphasizing just one view over the others without presenting what the other views bring to this discussion. (See *Suggested Books on the Views of Eternal Destiny* at the end of this booklet for some of the best presentations of each view). So, you need to do your own thinking, your own praying to God, and your own soul-searching. Search the Bible too, very carefully, and work it all out in your own mind and heart. God will indeed help you. And, if when you get done, you really feel that sinners and/or unbelievers – not just the “Hitlers” of this world, but all who sin and do not believe -- will go to hell forever, and that it is truly a result of God's justice ... then believe it, live it, and proclaim it with all your heart! But may I suggest that you also really go teach it, and get out there and warn people about the coming, inevitable, never-

ending doom that they are under? How can you not do this every day ... if you really believe it? I have noticed that people who claim that they believe in eternal punishment, don't seem to be telling anybody about it. Author and Bible teacher A.W. Pink put it this way, "*It is our bounden duty to warn sinners of their fearful peril. To remain silent is criminal.*" And Ray Comfort drew this conclusion. "*The scripture speaks of the Lake of Fire (Rev. 20:14), Wailing and gnashing of teeth (Matt. 13:42), where their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched (Mark 9:44). If we really believed in Hell, we would plead with sinners.*"

There are a few out there, however, who do consistently proclaim the warning of eternal punishment by God. I've seen them wearing their "sandwich signs," warning about hell. It seems like if someone really believes that the worst possible thing imaginable – never ending agony from which no one can escape or gain relief – is what will happen to sinners and/or unbelievers, then it would be their relentless pursuit to get this message of warning out to everyone they encounter. But people who say they believe this do little or nothing to warn anyone. I'm not judging anyone, just making an observation. I have attended many funerals and Easter services, and they sometimes mention the "wrath of God" and invite people to "believe in Jesus." But where is the heart-felt warning of the coming, inevitable, terrifying doom on no uncertain terms? Shouldn't people be warned about the grave danger upon them at important events as funerals and Easter services, when people are faced with the gravity of eternal issues? I cannot help but wonder if such preachers *really* believe it. So, if you really believe this is going to happen to people, then go warn them ... seriously!

I have also noticed that many Christians joke about hell and treat it lightly on a regular basis. Some of them use "hell" as a way to express "extremeness", saying things like, "I had a hell of a good time", or "what the hell!", or maybe even "hell no!", when they answer emphatically. Can they really do this, even once, for just one second, and at the same time really believe hell is a place where countless numbers of fellow humans (including many of their loved ones and friends) will spend eternity in never-ending agony and pain, crying out for mercy, unheard by anyone but God who sustains their very existence in this terrifying state, living each moment knowing this will never ever end? Can they joke about this kind of hell and at the same time really believe it is true? I do not think so.

A pastor friend of mine recently did a two-part series on hell. I commended him for doing this because this is actually very rare in churches that claim hell to be an "absolute truth" that they hold as a non-negotiable tenant of their faith. But two things stood out to me in his sermons. First, he said that usually, on almost any other subject, he teaches in a less-formal and light-hearted manner. But on this subject

(hell), he said he must present with the utmost sobriety and intensity. So, I must commend him for his consistently honest assessment of this subject. Also, to his credit, I have never known him to joke in any way about hell.

But secondly, he said twice (once in each sermon), “I hope I am wrong about my view of hell”. I could not help but wonder if he really meant this, or if it was just his way of saying that this was “a hard topic” on which to preach. It reminded me of what I read in Francis Chan’s book *Erasing Hell* – a book that defends the traditional view of Eternal Punishment. Early on in his book he relates a story about his dying grandmother and how sick he felt about the fact that she would spend eternity in hell.

If you are excited to read this book, you have issues. Do you understand the weight of what we are about to consider? We are exploring the possibility that you and I may end up being tormented in hell. Excited would be the wrong term to use here. Necessary would be more fitting.

For some, this discussion will open up old wounds. It certainly does for me. The saddest day of my life was the day I watched my grandmother die. When that EKG monitor flatlined, I freaked out. I absolutely lost it! According to what I knew of the Bible, she was headed for a life of never-ending suffering. I thought I would go crazy. I have never cried harder, and I don’t ever want to feel like that again. Since that day, I have tried not to think about it. It has been over twenty years. Even as I write that paragraph, I feel sick. I would love to erase hell from the pages of Scripture.

How about you? Have you ever struggled with hell as I have? Do you have any parents, siblings, cousins, or friends who, based on what you have been taught, will end up in hell? What a bone-chilling thought. Until recently, whenever the idea of hell — and the idea of my loved ones possibly heading there — crossed my mind, I would brush it aside and divert my thinking to something more pleasant. While I’ve always believed in hell with my mind, I tried not to let the doctrine penetrate my heart. But I reached a point where I could no longer do this. I could no longer acknowledge hell with my lips while preventing my heart from feeling its weight. I had to figure out if the Bible actually taught the existence of a literal hell. How great would it be if it didn’t! Then I would be able to embrace my grandmother again someday.

So I decided to write a book about hell. And honestly — I’m scared to death.

Then Chan continues on and writes a book about a reality that he hates, makes him feel sick, and scares him to death! Is this what the God of the universe is all about

– the God who loves His world, made people in his own image, packed them with worth and potential but who are also sick and lost and desperately in need of a savior? Is He a God who operates on *fear* as his means of saving his lost world that he so loves – one He loves enough to come himself as Jesus to save? Or is He a God who operates on *love*, which is the most powerful force in the universe -- a love that will never (and can never) fail and must always win... simply because “God is love”?

As for me ... I was taught about Eternal Punishment all my life in a Baptist church, and then a Bible Church. Two very fine churches, by the way, and ones I am grateful to for all the great things I was taught about God (and about life) for so many years. And this continues today. But as a small child, long before I ever really had a chance to look into these things formally, I remember thinking two things about hell. First, that it made more sense to me that if God really loved the world He would save all of it and not just part of it. That is quite a conclusion for a small child of about 7 or 8! Where did I get such an idea before I was fully indoctrinated?

But secondly, I remember that I hoped (against all hope, based on what I was taught), that somehow God would *actually* save everyone and that no one would be lost. But this was always pushed aside by assurances (from those who taught me) that this could never be true. How sad to teach a young child such a horrible thing as though it were an “absolute truth,” without clear and convincing evidence of its validity. This has been the source of trauma and fear for countless children in religious families for the past 1500 years. One author, who is a theologian and a counselor, wrote a book called *Spiritual Terrorism*. In it he chronicles the damage on children, extending into adulthood, from the terror of being taught Eternal Punishment, along with the difficulty trusting a God who appears to be untrustworthy. It took me 63 years of in-depth study, soul searching, and praying to figure out that never-ending punishment (with no restoring purpose) by God is probably not true. I look back and realize that when I *thought* I believed in eternal punishment, I really did not because I never spent any time really warning people about hell in the way I would have if I really did believe it! I attended church socials and events, and gave lip service about concern for those destined for hell, but I never really did much about it. I did care – very much – and hell concerned me greatly, because I was taught it, but my instinctive doubts and my lack of actions told a different story within me.

My Own Unique Journey

But as I aged and learned more, all the way through attending seminary and growing old, I was constantly reassured that the idea of “God saving all humanity” was impossible, that the fact of most people going to hell was inevitable, and that any

other view was “heresy”. Then at age 63, I looked into all of this (using all my study skills I had obtained), and examined the Bible on this subject very carefully (as Paul exhorted the followers of Jesus to do concerning “everything”). I also read a lot of Early Church History in great detail. This took several years. But I discovered a ton of facts and information that no one at any church or seminary had ever told me. And this changed everything. To discover that my Lord, my Savior, my Heavenly Father, who loved me so, who I had walked with all my life, turned out to *not* be an “eternal tormentor of souls”, but instead a loving savior who never gives up on anyone – this was pure joy beyond anything I had ever experienced!

Today I call it my “delightful devastation.” *Delightful* because of the amazing truth about God being everything I always suspected He must be ... and more! But also *devastating* because this new-found reality went against what I had been told all my life by people I loved and trusted. It was quite a journey, and one I am still on. Oh, but the peace, joy, sense of liberation, freedom *in* Jesus and freedom *from* “religion”, new-found ability to fully trust a God who is fully trustworthy, and a closer-than-ever daily walk with my Creator who loves and saves not just me, but His whole world ... all of this was something far beyond anything I can ever express in mere words alone!

But to those who differ with me, I can only say: Go look into this and ask God if He really is one who will inflict never-ending agony and suffering on those who sin and/do not believe (no matter the reason). And ask if this is one who will fail to save some people, even though they are made in His own image and therefore must have greater value to Him than we can ever imagine. Saving people is the one thing God does that they need the most! How could God *not* save them, when He has the *desire* and *power* to do so, and people have neither of these qualities to save themselves? And if you honestly and genuinely remain in such belief, then by all means go and worship God on Sunday (or Sabbath) that you believe to be as such, praise Him and thank Him for being a God who punishes people forever for their sin and/or unbelief, and believe that he does so in order to preserve (in the only way He can), His holiness and justice. But ... if you struggle with this, as I imagine and observe that most people do, I urge you to courageously look into the other four views and see if any of these are a more accurate and better explanation of who God really is.

