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MINISTRIES

ETERNAL PUNISHMENT

IS HELL REALLY GOING TO HAPPEN?

FORWARD

Three imponderable subjects visit, in some form and to some extent, every human brain which is capable of the most modest thought processes: (a) Where did I come from?, (b) What does this magical something called “life” which I now experience, that gleam in my eye reflected in the mirror, really mean; what is it and what is its significance? And (c) After this thing called “life” is over, what is going to become of me? Is there a sequel to this life on the other side?

The first question is actually not that vital because, in any case, you are here! The second one is a very serious one, and, again, those capable of any sort of awareness (not to mention sheer interest) know that this is a subject which should occupy us living beings. I am sure there are a lot of “unexamined” lives running about, and I would not go so far as to say such a life is not living, but, on the other hand, it is difficult to conceive of a human being stuck in non-fascination with this glorious and vast universe, and the human consciousness, his own human consciousness, which allows him to be aware of it. As to the third question, that one relative to the future---as it relates to you and me personally---well, that one is the big one.

Almost all humans, probably 99.995% who have ever lived, are living, or ever will live, cannot help but sensing that there is something beyond the grave, which is truly an amazing fact about our native humanity. If that sequel does occur, we are going to spend more time (or something which takes time’s place), by an astronomical factor, than we have, consciously at least, anywhere else. The subject can be a lot of things, but it cannot be only moderately important.

This book is about that question, and it arises out of that “knowing” that all of us are ultimately *eschatologists*, that is, we ponder “last things” just as man has since he first thought about anything. (That is a Greek word which comes from another Greek word, *eschaton*, which simply means “last things”).

Since my early youth, I have thought about the subject. I never was possessed by an abject fear of it, have no sense of having been morbid about it, but I thought it---like all human reality---was, and is, consummately fascinating. Long before I ever thought about it being possible, I had an innate sense of its reality, as I believe all humans do. Anybody who listens to the human conversation knows that. It is an integral piece of the context in which we live, and move, and have our being.

In those days, little did I know that God was going to save me and call me to preach His word. I was the first preacher/pastor ever in my family tree but, much to the chagrin of my then-unsaved Mother, much to the surprise to my comrades, and much to the delight of some beautiful Christians in my little south Texas town, I began the journey which has lasted, now, for over half a century. My first sermon, as a pastor, was on the subject---of hell! I was not angry with my tiny congregation, had no intention of scorching them over the pit of hell-fire, felt love for them, as well as joy that they would call me to be their pastor. I do remember that I thought it would be wise to lay down a theological base for all I would ever say to them. After all, I reasoned, if heaven and hell are realities, everything else pales into insignificance. I was to read,

in university days, what Martin Heidegger said about preparing for death. He said---as many other philosophical and theological and psychological types do---that until a man has made his peace with death, he is not prepared to live. The only other thing I remember about that first sermon is that the pastor of my hometown church, though a friend and a good man, upon hearing of my theme, laughed and said to me, 'So, you're gonna give 'em hell on the first Sunday!' He was possessed of several spiritual gifts, but encouragement was not one of them!

During the research and composition which produced this book, at times, a deep, quieting, sense of awe came over me as I thought about what God has said, *and is saying*, to us about hell. I heard myself quietly muttering to myself on one such occasion, "If any human had a scintilla of understanding what God is saying to us about hell, he would pore over every syllable on the subject in the Bible with a riveting sense of gravitas, and would treasure each word---each word!---He used to do say it." What a grand and sweeping theme is eternity! It encompasses all reality, stands above all values, informs every decision either God or man ever made, makes, or will make, envelops everything that exists in the entire cosmos in its more-than-oceanic infinitude.

For some, amazingly, it is a tedious study. The death of boredom is one hint, one adumbration, one moment when light from the other side of the gossamer-thin veil between time and eternity allows us a glimpse into the Great Beyond. I have prayed that such a moment will be yours as you peruse the pages of this book.

When I was a mid-teen, years before I became a Christian, I was looking through books in the home of an older sister. One of the books, written by a famed historian, fell open to a passage which will, I am sure, help whet an appetite about the subject.

High up in the North, in the land called Svithjod, there stands a rock. It is 100 miles high and 100 miles wide. Once every 1000 years a little bird comes to this rock to sharpen its beak. When the rock has thus been worn away, then a single day of eternity will have gone by. (1)

IS HELL REALLY GOING TO HAPPEN?

or

IS HELL FOR REAL?

or

HELL, YES! OR HELL, NO!

or

WHAT CAN A MODERN MAN BELIEVE ABOUT HELL?

or

HELL FOR MODERNS

or

WHATEVER HAPPENED TO HELL?

or

HAS HELL GONE AWAY?

It is remarkable how little people think about hell or trouble about it. This is the most striking evidence of human frivolity.

Nicholas Berdyaev

Why do we not say the ultimate things?

Dietrich Bonhoeffer

You shall not surely die.

Satan

CONTENTS

IS HELL REALLY GOING TO HAPPEN?	8
DOES MODERN MAN BELIEVE IN HELL?	8
DEFINITION OF TERMS	13
NEW TESTAMENT PASSAGES REFERRING TO HELL.	18
QUESTIONS ABOUT HELL	
What is the "orthodox" or "traditional" view of hell? . . . . .	.66
Why would God want anybody to spend eternity in hell? . . . . .	.68
Do other religions have a doctrine of hell? . . . . .	.68
How can God be wrathful and Jesus be merciful? . . . . .	.69
How can hell be consistent with a God of Love?	71
What about the Biblical inconsistency of saying that hell is characterized by both fire and darkness? . . . . .	.72
Does the Bible teach that the unrighteous will be resurrected? . . . . .	.72
Is it not judgmental to tell others they might go to hell? . . . . .	.74
Is fear of hell a proper motive to serve God? . . . . .	.74
How is it that good and wise men have believed other than what the Bible says about hell? . . . . .	.75
Will those in hell have other chances to be saved? . . . . .	.75
Is it not possible that, somehow and at some point, perhaps beyond one's imagination, all men will finally be reconciled to God? . . . . .	.77
Could it be that immortality is conditional, with the result that God gives it to some but not to others? . . . . .	.80
Does not the existence of hell deny God's omnipotence? . . . . .	.81
How is it possible that finite acts can cause infinite punishment? . . . . .	.83
Does everybody suffer the same in hell? . . . . .	.84

What if the devil and hell are nothing more than
mental states?85
Why does the fact of hell make people so angry?.....85
Is it possible that the only hell we experience is
here on earth?87
Will a person who never heard about Jesus go to hell? ...88
If a person is sincere in his religious beliefs, will not that
fact prevent him from going to hell?.....89

POINTS TO BE PONDERED..... 91

CONCLUSION 95

ENDNOTES 97

IS HELL REALLY GOING TO HAPPEN?

Some day, relatively soon, you are going to die.

If that fact shocks you, consider the greater problem: when your body dies, your spirit is going to live forever either in heaven or hell.

George Bernard Shaw said that the final statistic is that one out of one dies, but that statistic---and the fact it represents---is transcended in importance by that other troubling fact: no human being can finally die. Ever. Shakespeare, who knew the Bible well, put it graphically:

To die, to sleep;
To sleep: perchance to dream; ay,
 there's the rub:
For in that sleep of death what dreams
 may come
When we have shuffled off this mortal coil,
 Must give us pause.

All men have felt, and persistently continue to feel, despite the secularization of modern culture, that pause. A recent poll indicates that modern man thinks four times much about immortality as about sex. I once spoke with a young man, a sixteen year old non-Christian, about his eternal destiny. When I asked him if he ever thought about such things, he quietly answered, "Like all people, I think about them all the time."

Not only have men everywhere and at all times believed that physical death does not end life, but they have believed that whatever remains of this life, in some mysterious way, carries over into the next stage of existence which has commonly been called heaven and hell. By whatever names, heaven is thought of as being a pleasurable experience and hell as being a painful one, and both states are almost always thought of as being permanent.

DOES MODERN MAN BELIEVE IN HELL?

I have said that almost all people think about eternal matters, but the intensity with which we think about them is, obviously varied. Even among Christians, who traditionally have believed that there is a "heaven to gain and a hell to shun," extremely little is being said about hell in the last several decades. Suddenly, the subject, it is on the front page again (currently, on the front page of a secular national news journal, and

today, on the editorial page of the leading newspaper in one of America's largest cities) and is the subject of sermons, books (one of them, denying the Biblical view of hell, a best-seller), media interviews, movies, etc.

It was the ancient practice of ministers of liturgical churches to preach, on the four Sundays of Advent (the four Sundays immediately preceding Christmas) on Death, Judgment, Heaven, and Hell. The "typical" American congregation would be aghast if the minister stood on any Sunday of the any year, and preached about hell in down-to-earth terms that the average parishioner could understand. The senior pastor of a large "old-line" denomination church recently told one of his parishioners, who reported the conversation to me, "No, I don't believe in hell and I don't know of a single pastor in my denomination who does."

Until recently, books on the subject of hell have been rare, which is a strange phenomenon in light of the veritable oceans of ink which have been used to write about other religious matters, especially hell's counterpart, heaven. One peruses scores of "heavy" theological books in reference to the subject of eternal damnation and discovers a striking fact: voluminous theological studies on both the Old and New Testaments often give but scant space to the subject. As an example, Alan Richardson in his An Introduction to the Theology of the New Testament, running to almost three hundred pages, has but scattered references to the subject, probably adding up to no more than a single page or two. His clearest statement on the subject, *in a book which is purportedly an introduction to the theology of the New Testament*, is

The whole medieval mumbo-jumbo of hell and purgatory must go the way of astrology and alchemy and the rest of the pre-scientific gropings of self-tortured mankind. (2)

Bernard Ramm's Handbook of Contemporary Theology has no entry on either heaven or hell. Nineteenth Century Evangelical Thought, edited by Fisher Humphreys, is an excellent collection of fifty-six essays on a wide spectrum of theological subjects, but makes no reference to hell. God, Revelation and Authority is a monumental four-volume study of almost two thousand pages on a wide range of theological subjects, but one finds only a few desultory references to hell, eternal punishment, the final end of the wicked, etc. In the systematic theologies one finds a bit more material on the subject, but--proportionate to its relative importance to other theological subjects,--it is usually extremely limited.

Evidence abounds that modern man, even modern man with a Bible in his hand, has but little concern about what his Bible says about hell, or take seriously what he finds there. Even though he may be possessed by the troubling suspicion that there is a "dark side of the eschaton" (from *eschatos*, the end, i.e., the doctrine of last things) as some theologians have labeled it, he hesitates to submit the subject to light. He handles the issue in one of several ways: (a) He simply does not allow himself to think about hell, perhaps hopeful that the grim subject will simply go away, (b) He attributes such conceptions to a pre-scientific Biblical mentality, and says that the Bible writers were using oriental imagery to facilitate communication with the

pre-literate society of the first century, (c) He vaguely hopes that something good will finally happen to all men and uses words---if he is aware of serious discussions about the issue---such as “annihilationism” (which sees all the unrepentant in hell---at some point and after having suffered enough----as being put out of existence, “conditional immortality,” (actually another name for annihilationism, because it sees immortality, not as a an automatic possession of all humans, but as given only to those who come to Christ, and not to those who do not), “purgatory” (one’s sins are finally purged away in the afterlife), “probational damnation” (another name for purgatory) restorationism, (another name for purgation / universalism / probationalism), ” perhaps (although extremely rare in Christian circles) he even moves toward an acceptance of “reincarnation,” in an attempt to ameliorate the condition of the damned, (d) He, while hesitating to deny the doctrine lest he be thought theologically and/or philosophically “liberal,” (or provincial, depending on his context), does not speak of it and is uncomfortable when the subject is broached. (e) Perhaps he does not think or speak about the matter because he truly is theologically and / or philosophically “liberal” (i.e., his theology is seriously truncated from historic orthodoxy) , or (f) He blatantly denies, usually on what he perceives to be humane or merciful or rational bases, that any person will finally be “lost,” no matter what a Bible-based theological orthodoxy holds, or has historically held, in reference to the question. (g) Another response, especially popular today, is to make Biblical language about the subject metaphorical or symbolic or allegorical (which is but an extended metaphor), sometimes while attempting to hold on to some shred of theological correctness by admitting that something of meaning stands behind the Biblical imagery describing hell, but we have no way of knowing, in any substantive way, precisely what.

Approximately eighty-five percent of writing theologians, it is commonly estimated, do not accept the doctrine of eternal punishment, and so we should not be shocked that a less-than-robust view of the matter pervades the culture.

One other perspective is crucial here: this debate is not a new one. As baseline for any modern study of the various views challenging the orthodox view of eternal punishment, a statement made by church historian Lars Qualden is immeasurably valuable:

Origen of Alexandria (A.D. 185-254) caused another controversy. He taught that the Son, Jesus Christ, was but an emanation (outflowing) from the Father, and that the Holy Spirit was an emanation from both. On the ground of his ‘subordination’ of the Son, Origen has been termed the father or Arianism. . . .He also taught that the future life would be a scene of probation. The punishment of the wicked was not final, the redeeming work of Christ extending even to the fallen angels. Hence Origen was the father of Universalism. His doctrine of a temporal punishment of the wicked paved the way for the Catholic doctrine of “purgatory” His views were controverted by several synods, being finally condemned formally by the Church.” (3)

I have said “immeasurably valuable,” and have done so because *Origen hewed the stones which produced the foundation for every modern deviation from orthodoxy in regard to the eternal punishment of the wicked, with*

the possible exception of annihilationism. He espoused other patently unorthodox positions: he believed in reincarnation, that Christ was not fully divine but only “the first emanation from the Father,” and based his theology/philosophy, admittedly, on the Greek philosophers. He was later excommunicated from the church as a heretic. Qualden’s statement will serve as a vivid reminder that theological aberrations have been around for a very long time, and they, as current headlines indicate, display impressive staying power.

There have always been those, in the words of a modern theologian, who have attempted to rescue the church from the Bible.

In any case, most moderns are properly diagnosed by John Gerstner who said, “Modern Christian theology has tended to take either the pain out of eternity or the eternity out of the pain.” (4)

The Russian theologian-philosopher Nicholas Berdyaev had said earlier, “It is remarkable how little people think about hell or trouble about it. This is the most striking evidence of human frivolity.” (5) Satan told Adam that he would not surely die, and Satan continues to tell modern the same lie.

As was true in past centuries, so it is now: many moderns attempt to re-write the Biblical materials in such a way as to make them square with secularistic non-Biblical perspectives. A Seventh-Day Adventist (whose theology denies eternal punishment) which states it flatly: “...God doesn’t intend for anyone to spend eternity feeling uncomfortable.” (6)

Beginning with that philosophical pre-supposition (which is hedonistic to the core), the writer then attempts to make the Biblical materials harmonize with it. In an issue of “Senior Voice,” (7) another author says:

To Hell with Hell! Away with archaic concepts of eternal damnation and a fallen Angel named Satan. Surely we’ve grown beyond our Old Testament idea of a wrathful God to the New Testament’s God of love. Jesus’ ministry preached a universal, spiritual God which is ‘Love energy’ linking all of us forever.

The statement is a classic demonstration of the puerility of some modern eschatology, but, for many, it is “the gospel” on the subject of eternal punishment.

Yet another tack taken by modern man to quieten his nagging fears about the subject (as he does with many other matters, Biblical and otherwise) is to conduct polls and, thereby, discover what one may justifiably believe about it. Almost all such polls manifest the same pattern: a large majority of people typically say they believe in heaven, but not hell, and that they, themselves, believe they are going to heaven and not hell. God, one must have noticed, does not usually settle matters of any sort by conducting referendums or plebiscites, and no man is served well by doing so, or giving them weight in the pursuit of truth, or as a foundation for his own personal faith.

None of that is to infer, parenthetically, that the subject of hell has not been a focus of discussions among

theologians--it is just that their discussions have, for the most part, stayed in the rarefied atmosphere of theological debate. (See Four Views of Hell, edited by William Crockett, for an excellent bibliography of modern works on hell and related subjects.)

The question, then, is still before us: Is hell really going to happen? At least two facts about the issue are patently obvious: (a) We can know the answer, and (b) The answer cannot be moderately important. Surely, all who believe in a benevolent God know that if hell exists, God would have been a perfect fiend not to have revealed the matter to us with pristine clarity, albeit, as in all other matters, with less information than we might desire. How in the name of rationality (not to mention compassion) could He have left us in the dark about so important a matter as the eternal destiny of an immortal being? Further, it must be obvious that if hell exists--or will ever exist--we cannot afford to be ignorant of the revelation that God has given us about it, or to act upon it. Blaise Pascal, one of the most luminous minds in the history of western civilization, who became a devoted Christian as an adult, once said that one, if hesitant about believing in God, should "gamble" on the possibility of His existence because there was so little to lose (finitude) and so much to gain (infinitude) that sheer rationality should induce him to take the risk. (See his Pensees, #233) That perception, known as "Pascal's Wager" or "Gambit," may not be a sufficient and final base for a life of dedication to God through Christ, but it does prevent the issue from being frivolously waved aside.

C. S. Lewis put it all succinctly:

We are told that it (hell) is a detestable doctrine--and indeed, I too detest it from the bottom of my heart-- and are reminded of the tragedies in human life which have come from believing in it. Of the other tragedies which come from not believing it we are told less. For these reasons, and these alone, it becomes necessary to discuss the matter. (8, emphasis added)

Perhaps a final note should be added here: because hell is seldom the subject of popular sermons (which is provably the case), does not mean that hell has gone away. Observers of the modern preaching scene know, as well, that the subjects of gluttony and holiness are not popular either. It does not follow, however, that gluttony has ceased to be sinful, or that holiness has ceased to be virtuous. The absence of preaching about hell does not negate its existence.