Many people rightly say, “there must be a consequence for sin!” Of course there is ... we die! We are all dying because our sin is literally killing us. Paul wrote to the believers in Rome that “the wages of sin is death”. He did not say that it was never-ending punishment! In fact, eternal punishment, Hades, Gehenna (translated as hell in modern translations) are never mentioned in the whole book of Romans at all! Why not? Is this not the most complete and accurate statement of what Christianity

is all about? The Bible calls this sinful state we are in “the old man” (or old person), and that person is dying, and will die ... for sure, some day! But the “new person” that we are in Jesus who came to save us -- this new person that we are will live with God forever as a person made perfect and righteous as a result of Jesus dying *with* us, *for* us, and *as* us. Through Adam, the first human being, all humanity was plunged into sin and self-destruction. But, in the same way, Jesus (our “second” and “final” Adam) brought salvation to all humanity. Paul makes this very clear in his letter to believers in Rome. “Adam brought condemnation on all people, but Jesus brought a new life to everyone.” It's the same exact principle of “representation” operating in Adam and in Jesus. This is the wonderful Good News we are told – and told so that we can hear it, believe it, and benefit from it with a new and changed life when we turn *from* our sin that destroys us and *to* our God who saved us from that sin! (See *My Unexpected Personal Journey* at the end of this booklet for more details about what I learned, how, and why.)

A Final Word on the Word “Hell”

Now, one more thing, about the word “hell.” You can easily go look this up and figure it out for yourself, but the word hell, with its modern English definition of “a place of never-ending torment,” never occurs in the Bible! ... that is, not the original languages of Hebrew (Old Testament) and Greek (New Testament). This comes as a great surprise to most people since popular versions of the Bible, like the King James version originating in 1611 AD, translates many different words as “hell.” The two major words, Hades and Gehenna are both proper nouns and should be “transliterated” instead of translated. “Transliteration” is the process of bringing words over from one language to another using the sounds of that word, thus preserving the word itself as a “proper noun” (a particular person or place). Historically, translations have practiced this honest tradition of *transliterating* Gehenna as a proper noun ... that is, until Wycliffe’s English translation in about 1400 AD. For example, the Vulgate, which is the Latin translation that dominated for over a thousand years in the middle ages, *transliterated* Gehenna, rather than to assign a newly defined word like “hell.” Before that, the writers of the New Testament also *transliterated* Gehenna in recording the words of Jesus, who exclusively used this word (except for James, who used it once). And they seemed to just be following tradition set by the Jews who translated the Hebrew Old Testament into Greek and called it the Septuagint. As far as I know Wycliffe was the first to break with this long-held tradition of *transliterating* Gehenna, when he instead translated Gehenna as “helle,” which meant “hill” or “hidden place” in his day. But even at that time in English history, our modern day word “hell” (as a place of never-ending torment) was not intended. It seems, over time, the word Gehenna morphed into our modern-day word “hell” which now has a different meaning than

it did originally (a location south of Jerusalem where God brought temporal judgment on Israel in Jeremiah's day). It also seems that this use of hell for Gehenna was done by "religion" as a way to control people through fear ... and this continues to this day! (See the *Collection of Medieval Paintings of Hell* and the *List of Modern-Day Quotes About Hell* at the end of this booklet).

Gehenna, originally in the Old Testament (specifically, by the prophet Jeremiah), was the name of a valley south of Jerusalem. It was a place in his day where bodies were burned as a result of God bringing judgment on Israel (via their enemies) for sacrificing their precious little innocent babies to false gods. By the time of Jesus, 400 years later, Gehenna became a by-word for a metaphysical place of punishment. But this idea was developed by the Jews after (and apart from) God's revelation through His prophets in the Old Testament. And God's revelation to Israel seemed to have ceased about a century after the days of Jeremiah when the last book of the Old Testament was written. But even then, only *some* Jews considered Gehenna to be a place of "never-ending" punishment. Most of them saw it as a twelve-month period of time as restoration and correction. And so, Gehenna is a historical place, it is a proper noun, and it should be *transliterated* "ge-hen-na" in any language. And what do we do today? We translate it "hell," as a place of never-ending punishment. Why? Tradition! – since about 500 AD. (See the movie *Fidler on the Roof* for the foolishness of "tradition just for tradition sake").

Hades is another word that is commonly translated as "hell", imposing on it the modern definition of never-ending torment. But Hades is simply "the grave," or "the place of the dead." Hades is the same word as "Sheol" in the Hebrew Old Testament, which occurs there some 75 times. Hades occurs only eleven times in the New Testament and is not a place of eternal torment any more than Sheol was in the Old Testament. However, one of its eleven occurrences *does* mention "torment." It is in the parable of "the rich man and Lazarus." In this parable, the rich man is in Hades and in torment. But it does not say what the *cause* of his torment is (self-inflicted, or imposed on him), or *how long* he remains in this state, nor the *purpose* for this torment (correction or pure retribution). It is strange that many will take one verse containing "Hades", ignore the other ten occurrences in the New Testament, also ignore the seventy-five equivalent occurrences of Sheol in the Old Testament, and turn it into a place of eternal torment in this verse! What's with that? This is what is known as "reading a meaning into scripture," or "imposing a meaning on the text." Our goal, instead, should be to read *out of* the Bible what is in it – no more and no less. This is a noble task but not an easy one. It takes discipline, a very high view of the Bible, and a great desire to know what is true (and not just satisfy preconceived ideas and beliefs).

So there are eleven occurrences of Hades and twelve occurrences of Gehenna in the New Testament. But keep in mind that the gospel accounts record duplicate occurrences of Jesus's use of Gehenna, so there are really only about five unique occurrences of Gehenna in the New Testament (plus one use of it by James in his letter). Additionally, except for James, Hades and Gehenna are never used in any of the New Testament letters, not anywhere from Romans through Jude. (See the chart on *Occurrences of Hades and Gehenna in the New Testament* at end of this booklet). This is a very interesting fact since it is these New Testament letters that are considered to contain the bulk of doctrinal teachings in Christianity.

As for Early Church History, in that very important period of time after Jesus and His Apostles, none of the Christian Church creeds mention eternal punishment for the first 500 years. It was the influence of Augustine, and then the Roman Catholic Church itself, that eventually added eternal punishment as an official Christian Church teaching. These are all very important facts about Hades and Gehenna, and they show very clearly how weak the evidence in favor of eternal punishment really is, in the Old Testament, the New Testament, and in Church History. You can do whatever you want with these facts, but as you well know – facts are very stubborn things! Someone has wisely said, “you have a right to your own opinions, but not to your own facts!” (See the booklet *Stubborn Facts ... About Hell*, and the four-part video series on the *History of Eternal Punishment*, both in the GILF Website Resources section at the end of this booklet).

I mention all of this because the King James Bible, along with many other modern translations, render Hades and/or Gehenna as “hell” with its modern day meaning of “a place of eternal punishment.” But this is an inaccurate translation no matter how many translators do it, and it is an act of either incompetence, dishonesty, or most likely just “imposing personal beliefs on the text” as a result of their own zeal. And Gehenna seems to be the “work horse” of such efforts to mistranslate with the purpose of supporting the teaching of eternal punishment in the Bible, when really no such teaching exists.

Historically, Gehenna represented temporal (not eternal) punishment by God, based on its use in the Old Testament. It was a place where the Jews sacrificed their babies to idols in their pagan-based attempt to appease God. But God told them that such practice was “detestable”, and that He would judge them for it. So God allowed their enemies to be the source of His judgement and to come down and literally wipe them out, (though not completely). They were killed in large numbers, enough that the bodies would need to be burned to prevent disease. This was done in the Valley of the Son of Hinnom, which became known as “Gehenna.” As Paul Harvey used to say on his radio program many years ago, “now you know ... the rest of the story!”

Gehenna was not about hell or eternal punishment (though the Jews turned it into this, in the Maccabean period). Gehenna was about temporal (not eternal) punishment by God, with a *good* purpose of demonstrating very severely what they had done terribly wrong, how their sin was destroying them, and to bring about *correction* in those who survived His judgement.

Additionally, if you read through the Old Testament carefully, you will find no reference to eternal punishment of any kind (except for a couple of verses that can be read this way in Isaiah and Daniel). God never warned anyone of eternal punishment in the Old Testament – not at the fall in the Garden of Eden, not in God’s promise to Abraham, not in His giving of the law through Moses (though all kinds of other warnings were given), not in Job with all its philosophical discussion about life, not in Proverbs with all its presentation of wisdom, not in the Psalms with all its dealings with emotions concerning life, and no warning from any of the Prophets of Israel. Even Jonah, when he went to Nineveh to warn them of their coming doom, did not bother to warn them about a much worse doom of eternal punishment. How could he not do so, if it were true? How could God *not* warn them of the greater judgment of eternal punishment, if it were true? (See the four-part video series titled *The History of Eternal Punishment* in the GILF Website Resources section at the end of this booklet for four hours of detailed information).

What Is Judgement?

However, God does act severely in His judgment. Make no mistake. But why? What is His purpose in judgement? His judgement must be an act of His love, just as everything else He does is. This is why John said “God *is* love!” Because God loves people, He makes a big deal about sin and about detestable things like sacrificing innocent little babies on an altar in attempt to appease a God who does not need or require any such appeasing. They mistakenly, and instinctively, assumed that God needed to be appeased. Sadly, this is what many Christians today believe when they look at Jesus on the cross. They believe that Jesus came to earth and made a sacrifice in our place to “appease” (satisfy) God’s wrath toward us. But that is not what Jesus did. He came into this world to be a sacrifice in order to *take away* sin from us, because sin is our enemy, not God. God is the savior who came as a human, as one of us, to take our sin upon himself. That’s very different than God “inflicting pain” on somebody (either us or Jesus), to get back at us for sinning and “robbing Him of His honor.” This idea, called Penal Substitutionary Atonement, and it came from Anselm in the middle ages around 1000 AD. (See the booklet *God’s Judgment ... Love in Action* in the GILF Website Resources section of this booklet).

Closing Thoughts

So, putting my “teacher hat” back on, there are about five different, commonly held views of what happens to people when they die. These are: Eternal Punishment, Annihilation, Abandonment, Eventual Restoration, and Immediate Restoration. All views have a Biblical basis, are humanly reasonable, and have been held by very good and honorable Christians both now and in Church History. Therefore, they should all be respected, and we should afford others the right to hold any of these views as their honest and genuine belief before God ... just as we want them to afford us the same right and privilege. However, the many facts surrounding all of this cannot be easily dismissed (though they are by many), especially the facts about Eternal Punishment. Putting my “personal opinion hat” back on, I would say that the Eternal Punishment view is clearly the *weakest* view, both Biblically and historically – especially when looking at Early Church History. The other four views have a variety of support, but there seems to be a progression from Annihilation toward Immediate Restoration that increasingly recognizes the high character, moral excellence, and expected success of God as He has revealed Himself overwhelmingly in the Bible. However, as I have said many times, such conclusions are very personal, and are a “sacred trust” between each person and God. It is good and proper to share such views with others, but we should also always do so with unconditional love for others (as God has loved us), and maintain that “higher law of love in the Spirit” that supersedes any mere doctrinal statement or teaching position authored by mere men.

[A comment from a lady in the audience (expanded by her for clarification)]:
"I was just thinking about the five different views, and for me personally the Restoration view fits best. If we understood that people are being restored, we wouldn't judge as much. Instead, we would love and feel compassion much more. As it is now, we feel like it's our responsibility to decide who has sinned greater than others. But if we all just said, 'Oh my gosh even Jeffrey Dahmer and Hitler are going to be restored', and if that's what we really believe, then we will also seek love and restoration. After all, Jesus is love and restoration! We don't want people to suffer, but we do want judgement and things to be made right! But if we knew that people will be restored, we would also put away judgment that we take on ourselves in which we feel that it's our job to judge. We would be free to not judge because God will ultimately make things right. If we realized that God's love is big enough to show each person what caused them to sin (in differing degrees), and big enough to give each person a glimpse into how their lives have impacted their fellow humans ... and if we understood that God can take something awful and turn it into a thing of beauty, then we would all experience remorse and joy and we would know we are forgiven.

A second thought I have is that if God torments people for eternity, it doesn't seem right since it makes God just as bad as those who have tortured others! Yes, Hitler and Dahmer did these terrible things, but then if God does these same things (or worse) to them for what they did (or for not knowing Him, or for rejecting Him), and as a result He torments them forever ...that doesn't seem to make Him any better! For me God is love, and I just can't see how He could punish people forever. To me it seems that He will restore all of His creation. Jesus taught us to "love our enemies", yet can He do this while He endlessly tortures His own enemies? I find this totally inconsistent and out of harmony with God's character and nature. If we are willing to let go of our man-made concepts of God, we can align all of God's attributes with Scripture."

Thank you -- all good points. However, please realize that your arguments are mostly based on reason. This is not a bad thing, and it is part of how we each figure out what is true (and what is not true) in our own mind and heart. Even God, in the Bible, invites us to "come, let us reason together" about things having to do with salvation. But keep in mind that we cannot trust reason *alone*, because our reason *can* be faulty. We must also look at everything God reveals about Himself in the whole Bible, in its full and complete context, believing all that is there... but no more than that. And, we must discipline ourselves to not impose our ideas (or someone else's) onto what is written. Plus, all that I have related about the views of those in the Early Church, those who were closest to the time, culture, language and location of Jesus and His Apostles, is also of great help. (See the booklet *The Full Restoration of All Things by God, as Believed by Early Christians - before 500 AD* in the GILF Website Resources section of this booklet).

Remember, there is almost nothing in the Old Testament Jewish writings about eternal punishment. Also, that even the Jews, who came up with this view of Gehenna as a place of torment, even they predominately believed it was a temporary period of punishment (only 12 months) for the purpose of correcting and restoring sinners. They had a kind of "purgatory" view of Gehenna, where people are purged of their sin by a God who is good and seeks the best in even the worst sinner. It's the Roman Catholic Church (which is my heritage too as a Protestant), that introduced this view of Eternal Punishment as the official view of the Christian Church, in about 500 AD. (See the *Restoration View in the Early Christian Church* at the end of this booklet).

About the Author/Speaker

Carl Jones is a retired Sr. Technical Writer living in Grass Valley, California. Prior to this he was a Hardware/Software Engineer for thirty years, He has been married 45 years to the only true love of his life. He has two adult children and one beautiful grand-daughter, all of whom he loves more than life itself.

Carl earned a Bachelor of Science Degree in Electrical Engineering (1979) at California State University in Sacramento, California. He earned a California Community College Life Teaching Credential in 1984 and has taught technology classes at two California colleges. He also graduated from Dallas Theological Seminary with a Certificate of Graduate Studies in 2010. Carl has studied in the Masters of History program at American Public University in W. Virginia.

Carl is an Army veteran and served in Viet Nam in 1970. He has lived in Sacramento, CA; Eatontown NJ; Grand Rapids, MI; Dallas, TX; Beaverton, OR; and Nevada City, CA. He has made two trips to China (Hong Kong, Shenzhen, Shanghai and Beijing); one trip to Bangkok, Thailand; and one trip to England (Loughborough and London).

Carl also plays music publicly, and in about a dozen assisted living centers in Grass Valley.

Additional Resources

Books on Views of Eternal Destiny

The Creeds of the Christian Church

Mediterranean Maps

“The *Plan*” (The Redemption of Mankind)

Some Historical Paintings of Hell

List of Modern-Day Quotes About Hell

Occurrences of Hades and Gehenna in the New Testament

My Unexpected Personal Journey

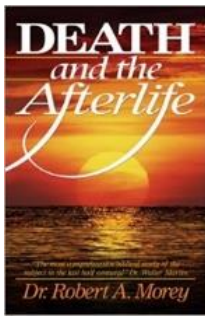
Restoration View in the Early Christian Church

GILF Website Resources

Books on Views of Eternal Destiny

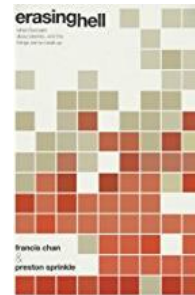
Below is a list of books that support the various views of Eternal Destiny. There are many books available, and these books listed below are just the ones I have read and found to represent each view completely and clearly. However, it is suggested that you do your own search for good books on this subject.

Eternal Punishment



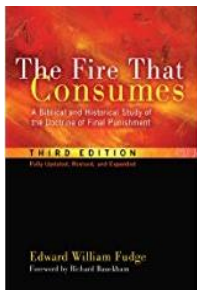
Death and the Afterlife by Robert Morey (1984) is a classic and standard defense of the Eternal Punishment view. It is a clear and complete presentation.

Erasing Hell by Francis Chan (2011) is a popular defense of the Eternal Punishment view. It is a less presentation of this view than Morey's book.



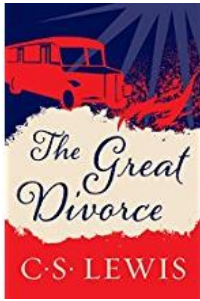
and recent complete

Annihilation



The Fire that Consumes by Edward William Fudge (2011) is an excellent and complete presentation of the Annihilation view. One of the best features of this book is Fudge's research into the views of the Early Church Fathers.

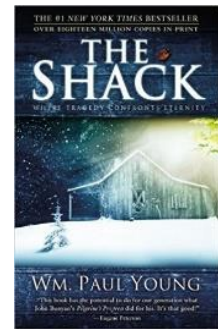
Abandonment



The Great Divorce by C.S. Lewis (1945) is a fictional story about a bus ride from hell to heaven. In it Lewis portrays people in hell as those who prefer it over heaven and return to hell to move out into darkness, forever abandoned by God.

Full Restoration

The Shack by Paul Young (2007) is perhaps the best presentation of the Full Restoration view. Though it is a fictional work, it provides (in story form) the theology predominant among Christians in the Early Church. This book has been extremely successful because it connects with regular people and conveys a message of hope in a God who does not fail to save His world that He created and so loves.



Simply Good News by N.T. Wright (2015) is an excellent presentation of God's plan to save His world and how he brought salvation about through Jesus as savior of the world. I highly recommend this book. It is a clear, easy-to-read book by one of the best Biblical scholars of our day!