DEFINITIONS

This study is essentially that of the New Testament teaching as to the state of the condemned dead, those persons who will experience eternal hell. In this section, an attempt will be made to cite, and briefly comment on, every reference to eternal punishment in the New Testament, and in the final section of the book, commonly-asked questions about hell will be discussed.

It is vitally important to begin with the very words of the New Testament because, shockingly, little emphasis is placed on those words even by astute theologians who address the issue, but who deny the orthodox view of the Bible, even though they customarily begin by saying they believe in the inspiration and authority of the Bible. No serious study can occur apart from a clear understanding of the meanings of the words used to describe hell, and many questions are answered upon the basis of their lexical meanings, not on the basis of English translations, but of the Greek words themselves.

Three Greek words, *gehenna*, *hades*, and *tartaros*, are used in the New Testament in specific reference to hell, and are translated by that word. The modern English word “hell” derives from an Old English word *helan*, meaning “to conceal,” and perhaps has a kinship with the German word *holle*, meaning “hollow.”

Gehenna, or *geenna*, is derived from two Hebrew words, *gai*, meaning “valley,” and *hinnom*, of questionable origin and meaning. It refers to a valley, the Valley of Hinnom, which lies south of Jerusalem, outside the city walls. It is also called the Valley of Tophet in the Old Testament and is there associated with the worship of the Ammonite god Moloch (or Molech). The word “tophet” is from a Hebrew word, *toph*, which refers to a drum (or the beating thereon) and is probably an allusion to the use of drums to drown out the cries of children being murdered there in the worship of Moloch.

During the reigns of the Old Testament kings Ahaz (II Chron. 28:3) and Manasseh (II Chron. 33:6), children were sacrificed there to Moloch. Such worship was forbidden by God, and during the reign of Josiah (II Kings 23:10), the site was desecrated. The Valley of Hinnom was a dumping ground for the refuse of the city of Jerusalem. Haunted by beasts and outcasts and characterized by rotting and burning debris from the city, *gehenna* came to be commonly used to symbolize the horror of the damned. Kittel says:

This name was given to the Wadi er rababe in South Jerusalem, which later acquired a bad reputation because sacrifices were offered in it to Moloch in the days of Ahaz and Manasseh (2 K.16:3, 21:6). The threats of judgment uttered over this sinister valley in Jer. 7:32, 19:6, cf. Is. 31:9; 66:24, are the reason why the Valley of Hinnom came to be equated with the hell of the last judgment in apocalyptic literature from the 2nd cen. B.C....The name *gehinnom* thus came to be used for the eschatological fire. (9)

The word is used twelve times in the New Testament, eleven of which appear in the synoptics. *In all those cases, the word is used by Jesus* (Matt. 5:22, 29, 30, 10:28, 18:9, 23:15, 33, Mark 9:43, 45, 47, Luke 12:5). In

all but one use, Jesus emphasizes that *gehenna* is an exposure to excruciating suffering. The word also occurs in James 3:5. It is always translated by the English word “hell.”

The second word translated “hell” is *hades*, which is another name for the Greek god Pluto, the god of the underworld in Greek mythology. It came to mean, also, the place where he lived. It is apparently derived from the Greek word *eido*, to see, plus the *alpha* privative, thus, it means “the unseen,” and refers, in fully developed New Testament theology, to the *temporal* region of the evil dead. It is thought of as being in the depths of the earth in contrast to the heights of heaven. (Matthew 11:23, etc.)

“Death and Hades” are spoken of in combination in Revelation 1:18, 6:8, 20:13, and 20:14, but, as we shall see, *hades* is temporary and hell is eternal.

Sometimes *hades* is thought of as being the place of all deceased persons, good and evil. Elsewhere the punishment of the wicked is emphasized with the righteous seen as being in paradise enjoying the presence and blessing of God. Several facts must be kept in mind as one studies the New Testament doctrine of life after death, and especially the concept of *hades*:

(a) Whatever may be gathered from the words of Jesus touching the state of the dead is to be regarded in the light of the current Jewish beliefs of His day, and see how far He sanctions such beliefs, and in what respects He modifies them. (10)

(b) Hades was conceived of as serving only an interim purpose; it was not thought of as lasting forever, but as being destroyed and cast into hell. (Rev. 20:13-14) It is an *intermediate state*, i.e., the state between death and resurrection of the condemned dead, as paradise is the intermediate state for the saved dead. (c) If both lost and saved are seen there, with the former experiencing pain and a sense of the absence of God and the latter experiencing pleasure and the sense of the presence of God, perhaps--as many believe--*hades* was “compartmentalized” allowing such seemingly disparate conditions to exist. (d) Many believe that at Jesus’ ascension He took the righteous dead out of *hades* and into the presence of God, into paradise, which, they affirm, was not (or is not, by that act) any longer in the underworld *hades* but in the presence of God above. (Eph. 4:8-10) The righteous dead now in paradise await the resurrection, at which time they will receive their eternal bodies in preparation for the final and eternal state of heaven. (II Cor. 5:8, Phil. 1:23, Luke 23:43, II Cor 12:1-4, I Cor. 15:51-54, I Thess. 4:16-178). Thus, as *hades* is now, for the lost, for all intents and purposes, hell without the body, so paradise is, for the saved, heaven without the eternal body. The conditions are intensified, i.e., the punishment of *hades* is greater in hell and the joy of paradise is greater in heaven. *Hades* and paradise, therefore, are temporary states in which people exist during the time between death and resurrection, and hell and heaven are the corresponding eternal states. *Hades* is

compatible with hell and paradise with heaven. (e) The lost souls which have gone to *hades* are to be delivered up at the time of their resurrection, at which time *hades* will cease to exist, being replaced by the eternal state of “the lake of fire,” i.e., *gehenna*, or hell. (Rev. 20:13-14) The indication is, again, that the

righteous dead will have been previously taken into paradise which is no longer to be associated with hades. Scofield says of hades:

(1) Hades before the ascension of Christ. The passage in which the word occurs makes it clear that hades was formerly in two divisions, the abodes respectively of the saved and of the lost. The former was called "paradise" and "Abraham's bosom." Both designations were Talmudic, but adopted by Christ in Lk. 16:22, 23:43. The blessed dead were with Abraham, they were conscious and were "comforted" (Luke 16:25). The believing malefactor was to be, that day, with Christ in "paradise." The lost were separated from the saved by a "great gulf fixed" (Luke 16:25). The representative man of the lost who are now in hades is the rich man of Luke 16:19-31. He was alive, conscious, in the full exercise of his faculties, memory, etc., and in torment.

(2) Hades since the ascension of Christ. So far as the unsaved dead are concerned, no change in their place or condition is revealed in Scripture. At the judgment of the great white throne, hades will give them up, they will be judged, and will pass into the lake of fire (Rev. 20:13-14). But a change has taken place which affects paradise. Paul was "caught up to the third heaven... into paradise" (2 Cor. 12:1-4). Paradise, therefore, is now in the presence of God. It is believed that Eph. 4:8-10 indicates the time of the change. "When he ascended up on high he led a multitude of captives." It is immediately added that He had previously "descended first into the lower parts of the earth," i.e., the paradise division of hades. During the present church-age the saved who die are "absent from the body, at home with the Lord." The wicked dead are in hades, and the righteous dead "at home with the Lord," alike await the resurrection (Job 19:25, I Cor. 15:52). (11)

Hades corresponds to the Old Testament *sheol*, which is used sixty-five times in the Hebrew Old Testament, and is translated "hell," "the grave," and "the pit." *Sheol*, too, represents the lower regions of shadows as contrasted with the upper regions of light.

Neither *sheol* or *hades* refers to the literal grave, the actual burial place of the dead. *Sheol* is, says A. B. Davidson, the eminent Old Testament scholar,

...a vast mausoleum, with cells around like graves. But it may be asserted with some reason that nowhere that nowhere is *Sheol* confounded with the grave, or the word used for the place of the dead body. (12)

What is true of *sheol* in that regard is also true of *hades*. It is not the grave or place of burial, but the place and condition of the souls and spirits of the dead. *Hades* refers to the place, and describes at least in part the condition, of the condemned dead between the time of death and hell, i.e., the intermediate state of the damned.

The third word used in the New Testament which is translated "hell" is the word *tartaroo*. It is used only once, in II Peter 2:4, and is a verbal form corresponding to the Greek noun *tartaros*. In that passage, Peter refers to the "angels that sinned" and says that God "cast them down to hell" (*tarartos*). W. E. Vine says of

the use of that word, that it is

...neither Sheol nor Hades nor Hell, but the place where those Angels whose special sin is referred to in that passage (II Peter 2:4) are confined “to be reserved unto judgment;” the region is described as “pits of darkness”... (13)

For the ancient Greek poets it refers to the infernal regions, a dark place in the bowels of the earth, a bottomless pit. Maybe, as Vine indicates, only fallen angels are there, but others believe *tartaros* is but another name for the final abode of all the damned.

Many other words are used in the New Testament to refer to various expressions of God's wrath sin and sinners. Sometimes they refer to the punishment of hell and sometimes they refer to temporal punishment of sin. It is important to observe that the word used often refers to what is happening to the sinner in time, *but, if he dies in the state described by the word (such a destruction, condemnation, judgment, etc.) the condition becomes eternal. Time extends into eternity.*

Paul describes the final state of those who have not obeyed the gospel of Christ by saying they “shall suffer the punishment of eternal destruction and exclusion from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might” (II Thess. 1:9; see I Thess. 5:3). The rebellious and impenitent store up for themselves wrath on the day of wrath when God's righteous judgment will be revealed (Rom. 2:5, 8; see 5:9; I Thess. 1:10, 5:9) Paul also describes the fate of the unsaved by the concept of perishing (*apollumi*). *This is both a present condition* (I Cor. 1:18, II Cor. 2:15, 4:3) *and a future doom* Rom. 2:12, II Thess. 2:10). This eschatological doom is also destruction (*apoleia*, Phil. 3:19, Rom. 9:22). A companion idea is that of death. Death, in the full inclusiveness of the term, is the penalty of sin (Rom. 5:12, 6:16, 23). While this death is the death of the body (Rom. 8:38, I Cor. 3:22), the term includes much more. This is shown by the fact that death is the opposite of eternal life (Rom. 6:23, 7:10, 8:6, II Cor. 2:16). *It is both a present fact* (Rom. 7:10f, Eph. 2:1) *and a future fate* (Rom. 1:32, 6:16, 21, 23; 7:5). (14, emphasis added.)

Such words as *apolea*, *olethros*, *krisis*, *pthora*, *dathairesis*, *abussos*, *thanatos* (and their cognates) which are translated by such words as destruction, corruption, judgment, death, abyss, condemnation, perdition, etc., often refer to the condition of the damned. Each of these words must be considered in a study of the New Testament doctrine regarding punishment for sin, whether that punishment is envisioned in its temporal or eternal aspect.

One word, which we will meet often in the New Testament Greek, demands special attention, and that is the word *aionion*. It is the word in the Greek language which expresses a condition/state which is endless, eternal, never-ending. It is sometimes compounded, but it cannot mean anything but everlasting. None of these words, nor the words *gehenna*, *hades*, and *tartaroo*, include the idea of annihilation in the sense of cessation of being. It is a loss of well-being, not of being, that the writers have in mind when they use these

words. Oehler, in describing the Old Testament conception of the place and condition of the unrighteous dead, says, "...*their consciousness is not destroyed.*" (emphasis his)

The NT as well as the OT is dominated by a view of things in which the modern idea that annihilation may be the fate of some men has no place. The dead are in a land of darkness and forgetfulness, cut off from knowledge of affairs human and Divine. Still, in this condition---at most a pale reflection of full-blooded life---*they exist.* (15)

What does the New Testament say, specifically, about the eternal condition of those in hell? Following is a list of passages found in the New Testament which make reference to God's punishment of sin. Some explicitly refer to God's response to sin and the sinner in eternity. In many cases, again, it is difficult to determine whether the reference is to time, to eternity, or to both. It must be remembered that while the reference may relate to life on earth, if the sinner dies in the state described (the condition of punishment, condemnation, judgment, etc.) that state either will or may become an eternal one.

ETERNAL PUNISHMENT IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

MATTHEW

3:7-12 But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees come to his baptism, he said unto them, O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance: And think not to say within yourselves, we have Abraham to *our* father; for I say unto you, that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham. And now also the axe is laid unto the root of the trees: therefore every tree which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire. I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance: but he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and *with* fire. Whose fan *is* in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor, and gather his wheat into the garner; but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.

The references to fire are customarily to hell's fire, though temporal punishment may also be in mind here. The language is eschatological; it speaks of those events which are to accompany the end of history, and therefore speaks of eternal punishment. "unquenchable" is an interesting word. It is *asbestos*, from the verb *sbennumi* (to quench, as with a fire) with the *alpha* privative, thus negating the quenching action. Patently, Jesus meant to convey that the fire is beyond time, and extends throughout eternity, else He would not have used this word. (Note Mark 9 where the idea is voiced five times, but in two different ways.)

5:20-22 For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into kingdom of heaven. Ye have heard that it was said by the of old time, Thou shalt not kill; and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment: But I say unto you, That whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council: but whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire.

Note that everybody will not finally enter the kingdom of heaven; universalism (the doctrine that says everybody will someday be saved) is patently denied here.

Note also that this is Jesus' first use of the word *gehenna*. It is found in His sermon on the mount and represents convictions that lay at the heart of His theology. It is no peripheral matter, or of tangential interest.

5:29-30 And if thy right eye offend thee, pluck *it* out, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not *that* thy whole body should be cast into hell. And if thy right hand offend thee, cut *it* off, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not *that* thy whole body should be cast into hell.

“Perish” in both cases is *apoletai* and “hell” in both cases is “*gehenna*”; these are the most commonly used words in the New Testament in reference to eternal hell and punishment therein. Jesus’ point is that no earthly suffering compares with that of hell; it must be escaped at any cost—better that a part should suffer than the whole person, or that any suffering on earth is to be chosen rather suffering forever.

7:13-14 Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide *is* the gate, and broad is the way that leadeth to destruction, and many there which go in thereat: Because strait *is* the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.

Here is an explicit reference to the dread fact that all will not be saved, and further, a severe warning is stated to encourage the exercise the will in escaping eternal punishment.

7:19 Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire.

Again, Matthew has Jesus using the figure of fire to speak of the judgment at the end of the age; although it is conceivable that temporal loss is envisioned here.

8:12 But the children of the kingdom shall be cast into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Jesus here makes reference, for the first time in the gospels, to “outer darkness” and “weeping and gnashing of teeth,” words which elsewhere and always, are associated with hell, as in Matthew 13:40-43, 13:50, 22:13, 24:51, and 25:30.

8:29 And behold, they (the demons which possessed the man from Gerasa) cried out, saying, What have we to do with thee, Jesus, thou Son of God? Art thou come hither to torment us before the time?

A reference to demonic suffering in hell, as in II Peter 2:4, Jude 6, Revelation 20:10, etc. “Torment” is from *basanidzo*, a word which is commonly used, in the New Testament, in reference to suffering in hell. The word bears the meaning of examining, by torture, tormenting, vexing, buffeting (when used of waves).

10:28 And fear them not which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.

Destruction does not refer to annihilation since it is never used that way in the Greek language. Either man

or Satan or God can destroy man's body, but only God can destroy (from *apollumi*, to ruin, create loss, etc.) his soul (psyche).

10:39 He that findeth his life shall lose it: and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it.

The concept of "lostness" is common to Jesus' teaching, and speaks, ultimately, of eternal loss, i.e., hell. Loss here is, again, from *apollumi*.

11:22-23 But I say unto you, It shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the day of judgment, than for you. And thou, Capernaum, which art exalted unto heaven, shalt be brought down to hell.

This is Jesus' first use of the word *hades*; it is the Old Testament equivalent of *sheol*, the place of all the dead. *Hades* finally will be thrown into hell; it is the intermediate state (in fully developed New Testament theology) of the lost dead between death and resurrection. (Revelation 20:13-14)

Jesus explicitly declares here that gradations of misery---varying degrees of punishment---exists in hell.

12:32 And whosoever speaketh a word against the Son of man, it shall be forgiven him: but whosoever speaketh against the Holy Ghost, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this world, neither in the world to come.

If this verse, while puzzling as to its precise definition, was the only sentence in the entirety of the New Testament, the possibility of sin, in some cases, never be forgiven even in eternity, is well established. No reference is made to another chance of being forgiven; in fact, the reverse is promised. The verse does not imply that a sin may be forgiven "in the world to come," only that certain ones assuredly will not. It is, as well, a denial of any hope of universal salvation.

12:36-37 But I say unto you, That every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment. For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned. "Judgment" is from *krisis*; "condemned" is from *katadike*, which means condemnation, sentence of condemnation, etc. The language is often used in the New Testament to speak of the final judgment, and the results thereof. This is an explicit reference to the final judgment and to the eternal (and negative) results of that judgment.

12:41-42 The men of Nineveh shall rise in judgment with this generation and shall condemn it: because they repented at the preaching of Jonas; and, behold, a greater than Jonas is here. The queen of the south shall rise up in the judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: for she came from the uttermost

parts of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and, behold, a great than Solomon is here. The word “condemn” (from *katakrino*) refers, most probably, to eternal consequences, as is evidenced by the future tense of the verbs. Twice it is said that they (in the future) “shall condemn it.” This is not a judgment in time, but beyond time.

13:30 Let both (wheat and tares) grow together until the harvest: and in the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, Gather ye together first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them: but gather the wheat in to my barn.

Since the scene clearly refers to the end of the age, this event relates to the final safety of the saved and the final punishment of the lost. See the next passage for similar language.

13:40-43 As therefore the tares are gathered and burned in the fire; so shall it be in the end of this world. The Son of man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity: And shall cast them into a furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth.