The Creeds of the Christian Church

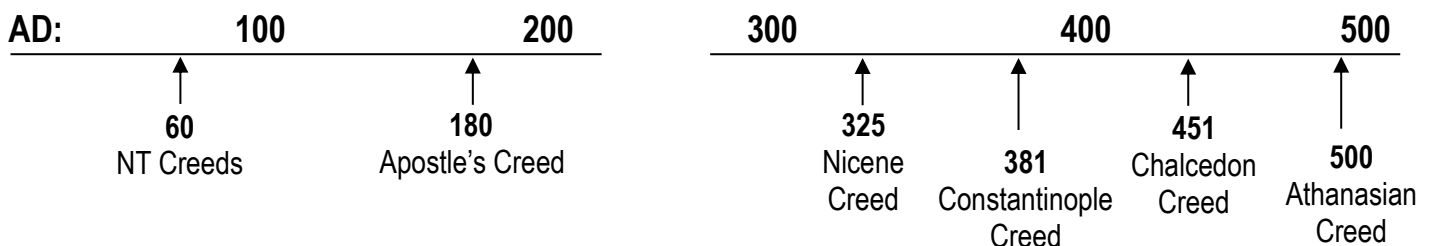
*(Demonstrating that “Eternal Punishment”
was not an officially held belief until 500 AD)*

Creeds are statements of faith describing what is officially held by a religion. Christianity has always had creeds in some form since its beginning in the New Testament (the writings by the followers of Jesus after his death and resurrection). The earliest and simplest NT creeds are found in the writings of the apostle Paul.

The early church that emerged after the era of the apostles of Jesus, also had creeds. The now famous *Apostle’s Creed* (The Old Roman Creed) is the earliest and best known. But it was not until after the *Edict of Milan* by Constantine (declaring Christianity to no longer be illegal) that the Christian Church (the Eastern and Western expressions, together) began to hold official Councils. In these councils, official creeds for the whole church were developed. There were seven great Councils held during the first millennium, but only the first four are presented here for the purpose of establishing at what point *Eternal Punishment*, was included in a creed.

The first four councils produced 3 creeds: Nicene, Constantinople, and Chalcedon (the Council at Ephesus did not produce a creed). None of these creeds included eternal punishment as a belief. It was not until 500 AD, in the Athanasian Creed that *Eternal Punishment* was introduced. This creed, however, was not a result of any of the seven great Councils, it was written some 100 years after Athanasius, and therefore not authored by him. It is often referred to as the “pseudo-Athanasian Creed”. So, to what degree it was considered “official’ by the church is in question. However, it has been adopted by many Christian organizations throughout church history.

The time chart below shows the creeds from these four earliest Councils, plus the Athenasian Creed, and the dates they were produced.



All of these Christian Church creeds are provided below in their fullness. In order to make it easy to confirm the introduction of eternal punishment into the creeds, all items dealing with salvation or eschatology (beliefs about the eternal state) are displayed in underlining below.

New Testament Creeds (55 AD)

1 Cor. 8:6: For us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist.

1 Cor. 15:3-7: I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. Then he appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles.

1 Tim. 3:16: Great indeed, we confess, is the mystery of our religion: He was manifested in the flesh, vindicated in the Spirit, seen by angels, preached among the nations, believed on in the world, taken up in glory.

Apostle's Creed (180 AD)

I believe in God the Father who is almighty, Maker of heaven and earth. I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only begotten Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, and suffered under Pontius Pilate. He was crucified, dead and buried, descended into hell and on the third day he rose again from the dead. He ascended into heaven, and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty. From there he will come to judge the living and the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy universal church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and in life everlasting.

Nicene Creed (325 AD)

We believe in one God, the Father Almighty, the maker of heaven and earth, of things visible and invisible. And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the begotten of God the Father, the Only-begotten, that is of the essence of the Father. God of God, Light of Light, true God of true God, begotten and not made; of the very same nature of the Father, by Whom all things came into being, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible. Who for us humanity and for our salvation came down from heaven,

was incarnate, was made human, was born perfectly of the holy virgin Mary by the Holy Spirit. By whom He took body, soul, and mind, and everything that is in man, truly and not in semblance. He suffered, was crucified, was buried, rose again on the third day, ascended into heaven with the same body, [and] sat at the right hand of the Father. He is to come with the same body and with the glory of the Father, to judge the living and the dead; of His kingdom there is no end. We believe in the Holy Spirit, in the uncreated and the perfect; Who spoke through the Law, prophets, and Gospels; Who came down upon the Jordan, preached through the apostles, and lived in the saints. We believe also in only one, universal, apostolic, and holy church; in one baptism in repentance, for the remission and forgiveness of sins; and in the resurrection of the dead, in the everlasting judgement of souls and bodies, and the Kingdom of Heaven and in the everlasting* life.*

* The Greek word translated as “everlasting” is the word AIONIOS, which was also commonly used in the New Testament and means “age-long” or “indefinite time period”, and most likely “judgement in the age to come” was the intended meaning.

Constantinople Creed (381 AD)

We believe in one God, the Father, the Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all that is, seen and unseen. And in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, of one being with the Father. Through him all things were made. For us, humans, and for our salvation, he came down from heaven, was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the virgin Mary, and became fully human. For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate. He suffered death and was buried. He rose again on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures. He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and his kingdom will have no end. And in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father, who in unity with the Father and the Son is worshiped and glorified, who has spoken through the prophets. And in one holy universal and apostolic Church. We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins. We look for the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come. Amen.

Chalcedon Creed (451 AD)

We, then, following the holy Fathers, all with one consent, teach men to confess one and the same Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, the same perfect in Godhead and also perfect in manhood; truly God and truly man, of a reasonable [rational] soul and body; consubstantial [co-essential] with the Father according to the Godhead, and consubstantial with us according to the Manhood; in all things like unto us, without sin; begotten before all ages of the Father according to the Godhead, and in these

latter days, for us and for our salvation, born of the Virgin Mary, the Mother of God, according to the Manhood; one and the same Christ, Son, Lord, only begotten, to be acknowledged in two natures, inconfusedly, unchangeably, indivisibly, inseparably; the distinction of natures being by no means taken away by the union, but rather the property of each nature being preserved, and concurring in one Person and one Subsistence, not parted or divided into two persons, but one and the same Son, and only begotten, God the Word, the Lord Jesus Christ; as the prophets from the beginning [have declared] concerning Him, and the Lord Jesus Christ Himself has taught us, and the Creed of the holy Fathers has handed down to us.

Athanasian Creed (AD 500)

Whosoever will be saved, before all things it is necessary that he hold the catholic faith. Which faith except every one do keep whole and undefiled; without doubt he shall perish everlastingly. And the catholic faith is this: That we worship one God in Trinity, and Trinity in Unity; Neither confounding the Persons; nor dividing the Essence. For there is one Person of the Father; another of the Son; and another of the Holy Ghost. But the Godhead of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, is all one; the Glory equal, the Majesty coeternal. Such as the Father is; such is the Son; and such is the Holy Ghost. The Father uncreated; the Son uncreated; and the Holy Ghost uncreated. The Father unlimited; the Son unlimited; and the Holy Ghost unlimited. The Father eternal; the Son eternal; and the Holy Ghost eternal. And yet they are not three eternal; but one eternal. As also there are not three uncreated; nor three infinites, but one uncreated; and one infinite. So likewise the Father is Almighty; the Son Almighty; and the Holy Ghost Almighty. And yet they are not three Almighties; but one Almighty. So the Father is God; the Son is God; and the Holy Ghost is God. And yet they are not three Gods; but one God. So likewise the Father is Lord; the Son Lord; and the Holy Ghost Lord. And yet not three Lords; but one Lord. For like as we are compelled by the Christian verity; to acknowledge every Person by himself to be God and Lord; So are we forbidden by the catholic religion; to say, There are three Gods, or three Lords. The Father is made of none; neither created, nor begotten. The Son is of the Father alone; not made, nor created; but begotten. The Holy Ghost is of the Father and of the Son; neither made, nor created, nor begotten; but proceeding. So there is one Father, not three Fathers; one Son, not three Sons; one Holy Ghost, not three Holy Ghosts. And in this Trinity none is before, or after another; none is greater, or less than another. But the whole three Persons are coeternal, and coequal. So that in all things, as aforesaid; the Unity in Trinity, and the Trinity in Unity, is to be worshipped. He therefore that will be saved, let him thus think of the Trinity. Furthermore, it is necessary to everlasting salvation; that he also believe faithfully the Incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ. For the right Faith is, that we believe and confess; that our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is

God and Man; God, of the Substance [Essence] of the Father; begotten before the worlds; and Man, of the Substance [Essence] of his Mother, born in the world. Perfect God; and perfect Man, of a reasonable soul and human flesh subsisting. Equal to the Father, as touching his Godhead; and inferior to the Father as touching his Manhood. Who although he is God and Man; yet he is not two, but one Christ. One; not by conversion of the Godhead into flesh; but by assumption of the Manhood into God. One altogether; not by confusion of Substance [Essence]; but by unity of Person. For as the reasonable soul and flesh is one man; so God and Man is one Christ; Who suffered for our salvation; descended into hell; rose again the third day from the dead. He ascended into heaven, he sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty, from whence he will come to judge the living and the dead. At whose coming all men will rise again with their bodies; And shall give account for their own works. And they that have done good shall go into life everlasting; and they that have done evil, into everlasting fire. This is the catholic faith; which except a man believe truly and firmly, he cannot be saved.

Several observations are in order. First, the creeds of the Christian church became larger and more speculative in nature over the course of time in church history. The Apostle's Creed seems to be taken from creed-like statements in the New Testament writings of the Apostles of Jesus. The Nicene Creed is an expansion of the Apostle's Creed, with new items of belief and more detailed explanations (speculations) of existing beliefs. The Athanasian Creed was a much greater expansion with new speculations added, including eternal punishment. This was over 400 years after time of Jesus and his Apostles, and was a time in which the Roman Catholic (Western) Church was emerging into its period of monstrous brutality over people under Papal Authority. During these middle ages, eternal punishment was used as a weapon to control people through fear. Eternal Punishment is never found in the Old Testament, New Testament, or in the Early Christian Church which predominately believed God would eventually reconcile all things in heaven and earth to himself, in a re-creation whereby he "fills all in all" (completely fills all beings) and "brings everything in subjection to himself".

Mediterranean Maps

Below are two maps of the Mediterranean region. One is the locations of the destinations of the New Testament Letters. The other is a map of the locations of the seven churches in the book of Revelation. Please notice that all churches, except the church at Rome, are located in the eastern part of the Mediterranean region. In this region the language and culture is predominately Greek, as opposed to the Latin language and culture of the western region in which the church of Rome was located.

Map of the Locations of the Destinations of the New Testament Letters:



Map of the Locations of the Seven Churches in the book of Revelation:



The Plan

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

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

The God of the Plan

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

People and Their Need

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

God’s Rescue of People

After failing miserably in the exercise of our freedom, God himself came into the world he created as a fellow human being. He allowed himself to be born in a horse-feeding tray and lived a life as a humble carpenter named Jesus. But his purpose in becoming a fellow human being was to fully join us in our suffering and misery, and to die *with* us. But he also died *for* us, and even died *as* us, taking the penalty of sin (death) on himself. He came into this world so that all the trouble that happens to us, also happens to him. But in doing so, what happens to him also happens to us!

So when he conquered death by raising from the dead, he brought a new and everlasting life to everyone. This is the wonderful gift that he gave to humanity that he so loves -- a free gift that is unearned by us in any manner of behavior or belief. He saved us, all of us, simply because he loves us!

How People Respond

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

God’s Completion of His Plan

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

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

saved from what God will do to us because of our sin, we need to be saved from what sin will do to us because of God who loves us and saves us.

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

Some Historical Paintings of Hell

The paintings shown below are just a fraction of what was produced in the Middle Ages, by the Christian Church and artists of that era. They demonstrate how graphic and terrifying the society's view of hell had become from the influence of the Roman Catholic Church. If hell is real, and is a place like this, then why do we not hang such paintings in our churches today who claim they believe in Eternal Punishment by God? Would this not help to warn people – especially children – of the horror that they face if they do not believe or behave correctly? But we do not do this! Why? Perhaps we really do not believe it.

The Last Judgement: Hell, Fra Angelico, (1431):



Medieval image of hell in the Hortus deliciarum of Herrad of Landsberg (1180):



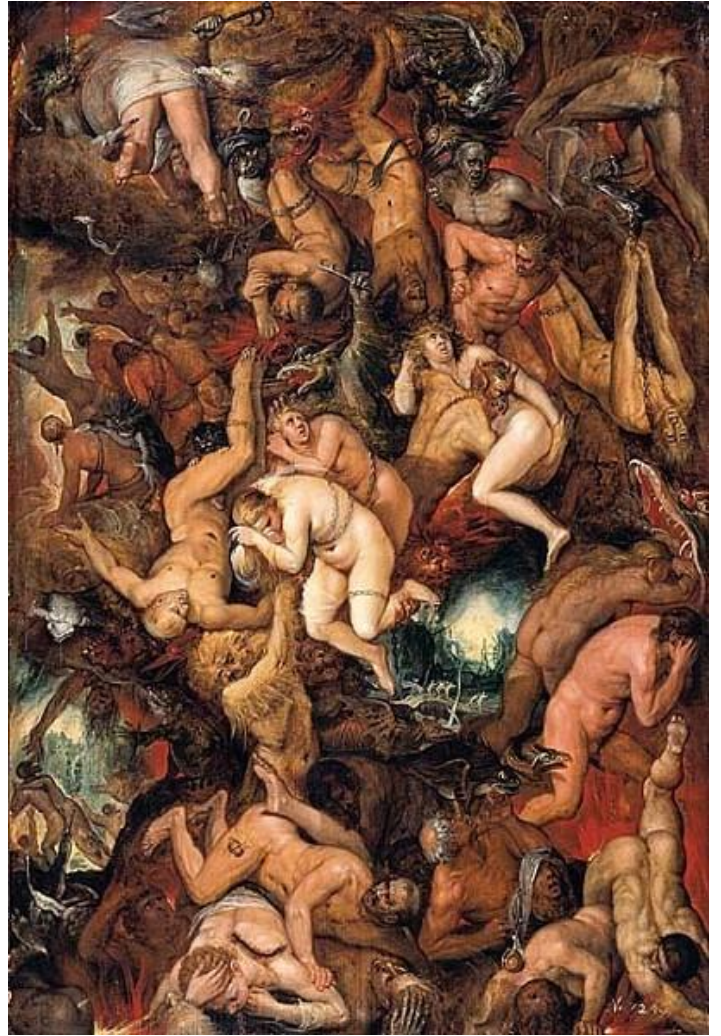
Hell, Coppo di Marcovaldo, Mosaic, Baptistry, Florence (1274):



The Hell, Herri met de Bles (1545):



The Damned being cast into Hell, Frans Francken the Younger (1605):



Hellmouth close-up from "The Hours of Catherine of Cleves (1440):



List of Modern-Day Quotes About Hell

Listed below are some quotes from popular contemporary theologians, Bible teachers, and pastors. Notice how graphic and detailed their descriptions are of hell. Where did such extreme ideas come from? We find nothing of this kind detailed horror in the Old Testament, New Testament, nor in the majority of Early Church Fathers (with a few exceptions). Looking carefully at the history of the Christian Church, going all the way back to the time of Jesus and His Apostles, it seems rather obvious that this kind of view of hell came from the Western/Latin Roman Catholic Church that emerged in about 500 AD.

Hades a place of torment and agony ... The judgment and Hell will be more tolerable for some than for others ... The fact that Hell will not be the same for everybody in no way implies that it will be a good place for anybody. People in Hell will be separated from God and all that is good forever. As much as I dislike the idea, I do believe that the lake of fire (hell) is a real, literal place.

-- **Charles Stanley**

I know of no one who has overstated the terror of hell ... we are meant to tremble and feel dread. We are meant to recoil from the reality. Not by denying it, but by fleeing from it into the arms of Jesus who died to save us from it. -- **John Piper**

Hell is a place of unrelieved torment and horrible misery ... a place of a impenetrable darkness ... a place of fire ... a place of unrelieved torment for both body and soul. Hell will be horrible for everybody there, but some people will suffer more than others. -- **John MacArthur**

The abyss is literally a shaft. Somewhere upon the surface of the earth there is a shaft. The entrance to this shaft leads down into the heart of the earth where Hades exists. Hades is often translated "hell" in the Bible. Hell does exist. It is in the center of the earth. -- **Chuck Smith**

Hell is going to be eternity filled with grief and pain, and unquenchable fire, according to the Bible. -- **Franklin Graham**

Hell is an experience of intense anguish ... a sense of loneliness ... There is the realization that this separation is permanent ... Thus, hopelessness comes over the individual. -- **Millard J. Erickson**

For hell is viewed by our Lord Jesus Christ not as "made for man," but as "made for the devil and his angels." Humans as such were made for fellowship with God and for eternal glory. That such creatures should be banished forever into the outer darkness with no escape exit, should fill us with a sense of horror.

-- Sinclair B. Ferguson

The lost will be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord (2 Thess. 1:9). No one lives without God ... He gives you every breath you take. His kindness surrounds ... He makes the sun rise on both the evil and the good and sends rain on the unjust as well as the just (Matt. 5:45). He gives you beauty of a summer evening, the coolness of a refreshing breeze ... He delights you with the taste of fresh crusty bread or the juice of a ripe peach. Perhaps you have experienced the ecstasy of love. These are God's gifts ... All of these are blessings are from God ... But in hell all of this will be taken from you ... all the dignity that you now have as an image bearer of God will be stripped from you ... The wicked will burn with fire but they will not be consumed.