In interpreting the parable of the wheat and tares, Jesus does not give up the use of the literal language in which the parable was originally cast. He retained the use of the words “burned in the fire” and “furnace of fire.” He also repeats the phrase associated with eternal punishment, “. . .there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth.” There is in His speech no amelioration of the stark reality of eternal punishment, even though-- in His interpretation of His former saying--He had a perfect opportunity to speak more specifically and realistically and not metaphorically or symbolically. *Given a clear-cut opportunity to contrast “truth-in-parable” with “truth-in-fact,” He does not do so.*

13:49-50 So shall it be at the end of the world: the angels shall come forth, and sever the wicked from among the just. Again, when interpreting the parable of the net, Jesus used the language of “fire” and “wailing and gnashing of teeth,” the language of eschatological realities for the unsaved.

16:18-- And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. This is not necessarily a direct reference to eternal punishment, but, in view of the meaning of the word *hades* elsewhere, it is at least a tangential reference. It is certainly no denial of the existence of *hades*.

16:25-26 For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find

it. For what is a man profited if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?

Interestingly, if a man “loses” (from *apollumi*) his life for Christ, he will save it; if he saves his life (by living for himself) he loses (again from *apollumi*) it eternally. The first use of the word refers to temporal loss, the second of eternal loss.

This statement of Jesus makes no sense if (a) no hell exists, (b) men will ultimately be annihilated there, or (c) an endless opportunity for salvation follows this life. This passage (actually, like all passages which speak of ultimate reality) is heavy with divine gravitas and makes a farce and a frivolity out of every attempt to diminish the sharp edges of Jesus’ language about such matters. Jesus is clearly stating, “If a man owned the entire universe and lost his *psuche*, his soul, his true self, he would not possess sufficient value to redeem it.” This sentence is perhaps the most serious one Jesus ever said about the importance of being saved, and trivializes every attempt to diminish the reality of the Biblical doctrines of heaven or hell.

18:8-9 Wherefore if thy hand or thy foot offend thee, cut them off, and cast them from thee: it is better for thee to enter into life halt of maimed, rather than having two hands or two feet to be cast into everlasting fire. And if thine eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee: it is better for thee to enter into life with one eye, rather than having two eyes to be cast into hell fire.

Jesus uses the figure of fire again, but here adds to it a word which is seen for the first time in Matthew in this context, i.e., *aionion* which, as we have seen, is the strongest Greek word to express endlessness. Here the phrase is *to pur to aionion*,” the fire the everlasting.”

18:14 Even so it is not the will of your Father which is in heaven, that one of these little ones should perish.

“Perish” is the word *apoletai*.

21:44 And whosoever shall fall on this stone shall be broken: but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him into powder.

Here is a probable reference to the temporal condition of those who reject God, but it also includes an eternal aspect as well. The language is that of prophecy and includes the time frame of Christ’s final triumph in human history. See Daniel 2:34-35, 45

22:13-14-Then said the king to the servants, Bind him hand and foot, and take him away, and cast *him* into outer darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. For many are called, but few *are* chosen.

Here is an explicit reference to the fact that not all will be saved, that although the Holy Spirit calls men to salvation, not all will respond.

23:15 Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For ye compass sea and land to make one proselyte, and when he is made, you make him twofold more the child of hell than yourselves.

Religious proselytes are warned of the possibility of going to hell, as are those who proselytize them. The fact of degrees of gradations or degrees of punishment is again, referenced here, as elsewhere, with the phrase, "...twofold more the child of hell..."

23:23 Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of Hell?

"Damnation of hell" is, literally, the judgment of gehenna," *kriseos tes geennes*.

24:51 And shall cut him asunder, and appoint him his portion with the hypocrites: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

25:30 And cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

25:41 Then he shall say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels.

"Cursed" is from *kataraomai*, to curse, imprecate evil upon, etc. Hell, Jesus says, was designed for the devil and his angels, but that, obviously, does not prevent men from experiencing it.

25:46 And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into eternal life.

The differing English words "everlasting" and "eternal," used of heaven and hell respectively, are the same Greek word, *aionion*. If heaven is eternal, so, patently, is hell, and vice versa. *Aionion* has more in it than the idea of duration; it embodies the concept of a certain quality of life, whether used of the lost or the saved. The word does, however, entail the concept of duration. Clearer language is difficult to conceive as to both eternal states.

26:24 The Son of man goeth as it is written of him, but woe unto that man by whom the Son of man is betrayed! It had been good for that man if he had not been born.

While this passage makes no explicit reference to eternal punishment the words lose much of their force if no pain beyond mortal experience is envisioned here. They could hardly have been spoken by someone who believed that, in the end, all things will finally be well with all men. To say that it had been better for an immortal being not to have been born than to commit such a sin hints, explicitly, at the terrible importance of sinful acts.

MARK

3:29 But he that shall blaspheme against the Holy Ghost hath never forgiveness, but is in danger of eternal damnation.”

The phrase “blasphemy against the Holy Ghost” has been variously interpreted, but it is commonly understood to refer to the is marked by a persistence in such activity. Whatever the precise nature of the sin, the perpetrator is warned that he will never have forgiveness, but, as Mark’s original language has it, “has everlasting (*aionion*) sin.” Matthew says such sin will not be forgiven “neither in this age or the age to come.” (12:31) No reference is made in the Bible to any sin being forgiven “in the age to come” which has not previously been forgiven in the present age. Whatever will be forgiven in the age to come will already have been forgiven in this age. See Matthew 16:19, and note the perfect tense, “. . .whatever you shall bind shall have been bound in heaven, and whatever you shall loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven.” (NASB) Again, the passage patently denies universalism.

8:35-37 For whosoever will save his life shall lose it; but whosoever shall lose his life for my sake and the gospel’s, the same shall save it. For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? Whosoever therefore shall be ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him also shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he cometh in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.

See comment on Matthew 16:25-26, but note that the loss of “soul” and “life” (same Greek word, *psuche*), in this context, refers to eternal loss since the Bible offers no hope of salvation following death.

9:43-48 And if thy hand offend thee, cut it off: it is better for thee to enter in to life maimed, than having two hands to go into hell, into the fire that never shall be quenched: Where their worm dieth not and the fire is not quenched. And if thy foot offend thee, cut it off: it is better for thee to enter halt into life, than having two feet and to be cast into hell, into the fire that never shall be quenched: Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched. And if thine eye offend thee, pluck it out: it is better for thee to enter into the kingdom of God with one eye, than having two eyes to be cast into hell fire: Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched.

This is perhaps the most explicit statement recorded of Jesus’ teaching about the duration of hell with his thrice-repeated “Where the worm dieth not,” his thrice-repeated “. . .and the fire is not quenched,” and his twice-used phrase “into the fire that never shall be quenched.” Note that, as we saw in Matthew, *asbestos*

is used, meaning unquenchable, and the phrase *ou sbennumi*---not to be quenched---which, obviously, comes to the same thing. Again, for those who argue that the language here is metaphorical, (a) why does Jesus repeatedly use it without qualification, and (b) how could He have been clearer if indeed He did mean to convey endlessness? Perhaps this is the place to observe that if Jesus had spoken in the terms of final science, no one but a handful of elite scientists of the last generation living on earth could have understood Him---which is precisely why He chose language whose meaning is sufficiently lucid for all generations to understand His essential message.

Further, the revelation of the duration of hell does not depend on the definition of one word (such as the oft-used *aionios*) but on the clear meaning of full propositional sentences which explicitly state His meaning regarding eternity. In six verses (vss 43-48) eight clear statements occur regarding the eternal duration of hell. *Gehenna* is used three times in the passage.

12:40 Which devour widows' houses, and for a pretence make long prayers: these shall receive greater damnation.

See Matthew 23:14; "damnation" here is *krima*. judgment. Again, gradations of pain in hell are evidenced.

16:16 He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved, but he that believeth not shall be damned.

"Damned" here is *katakrithestai*, "will be condemned by judgment". The acts of "believing" and "disbelieving" are associated with the proclamation of the gospel and, therefore, have to do with actions performed in time but which produce eternal ramifications.

LUKE

3:9 And now also the axe is laid unto the root of the trees: every tree therefore which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire. (See Matthew 7:10)

3:17 Whose fan is in his hand, and he will throughly purge his floor; and will gather the wheat into his garner; but the chaff he will burn with fire unquenchable. (See Matthew 3:12)

6:27 Judge not, and ye shall not be judged: condemn not, and ye shall not be condemned: forgive and ye shall be forgiven.

“Judged” and “condemned” may, here, have either temporal or eternal implications, or both.

6:49 But he that heareth, and doeth not, is like a man that without a foundation built an house upon the earth; against which the stream did beat vehemently, and immediately it fell; and the ruin of the house was great. “Ruin” (*regma*) speaks of the result of a house (i.e., a life) built on other than what Jesus commanded, and therefore produces either temporal or eternal loss, or both. To put it otherwise, how could a man build a “house” in time which had no eternal consequences?

9:24-26 For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: but whosoever will lose his life for my sake, the same shall save it. For what is a man advantaged, if he gain the whole world, and lose himself, or be cast away? For whosoever shall be ashamed of me and of my words, of him shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he shall come in his own glory, and in his Father’s, and of the holy angels. (See Matthew 16:25-26, Mark 8:35-37)

9:56 For the Son of man is not come to destroy men’s lives, but to save them. If “save” has eternal consequences, as it surely does, so does “destroy.”

10:12-15 But I say unto you, that it shall be more tolerable in that day for Sodom, than for that city. Woe unto thee, Chorazin! Woe unto thee, Bethsaida! For if the mighty works had been done in Tyre and Sidon, which have been done in you, they had a great while ago repented, sitting in sackcloth and ashes. But it shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the judgment, than for you. And thou, Capernaum, which art exalted to heaven, shalt be thrust down to hell.

So many of the inhabitants of entire cities had not repented of their sins that Jesus could speak of them in their entirety descending to hell (*hades*). That fact, however, does not speak of total civic solidarity either

in heaven or hell. Societal judgment does, of course, occur, but, as the Bible makes abundantly clear, one's ultimate eternal state is not determined by his social context, but by his own personal behaviour.

11:31-32 The queen of the south shall rise up in the judgment with the men of this generation, and condemn them: for she came from the utmost parts of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and, behold, a greater than Solomon is here. The men of Nineveh shall rise up in judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: for they repented at the preaching of Jonas; and, behold, a greater than Jonas *is* here. (See Matthew 12:41- 42)

12:46-48 The lord of that servant will come in a day when he looketh not for *him*, and at an hour when he is not aware, and will cut him in sunder and at an hour when he is not aware, and will cut him in sunder, and will appoint him his portion with the unbelievers. And that servant, which knew his lord's will, and prepared not *himself*, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many *stripes*. But he that knew not, and did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few *stripes*. For unto whomsoever much is given of him shall much be required: and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more.

The "portion of unbelievers" cannot be interpreted otherwise than as having eternal implications. The principle of degrees of punishment is here explicitly stated. "Many stripes" may speak of either intensity of punishment, duration of punishment, or both. One may lack complete knowledge of the Lord's will ("But he that knew not..."), but Romans 1:19-2:29 clearly indicates that all men have sufficient light to be held accountable, as do many other passages in the Bible.

13: 3- 5 I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish. Or those eighteen, upon whom the tower of Siloam fell, and slew them, think ye that they were sinners above all men that dwelt in Jerusalem? I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.

"...shall not likewise perish (*apoleisthe*, from *apoluo*) is eternal death, i.e., hell. It could not possibly refer to physical death since all men--repentant as well as unrepentant, die physically.

13:24-28 Strive to enter in at the strait gate: for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able. When once the master of the house is risen up, and hath shut the door, saying, Lord, Lord, open to us; and he shall answer and say unto you, I know you not whence ye are: Then shall ye begin to say We have eaten and drunk in thy presence, and thou hast taught in our streets. But he shall say, I tell you, I know you not whence ye are; depart from me, all ye workers of iniquity. There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when ye shall see Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and all the prophets, in the kingdom of God, and you

yourselves thrust out.

See Matthew 7:21f. While men may seek salvation after death, no evidence exists, in this or any other biblical passage, that it may be attained after death. In fact, the impossibility of being saved following death is the essential point of Jesus' words in this passage. This single passage outweighs---because of its lucidity and simplicity---every obscure scriptural passage cited by non-traditionalists regarding eternal punishment when defending their views.

16:19-31 There was a certain rich man, which was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day: And there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, which was laid as his gate, full of sores. And desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table: moreover the dogs came and licked his sores. And it came to pass, that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom: the rich man also died, and was buried; And in hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom. And he cried and said, Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame. But Abraham said, Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things; but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented. And beside all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed: so that they which would pass from hence to you cannot; neither can they pass to us, that would come from thence. Then he said, I pray thee therefore, father, that thou wouldst send him to my father's house: For I have five brethren; that he may testify unto them, lest they also come into this place of torment. Abraham said unto him, They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them. And he said, Nay father Abraham, but if one went unto them from the dead they will repent. And he said unto him, If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead.

Note that this passage is set apart in the text from other materials in Jesus' teaching. He has been speaking about divorce and then the forgiveness of others. Disparate material both precede and follow His story about Lazarus. If attempts are made---as they are---to interpret the story of the rich man and Lazarus to refer to other than its obvious subject---the state of man following death---that attempt can justly be labeled *eisegesis*, i.e., a reading into the text what is not there. The rich man is not damned because he was rich, nor is the poor man saved because he was poor. We are not informed in this passage as to the basis of their having been consigned to their varied spheres. Other New Testament materials must be consulted for that answer.

Neither the rich man nor Lazarus has lost his identity in the story. They have not ceased to exist nor have they become somebody or something else. (See the passage on the Transfiguration in Luke 9: 28-36 for an indication as to the retention of personal identity on the part of those who have died.)

No less than seven indications are (though some of them overlap) are ascribed to the condemned man: (a) He exists, v23. (b) He sees, v 23, (c) He speaks, v 24, (d) He experiences pain, v 24, (e) He remembers, vss 25-27, (f) He possesses cognitive powers, v 25, (g) He reasons, 27-30. Further, his consciousness is height-

ened. He is cognizant of specific and current facts in reference to three realms (the only three which exist): his, that of Lazarus, and that of his brothers. A form of the English word “torment” is used four times in the passage (vss 23, 24, 25, 26) and translate two Greek words, *basanos* (from *basanidzo*, which speaks primarily of testing metals by the use of a touchstone, or to put to a test; the noun form refers to a torturer; in Matthew 18:34 it is translated “tormenters” or “inquisitors”) and *odune* (from *odunao*, to suffer pain, to be in anguish or distress.)

Specific aspects of the torment are referenced, i.e., the discomfort produced by thirst (v 24) and the anguish produced by the possibility of his brothers experiencing hades (vs 27-28). Those two aspects of suffering refer to the suffering of the spiritual body and soul, the “outer” and “inner” man. However, if we assume, as we justifiably may, that this scene takes place before the rich man receives his eternal body (that is, while he is in hades, not hell, and therefore is in an intermediate state), his suffering pain in that state is instructive in that he is suffering before he possesses an eternal body.

No discussion occurs, it will be noted, between the rich man and Lazarus, but only between the rich man and Abraham.

The impassibility of the “great gulf” (*chasma mega*) which has been fixed (*esteriktai*=firmly set; note the perfect tense---a completed act in the past with present results) is emphasized. The phrase “. . .and seeth Abraham afar off. . .” (vs 23) indicates that a double restriction exists: the rich man cannot pass over the gulf and neither can Lazarus (v 26). The possibility is suggested in v 27, that such a movement might be contemplated, or even wished, indeed, desired. The plural “they” in v26, does not imply that people in hades are in close proximity to each other; it only implies that all the condemned are on one side of the gulf and all the saved on the other. Jesus’ words about “outer darkness” refer to the terrible isolation experienced in hades. T. S. Eliot’s line in The Cocktail Party is relevant: “Hell is oneself, There is nothing there and nobody there. One is forever alone.” Milton’s line is, “Which way I fly is hell; I am hell.” William Morris once said, “Fellowship is life; lack of fellowship is death. Fellowship is heaven; lack of fellowship is hell.” Thomas Paine, on his death-bed, repudiated the teaching of his The Age of Reason and begged for someone, even a child, to stay with him in his death. He exclaimed, it is said, “It is hell to be alone.” Sartre saw it otherwise in his No Exit; the problem was not the absence of people, but their inescapable and nauseous *presence*. He writes of three people who had died, but were forced to live together for eternity, never being able to interact with anybody else, but unable to leave each other or their narrow room even when the door was unlocked.

If we who live do not understand the miserable plight of the lost, whatever the precise context, those in hades, according to vss 27-28, do. Interestingly, the rich man knows the one necessary requirement for escape, the act of repentance.

The hope stated in v 30 (“Nay, father Abraham: but if one went unto them from the dead, they will repent.”), is ill-founded because it does not take into account man’s rebellious spirit. In point of fact, one did return from the dead and man, confronted with that information, continues to reject God and His revelation.

It will be said, as it has been said ever since He said it, that the figurative language used here calls for a wide latitude in interpreting the true meaning of what Jesus meant. In fact, even if such language is used (which is a gratuitous assumption) the reality of hell, all agree, is worse than any description of it. As heaven is more blessed than language can convey, so hell is more cursed than language can convey. The same holds true if, as some say, the passage is parabolic. The truths that underly the parable of the wheat and tares or the prodigal son are no less pertinent because they are cast in parabolic form. A parable (from *ballo*=to cast, and *para*=alongside) is that which is cast alongside something else to explain it; it is in the New Testament, literally, “an earthly story which a heavenly meaning.”

Even if we posit that highly symbolic language is used here, the substantive issue is not the type of language used, *but the reality behind the symbols*. How is the horror of *hades* ameliorated even if, indeed, Jesus was speaking in parabolic form? Again, God limited His revelation to linguistic forms which all ages could comprehend, and did not speak in such high-flown terms which-- even though--none but a very few could comprehend. The problem is not with the Transmitter, the problem is with the receiver. It is no wonder that what Jesus said, and the way He said it, continues to be heard because He spoke to the deepest mysteries of human existence, and ultimate reality, even to those who claim to honor Him and deny the truth He spoke.