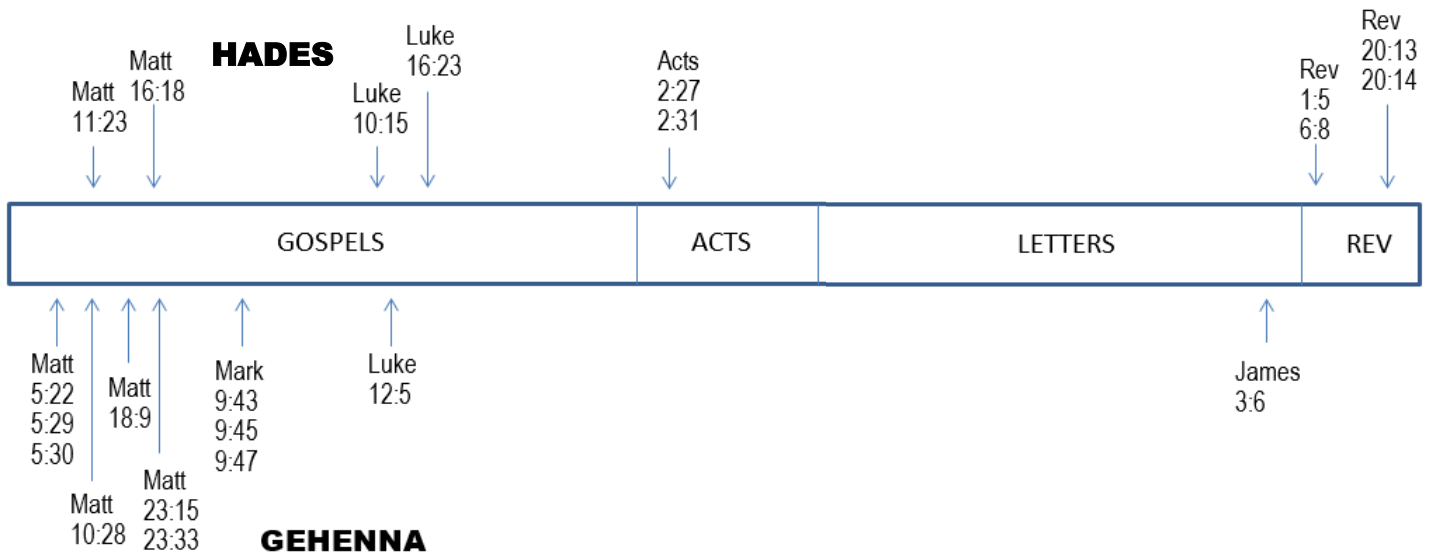
-- Edward Donnelly

Indeed, all other senses will be affected too: the ear with hideous noises, shrieks and yells from fellow damned sinners; the eye with fearful, ghastly, and horrible spectacles; the smell with suffocating odors and nasty stench, worse than that of carrion or that which comes out of an open sepulcher. Your bodies shall be tormented in every part in the flames of hellfire ... the pains of hell fire will be a thousand times more horrible and tormenting. Your bodies cannot now endure much pain without expiring ... but hereafter God will strengthen your bodies to endure; they shall have ... quicker sense and so much more capacity for pain ... Your bodies shall roll and tumble in flames, and burn with horrible pain and yet never be consumed ... I believe that the space of one quarter of an hour in hell will seem longer to the damned than a whole life of misery in this world.

-- Thomas Vincent

Consider for a moment the companions who will share Hell with those who stubbornly resist God's mercy to the very end -- Hitler, Stalin, plus every other murderer and torturer in history Consider for one horrible moment what a normal citizen would experience if they were condemned to live in the worst penitentiary in North America, totally at the mercy of the Wicked, perverted prisoners. Imagine that there were no guards or cell bars to protect you from the rage and cruelty of the merciless criminals who shared your jail ... However, those who reject the salvation of Jesus Christ to the very end of their lives will face a situation far more horrible than the one suggested. – Grant Jeffrey

Occurrences of Hades and Gehenna in the New Testament

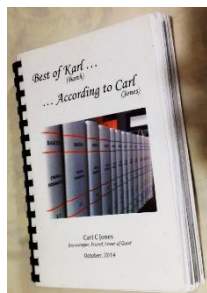


Observations:

1. Hades is never used in any of the NT letters where most Christian doctrine is found.
2. Hades is the Greek word for the Hebrew word Sheol, found in the Old Testament some 75 times, and means “the grave”
3. Hades is never presented as a place of eternal punishment.
4. Gehenna is only used by Jesus, (except once by James).
5. Jesus only mentions Gehenna five unique times on just four occasions (when considering duplicate occurrences in the three synoptic gospels).
6. Jesus never identifies Gehenna as a place of eternal punishment.
7. Over half of the occurrences of Gehenna are in Matthew, a gospel written for Jewish people.
8. Gehenna is never used by John, Paul, Peter, Jude, or the Author of Hebrews, nor is it used in Acts or the book of Revelation.

My Unexpected Personal Journey

Below is the *Introduction* to a booklet I put together a few years ago titled “Best of Karl ... According to Carl”. It is a collection of the very best pages that I found when I read through Karl Barth’s massive 14 volume *Church Dogmatics*. In it I describe my unexpected personal journey out of believing in Eternal Punishment and into Full Reconciliation of humanity by God as a result of his infinite love and grace.



Introduction

Karl Barth (pronounced “bart”) has been proclaimed by many to be the most influential theologian of the 20th century. There is no real way to verify or measure this since it is a purely subjective conclusion. But the fact that this has been legitimately claimed by some of his peers, perhaps, places him in the running. But, really, what difference does it make? Even if this is true it certainly does not automatically render him correct in what he believed and wrote. However, it seems reasonable that he should be given at least a fair reading, and his ideas about God given honest consideration.

This is what I did. But, to be perfectly honest, I originally bought Barth’s massive fourteen-volume *Church Dogmatics* set because it was on sale at an incredible price of \$119, and because it would look great on my book shelf (along with my other twelve *Systematic Theology* sets that I acquired over the past 30 years). I also thought I might actually take a look at it someday, in spite of the fact that I knew it was “off-base” and held some kind of “liberal, neo-orthodox” position.

When I received Barth in multiple boxes, I unpacked it, broke-in each individual volume (as I do all new books), and did a little browsing around in it. My first impression was that it was not very well organized and what little I read was not making a whole lot of sense. But, of course, that was consistent with what I was expecting and, perhaps, what I was looking for in it.

Time went by – oh, maybe a year or so. I got bored one day with my other books and decided to take a more serious look at Barth. After reading twelve other *Systematic Theologies* over the past 30 years, I was pretty good at sizing-up where

a new one would rightly be placed on the positional spectrum (from very Calvinistic - like Shedd, to very Arminian - like Finney). As I examined Barth's fourteen volumes (and this was no small task) I found that I was unable to place Barth anywhere on the known spectrum. He seemed to be more "Reformed" than I expected, yet where was his section on hell, wrath, and judgment? Hmmmmm... he just did not fit anywhere. Also, his order of topics did not flow in the usual sequence of: The Bible, Nature of God, Man and The Fall, The work of Christ, Salvation, Work of the Holy Spirit, the Church, and Future things. (I have not used big theological terms here in order to spare my hopefully-engaged normal readers). And where the heck was Eschatology (Future things)? Totally missing!

Well, after many hours spent, over about a week's time, becoming more confused about Barth than informed, I set him aside, back on the shelf where the fourteen volumes looked great in their massively wide posture. But ... I still did not know where to place Barth on the grand spectrum of Systematic Theologies. This bothered me.

About a year later a friend of mine began pestering me about "inclusion" and "universalism". Having been very well-trained by my excellent foundational training at Dallas Seminary (followed by 30 years of reading twelve systematic theologies), I was well-equipped to help my friend get back into the real world and, at least, find a place for him on the great spectrum of theological diversity. We had many interesting emails and discussions. Wanting him to have some kind of solid theological basis for his beliefs, I did my best to steer him toward one of the great twelve Systems I had so carefully studied in the past.

I started with the less-than-extreme-Calvinistic (but very organized) Berkoff. When that did not take, I then moved to Chafer (first President of Dallas Seminary) who broke with Calvinism in many places. Plus, Chafer was terrific on grace, which my friend was "especially fond of". But upon further failure to make a match, I tried Millard Erikson. Much flexibility there! Exasperated, I thought maybe "good old Barth" -- the guy who is just a dollar short of full liberalism -- is what he needs. Besides, Barth appeared to be some kind of universalist like my friend had become, so maybe there was hope. I was determined to find my friend a systematic theology he could claim as his own. But I have a strict policy of not recommending books I have not read myself. (Got burned doing that a long time ago!) So, I dug into Barth.

Now you need to understand that this was no small undertaking. In fact, at four-million words, I knew I would not be able to read all of it. At that enormous size, Barth was more than twice the size of my next largest Systematic Theology -- Chafer -- who wrote eight volumes. But I figured that in a reasonable amount of time I

could know what Barth believed and could then recommend it to my friend with a clear conscience, and solve my problem of getting him locked into at least a “respectable” theological basis.

I started reading through Barth around May of 2013. I did some reading almost every day, all through summer, into early fall. I spent from one to three hours per day, sometime more, often on weekends. I estimate that I spent about 175 hours reading Barth. It came out to about a fourth of Barth’s massive work – about a million words. At times I browsed carefully, but also often read with great focus (as indicated by the underlining and markings in these photocopy reproductions of my favorite sections).

Like a good boy, I started at the beginning. That did not last long. It was kind of like deciding to read through the Bible and giving up in Leviticus. Barth’s first volume is perhaps the most difficult (as I now look back). There he deals with the Word of God and the Knowledge of God (as do most other systematic theologies). But it was somewhat esoteric and a little convoluted.

After deciding to not start from the beginning, I did the opposite and jumped to the last of his four major divisions. Barth divides his work into: The Word (Revelation), God (Theology Proper), Creation (Providence, Man, etc.), and Reconciliation (Salvation). So into “Reconciliation” I went. I figured this is where Barth’s rubber would meet the road. But as I read, it made little sense to me. He was clearly talking about grace and Jesus (a lot!), but what did he really mean by it? Something was missing. I figured it must be something after Revelation (part 1), but before Reconciliation (part 4). So I dug into Volume 2 on Election. Here I found the key to understanding Barth that I needed.

I was amazed at what I read – partly because I could finally understand him (well, mostly), but also because of what he was saying. Before I go into what he was saying about election, let me tell you what I learned about reading Barth.

One thing I learned is that, like reading anyone’s work, you have to read long enough to get a feel for how that person thinks. There is really no shortcut for this. You just have to spend enough time reading and trying to understand. For me, it may have been my failed attempts in Revelation and Reconciliation that let me “pay my dues” in achieving this needed familiarization

The other key to understanding Barth (and you will hear this from most anyone who tries to explain his work) is that he is very repetitive. But this is not typical repetition, nor is it meaningless or without purpose. Barth repeats information in a kind of

“circular but progressive” manner. He is constantly restating topics in different ways, but he also weaves older information into newer as he presents it. This is, perhaps, the great genius of how Barth writes. It is not normal or typical, and most writers would end up with meaningless repetition that would result in no readers at all. But for Barth it is a thing of beauty. Really! I was amazed as I read. What an intricate masterpiece of interconnected thought. Never have I read anything like it. I think it is just the way his mind works. I really do not think anyone (including Barth) could plan this out deliberately as an organized outline. Sometimes I got bogged down and wanted to quit, then, at about the breaking point, the text moved on to the next set of ideas and I had understood far beyond what I would have in normal (linear-logical) presentation.

Now on to what Barth has to say about election. He presented election in three aspects: The election of Jesus, the election of Israel, and the election of the individual. And, sure enough, when I did my very thorough study of salvation in the New Testament, (after I finished my reading of Barth), I found that this three-fold view of election was very good and helpful. But of the three, the election of Jesus was the most remarkable to me. Barth’s position is that God has chosen every person by choosing Jesus as the man who represented the whole human race. This is why, repeatedly, we are told that we are “chosen in Christ” (as seen in Ephesians 1). This insures that salvation is completely by grace and not of any kind of works – not even by the work of faith that we exercise in response to what God has done for us in Christ.

Once I understood how Barth views election (and there is much more that could be said about this), I was better equipped to understand what he believed about Reconciliation. Obviously, it follows that if God has elected all people in Jesus (who was their sole representative), then God has also completely reconciled all people to himself in Christ. In Colossians Paul said that “God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself”. There is no sense of potentiality in this statement, only of actuality. God actually and completely reconciled the world to himself in Christ. From His perspective, it was finished and complete.

Faith then, for Barth, is a persons’ unmerited response to what God has already fully and completely done for him/her. When a person believes, he/she is only acknowledging what has already been done, and the act of believing earns nothing and cannot improve in any way God’s already established reconciliation of that person in Christ. Belief only changes the heart and mind of a person toward God, it does not change or improve God’s heart and mind toward the believer. Barth further establishes (in his section on faith) that faith is the realization that we can be right with God only and completely by grace, and that even the act of faith itself earns us

nothing. Barth's section on faith was revolutionary for me and it rang true with salvation by grace alone, apart from all works whatsoever.

As I read through Barth, I remember thinking three things. First, that Barth spends more time on the person of Jesus and grace than anyone I had read in the past. This included Chafer, who is very big on grace. I told a friend (who I attended Dallas Seminary with) that when it came to grace, Barth was "Chafer on steroids". Unfortunately he was a little offended, so I offered this consolation: "Too many steroids can cause problems!" Hope it helped.

The second thing I noticed when I was reading Barth, was that if he was right in what he believed it would indeed be the best news I, or anyone else, could ever hear: that God was big enough, loving enough, and gracious enough to save the whole world – save all who were made in his image and bear his very likeness.

But third, good as it sounded, I just did not believe this. Everything I had studied over the past 30 years told me that this could not be true, and so I continued to not believe Barth.

However, I then had to turn to Scripture (and Scripture alone) to find out if there was any possibility that Barth (and my friend) were right to any degree whatsoever. I originally started reading Barth so I could legitimately recommend it to my friend - - so he would have at least something to hang his theological hat on. But after my 175 hours of reading over about five months, my perspective had surprisingly changed. It was a very strange experience – one I had not experienced before. I was absolutely thrilled at the prospect that God could be much bigger and more gracious than I had ever imagined (or was ever allowed to imagine by past studies), and yet I was very skeptical that this could really be true. I certainly was not about to trust Barth, nor was I going to blindly trust my friend. But I was willing to trust what God says in His Word. I needed to see it in Scripture – not just proof texts, but a thorough, in-context understanding that is based on the best hermeneutics, knowledge of Greek, and inductive study techniques. But more importantly, I needed to ask God to show me the truth as I sought with an open a heart and mind -- one as open as I could possibly have.

And this is what I did. I set out to examine all of the passages in the New Testament on salvation and related subjects. I read through the New Testament three times, marking every passage that had to do with these five subjects:

1. Election, predestination, choosing, calling, etc.

2. Atonement, propitiation, redeeming, etc.
3. Faith, believing, receiving, regeneration, etc.
4. Judgment, condemnation, punishment, etc.
5. Reconciliation, restoration, glorification, etc.

I found well over 500 passages that I categorized, analyzed, compared, listed, and drew conclusions about. My goal was to paint a picture (metaphorically) of each of the five subjects and try to understand (based on scripture alone) what God was saying. This took a long time and I spent another several hundred hours doing this well into spring of 2014. When I was done, I came to some amazing conclusions. And these conclusions (for me anyway) were compelling. In fact, I was overwhelmed by the force of scripture as it presented itself in its full context.

For example, my new study of the atonement of Christ showed me clearly that whatever Jesus did on the cross, he did it for all people equally. But I equally concluded that no matter who Jesus died for, what he did was actual (not potential), final, and complete. He actually became sin itself on the cross, took away the sin of the world, and was indeed the actual savior of all humanity (not just a potential savior). Once I wedded these two truths, it was “game over” in my mind concerning the complete salvation of all humanity as God’s ultimate plan and successful execution. I now refer to this as my “delightful devastation”.

Barth did not convince me of how infinitely great God’s love and grace are, and that He saved the human race in its entirety – scripture did. What Barth did for me was to “give me permission” (so to speak) to seriously consider what I had been told, by every systematic theology in the past, could not be true. At that point it was just a matter of going back into scripture and reading it honestly for myself, and not reading it exclusively through the view that I had always assumed to be true in the past. For this I will always be thankful to my, now, good friend, Karl Barth. He is one of the first people I will look up after the resurrection, to thank him for not only helping me, but for standing up to both those who claimed God was dead, and to those who did not fully reform their thinking back past Augustine to the early church fathers who learned directly from the apostles.

It is my sincere hope that the sections that I have deemed “the best of Karl” will be as encouraging to you about Jesus and grace as they were to me.

Restoration View in the Early Christian Church

The following thirty-one statements are the *Summary of Conclusions* at the end of J.W. Hanson's book titled *Universalism: The Prevailing Doctrine of the Christian Church During Its First Five Hundred Years*. After looking into all of Hanson's thirty-one points, and finding them to be an accurate representation of Early Church History, I thought this list might prove itself to be very helpful for anyone wanting an overview of Universalism in the Early Church.

In order to make Hanson's conclusions easier to read and understand (since he wrote in the late 1800's), I took the liberty of paraphrasing what he wrote. But I tried to preserve his original wording and thoughts as much as possible. Please consult Hanson's original work for the exact wording. It is available as a free download online at:

<http://www.tentmaker.org/books/Prevailing.html#304>.

A few of the many points established previously in this book are summarized here:

(1) During the First Century the primitive Christians did not dwell on matters of eschatology, but devoted their attention to apologetics; they were chiefly anxious to establish the fact of Christ's Second Coming, and of its blessings to the world. It is possible that the subject of eternal destiny was left as an open issue in the Early Christian Church until Paganism and Judaism introduced erroneous ideas. But then, when the New Testament doctrine of the apokatastasis was asserted, universal restoration became an accepted belief as stated later by Clement and Origen in A.D. 180-230.

(2) The Catacombs give us the views of the unlearned early Christians. Not a syllable is found hinting at the horrors of Augustinianism (eternal punishment), but instead the inscription on every monument harmonizes with the Universalism of the early fathers.

(3) Clement of Alexandria declared that all punishment, however severe, has a purifying purpose, and that even the "torments of the damned" are a curing action by God. Origen explains that even Gehenna is a limited and curing kind of punishment. Origen was in agreement with all the other ancient Universalists, declaring that "aionion punishment", is consistent with universal salvation. Therefore, the fact that other primitive Christians were less clear as to their

meaning of this term (aionian punishment), does not prove that they believed that God's punishment was never-ending.