Peter Kreeft is helpful here:

Though the fire and the gnashing of teeth are imagery, what they image is indeed horrible. This is not an objection (to hell); this is simply a true observation. The observation becomes an objection, an argument, only by assuming that what is so horrible cannot exist. But how can that be proved? Very horrible things do exist. Pain to the point of panic and insanity exists. The Holocaust exists. The objection is not an argument but a confession of naivete.(16)

JOHN

3:15-19 That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life. For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through him might be saved. He that believeth on him is not condemned; but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.

“Perish” in v 16 (it does not appear in some Greek versions in v 15) is *apoleitai*, and has eternal consequences, as does “condemn” (from *krino*) in vs 17, 18 (twice) and 19. One of the most explicit references in the entire Bible on the subject of God’s love for His creatures also speaks of the destruction of those who reject His son as the Saviour.

3:36 He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him.

“Everlasting” is the only word the Greeks ever used to describe that which is eternal (*aionion*). The wrath (*orge*) of God currently and continually abides (from *meno*, to remain, to continue with, etc.) on the unbeliever; it has both present and future manifestations. The warning that such will not see life cannot justifiably be interpreted as having other than eternal consequences. “Life” (*zoe*) in both uses refers, not essentially to quantity, as biological life (*bios*), but to a quality of life, the life of the spirit of man.

Mostly *zoe* refers to that quality of life which is derived from God and which characterizes the personality of Jesus Christ and of those who come to God through him. It sets for the ‘the blessedness of God, and the blessedness of the creature in communion with God’ (Trench). This life is derived from Christ (John 1:4), is imparted to those who are united to him by faith (Rom. 6:4; I John 5:12) and reaches through physical death to eternity (II Cor. 5:4, II Tim. 1:10). The emphasis in *zoe* is thus on the spiritual and moral quality of the life given to believers. (17)

In this regard, I Timothy 5:6 (“But she that liveth in pleasure is dead while she yet liveth”) demonstrates the difference between the two words: one may well be alive physically but dead spiritually.

5:24 Verily, verily, I say unto you, he that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life.”

Again, “death” is contrasted to “everlasting life” (*zoon aionion*) and is therefore a reference to eternal death. The believer has passed, in the act of belief, from spiritual death (obviously not bodily death) into spiritual life, and

the unbeliever remains in spiritual death (obviously not bodily death, since he remains physically alive.)

This insight (of the relationship between sin and death) is deepened in the Johannine writings, where ‘death’ does not as a rule mean physical death, but the consequence of sin and alienation from God (contrast ‘life,’ ‘eternal life,’ and cf John 11.25f., 5.24f., 6.50, 8.24). It should, however, be noted that, though the NT speaks of eternal life, it nowhere mentions eternal death; *and we must not be hasty to embrace ideas about eternal extinction, etc., for which there is no clear biblical sanction.* (18, emphasis added)

5:28-29 Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, And shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of the damned.

Here is a clear reference to the fact that all the dead, the righteous and the unrighteous alike, will be raised from the dead, the righteous will experience a “resurrection of life (*zoe*=life),” and the unrighteous will experience a “resurrection of damnation (*krisis*=judgment). This passage is a clear denial of the legitimacy of the “conditional immortality” argument which sees immortality as belonging, solely, to the saved, as a specific gift from God, and the lost as not possessing immortality naturally, or automatically, who will thus simply cease to exist at death.

8:24 I said therefore unto you, that ye shall die in your sins: for if ye believe not that I am he, ye shall die in your sins.

“...unbelievers, who die physically as such, remain in eternal separation from God...”, i.e., suffer eternal death.” (19)

11:26 And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die.
If spiritual death is not possible, this sentence by Jesus is meaningless.

12:47-48 And if any man hear my words, and believe not, I judge him not; for I came not to judge the world, but to save the world. He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day.

“Judge” is contrasted to “save,” and is therefore used of the judgment which results in one being consigned to hell. The word “saved” would never have been used if human beings had no need of being saved. One

naturally asks, "Saved from what, and to what?" The judgment of God is the ultimate condition of lostness. See also 16:8-11. Note the eschatological reference: the judgment here is "in the last day," i.e., the day of final judgment (see Rev. 20:11f.) which issues in the eternal states of heaven and hell.

15:6 If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; men gather them, and cast *them* in to the fire, and they are burned.

A possible reference to the judgment of the believer's works, and thus, not to eternal loss by fire. Others hold that it is a reference to apostasy, and therefore the fire spoken of is the eternal experience of the apostate i.e., hell. When, however, this passage is compared to Jesus' words in Matthew 13:40 ("Therefore as the tares are gathered and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of this age," etc.) the indication is that He may well be speaking here of the same event.

17:29-37 But the same day that Lot went out of Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven, and destroyed them all. Even thus shall it be in the day when the Son of man is revealed. In that day, he which shall be upon the housetop, and his stuff in the house, let him not come down to take it away: and he that is in the field, let him likewise not return back. Remember Lot's wife. Whosoever shall seek to save his life shall lose it; and whosoever shall lose his life shall preserve it. I tell you, in that night there shall be two men in one bed; the one shall be taken, and the other shall be left. Two women shall be grinding together; the one shall be taken, and the other left. Two men shall be in the field; the one shall be taken and the other left. And they answered him, Where, Lord? And he said unto them, "Wheresoever the body is, thither will the eagles be gathered together."

"Save his life" and "lose his life" certainly have eternal ramifications, or Jesus' statement is severely trivialized. Brimstone is *theion, sulphur*, and *is* used eight times in the New Testament, all but one by John: (Luke 17:20), and, when by him, always having reference to the judgments at the end of human history. (Rev. 9:17, 18, 4:10, 19:20, 20: 10, and 21:8). It is related to "gopher" wood, a resinous wood which is highly combustible.

ACTS

2:27-31 Because thou wilt not leave my soul in hell, neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption. Thou hast made known to me the ways of life; thou shalt make me full of joy with thy countenance. Men and Brethren, let me freely speak unto you of the patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried, and his sepulchre is with us unto this day. Therefore being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him, that of the fruit of his loins, according to the flesh, he would raise up Christ to sit on his throne; He seeing this before spake of the resurrection of Christ, that his soul was not left in hell, neither his flesh did see corruption.

No specific reference to eternal punishment is stated explicitly here except by means of the inherent meaning of the word “hades.”

3:23 And it shall come to pass, that every soul, which will not hear that prophet, shall be destroyed from among the people.

The word “destroyed” (*eksolethreuthesetai*) need not denote eternity of punishment, but its Greek noun root, *olethros*, may, and often does. It means “ruin, destruction, death,” but never annihilation.

8:20 But Peter said unto him, Thy money perish with thee, because thou hast thought that the gift of God may be purchased with money.

Literally, “The silver of you with you may it be into perdition...” Peter consigns both Simion and his money to a state or condition described by the word “perish,” or *apoleia*, “destruction, waste, loss,” etc. It often (Matt. 7:13, John 17:12, Phil. 1:28, 3:19, II Thess. 2:3, Heb. 10:39, II Peter 2:3, 3:7, Rev. 17:8, 17:11), but does not always refer to eternal loss. It is, in any case, the opposite of *soteria*, salvation, preservation.

24:15 And have hope toward God, which they themselves also allow, that there shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and the unjust.

Both just and unjust will be raised from the dead, and exist in eternal states. This passage denies conditional immortality, that is, that immortality is given by God only to the saved, and not to the unsaved, who simply perish at death. (*Paul taught what he had believed as a Jew and as a Christian, i.e., that both lost and saved will be resurrected.*)

24:29 And he reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and justment to come.

Again, “judgment to come” may speak of temporal judgment at some time before death, but it is not used that way in the New Testament, and thus, this sentence may well speak of the end-of-history judgment which has eternal consequences.

26:17-17 Delivering thee from the people, and *from* the gentiles, unto whom now I send thee; to open their eyes, *and* to turn them *from* darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among **them** which are sanctified by faith that is in me.

The phrase “...inheritance among them who are sanctified...” speaks of the eternal state of salvation and, tacitly, contrasts them with those who possess no such salvation.

ROMANS

1:32 Who knowing the judgment of God, that they which commit such things are worthy of death, not only do the same, but have pleasure in them that do them.

“Death” very probably refers to eternal death, i.e., eternal separation from God. If such are “worthy of death” in time, it could hardly be argued that they are worthy of life in eternity.

2:2-3 But we are sure that the judgment of God is according to truth against them which commit such things. And thinkest thou this, O man, that judgest them which do such things, and doest the same, that thou shalt escape the judgment of God?

The phrase “judgment of God” in v 2 is spoken of as occurring in the present, while the “judgment of God” in v 3 references God’s eternal judgment. No reference is ever made in the New Testament to an *appeal*, or to a *repeal*, of the judgment of God following death. Final judgment is based on a man’s condition at death, and that judgment dictates one’s eternal state, according to the New Testament.

2:5-10 But after thy hardness and impenitent heart treasurest up unto thyself wrath against the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God; who will render to every man according to his deeds: to them who by patient continuance in well doing seek for glory and honour and immortality, eternal life: but unto them that are contentious, and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, upon every soul of man that doeth evil, of the Jew first, and also of the Gentile; but glory, honor, and peace, to every man that worketh good, to the Jew first, and also to the Gentile.

The RSV translates v 5, “But by your hard and impenitent heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath when God’s righteous judgment will be revealed.”

The day of God’s wrath is the ultimate judgment of God. Technically, God’s judgment does not await any future judgment; it is persistently operative. (“...he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth---present tense---on him,” John 3:36). The “day of judgment” spoken of here is actually only a revelation of that judgment which is not constantly occurring.

Four things are promised to those who live for God: (a) v 7-eternal life, (b)v 10-glory, (c) v 10, honor, and (d) v 10, peace. Conversely, four things are promised to those who do not live for God: (a) v 8, indignation (*orge*=anger, wrath), (b) v 8, wrath (*thumos*=passion, hot anger, wrath), (c) v 9, tribulation (*thlipsis*=pressure, affliction, distress), (d) v 9, anguish (*stenochria*=narrowness of space, want of room, difficulty, distress,)

The four words to describe the condition of those who experience God's judgment represent a catalogue of expressions of pain and suffering and the resultant misery. Again, the results of this "day of God's wrath" follow life on this earth; we have no reason--given this or any other passage in the New Testament--to expect that they will ever cease.

This passage is cited, often, to demonstrate that good men can be saved apart from the gospel of grace, simply by living a noble life which pursues "glory and honor and immortality." Properly defined, neither "glory" nor "honor," nor "glory," nor "immortality" is possible without the influences of saving grace operative in a person's life. Further, no man could have written other passages throughout the book of Romans and intended to convey that anybody could be rightly related to God except through His grace becoming operative by means of personal salvation. That would have, to put it simply been to contradict the essential message of the epistle.

3:5 But if our unrighteousness commend the righteousness of God, what shall we say? *Is* God unrighteous who taketh vengeance?

Literally, "God (is) the one inflicting the wrath." "Inflicting the wrath" is *epipheron ten orgen*=setting, or, afflicting the wrath upon." This passage may refer to God's wrath being inflicted in time, but it may also refer to the eternal expression of that wrath.

5:9 Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him. The setting is eschatological; we shall be saved or we shall experience God's wrath. This verse refers to eternal salvation and eternal punishment.

5:12 Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin, and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned.

Paul uses the word "death" often to refer, not only to physical death, but spiritual death, both of which result from sin. Spiritual death is the opposite of spiritual life, that is, it refers to the spiritual state of those who are not saved. The status of spiritual death is reversed by faith in Christ. (See John 3:16, Eph. 2:1) For other uses of the word "death" in this sense, see also Rom. 5:14-15

5:15-18 But not as the offence, so also is the free gift, for if through the offence of one many be dead, much more the grace of God, and the gift by grace, *which is* by one man, Jesus Christ, hath abounded unto many. And not as it was by one that sinned, *so is* the gift: for the judgment *was* by one to condemnation, but the free gift is of many offences unto justification. For if by one man's offence death reigned by one; much more they which receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness shall reign in life by one,

Jesus Christ.) Therefore as by the offence of one *judgment* came upon all men to condemnation; even so by righteousness of one the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life.

If the opposite of “judgment” (*krina*) and “condemnation” (*katakrima*) (v 16) is the free gift of eternal life and the resultant liberation from judgment and condemnation, the “judgment” and “condemnation” in this passage patently have eternal implications. The entire argument, otherwise, is meaningless. While salvation and condemnation have temporal ramifications, those effects are certainly not exhausted in the temporal setting. The concepts of death and life both in their temporal and eternal implications, are again contrasted in 5. 21.

6:23 For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. Again, spiritual and eternal death is contrasted to spiritual and eternal life. (Some who hold to the theory of annihilationism would say that the wages of sin is, at some point beyond physical death, annihilation.

See the section on “Objections” for the orthodox position on the subject of annihilation following physical death.

9: 3 For I could wish that I myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh. “Accursed” is from *anathema*; it refers to that which is totally devoted to God for destruction. Hell is the final *anathema* of God,

9:22 What if God, willing to show his wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction...

Literally, the “vessels of wrath (*orges*) having been fitted for destruction (*apoleian*).” Robertson says this passage refers to “endless perdition (Mt. 7:13, II Thess. 2:3, Phil. 3:19), not annihilation.” (20)

12:19-20 Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but, rather, give place unto wrath; for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord. Therefore, if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him to drink; for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head.

God’s vengeance (*ekdikesis*=vengeance, vindication) has eternal implications. The reference to “coals of fire on his head” may refer to a temporal process by means of which the man may be awakened to repentance but it may refer to eternal punishment as well. See Psalm 18:12-24)

I CORINTHIANS

1:18 For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God.

“Perish” (*apollumenois*=the ones perishing) could not possibly refer to physical death, or Paul’s sentence amounts to “those who are physically dying think the preaching of the cross is foolishness,” and he would not have contrasted the “foolish/perishing” connection with those who are “saved by the power of God.” This sentence only makes sense from an eschatological point of view.

6:9-11 Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God.

No specific reference to hell appears here, but the hiatus between the future of the righteous and the unrighteous is distinct. “The Kingdom of God” is a euphemism, obviously, for heaven.

11:32 But when we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world.

“Condemned (*katakritomen*) with the world” has eternal implications, and therefore speaks of eternal judgment. A form of the Greek word *krima*, judgment, is used twice in v 31, twice in v 32, and once in v 34; it does not in all its uses refer to eternal judgment, but it may, in all cases, have eternal implications.

16:22 If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be Anathema Maranatha. “Maranatha” is an Aramaic word meaning, “Our Lord comes,” It was used by early Christians as a watchword regarding the hope of the church, the Lord’s return. “Anathema,” too, is Aramaic, and refers to something that was devoted to God for destruction, therefore, “accursed.” The point here is that one’s fate is settled once and for all at the time of the coming of the Lord. It is impossible to imagine that the apostle does not here suggest negative eternal results for a person so categorized.

II CORINTHIANS

2:15-16 For we are unto God a sweet savour of Christ, in them that are saved, and in them that perish; to the one we are the savour of death unto death; and to the other the savour of life unto life. And who is sufficient for these things?

The verbal forms here are in the present tense, thus, "...the ones being saved," and "...the ones perishing (*apollumenois*)." The conditions are current; both eternal life and eternal death are states which begin in time and extend into eternity. The word, "perish," then, as always, speaks of eternal loss of well-being, but not of existence.

4: 3-4 But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost: in whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ who is the image of God, should shine unto them.

In language almost identical to the last passage cited, the apostle says that the good news is hidden to them that are "lost," which is (*apollumenois*, from *appolumi*= to utterly destroy, to kill. Again, to say that the word is exhausted by referring to physical death makes the apostle say the absurd: "Everybody who is not saved is dying physically." The word, as always, has to do with spiritual death which, if not reversed by faith in Christ describes his eternal existence.

5:10 For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad.

Judgment seat" is *bematos*, from *bema*, a raised platform where court was held in the first-century Greek cities. Such a *bema*, perhaps the specific one Paul references here, still stands in the marketplace of the ruins of ancient Corinth. This passage, many commentators agree, has to do with Christians being judged in regard to their works; the lost are not in view here. (See I Cor. 3:9-15) The results of that judgment, nevertheless, as with all judgments following death, are of eternal import, and impact eternity. It is impossible to think otherwise.

Other commentators hold that the "all" of v 10 means that all men, whether lost or saved, will stand before Christ in this judgment, which explains Paul's use of the word "terror" (*phobos*=fear) in v 11. Despite Paul's word *phobos*, which demands serious and careful thought, that all--both lost and saved--are seen at this judgment is doubtful because of the apostle's conclusion to the judgment, "If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss; but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire (or, in common parlance, "by the skin of his teeth."). (I Cor. 3:15)

7:10 For godly sorrow worketh repentance not to be repented of; but the sorrow of the world worketh death.

Literally, "...but the world's grief works out death," temporal and eternal. If repentance brings eternal life now and later, the lack of repentance brings eternal death now *and* later. "Death" therefore speaks of one's eternal condition unless reversed by faith in Christ before physical death.

11:15 Therefore *it is* no great thing if his ministers also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness; whose end shall be according to their works. A veiled but distinct reference to the end (*telos*) of demonic ministers which can be nothing less than a justly-deserved ("according to their works") eternal punishment.

GALATIANS

1:8 But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach another gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed.

“Accursed” is *anathema*; a thing devoted to God to be totally destroyed; a votive offering to be totally given to God; that which is cursed. A veiled but certain reference is made here by the use of the word of destruction to a person (as here) or thing. No reference is made here, or elsewhere, demonstrating that the curse being lifted apart from salvation through Christ during time.

3:10 For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse (*kataran*): for it is written, Cursed (*epikataratos*) is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them. The two Greek words may or may not refer to eternal punishment.

5:19-21 Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these; adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like: of the which I tell *you* before, as I have told you in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God.

“Shall not inherit the kingdom of God” indicates that the apostle does not envision everyone being a part of God’s eternal kingdom. Paul’s word “do” is *prasso*, “to do, to practice, to be engaged in.” Our word “practice” is behind the word. At which point an act, or several acts, becomes a “practice,” is known only to God. In any case, here is another denial of universal salvation.

6:8 For he that soweth to his flesh shall reap corruption; but he that soweth to the spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting.

“Life everlasting” (*zoen aionion*) is contrasted to “corruption” (*pthoran*), therefore, “corruption” must necessarily speak of eternal consequences, otherwise the comparison is non-sensical.

EPHESIANS

2:1-5 And you *hath he quickened*, who were dead in trespasses and sins: wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience: among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of the flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others. But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ (by grace ye are saved)...

The condition of the unredeemed sinner is spoken of as death, the implications of which certainly extends beyond the grave, absent the life-giving experience of salvation. A person moves from an existence in time marked by death, into an existence in eternity marked by death. The fact is mentioned in v 1 (“dead in trespasses and sins”) and in v 5 (“dead in sins”). The evidence that the apostle had eternal negative connotations in mind when he used the phrase is that it is contrasted with salvation in Christ, which unquestionably brings eternal positive connotations. (See John 5:24, Col. 2:13, Rev. 3:1)

The emphasis in regard to salvation in the passage is not on the temporal benefits it conveys, but “...that in the ages to come he might show the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus” (v 7). Salvation is eternal deliverance; spiritual death is eternal bondage, thus this verse speaks of hell in terms of death. As spiritual death is nothing else than the alienation of the soul from God, we are all born as dead men, and we live as dead men, until we are made partakers of the life of Christ... (21)

The New English Bible translates the clause “and were by nature the children of wrath even as others” with these words: “In our natural condition we, like the rest, lay under the dreadful judgment of God,” an obvious reference to the essential condition of hell.

2:12 That at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world.

“Afar off” speaks of a temporal condition, but sounds remarkably like the language of Luke 16:26, “And beside all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed...” The separation from God which marks the experience of the sinner in time will make his experience in eternity. “Ignorant of the Divine salvation and of Christ in whom it was found, they had nothing to hope for beyond this world.” (22)

4:18-19 Having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart: who being past feeling have given themselves over unto lasciviousness, to work all uncleanness with greediness.

The New Testament knows nothing of a reversal of the understanding being darkened, of alienation from the life of God, of spiritual ignorance and blindness apart from salvation of Christ in time. Those conditions extend out into eternity and describe the eternal condition of men without God. They speak of eternal loss, of hell, which is---by whatever definition---marked by those conditions. To put it another way, by what process, other than faith in Christ in time, might a human hope to attain to the “life of God” beyond his earthly journey?

4:22 That ye put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts....

The word “old man” and “corruption” (from *ptheiro*=to destroy) speak of eternal realities; they represent qualities of existence in hell. “Some (e.g., Meyer) take the *eternal* destruction to be in view here, the *present* participle expressing what is to issue in destruction or indicating *certainty* of the future (destruction).” (23)

5:5-8 For this ye know, that no whoremonger, nor unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. Let no man deceive you with vain words: for because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience. Be not ye, therefore, partakers with them. But ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord.

Again, Paul issues the explicit warning that all men will not finally be saved. Men may attempt to deceive others into believing that such will be the case, but, in fact, God’s wrath (*orge*) awaits (the word is *erchetai*=is coming, i.e., a future tense verb) to the “sons marked by disobedience.”

Hell is the experience of God’s *orge*, which is here exhibited “...as operating now, but also as looking to fulfill itself in the final adjustment. Here its future operation in the ultimate awards may be specially in view, but not that alone.” (24)

You are darkness in time, the apostle says, and you are headed for darkness in eternity.

PHILIPPIANS

1:28 And in nothing terrified by your adversaries: which is to them an evident token of perdition, but to you of salvation, and that of God.

“Perdition” is *apoleias*, destruction. It is contrasted with “salvation,” and therefore speaks of the opposite eternal condition.

3:19 Whose end is destruction, whose God is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things.

Again, “destruction” is *apoleia*. The end result, both in time and eternity, of being “enemies of the cross of Christ,” is destruction. “Paul regards the two issues of human life as *soteria* (salvation) and *apoleia* (destruction).” (25)

COLOSSIANS

1:13 Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son.

The “authority” (*eksousias*) of the darkness” is a reference to the temporal speak of the eternal darkness of hell. The darkness, to put it otherwise, is not exhausted in time, neither do we have any indication, here or elsewhere in the New Testament, that such mental darkness becomes light in eternity except by accepting Christ’s salvation.

1:21 And you, that were sometime alienated and enemies in *your* mind by wicked works, yet now hath he reconciled.

Alienation from God is the temporal condition of those who are enemies of God, but the word pictures an eternal separation from God in hell as well. The thrust of this passage is that God has reversed this alienation and reconciled us to Himself in Christ. Both the alienation and the reconciliation express themselves in time, but they extend beyond time unless reversed in time.

2:13 And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he quickened together with him, having forgiven you all trespasses.

Spiritual death is here contrasted with “quickening” (*sunezoopoiesen*, from *suzopoieo*=to make a sharer in the quickening of another, used only here and Ephesians in the New Testament). Both spiritual death and spiritual “quickening” have eternal implications.

3:5-6 Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry: for which things’ sake the wrath of God cometh on the children of disobedience.

The sinner, living under God’s wrath (*orge*) now may, in the future (as the future verb *erchetai* shows), expect the same. This is actually a prophecy of the condition of unbelievers in hell---they will be the recipients of God’s wrath, which is expressed in a wide variety intensities.

I THESSALONIANS

1:10 And to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, even Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come.

Literally, "...Jesus the one delivering us from the wrath (*orge*) to come," i.e., that wrath which will befall all those who are not in Christ. Robertson says, "It is eschatological language, this coming wrath of God for sin. (I Thess. 2:16, Ro. 3:5, 5:9, 9:22, 13:5)." (26)

2:16 Forbidding us to speak of the Gentiles that they might be saved, to fill up their sins always: for the wrath is come upon them to the uttermost.

The New English Bible has it: "All this time they have been making up the full measure of their guilt, and now retribution has overtaken them for good and all." The last clause probably means, "God's wrath has come upon them at last." The verb form is in the present tense, but the results of God's wrath upon those who have rejected Jesus is not exhausted in time. The reference here probably does speak of the current condition of the unbeliever, but it has definite eternal significance.

4:6 That no man go beyond and defraud his brother in any matter: because that the Lord is the avenger of all such, as we also have forewarned you and testified.

The vengeance of God (*ekdikos*=the one who exacts penalty from another, the one who vindicates another) will occur in time and eternity (in the absence of repentance in time). This reference may not have eternal retributive judgment in view, but it may. "Modern men and women need to remember that God is the avenger of sexual wrong both in this life and the next." (27)

5:3 For when they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape.

"Destruction" is *olethros*, from *ollumi*-to destroy. See II Thess. 1:9. The judgments of the "day of the Lord" begin in time but extend into eternity. Only if no negative eternal results were caused by God's judgment can this statement refer only to temporal loss.

5:9 For God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ.

"Wrath" and "salvation" are contrasted, demonstrating that both have eternal implications. It could be argued that "wrath," here, refers to man's wrath, or Satan's wrath, and that "salvation" means "deliverance"

from the same---in time. Linguistically, that argument is possible, but given the similarity of language elsewhere in the New Testament which refers unendingly to the eternal effects of “wrath” and “salvation,” and the absence of such language in temporal settings, the weightier evidence suggests the issues are eternal and not temporal, or not solely temporal.

II THESSALONIANS

1:5-9 *Which* is a manifest token of the righteous judgment of God, that ye may be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which ye also suffer: seeing *it is* a righteous thing with God to recompense tribulation to them that trouble you; and to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power....

It is difficult to imagine that one could peruse this passage and not assent to the orthodox view of eternal punishment. Many of the central facets of the subject are either explicitly stated here, or implicitly inferred. Verse 6 literally says, "...since it is a just thing with God to repay affliction to those afflicting you." At Jesus' appearing, His second coming, the unrighteous will receive affliction (*thipsis*=a squeezing, a crushing) and the righteous will receive rest (*anesin*, from *anesis*=a loosening, a relaxation, relief) both have undeniable eternal effects, as is explicitly stated later. In a "fire of flame" Jesus will give "full vengeance to the ones not knowing God and to the ones not obeying the gospel of our Lord Jesus." The penalty will be "destruction eternal" (*olethron aionion*) from the presence (literally, the face) of the Lord and from the glory of his strength."

The punishment of the wicked here is definitely eschatological, and it is eternal. This phrase ("eternal destruction") does not appear elsewhere in the N. T., but it is in IV Macc. 10:15), and is *ton aionion tou turannou olethron* the eternal destruction of the tyrant (Antiochus Epiphanes). Destruction (cf. I Thess. 5:3) does not mean here annihilation, but, as Paul proceeds to show, separation *from the face of the Lord* (*apo prosopou tou kuriou*) and from the glory of his might (*apo tes doxes tes ischuou auto*), an eternity of woe such as befell *Antiochus Epiphanes*.... Paul means by *age* long the coming age in contrast with this age, as eternal as the New Testament knows how to make it. (28)

As for the word rendered "everlasting" (or eternal) for it is the same which is used, e.g., Heb. vi.2) it would certainly convey to St. Paul's readers the notion of incessant duration in time; it is, of course, only an adaptation to human language to speak of time at all in such a case, as we cannot tell what may take the place of time in the next dispensation; however, so far as the actual words go, there is nothing in these passages (Matt. xviii.8, xxv. 41, 46, Mark 3:29; Heb. vi.2, Jude, verse 7) to suggest any future alteration in the state of the lost. (29)

2:10 And with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved.

As often in Paul's epistles, a present tense verbal form is used "in the ones perishing;" judgment is both current and coming. Again, too, those being destroyed (*apollumenois*) are contrasted with those being saved, demonstrating that destruction is thought of in eternal terms. If salvation is eternal, so is destruction.

2:12 That they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness.

“Damned” is *krithosin*, i.e., judged; the results of that judgment are of eternal consequence. This judgment is also contrasted, as often in the New Testament, with salvation (*soterian*) and sanctification (*hagiasmo*, from *hagiasmos*, literally, “a holification.”) in verse 13, demonstrating that it has eschatological ramifications.

I TIMOTHY

1:19 Holding faith, and a good conscience; which some having put away concerning faith have made shipwreck.

This verse may speak of either temporal and/or eternal results of turning away from the true faith, but the phrases “have made shipwreck” and “delivered unto Satan” (v 20) describe conditions, in any case, which may be reversed by repentance toward God and faith toward the Lord Jesus.

5:6 But she that liveth in pleasure is dead while she liveth.

It is impossible to imagine that the apostle did not have eternal implications of spiritual death in mind when he used the word “death” here.

5:12 Having damnation, because they have cast off their first faith.

A probable reference to apostasy, and therefore, a reference to a damnation which has eternal dimensions. Verse 15 (“For some are already turned aside unto Satan”) could well confirm the fact.

5:24 Some men’s sins are open beforehand, going before to judgment; and some *men* they follow after.

“The exegesis of *proagousai* and *epakolouthousin* (“going before” and “they follow on”) depends on the view we take of krisis; viz., whether it refers to a judgment passed by man in this world, or to the final doom pronounced by God in the next.” (30)

6:9 But they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition.

“Destruction and perdition” translate words (*olethron kai apoleian*) commonly used in the New Testament to describe eternal punishment, although the precise combination of those words is used only here. It is possible, but difficult, to argue that only temporal judgment is meant here.

Interestingly, H. D. M. Spence says that “destruction” refers to the physical body and “perdition” to “that more awful ruin of the eternal soul.” He puts it thus: “This premature breaking up of the earthly tabernacle is the herald and precursor of the final perdition of the immortal soul.” (31)

II TIMOTHY

1:10 (In reference to God's "purpose and grace," Paul says about God's plan:) (It) is now made manifest by the appearing of our Saviour Jesus Christ, who hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.

To conclude that Paul means to convey that Jesus has abolished spiritual death for all men is to miss the crucial words "through the gospel," i.e., by means of the gospel. Further, the apostle says here, not that Jesus *gave* light and immortality to anybody, but only that He has *shed light on them both*. The demonstrable essence of the Pauline message is that through believing the gospel, one achieves both spiritual life and immortality. (Immortality is *aphtharsian*, from *aphtharsia*=incorruptibility, imperishability, immortality).

4:1 I charge thee, therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom....

Every human who has ever lived, or who will ever live, will be judged, and that judgment will occur (in fulness) "at his (Christ's) appearing and his kingdom." Appearance" here is *epiphaneia* ("to shine forth"), one of three words commonly used in the New Testament of Christ's second coming.

That judgment is God's final judgment of all men, and it will have eternal ramifications, for all, both believers and unbelievers.

TITUS

3:10-11 A man that is an heretick after the first and second admonition reject; knowing that he that is such is subverted, and sinneth, being condemned of himself.

While this passage does not necessarily speak of eternal punishment (although "subverted"=*ekestraptai* and "condemned of himself"=*autokatakritos*" may do so), we are to understand here that the offer of salvation, at some point, ceases, and is not to be thought of as existing forever.

HEBREWS

2:3 How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation. . . . The statement may refer to Christians who neglect to live out the implications of their salvation. If so, eternal loss results.

6:2 (In reference to “the word of the beginning of Christ,” the author speaks of) the doctrine of baptisms, and of the laying on of hands, and of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment.

“Eternal judgment” is the judgment the results of which are eternal, which---among other things---signifies that it transcends time. ‘It is here called ‘eternal judgment’ (*krima aionion*) because it is the judgment which is valid for the whole age (*aion*) to come, as distinct from the temporal judgments of the present age. (32, footnote)

9:27-28 And it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment: so Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many; and unto them that look for him shall he appear the second time without sin unto salvation. The judgment of passage takes place, not in time, but beyond time and thus, has eternal consequences. This is man’s final judgment, a final calling into account. The negative effects of such a judgment are nullified by “salvation,” which includes “the forgiveness of the sins of many.” On this passage, one writer has this:

In the description of the state of the soul after death it is made clear that the soul enters at once into a state of blessedness or the reverse. . . These conditions---though they will be intensified---are not to be essentially altered on the Day of Judgment itself. This practically means that judgment sets in immediately after death, and that a man’s fate is virtually determined by the present life. (33)

Another writes: “The intermediate state is a state of joyous or else agonizing and fearful, *expectation of* ‘judgment’; after the judgment comes the full and final state of joy, or else woe. (34)

10:26-31 For if we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries. He that despised Moses’ law died without mercy under two or three witnesses: of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace? For we know him that hath said, Vengeance *belongeth* to me, I will recompense, saith the Lord. And again, The Lord shall judge his people. It is a fearful thing to fall in to the hands of a living God.

We are told that the result of apostasy, of willfully rejecting the light one has in Christ, invites---literally, “a certain expectation of judgment and zeal of fire (an anger or zeal marked by fire) being about to consume

(*esthio*=to eat up, devour, consume) the adversaries.”

In v 31, the author quotes two passages from Deuteronomy 32, and thus the phrase, “his people” in the second quotation is to be understood in the specifically Old Testament sense, i.e., in a corporate rather than an individualistic sense of the New Testament. Some commentators indicate that the reference to God judging His people refers only to His vindication of them as against their enemies and does not have the eternal punishment of the apostate and/or the enemy in view. It is, however, possible—as many commentators hold—that, in view of the fact that he is speaking of real and final apostasy, a final and determined turning away from God, eternally negative results of God’s “vengeance” may be in view.

10:39 But we are not of them who draw back into perdition, but of them that believe to the saving of the soul.

The author commends his readers as being genuine Christians and not candidates for apostasy, and therefore will not suffer destruction (*apoleia*) which is so often descriptive of eternal punishment. “Destruction” is contrasted to “possession of the souls,” (*peripoiesin psuches*); both produce eternal results.

12:29 For our God is a consuming fire.

This is perhaps a reference to the general judging activity, or the power of God’s judging power and authority. It may, however, be a specific reference to hell’s eternal fire. “Consume” is from *analisko*, to destroy by burning. It cannot, in the light of the explicit and consistent teaching of the New Testament, refer to God annihilating human beings in hell. The question is not whether He can do such a thing or not; it is whether or not He indicated in the New Testament that He performs such acts, and He does not. It is an aspect of the character of God as revealed in the Bible that plays little part in such present-day thinking about Him; but if we are to be completely “honest to God,” we dare not ignore it. Reverence and awe before His holiness are not incompatible with grateful trust and love in response to His mercy. (35)

JAMES

1:15 Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death.

“Death” is eternal and spiritual death, even though physical death, as well, is a direct consequence of sin. E. Leslie Mitton says of this verse:

If man remained (in New Testament thought) a disobedient and unrepentant sinner, it was his doom to the last to be cut off from God, just as the dead in Sheol (in Old Testament thought) had been thought to be cut off. So it was natural that the end of the sinful man, unredeemed by Christ, should be called “death,” the opposite of eternal life, and involving separation from God. (36)

3:6 And the tongue *is* a fire, a world of iniquity: so is the tongue among our members, that it defileth the whole body, and setteth on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire of hell.

This is the only use of *genenna* outside the gospels. The concept of fire is used three times in the passage. The first is *pur* (“fire,” and refers here to inflamed speech), the other two are from *phlogidzo* (“to set on fire, to burn up,” and is used only here in the New Testament). Some would argue that this passage suggests that the fire of hell is metaphorical since the tongue’s fire surely is. Others would hold that, while that may be true, the tongue is set on fire, in a metaphorical way, by the actual fire of hell.