(4) Like our Lord and his Apostles, the Early Christians avoided words used by Pagans and Jews to define their view of never-ending punishment ("aidios" and "adialeipton timoria"). Instead, these Early Christians called punishment "kolasis aionios" which means discipline and chastisement of indefinite, but limited duration.

(5) The early Christians taught that Christ preached the Gospel to the dead, and that it was for that purpose that he descended into Hades. Many held that he released all who were in Hades when he went there. This shows that repentance beyond the grave and perpetual probation was accepted in those early days of the Christian Church, which by far precludes our modern-day error that the soul's destiny is decided upon death.

(6) Prayers for the dead were universal in the early church, which would be absurd if the condition of those who die is unalterably fixed at the grave.

(7) Some early Christian leaders used false threats of eternal punishment to keep the common people in check, and believed that the actual truth should be held and understood by only a "select few" who have special knowledge. And so, there is no doubt that many who seemed to teach endless punishment, really held the broader view of universalism, and only preached terrors of eternal damnation as a type of "crowd control".

(8) The first *somewhat complete* systematic statement of Christian doctrine given to the world was by Clement of Alexandria in A.D. 180, and universal salvation was clearly one of his positions.

(9) The first *complete* presentation of Christianity as a system was by Origen in A.D. 220, and universal salvation was explicitly presented in it.

(10) Universal salvation was the prevailing doctrine in Christendom as long as Greek (the language of the New Testament), was the language of Christianity.

(11) Universalism was believed by most Christians during the best centuries of Christianity (the first three). During this time, Christians were known mostly for simplicity, goodness, and missionary zeal.

(12) Universalism became least known and accepted in the Christian Church when Greek, (the language of the New Testament) was least known and used by the church. During this time, Latin became the official language of the Church when it became known for its darkest, most ignorant, and corrupt practices.

(13) Not a single writer, among those who describe the heresies in the Christian Church during the first three hundred years, ever lists Universalism as a heresy. And this was the time when Universalism was believed by the majority, and certainly by the greatest of the Early Church Fathers.

(14) Not a single creed during the first five-hundred years of the Christian Church ever expressed any position contrary to Universal Restoration. Nor did they ever express any position in favor of Eternal Punishment.

(15) With the exception of the arguments of Augustine (A.D. 420), there was never any arguments made against Universalism, for at least four hundred years after Christ, by any of the Early Church Fathers.

(16) While the great church councils that assembled in various parts of Christianity, "anathematized" (condemned) every kind of doctrine believed to be heretical, none of these councils, for more than five hundred years, ever condemned Universalism. Instead, Universalism was advocated in every century by the principal scholars and most revered saints.

(17) As late as A.D. 400, Jerome said that "most people" (plerique) believed in Universalism. And Augustine complained that "very many" (quam plurimi), believed it. This low number of adherents was in spite of the tremendous (and growing) influence of Augustine, and also in spite of the mighty power of the semi-pagan secular forces in the church that were aligned against it.

(18) The principal ancient Universalists were Christian born and reared, and were among the most scholarly and Godly of all the ancient believers.

(19) The most celebrated of the earlier advocates of endless punishment were heathen born and led corrupt lives in their youth. Tertullian one of the first, and Augustine, the greatest of them, both confessed to having been among the vilest before becoming Christians.

(20) The first advocates of endless punishment, Minucius Felix, Tertullian and Augustine, were Latins, ignorant of Greek, and less competent to interpret the meaning of Greek New Testament than were the Greek scholars who were the majority.

(21) The first advocates of Universalism, immediately after the Apostles, were Greeks who read and studied the New Testament writing in the Greek language – in which the New Testament was written. They found their Universalism in the Greek New Testament. Who would we expect to be correct, those who studied the New Testament in Greek or in a Latin translation?

(22) The Greek Fathers announced the great truth of universal restoration in an age of darkness, sin and corruption. There was nothing to suggest universalism to them in the pagan literature or religions of that day. Universalism was completely contrary to everything around them. Where else could they have found universalism but in the Gospel message of the New Testament?

(23) All ecclesiastical historians, and many Biblical critics and scholars, agree to the prevalence of Universalism in the earlier centuries.

(24) From the days of Clement of Alexandria to those of Gregory of Nyssa and Theodore of Mopsuestia (A.D. 180-428), the great theologians and teachers, almost without exception, were Universalists. There was no one, equal in number in the same centuries, that were comparable to them for learning and goodness.

(25) The first theological school in Christendom, the great one established in Alexandria, taught Universalism for more than two hundred years.

(26) In all Christendom, from A.D. 170 to 430, there were six Christian schools. Of these, four schools taught Universalism and only one taught Eternal Punishment.

(27) The three earliest Gnostic sects, the Basilidians, the Carpocratians and the Valentinians (A.D. 117-132) were condemned by Christian writers and their

heresies pointed out clearly. But though they taught Universalism, that doctrine is never condemned by those who oppose them. For example, Irenaeus condemned the errors of the Carpocratians, but does not reprehend their Universalism, though he clearly ascribes the doctrine to them.

(28) The first defense of Christianity against Infidelity (Origen against Celsus) puts the defense on Universalistic grounds. Celsus charged the Christians' God with cruelty, because he punished with fire. Origen replied that God's fire is curative and that he is a "Consuming Fire," because he consumes sin and not the sinner.

(29) Origen, the chief representative of Universalism in the ancient centuries, was bitterly opposed and condemned for various heresies by ignorant and cruel fanatics. He was accused of opposing Episcopacy (government of a church by bishops) because he believed in the pre-existence of the soul, etc. But he never was condemned for his Universalism! The very council that anathematized (condemned) "Origenism" esteemed highly Gregory of Nyssa, who was clearly a Universalist just like Origen. Lists of Origen's errors are given by Methodius, Pamphilus and Eusebius, Marcellus, Eustathius and Jerome, but Universalism is never named by any one of his opponents. For example, Hippolytus (A.D. 320) names thirty-two known heresies, but Universalism is not mentioned as among them. Epiphanius, (known as "the hammer of heretics,") describes eighty heresies ... but he never mentions universal salvation. All such silence about condemning Universalism happened at a time when, Gregory of Nyssa, an outspoken Universalist, was known as the most conspicuous figure in Christendom.

(30) Justinian, a half-pagan emperor who attempted to have Universalism officially condemned, lived in the most corrupt epoch of the Christian centuries. He closed the theological schools and demanded the condemnation of Universalism by law. But the doctrine was so prevalent in the church that the Second Council of Constantinople (held under Justinian's ruling authority) refused to obey his edict to suppress Universalism. Some historians view the "age of Justinian rule" as the worst form of rule civilization has produced.

(31) As a final conclusion, it is safe to say that the first clear and definite statement of human destiny by any Christian writer (after the days of the Apostles) includes universal restoration, and that doctrine was advocated by most of the greatest and best of the Christian Fathers for the first five hundred years of the Christian Era.

Any careful study of the early history of the Christian religion will show that the doctrine of universal restoration was least prevalent in the darkest, and prevailed most in the most enlightened era of the earliest centuries. It was the prevailing doctrine in the Primitive Christian Church.

Keep in mind that the above list is only Hanson's conclusions. To see what he bases his conclusions on and evaluate the validity of them, examine his book more carefully. But you must also keep in mind that even the evidence given in his book (based on the reference he provides) must also be verified – if you want to know if what he claims is actually true.

So, ideally, as time allows, you should look into all his resources and references that he provides and make sure that: (1) such references actually exist, (2) that he has not quoted his references “out of their context” (and many times, people in their zeal do this without realizing it ... but it is invalid information just the same), or (3) has misunderstood, or illogically concluded something from a referenced source.

When I first read Hanson's work (and it was one of the earliest resources I encountered on Universalism in Early Christian Church history), I was very skeptical and assumed that he was exaggerating (at best) or was dishonest (at worst). But I was intrigued by the general claim he was making that Universalism prevailed in the Christian Church for the first 500 years, thinking that I could not possibly have missed this after seminary training and thirty-five years of personal study. But I also figured that a claim like Hanson's is so over-the-top extreme that it would be easy to disprove. I expected to have some fun in the process. But as I looked into his claims and went to the primary sources (the actual writings of the Early Greek Church Fathers) that he referred to, I quickly discovered that, with very few exceptions, Mr. J.W. Hanson – a nineteenth century Universalist scholar – was a very reliable source on this subject of which he wrote!

About the Author

Carl Jones is a retired Sr. Technical Writer living in Grass Valley, California. Prior to this he was a Hardware/Software Engineer for thirty years, He has been married 45 years to the only true love of his life. He has two adult children and one beautiful grand-daughter, all of whom he loves more than life itself.

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Carl is an Army veteran and served in Viet Nam in 1970. He has lived in Sacramento, CA; Eatontown NJ; Grand Rapids, MI; Dallas, TX; Beaverton, OR; and Nevada City, CA. He has made two trips to China (Hong Kong, Shenzhen, Shanghai and Beijing); one trip to Bangkok, Thailand; and one trip to England (Loughborough and London).

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