4:12 There is one lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy: who are thou that judgest another?

God will destroy some and save some. “Save (from *sodzo*) and “destroy” (from *apollumi*) are, as so often in the New Testament, set forth as opposites, demonstrating that eternal consequences are referenced in the use of the two words here.

“Save” and “destroy” are words which may have present spiritual meaning, or a future eschatological meaning, says C. Leslie Mitton. Or, of course, they may refer to both settings, and often do. Of this verse Mitton says: “Here, however, the reference appears to be largely to the *future* verdict of God as judge. (37)

5:20 Let him know that he who converteth the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins.

“Soul (*psuche*) death” is not physical death, even though *psuche* is sometimes used in the New Testament in the simple sense of a human., To escape only physical death, *for the moment*, severely trivializes the sacrificial death of Christ for the sins of mankind.

I PETER

4:5-6 Who shall give account to him that is ready to judge the quick and the dead. For for this cause was the gospel preached also to them that are dead, that they might be judged according to men in the flesh, but live according to God in the spirit.

Physical death does not prevent the judgment of sins. All men will, whether dead or alive, be judged, and will experience temporal, and apart from repentance, eternal loss if the judgment has negative results.

“For this cause...” in v 6 means, “with a view to the final judgment.”

4:17-18 For the time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God: and if it first begin at us, what shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel of God? And if the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?

First century Christians knew that they had passed from the former age to the eschatological “age to come” with Christ’s appearing. It is in this “age to come,” i.e., the current age, that all humans will be judged and “the end (*telos*) of the ones disobeying the gospel of God” will be condemned by God. Since that judgment occurs at the end of this age, the consequences are eternal.

II PETER

2:1-4 But there were false prophets also among the people, as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them and bring upon themselves swift destruction. And many shall follow their pernicious ways; by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of. And through covetousness shall they with feigned words make merchandise of you: whose judgment now of a long time lingereth not, and their damnation slumbereth not. For if God spared not the angels that sinned, but cast them down to hell, and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved unto judgment....

“Destruction” in v 1 and “damnation” in v 3 (both from *apoleia*) refer to eternal destruction. Peter says (v 4) that God is “consigning to hell (*tartaros*, used only here in the New Testament) in pits of gloom” the angels that sinned, and that they are being held there for a future judgment. The passage is an explicit reference to eternal loss as a result of sin and judgment to follow.

2:9 The Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptations (from *peirasmos*, trials), and to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished.

Verse 9 is Peter’s conclusion to a lengthy dissertation which begins at 2:1, the essence of which is that God is faithful to honor His word both to the saved and the unsaved. For the lost, God has “reserved (*tereo*=to keep) the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished (from *koladzo*=to chastise, correct, punish).” Eternal judgment is patently in view here.

2: 12-13 But these, as natural brute beasts, made to be taken and destroyed, speak evil of the things that they understand not; and shall utterly perish in their own corruption; and shall receive the reward of unrighteousness, as they that count it pleasure to riot in the day time.

False teachers are characterized by the word “corruption” (*pthoran*=destruction, corruption, decay), a word used three times of them in v 12: they are “captured” for it, and in their “corruption” they will be “corrupted!” They will “receive the reward of unrighteousness (*misthon adikias*=the wages of unrighteousness),” i.e., face God’s judgment and the eternal consequences thereof.

2:17 These are wells without water, clouds that are carried with a tempest; to whom the mist of darkness is reserved forever.

The gloom of darkness has been kept (*teteretai*, from *tereo*=to keep, reserve; note the perfect tense *which denotes a completed action in the past with current results*) for these false teachers. *Here is evidence that many*

thousands of years in hades have not produced redemptive results.

3:7-9 But the heavens and the earth, which are now, by the same word kept in store, reserved unto fire against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men. But, beloved, be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.

Peter restates his theme: God is faithful to His promises both to the saved and the unsaved. He emphasizes God's merciful patience in "willing" (*boulomenos*, from *boulomai*=to will, wish, desire, purpose) that all come to repentance. This passage is used by some as a basis for universalism, but if it reveals God's inexpressible patience, it also reveals His promise of "the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men," a phrase which would be nonsensical if all will one day be saved.

I JOHN

3:14-15 We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren. He that loveth not his brother abideth in death. Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer: and ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him.

“Abideth (from *meno*, to remain, often in the sense of “in vital union with”) in death” and “hath (no) eternal life abiding (again, *meno*) in him” are phrases which refer to current conditions, the verb forms being in the present tense. The results of “remaining” in that condition are negative and eternal. If we have passed “from death unto life” it is obvious that spiritual and not physical existence is meant.

5:11-12 And this is the record, that God hath given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life.

Not to possess life is to possess death; “hath not life” is a reference to the eternal loss associated with spiritual death. The loss is experienced, to some extent, in time, but ultimately in eternity.

JUDE

5-7 I will therefore put you in remembrance, though ye once know this, how that the Lord, having saved the people out of the land of Egypt, afterward destroyed them that believed not. And the angels which kept not their first estate, but left their own habitation, he hath reserved in everlasting chains under darkness unto the judgment of the great day. Even as Sodom and Gomorrhah, and the cities about them in like manner, giving themselves over to fornication, and going after strange flesh, are set forth for an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire,

While the reference to destruction in v 5 (*apoleian*) may (but need not solely) refer to temporal destruction, the “judgment of the great day” of v 6 is placed in an unquestionably eschatological setting. “The great day” (and like phrases involving “the day”) is always, in the New Testament, a reference to an eschatological event, and speaks of the final judgment.

The adjective “everlasting” in reference to chains (or bonds) in v 6 is *aidiois*, (from *aei*, ever, unceasingly, perpetually) is used only here and in Romans 1:20 in the New Testament. It is a synonym of *aionios*. The cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, while devastated in a temporal setting, are nevertheless...”set forth (as) an example (of) undergoing fire of eternal (*aioniou*) vengeance.

...normally in Scripture, eternal fire means hell fire; so the meaning (here) probably is that their fiery destruction was a foretaste of that eternal fire which awaits the devil and all his accomplices. (38)

12-15 These are spots in your feasts of charity, when they feast with you, feeding themselves without fear: clouds they are without water, carried about of winds; trees whose fruit withereth, without fruit, twice dead, plucked up by the roots; raging waves of the sea, foaming out their own shame; wandering stars to whom is reserved the blackness of darkness for ever. And Enoch also, the seventh from Adam, prophesied of these, saying, Behold, the Lord cometh with ten thousands of his saints, to execute judgment upon all, and to convince all that are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds which they have committed, and of all their hard speeches which ungodly sinners have spoken against him.

“Twice dead” (v 12) is, literally, “twice dying,” probably does not include physical death since the subjects are, presumably, still living. Apostates were often spoken of by the Jews as being “twice dead,” perhaps in the sense of “raised to the second power.” In any case, they are devoid of spiritual life, and, thus, the term here has undoubted eternal negative implications, unless reversed by faith in Christ, a future not contemplated here. The judgment spoken of in v 13, is eschatological in its setting, and its consequences are eternal (*aiona*).

REVELATION

1:18 I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and death.

“Hell” here is *adou*, from hades, the intermediate state between death and the final judgment (for the lost) and a place of suffering for the unredeemed (See Luke 16:19-31). *Hades* is used four times in the Revelation (1:18, 6:8, 20:13, 20:14); *gehenna* does not appear in the book.

9:1-2 And the fifth angel sounded, and I saw a star fall from heaven unto the earth: and to him was given the key of the bottomless pit. And he opened the bottomless pit; and there arose a smoke out of the pit, as the smoke of a great furnace; and the sun and the air were darkened by reason of the smoke of the pit.

The bottomless pit is the abussou, abyss:

The abyss is seen as the place to which the demons in the Gadarene's swine expected they might be sent (Lk. viii.31), while in Paul's one use of the term it is the abode of the dead (Rom. x.7). All the other examples of the word are in Revelation (ix. 1,2,11, xi.7, xvii.8, xx. 1,3). Here it is a place inhabited by spirits, and firmly under God's control (the key is 'given' in this verse, and that seems implied in xx.1). It is not the place of punishment, for that is described as a lake of fire (xx.10,14f.). Charles speaks of the abyss in this book as “the *preliminary* place of punishment”. But the idea of punishment does not seem to be implied in any passage where the term is used. It is the place of the incarceration of Satan (xx.1f), but torment is not implied. It is inhabited by beings hostile to God, but they are subject to His control. (39)

11:18 And the nations were angry, and thy wrath is come, and the time of the dead, that they should be judged, and that thou shouldest give reward unto thy servants the prophets, and to the saints, and them that fear thy name, small and great; and shouldest destroy them which destroy the earth.

John does not see everyone as ultimately being saved. Literally, here, “... the nations were angry (*orgisthesan*, from *orge*) and came the wrath (*orge*) of thee...”. Here we have the wrath of the nations being confronted by the wrath of God! In the end, God's wrath is expressed in judgment against men in the destruction (“... and to destroy, *diaphtheirai*, of the ones destroying, *diaphtheirontas*) the earth...” Both words are from *diaphtheiro*=to corrupt or to destroy utterly.

John places a stronger emphasis on God's wrath in the Revelation than does any other New Testament writer, mentioning it in 12:12, 14:8, 10,19, 15:1, 7, 16:1, 19, 18:3, 19:15.

14:9-11 And the third angel followed them, saying with a loud voice, If any man worship the beast and his

image, and receive his mark in his forehead, or in his hand, the same shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured without mixture into the cup of his indignation; and he shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb: and the smoke of their torment ascendeth up forever and ever: and they have no rest day nor night, who worship the beast and his image, and whosoever receiveth the mark of his name.

It is difficult to imagine plainer language as to the horror of the condition of the lost. This passage reeks with the ineradicable reality of eternal punishment. John, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, is very certain that a painful eternity exists for the unsaved, and stretches language to its limits in stating that fact.

“Wrath” is seen twice in v 10; the first being *thumou*, from *thumos*, and the second from John’s usual word *orge*. *Orge* arises out of God’s settled disposition toward sin and the sinner while *thumos* is the anger which speaks of suddenness and intensity. If one says these are anthropomorphisms (attributing human mental or emotional states to God) the realities behind the anthropomorphisms surely are more horrific realities than human language is capable of conveying.

“Forever and ever” in v 11 is *eis aionas aionon*, “unto ages of ages,” which is actually a powerful redundancy to emphasize the duration of eternal punishment. Some argue that *aionion* is, at times, used of something less than eternity in the New Testament, though they admit that it often does. When the word is used, as here, in doubled fashion, no serious Greek scholar could ever argue that it means anything less than eternity.

Against the frivolous charge of Biblical inconsistency is that the fire in hell would emit light, and yet hell is spoken of as a place of “outer darkness.” The obvious solution to the supposed conundrum is the presence of another material reality in hell, that of overwhelming smoke, makes it entirely imaginable.

14:19-20 And the angel thrust his sickle into the earth, and gathered the vine of the earth, and cast it into the great winepress of the wrath of God. And the winepress was trodden without the city, and blood came out of the winepress, even unto the horse bridles, by the space of a thousand *and* six furlongs.

In the fourteenth chapter of the Revelation, John comes to the end of history (“Babylon is fallen,” v 8), as he does at the end of the seals, trumpets, and bowls judgments. The cataclysmic destruction of the wicked at the end of the age is in view here. The destruction occurs in time; its effects extend into eternity. Every human is either in the vintage or the harvest. The “winepress” obviously speaks of the excruciating nature of the final judgment.

15:1 And I saw another sign in heaven, great and marvelous, seven angels having the last plagues; for in them is filled up the wrath of God. The plagues, again, represent the final judgment on earth. “In them is God’s wrath is filled up,” *etelesthe*, from *teleo*, i.e., reaches its end or aim or final purpose. Although they do not exhaust the expression of God’s wrath, the results are eternal and they entail, therefore, eternal loss. (See 20:1-3, 10-15)

The manifestations of the pouring out of the bowls of wrath extend through 16:21.

16:19:6 This entire section deals with the judgment of “Babylon,” the great whore. While her judgment occurs in time, the results of that judgment are spoken of as having eternal consequences. Very probably 17:8 (“perdition,” *apoleian*), 17:11 (“perdition,” *apoleian*), and 19:3 (“her smoke rose up forever and ever, *eis tous aionas ton aionon*) speaks of eternal punishment, while other references in the section may or may not: 16:9, 17:16, 18:7, 18:8, 18:10, 18:15, 18:18, 18:19. It is impossible to speak of the duration of eternity in stronger terms. (Some dislike speaking of “duration” in reference to eternity because it is of a different quality than time, they say. Time morphs into eternity. Perhaps, but perhaps not. Eternity may represent more than duration, but it does not mean less than duration. In any case, the Biblical writers had to use language available to them, and to us.

19:15 And out of his mouth goeth a sharp sword, that with it he should smite the nations: and he shall rule them with a rod of iron: and he treadeth the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God.

Heaven is opened and Christ “in righteousness he doth judge and make war” (v 11). The essential results of His judgment are recorded in v 15: the smiting of the nations, (b) The rule over them with a rod of iron, (c) The treading of the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God. All of that represents judgment in a temporal setting which carries over into eternity. The words “anger (from *thumos*) and wrath (from *orge*) of Almighty (from *pantokrator*) are, again, the strongest words available to John to describe the end of human history and the judgment of God upon it. *Pantokrator* is used in the New Testament once by Paul (II Cor. 6:18), and ten times by John, all in the Revelation.

19:20 And the beast was taken, and with him the false prophet that wrought miracles before him, with which he deceived them that had received the mark of the beast, and them that worshipped his image. These both were cast alive into a lake of fire burning with brimstone.

The “lake fire” is the Biblical language for the final state of the unredeemed, that of hell.

20:6 Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years. “The second death” is to experience hell forever. See 20:14, 21:8.

20:10 And the devil that deceived them was cast in to the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are, and shall be tormented day and night forever and ever.

The members of the unholy trinity are now sent to hell forever. The same Greek word is used here to denote the duration of hell as is used to denote the duration of heaven, i.e., *aionios*. The phrase here is *eis tous aionas ton aionon*; it is, again, it is an intensification of the only means by which the Greeks could express endlessness. (See Matthew 25:46)

Not only does hell last forever, its torment (from *basanidzo*, to put to the test, to torture, torment, distress) lasts forever as well.

20:13-14 And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell (not hell, but hades) delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works. And death and hell (again, *hades*) were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death.

Those in hades (the unredeemed) are cast into hell, thus, the intermediate state no longer exists. Death and hades are themselves cast into hell.

21:8 But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death.

Here John mentions, for the final time in the Revelation, the “second death,” eternity in the lake of fire.

QUESTIONS OFTEN ASKED ABOUT HELL

1. WHAT IS THE “ORTHODOX” OR “TRADITIONAL” VIEW OF HELL?

Many who write and speak against the “orthodox” view of hell typically set up “straw men” which are caricatures, and worse, of the Biblical hell. They want people to assume, for instance, that Dante’s view of hell, from his “Inferno,” finished in about 1307, and which is a highly imaginative allegory, depicts the “orthodox” view (one presumes that includes Dante’s circle of ice). Dante’s description of the suffering in his various levels of hell is of horrific conditions, but we are clearly told in the Bible of the fact of terrible suffering there, but very little precise description of it. If these same authors are defending a “metaphorical” view of hell, they often quote C. S. Lewis in his “The Great Divorce,” another fanciful allegory about heaven and hell, but they apparently do not think---because they never say so---that his heaven depicted there is actually what he believes about it. Neither do they say that his Perelandra---which paints another patently fanciful picture of heaven---is his actual view of heaven. Most universalists cite the third-century theologian Origen, the father of universalism, as if he held to an orthodox (meaning Biblical) view of hell, or at least as if he legitimizes a serious discussion of the possibility of all finally being saved. They use words and phrases to define orthodoxy such as “God (in the orthodox view) acts like a deep-fry cook,” “Hell is like God watching a cat squirm forever in a microwave,” (quoting, with approbation, the French existentialist and atheist, Jean Paul Sartre), “Hell is like chestnuts roasting on an open fire,” hell is “savage,” “cruel,” unjust,” “vindictive,” and/or “sadistic.” Hell “brings delights to the saints,” “God is satisfying His desire for revenge,” “God is a sadistic torturer,” the orthodox view of hell “makes God look like a bloodthirsty monster,” and, when addressing our Lord’s warnings about hell being a place where there is “gnashing of teeth,” one promises “teeth will apparently be furnished for the toothless.” In a brief essay on hell, author Clark Pinnock begs us to believe ---since he states the supposition eight times (40) ---that orthodoxy has the saints watching sinners roast in hell and enjoying the sight. To prove his point, he quotes Dante, Augustine (sort of), and Jonathan Edwards as holding that view---passing it off as “orthodoxy.” He does admit, “I acknowledge this view but doubt that more than a handful of people today could assent to this cruel aesthetic.” (41)

In point of fact the “handful” is very nearly mythological. *And always was*. Such a view has never characterized orthodoxy, even if his citations are correct. Defending his view of ultimate annihilation for obdurate sinners, Pinnock says orthodoxy holds to the view that punishment in hell is eternal only because the idea of automatic immortality, which, he says, derives from Plato’s view of the indestructibility of the soul. Orthodoxy is not defined by theological aberrations of any sort, but by the explicit teachings of Scripture.

The accusations against the orthodox view of the character of God in allowing eternal punishment (used, parenthetically, in purportedly serious theological works---I am here referring specifically to Four Views)---causes objective students to wonder how substantive their arguments are if they are forced to stoop to such inanity, not to say blasphemy, to caricature all orthodoxy.

It is also to be remembered, and pondered deeply, that these things are said by people who assure us they believe in the inspiration and authority of the Bible. They simply believe that orthodoxy had it wrong, and

sometimes, terribly wrong, and still does.

Thus, one asks, what is the “orthodox” or “traditonal” view of hell? The orthodox view of hell has been commonly held to state that the wicked will experience, eternal punishment, and that the punishment is not rehabilitative or redemptive, but punitive.

The Westminster Confession puts it this way: the lost “shall be cast into eternal torments and be punished with everlasting destruction.” (As we have seen, “destruction” does not mean, to the Biblical authors, annihilation. Further, “orthodoxy” does not require that one subscribe to the double-edged predestination of some Calvinists.)

The Baptist New Hampshire Confession states:

(We believe” that the end of this world is approaching; that at the last day, Christ will ascend from heaven, and raise the dead from the grave to final retribution; that a solemn separation will then take place; that the wicked will be adjudged to endless punishment, and the righteous to endless joy; and that this judgment will fix forever the final state of men in heaven or hell, on principles of righteousness.
(Section XVIII)

In its current confession, “The Baptist Faith and Message,” in regard to “Last Things,” we read:

God, in His own time and in His own way, will bring the world to its appropriate end. According to His promise, Jesus Christ will return personally and visibly in glory to the earth; the dead will be raised; and Christ will judge all men in rigeousness. The unrighteous will be consigned to Hell, the place of everlasting punishment. The righteous in their resurrected and glorified bodies will receive their reward and will dwell forever in Heaven with the Lord.

The New Catholic Encyclopedia states that “since NT times the doctrinal statement of belief in the mystery of hell is found in the Catholic professions of faith,” and in 543 AD, in a definition “reflecting the faith of the Church of the East and West, the punishment of demons and the damned was declared unending.” That does not mean that previous to 543 the doctrine was not believed, but that at that time it was clarified in the canons of the church.

The Lutheran Augsburg Confession reads, in part: It is also taught among us that our Lord Jesus Christ will return on the last day of judgment and will raise up all the dead, to give eternal life and everlasting joy to believers and the elect but to condemn ungodly man and the devil to hell and eternal punishment. (Article XVII)

2. WHY WOULD GOD WANT ANYBODY TO SPEND ETERNITY IN HELL?

The Bible states plainly that God does not take pleasure in the death of the wicked (Ex. 18:23, 32, 33:11, etc.), that He is not willing that anyone should perish (I Tim. 2:4), and that He has done everything short of destroying man's freedom to prevent people from going to hell.

God's ultimate demonstration of His desire that men escape hell is the sending of His Son to suffer the effects of hell for us, the just for the unjust (I Peter 3:18) in order that men might not have to.

In John 3:16-18, God makes it clear, not only that He loved man with sufficient intensity to give His Son up to death for us, but that "...God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved." Later, in verse 36 of the same chapter, John says, "He that believeth on the Son hath (present tense) everlasting life: and he that believeth not shall not see (future tense) life; but the wrath of God abides (present tense) on him." For centuries evangelical preachers have preached sermons whose essential theme is "Blockades on the Road to Hell;" the list is lengthy!

From one perspective, it can be truthfully said that every act of God recorded in the Bible is an expression of His desire to prevent people from going to hell. He continues to ask, "Why will you die?" (Ex. 18:31), meaning, "Why will you continue to choose to rebel against me and suffer the consequences of eternal death when I offer you life?"

3. DO OTHER RELIGIONS HAVE A DOCTRINE OF HELL?

In the interesting book entitled Traditional Aspects of Hell, James Mew discusses the Egyptian, Assyrian, Brahman, Buddhist, Zoroastrian, Classic (i.e., Greek and Roman), Scandinavian, Hebrew, Christian, Muslim, and various barbarian conceptions of hell. Punishment, to one extent or the other, of one kind or another, and for differing reasons, is attributed to each definition of hell, by whatever name. In dealing with the Christian view of hell, Mew does not consider the Biblical materials but offers some of the various perceptions of hell by Christian thinkers through the ages, emphasizing the Medieval period (which informs many criticisms of the supposed "orthodoxy" which dates to that period). For that reason, the book does not present a full or balanced, or even Christian, view of the subject.

Mew says:

Nothing, if we may rely upon common consent, ancient origin, and religious authority, is more certain than the existence of hell. It is proved alike by holy scripture, the holy fathers, and pagan testimony." (42)

S. G. F. Frandon's The Judgment of the Dead: The idea of Life After Death in the Major Religions, reports the same phenomenon in the religions of India, China, Japan, and elsewhere. "One thousand years before the time of Moses, inscriptions on the tombs of Egyptian kings reveal expectations of avoiding future punishment beyond death by means of good deeds performed during life.(43)

4. HOW CAN GOD BE WRATHFUL AND JESUS BE MERCIFUL?

In the very nature of the case it is impossible for God and Jesus to act contrarily to each other if we ascribe full deity to both, as Christian orthodoxy has always done.

As Alan Richardson says:

There can be no doubt at all that Jesus taught the reality of the last Judgment (e.g. Matt. 5.21f; Mark 9.43-48, etc.), however we may explain the meaning of his parabolic and pictorial language. He clearly regards himself as related to *orge* (wrath) and *krisis* (judgment) as he is related to *basileia* (kingdom), *zoe* (life) or *doxa* (glory). He is the bearer of the divine wrath, as when, for example he is constrained to pronounce the doom of Jerusalem and the divine judgment upon Judaism, the barren fig-tree (Mark 11.14, 20; Luke 13.34.; 19-41-44; cf. Mark 12.9f). He is the bringer of the 'woes' of the Messiah, because these things must be before the End can come (Mark 13.5-27). The Messiah must inevitably exercise God's judgment (Matt. 25.31f; John 5.22, 30, 8:16, 9.39; Rom. 14.10; II Cor. 5.10; II Tim. 4.1,8; I Pet. 4.5; Rev. 16:10; 19.11), and it is thus impossible to distinguish between God's wrath and the character and work of Jesus Messiah. God and Christ are one, even in judgment, as the NT and Catholic theology consistently affirm; only a certain kind of degenerate Protestant theology has attempted to contrast the wrath of God with the mercy of Christ." (44, emphasis added)

5. HOW CAN HELL BE CONSISTENT WITH A GOD OF LOVE?

This question is, of course, closely related to the previous one. Because the Bible says that God is love (I John 4:6) and because love is commonly associated with an easy-going license to do whatever one pleases, hell is often thought of as being not only a contradiction of God's love, but the very antithesis thereof. No loving God would, it is supposed, have devised such a place or condition as hell, and therefore it must have had its provenance elsewhere. Hateful men, for whatever reason, have produced it and not a loving God.

In point of fact, the Bible contains hundreds of references to the wrath of God, and those expressions are by no means confined, as if often supposed, to the Old Testament. In fact, the New Testament writers, and Jesus in particular, fills out many of the gaps in our knowledge of the plight of the wicked in the Old Testament dispensation, and do so in pellucid language. Even the most cursory reading of the Bible abundantly demonstrates that it is impossible to conceive of a Biblical world-view which does not take into account the wrath of God.

The fact that, on the one hand, God is omnipotent and God is love, and, on the other, eternal retribution is plainly taught in Scripture, raises problems for our minds that in all probability we cannot fully solve. It is easy in such cases to produce a logical answer at the cost of one side of biblical truth, and that has often been done....The reality and eternity of suffering in Gehenna is an element of biblical truth than an honest exegesis cannot evade. (45)

In what realm of human existence, it might be helpful to ask, is a God revealed who is incapable of wrath? If we say nature reveals such a God, the facts contradict us. If we say conscience speaks of such a God, we discover that our consciences, indeed, do, universally, “make cowards of us all,” as Shakespeare, precisely because our knowledge, which is surely innate, calls us into account. The word “guilt” is from a Yiddish word “gelt” which means “money,” in the sense of “owing money,” as in a debt. If we affirm that the religions of the world portray such a God, yet the religious literature of the ages proves us wrong.. If we say that the Judeo-Christian scriptures reveal such a God, we are fantasizing and simply denying the demonstrable facts. If we say morality or humaneness or mercy denies the necessity of punishment, we stand athwart the ineluctable facts of our own existence. If we call upon logic, however twisted, as our ally, the truth is that we cannot even imagine a world in which nothing and no one ever stands against evil.

The scriptures aside, the only well-rounded personality imaginable is one which is capable of expressing anger. Perhaps one could argue, even so, God does not have to be capable of expressing wrath to possess a “well-rounded personality,” and that such terminology is the result of anthropomorphic thinking, of creating God in our image. In any case, the burden of proof in such matters is with the one who denies such a capability on the part of God and who gives up the scriptural revelation of Him in the Bible. Further, it does no good to hold that the wrath of an earlier Biblical revelation gave way to love in the later revelation; in the final stages of the New Testament materials, and notably in the life and teaching of Jesus Himself, such expressions are abundant and explicit.

Nor will it do to attribute God’s wrath solely to the operation out of some impersonal set of laws which govern the universe, While the lawful constitution of the universe and violations thereof do produce a “judgment” on man, that view does not do justice to a full-orbed Biblical doctrine of divine retribution. The wrath of God is His personal expression of His settled disposition toward sin and the sinner. (See II Thess. 1:5-10, Rev. 19:11-16, Proverbs 6:16-19, etc.)

The horror of man’s sin is precisely that the sinner invites the wrathful response of a loving God. One must contemplate the mystery of the phrase “the wrath of the *Lamb*” (Rev. 6:16) which is destined to manifest itself against those who hate God. The idea of a wrathful lamb is extremely suggestive and is portrayed imaginatively and powerfully in the Van Eyck brothers’ “Ghent Altarpiece.”

To be certain, much about God’s wrath is deeply mysterious, but the suspicion that any human can be more humane or merciful or full of pity than God is unsophisticated arrogance and actually portrays a settled hatred for the God who is revealed in the Bible.

Andrew Fuller said about the subject:

“Sin and misery being contrary to the holiness and benevolence of God, they must, it seems, come to an end.” Such an assertion is made; but where is the proof? A little more assurance might lead another to say that sin and misery, being contrary to the holiness and benevolence of God, cannot exist in a

future state; and, were it not for the awful evidence of facts, another might assert that sin and misery do not now exist; for, in theory, it would be as easy to prove that the present existence of sin and misery is as contrary to

the holiness and benevolence of God as to their existence in the future; and that their existence in the future, for ages of ages, is as contrary to the holiness and benevolence of God as their existence to an endless duration. By such kind of reasoning, some men have become atheists, because they cannot reconcile the present state of things with their ideas of a superintending Power, possessed of infinite holiness and benevolence; and I cannot but tremble for the man who begins to travel in this unwary path, but measuring the Divine administration by his own unhallowed notions of moral fitness. (46)

An interpretation of the nature of God which allows Him to express only His love Is an interpretation of the divine nature, says John Gerstner, which pastor/theologian, Jonathan Edwards, never held.

Therein is the greatest error of our times into which Jonathan Edwards never fell. God (to Edwards) is love but he is more than love and he is other than love. God is holiness; God is justice; God is wisdom; God is wrath. God is God. (47)

Perhaps this is the place to note one of the most puzzling aspects of the argument of those who suggest that hell is not moral, that, indeed, the hell of Christian orthodoxy reveals a God unworthy of our sense of morality. One looks in vain for any reference to this obvious conundrum: how is it that heaven is never seen as being “immoral?” How, precisely, is it “moral” for God--on the basis of a finite decision in time--to give to those who love and serve Him endless bliss? By what standard of morality, or justice, or even logic, could such a thing be defended? If we operate on the basis that whatever God does that pleases us makes perfect sense, but whatever He does that does not please us rankles against our sense of morality, it must be patently obvious that our theology is based on a highly subjective and self-serving position, and not on dispassionate truth. *One waits in vain to hear the subject addressed by those who seek, on the basis of “morality,” to deny the Biblical doctrine of hell.*

6. WHAT ABOUT THE BIBLICAL INCONSISTENCY OF SAYING THAT HELL IS CHARACTERIZED BY DARKNESS WHICH PRECLUDES LIGHT-PRODUCING FIRE?

One encyclopedist asks it like this, in an attempt to make the fire metaphorical: “Jesus spoke of a place of punishment as ‘outer darkness’ (Matt. 8:12, 22:13, 25:30). Can a place have both literal fire and literal darkness. What reason does one have for taking one expression as literal and not taking the other as literal? “That question is often asked in the literature, as if it presents an insuperable difficulty for those who accept the literal view of the description of hell. That is, however, to forget that Jesus spoke of another element in hell, that of smoke. (See Rev. 14:11, “And the smoke of their torment ascends forever and ever...”, Rev. 19:3, “Alleluia! Her smoke rises up forever and ever!”) , The explanation may be very simple: we are not told that the fire is *seen* in hell, only *felt*. The sight of it may well be obscured by the smoke. A campfire on

a moonless night would be an apt figure: comparatively very little light with immense darkness. Further, light-and-darkness in hell may be intermittent. None of that proves a literal view, but it does deny the idea that fire must cancel the darkness, and vice versa. It may also speak to the hint of petulance in much of what is written about the minutae while missing the obvious.

7. DOES THE BIBLE TEACH THAT THE UNRIGHTEOUS WILL BE RESURRECTED?

Several passages make it abundantly clear that, yes, the unrighteous will be resurrected. John 5:28-29 quotes Jesus as saying:

Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that in the graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation (*krisis*=judgment). Note that the word “resurrection” is the same in both cases.

Daniel 12:2 tells us, “And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt. The Tyndale commentary says of the word “many,”

“...the use of the word ‘many’ in Hebrew is not quite parallel with its use in English. Hebrew *rab-bim*, ‘many’, tends to mean ‘all,’ as in Deuteronomy 7:1; Isaiah 2:2; and in Isaiah 52:14, 15, 53:11, 12, where this key-word occurs no less than five times with an inclusive significance”. (Daniel, p. 204) Note, as well, that the two “awakenings,” i.e., resurrections, we are told in Revelation 20:4-6, are separated by a thousand years, the saved having been raised a thousand years previous earlier than the one reported there. (48)

The Bible reveals little about the eternal body of the saved (with the notable exception of I Corinthians 15, II Cor. 5:1, and Philippians 3:20-21, along with glimpses of Jesus’ body following His resurrection) and less about the body of the lost, but resurrection, in the Bible, whether of the lost or saved, always assumes bodily resurrection. In fact, the very word explicitly demands it. Apparently, in both cases, the body will be adapted to a spiritual existence and will not be subject to wear and tear and time and space limitations.

A “spiritual” body does not mean a body made of spirit but one completely vitalized and transformed by the Spirit of life. The resurrection body does not belong to a *wholly* other order of existence; it is the present body redeemed (Romans VIII. 23) when mortality is swallowed up in life. (2 Cor. V.4) (49)

No amorphous (formless) body is envisioned in the resurrection, in view of the fact that identity is retained. The New Testament writers never speak of the eternal existence as being disembodied or disincarnate. In fact, Paul explicitly says that he was longing, not to be “unclothed” (i.e., disembodied) but “clothed upon, that mortality might be swallowed up of life.” He was awaiting the future dissolution of his earthly body and for his “house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.” (II Cor. 5:1-4)

Further, there seems to be a definite connection, though of a mysterious sort, between the body that now is and that which shall be. In the case of the saved, the same body is raised that is sown, though, of course, with immense changes. As there is a substantive correlation between the seed and the resultant plant, so there will be a correlation between the earthly body which is sown and the eternal body which rises from the grave. (I Cor. 15:35-44)

J. G. S. S. Thompson, commenting on the nature of the eternal body of the saved says:

The continuity and identity (between the earthly and heavenly bodies) may be in moral personality rather than material particles, but a “bodily” form “as the angels,” infinity with loss of finitude is assured. Scientific study and philosophical thought today support the credibility of this hope. No longer is personality divorced from the physical organism. Matter is energy, organizing itself in particular patterns. The body is not identical with a particular collection of molecules. Through a seven years’ mutational period, the body remains identically itself, not because material particles are immutable but because they are organized after the principle of the body’s self-identity. The body is essential to the self. Consciousness involves body as well as mind. The physical body’s identity and continuity with the spiritual body, and the transmutation that will be involved is a “mystery,” but a relation between the self here and the self there is certain. “This mortal” is significant for the future “immortality.” It secures not only the survival of the soul, but the future life of the whole man, the restoration and recognizability of the total personality clothed in a “spiritual body.” (50)

Alan Richardson says that

At our resurrection we shall possess what in the (literally to us inconceivable) world of spirit corresponds to our bodies in the material world---means of expression, identification, recognition, etc. (50)

We may safely assume that the body of the lost bears the same relation to the life of the lost as does the eternal body of the saved to their earlier life on earth as well.

Frank Stagg says:

It is well to consider with Nicholai Berdyaev that “Materiality and corporeality are not one and the same thing.” What is thought of as “the other world” is also a bodily world ‘in the sense that there exists an eternal form, eternal countenances, and the eternal impression upon them. (52)

8. IS IT NOT HARSH, EVEN JUDGMENTAL, TO TELL SOMEBODY THEY MIGHT GO TO HELL?

No one could justifiably be accused of harshness if he warned a motorist that a bridge was out, or a sick person that certain medicines might kill him, or a child that he should not play with rattlesnakes. The danger of hell, however, is astronomically greater than those situations because it affects, not only time, but eternity. In fact, no matter how harshly such a warning might be given, he whose life is spared would surely be grateful for the warning. Such a warning would obviously constitute an act of love of the highest order. Conversely, not to give such a warning would constitute, all agree, an act of criminal negligence. The courts of the land universally hold him accountable who refuses, or neglects, to give such warnings. Or, to change the metaphor, he who knew the cure for cancer (and was himself, let us say, healed of the disease by the use of the cure) but refused to tell others about it would surely be accounted by fair-minded people as being contemptuous and hateful of humanity. If Jesus' life is any indication of what ours ought to be, we must feel the obligation to speak freely about eternal matters.

In any case, every human is cast constantly into situations where he must speak, regardless of the consequences to himself and others, that which he knows to be true. Thoughtful persons, when announcing painful truth, reason as follows, "I will not leave you temporarily happy at the risk of leaving you permanently miserable." Paul once said that we should speak the truth in love (Eph. 4:15) indicating that both what we say and the way we say it are important. On another occasion he asked, though, without reference as to how we announce a matter, "Am I therefore become your enemy, because I tell you the truth?" (Gal. 4:16)

None of that is to encourage harshness in speech or conduct; it is to say that the value of truth stands above linguistic sensibilities.

The obvious must not escape us here: in the study of the New Testament one is struck by the fact that Jesus Himself, the personification of love (a) spoke more

about hell than anyone else, (b) spoke of it much more often than He did about heaven, (c) spoke of it in horrific terms, and (d) stated that He was patently warning people that they would end up in hell if they did not act to escape it.

9. IS FEAR OF HELL A PROPER MOTIVE FOR SERVING GOD?

When Robert Burns said that "the fear o' hell's a hangman's whip to haud the wretch in order," he verbalized an age-old suspicion of many critics of the doctrine of eternal punishment, namely, that the doctrine is expressive of an attempt to force moral conformity, especially the speaker's view of morality, on others.

Several observations are pertinent to the question: (a) In some cases that fear may hold people in line, in others it apparently does not, but we have no proof in either case that such is God's motive for allowing hell

to exist. (b) If fear of punishment prevents some would-be murderer from taking my life, I am grateful for the restraint such fear imposes on him. He might not be any more moral for the restraint, but I would be more alive. (c) No one can read Jesus' words and miss His intention to frighten certain people. His repeated use of the word "woe" in Matthew 23 means, in common parlance, "Be afraid, be deathly afraid, of the judgment which is surely to befall you," as does His unanswerable question of verse 33 of that same chapter, "Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of hell?" If the auditors were afraid of the possibility of eternal hell after hearing such words, it was only because they understood precisely what Jesus intended to convey. That is not to say He was affirming fear as the sole motive for serving God, but words cease to have meaning if He was not suggesting that they had every right to be afraid of the future He envisioned for them. (d) Scores of generations of devoted and saintly Christians have served God, but not, certainly, solely out of craven fear of hell. They have served God (among other things) because they knew about hell ("Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men..."), and because they knew about heaven ("And every man that hath this hope—the hope of the resurrection and life in heaven—in him purifieth himself even as he is pure." (II Cor. 5:11, I John 3:2)). (e) Honestly, is it not possible that no act, however altruistic, is completely free of the fear factor, though the fear may be subconscious? Is each of us sufficiently knowledgeable of the dynamisms of the labyrinthine recesses of our psyches that we can say, with total certainty, of any of our acts, "There is in that act not a scintilla of fear of any kind?"

10. HOW IS IT THAT GOOD AND WISE MEN HAVE BELIEVED OTHER THAN WHAT THE BIBLE SAYS ABOUT HELL?

"Good and wise men" have denied, at one time or the other, every doctrine of the Bible. Paul informs us that "...the world by wisdom knew not God...". Peter admitted that, even in his day, all men did not believe in the promised literal return of Jesus to the earth. He said they were "willingly ignorant." (II Peter 3:5) Ignorance of divine things has little to do with mental abilities; it has much to do with the willingness to accept in faith the revelation of God. When we are told in Psalm 14:1 and 53:1 that "the fool has said in his heart, "There is no God," we are not to understand the word "fool" to refer to mentality but to morality. He is a moral fool who rejects God or God's revelation, even though he may be labeled "good" and "wise" and much else by the world's standards.

No man can be truly good or wise who rejects God's word. Truly good and wise men often differ about the details, and the ramifications, of the divine revelation, but they are universally (by definition) eager to believe and live by everything God says. That, and that alone, qualifies a human to justifiably be labeled as "good" and "wise," as we shall all one day discover.

11. WILL THOSE IN HELL HAVE OTHER CHANCES TO BE SAVED?

The theory of a "second chance" (whatever label is used) holds that those who die unsaved will have other chances for salvation following death. Sometimes it is said that they have but one chance in a relatively brief span of time, sometimes it is believed that they have an infinite number of chances during an infinite

period of time. Some who hold the position do so out of a sheer sense of humaneness, of mercy, or even of logic. (“How could God not finally tire of punishing people?” “How can a finite act in time cause eternal punishment?” “What purpose could such continual punishment, without any opportunity for repentance, characterize a God of love?” “After a sufficient time of suffering punitively, or penally, is it not morally right to act redemptively, and forgive the sinner,” etc.) Peter’s statement regarding Jesus preaching to the “spirits in prison” (I Peter 3:18-20) is often used as the Biblical basis to defend the position, although it has nothing to do with offering an invitation to be saved, but is a proclamation (the word used is *kerusso*, to announce, to proclaim as a herald, as contrasted with the word *euangellidzo*, to evangelize, or to announce the good news of the gospel) of his victory over the grave.

The intermediate state (the period between death and judgment) is held by some to be the time during which other chances for salvation occur. H. M. Luckock is representative of those who hold, and defend, this view:

We shall find, we believe, the only solution to these perplexing difficulties (relative to the vast number which have never heard the gospel and who therefore die unsaved) through the vast possibilities of the Intermediate State. (53)

Luckock and others assume that the consequences of time (perhaps an infinite amount of time) and opportunity will produce repentance and salvation. Conversion there is as possible, and perhaps more likely, they say, due to the effects of the intermediate state, than it is during life.

We have no reason, or evidence, however, for believing that to be the case. Certainly, no promise of that sort is advanced, or even suggested, in the Biblical materials. Strikingly, if restoration is possible, no Biblical passage encourages either prayers or deeds in behalf of the conversion of the unsaved dead. The practice of praying for the dead is based on the non-canonical book of II Maccabees, 12:39f. Boettner says:

The solemn reality is that all who die in unbelief pass beyond death to a lost eternity. There is nothing in Scripture to indicate that they receive a second chance. Scripture uniformly represents the state of the righteous and that of the wicked after death as fixed. (54)

Again, Boettner:

There is not one verse in Scripture that lends any real support to the idea of a second probation. Its consistent teaching rather is that it is in this world that man’s fate for good or evil is decided, that what the person is at death he continues to be throughout all eternity. Once man has passed the boundaries of this life there is no turning back, no recall. A great and impassable gulf separates the righteous from the wicked, and the intermediate state is of no value whatever in preparing for judgment. (55)

A.H. Strong puts it this way:

The world is already a place of a second probation; and since the second probation is due wholly to God's mercy, no probation after death is needed to vindicate the justice or goodness of God. (56)

Revelation 22:11 indicates that the time comes when God says, "Let the evildoer still do evil and the filthy still be filthy, and the righteous still do right, and the holy still be holy. (RSV)

Harold Lindsell says of this verse:

This phrase points up plainly the truth that the final condition of the wicked is one of hopelessness. There is no evidence here of universal salvation for all men. Rather, the door is shut forever, and those who remain outside shall never find entrance.

Suffering has in itself no reforming power. Unless accompanied by special renewing influences of the Holy Spirit, it only hardens and embitters the soul. We have no Scriptural evidence that such influences of the Spirit are exerted after death, upon the still impenitent; but abundant evidence, on the contrary, that the moral condition in which death finds men is their condition forever...To the impenitent and rebellious sinner the motive must come, not from within, but from without. Such motives God presents by His Spirit in this life; but when this life ends and God's Spirit is withdrawn, no motives to repentance will be presented. The soul's dislike for God (we may even say, the sinner's hatred for God) will issue only in complaint and resistance. (57)

Denney, in his Studies in Theology, puts it this way:

The real argument against future probation is that it depreciates the present life, and denies the infinite significance that, under all conditions, essentially and inevitably belongs to the actions of a self-conscious moral being. (58)

With awful finality, Jesus says, "I go my way, and you shall seek me, and shall die in your sins: whither I go, you cannot come." (John 8:21) See also Romans 2:6-16, Hebrews 6:8, Matthew 25: 41-46, and other passages in which the words "eternal" and "everlasting" are used in reference to hell for evidence that judgment at death does not produce a probationary state or condition, but forever fixes the condemned in an eternal state.

12. IS IT NOT POSSIBLE THAT, SOMEHOW AND AT SOME POINT PERHAPS BEYOND OUR IMAGINATION, ALL MEN WILL FINALLY BE RECONCILED TO GOD?

Actually, this is another form of the former question, but it will be helpful to consider it from the view of the possibility of universal salvation. Again, most writing theologians (not to say others) are universalists,

and one would not be surprised to discover that, forced to give a specific answer on the question, the vast majority of professing Christians hold the same position. It is called “universalism,” and it affirms that, somehow, at some point, by some means, all men will be finally be reconciled to God.

Several things must be said about that possibility, remembering all the while, the observations just given regarding “second chances.”

(a) Universalism is usually attributed to Origen, a theologian of the third century, and is, from many perspectives, appealing. How could any person be pleased to know that others will suffer for eternity? Watching people suffer, in time, is painful enough, totally apart from any consideration of eternity. The problem is that the universe simply does not work on the basis of our wishes. “If wishes were horses, beggars would ride,” says the old adage. But, in the real world, wishes are not horses, so beggars continue to walk.

(b) The idea of universal salvation has no basis in the Biblical revelation. It is true that a smattering of verses, or phrases thereof, are sometimes cited as suggesting universal salvation, but, unless one comes to them with a decided philosophical and theological bent, he would never find the doctrine in them. The passages most often referenced are II Peter 3:9 (where God is spoken of as desiring that all be saved), Romans 5:18 (where we are told that by one man’s trespass all men are lost and so by one man’s (Christ’s) obedience all men will be saved), Romans 5:8 (where we are told that while we were yet in our sin, Christ loved us and sent His son to die for us), Luke 23:34 (where Jesus asks God to forgive those who crucified Him because they did not know what they were doing,) I Timothy 4:10 (where we are told that Christ is the saviour of all men, especially of those who believe,) Phil. 2:10-11 (where we are told that every knee shall bow to Christ, and all will confess Him to be Lord), Romans 11:32 (where we are told that God has committed all men to disobedience that He may have mercy on all ,) Phil. 3:21 (where we are told that God is able to subdue all things to Himself), etc. A favorite passage is Acts 3:21 where Jesus is said to have gone to heaven “until the times of restitution of all things...”. The non-orthodox accepts this as a cryptic promise, based on the word “restitution” (*apokatastasis*), that God will finally and ultimately “make all things come out right,” i.e., will reconcile not only men, not only rebellious angels, but the entire universe to Himself. Many interpretations of this word (*used only here in the New Testament*) are possible, including the common one, that God will finally--in His own way and in His own time--cause harmony to prevail in the entire universe. “Harmony,” that is, by His definition, and not ours. The absence of hell is not required for such harmony.

It is to be remembered that, in order for God’s people to enjoy the unspeakable glories of heaven, a transformation will be required; the same may properly be said of those in hell. Some have surmised that Paul was speaking of such a possibility when he wrote

What if God, willing to show his wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath fitted (from *katartidzo*= to prepare, outfit, adjust thoroughly)

to destruction: and that he might make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy, which he had afore prepared (from *proetoimadzo*=to prepare or appoint beforehand) unto glory. (Romans 9:22)

A central hermeneutic rule is that the obscure passage must always be interpreted in the light of the translucent one, and not vice-versa. Another such principle states that “the burden of proof is always on the innovator.” While the doctrine of eternal punishment, like much else in the universe, will continue to puzzle mortal minds, the preponderant message of the Bible is demonstrably what orthodoxy has always held about the basics of the subject---unsaved men will suffer eternal punishment.

Several things are obvious about all those texts: none of them specifically promises salvation to all men; each of them, taken in context, in fact, deny the same; and no orthodox creed has ever seen them as evidence of universal salvation. One looks in vain at the Biblical materials for a clear-cut statement in defense of universal salvation. W. R. Inge says, “No sound Greek scholar can pretend that *aionios* means anything less than eternal.” (59)

(c) Often, the universalist makes his defense, not the biblical materials, but on logic, mercy, humanness, a sense of moral propriety, (or impropriety), and/or the value of historic testimonies of various sorts, both Christian and non-Christian. To state that fact is to answer it: all serious interpreters of ultimate reality must be chary of relying on the testimony of mortals who, at some time and place in history, have soberly declared preposterous things to be true.

(d) One asks: how is it possible for men to be coerced to freely love God, either now or in the eternity to come? If we say God will bring sufficient force---however defined---to bear against human recalcitrance that men will, uncoerced, love Him freely, one asks, “Why does He not do that now?”

(e) On a moral base, so often cited as that which demands that every person ultimately be saved, can it not be argued that God is immoral for promising, explicitly, that eternal pain and suffering will visit those who do not come to Him in time, only (as some freely state) to go back on His promise and change the conditions of salvation. How is it moral for God to tell mankind, for thousands of years, what He has always known is not true, i.e., that He really did not mean what He was clearly saying?

(f) It is common for universalists to charge non-universalists with motives of revenge, sadism, arrogance, Pharisaism, etc., and not belief in the Scriptures for the orthodox position. Honesty demands, however, that the universalist defend his position on stronger ground, since it is inconceivable that any honorable person (except, perhaps, in a momentary fit of rage against somebody who has caused the death, let us say, of millions) would suppose that anyone could be happy that people suffer in time, not to mention to be consigned to eternal suffering and pain. The old canard that God, the angels, and the saints anticipate, with exceeding joy, spending eternity rejoicing at the sight (yes, some say “sight”) of fellow humans suffering in exquisite pain in hell, is beyond comment, and betrays the barrenness of the

imagination of the anti-orthodox, if not their ethics.

Whether suffering in hades lasts forever or not, we know that it has lasted now for over two thousand years and will continue to exist at least until it is cast--for another thousand years after Jesus returns--not out of existence, but into hell at the end of human history, according to the plain language of Revelation 20:15. We have no evidence there, or elsewhere, that anyone so consigned has repented, been converted, or become reconciled to God--or ever will.

(g) The huge, and often admitted problem, with the universalist is that he forces man, against his will, to go to heaven, whether he wishes to or not. Is it possible that, given illimitable time in eternity to soften man's obstinacy, some will continue to rebel against God? Such a situation is not inconceivable, but the universalist has no answer except that such persons will simply be annihilated at some point. That "solution" would work only if annihilation is a viable option, which many universalists--by definition--deny, as does Christian orthodoxy. (We will look at the idea of annihilationism later.)

As to the staying power of man's recalcitrance against God, we are told that--after suffering the unspeakably horrific judgments which are to fall on the earth in the last days of human history--"...they (the non-saved) "blasphemed the God of heaven, because of their pains and their sores, and repented not of their deeds." (Rev. 16:11)

The issue in all this is not what God is able to do; it is what He is pleased to do, and what He has been pleased to tell us plainly and repeatedly about His plans .

13. MAYBE IMMORTALITY IS CONDITIONAL, WITH THE RESULT THAT GOD GIVES IT TO SOME BUT NOT TO OTHERS.

The question is integral, obviously, to earlier ones. A significant philosophical base stands beneath the idea of annihilationism: it is the opinion that all humans do not possess immortality. Nobody, in fact, is born with it, we are told. God supposedly gives it to those who accept Him and follow Him. Plato, and other early Greek philosophers, taught that man naturally has an immortal soul and that he, therefore, can never not exist. Such a view complicates the issue, say the critics, and, in fact, is responsible for it. The entire question of eternal punishment is a very different one--from the viewpoint of logic, morality, and sheer human kindness--if we simply posit that good men live forever and bad men, after "appropriate punishment," simply cease to exist. Even those who are exercised about God "bringing the entire universe back into harmony with Himself," becoming "all in all," "restoring all things," and by doing so, evading an eternal universe bifurcated between the lost and the saved (thus escaping the dreaded epithet of "an eternal unresolved dualism"), even they have no philosophical problem with such a "solution" which creates, precisely, what they dread. Has God forgotten that such people ever existed? If He is not happy, cannot be happy, that they exist in hell, how is He happy that they cease to exist in any sense? In His mind, can they even be thought of, no longer existing? Does that make God delusional, to refuse to admit what He knows to be true? The eternal scene may appear to be a bit tidier, but only because, in our earth-bound minds, we have "solved" a truly

cosmic dilemma while causing greater ones. And none of that is to face squarely the larger dilemma, that of the precise meaning of the explicit language used to give us God's revelation.

The annihilationist says, vehemently, "I believe it when the Bible says, 'the wicked shall perish!'" That is the precise position of eschatological orthodoxy, but, as we have consistently seen, "death" in the Biblical language does not mean non-existence. On the word "death" Vines has this:

(Death means) the separation of man from God; Adam died on the day he disobeyed God, Gen. 2:17, and hence all mankind are born in the same spiritual condition, Rom. 5:12, 14, 17, 21, from which however, those who believe in Christ are delivered. John 5:24; I John 3:14. "Death" is the opposite of life; it never denotes nonexistence. As spiritual life is "conscious existence in communion with God," so spiritual "death" is "conscious existence in separation from God." (60)

Again, Jesus' promise to those who do not believe in Him as "perishing" in the future, is absurd if He had been speaking of physical death. And so with Paul when he spoke of those who did not hear his message as "them that perish," (II Cor. 2:15-16) which would have been tantamount to him saying "Mortals who will not heed the gospel are physically dying."

Dr. A. T. Robertson says of the Greek word *aionios* which is so often used in the New Testament when eternity is envisioned:

The word *aionios* (from *aio*, age, *aevum*, *aei*) means either without beginning or without end or both. It comes as near to the idea of eternal as the Greek can put it in one word." He adds later, "There is not the slightest indication in the words of Jesus here that the punishment is not coeval (i.e, existing during the same period of time) with life." (61)

A.H. Strong says,

If, when used to describe the future punishment of the wicked, they (the Greek words *aion* and *aionios*) do not declare the endlessness of that punishment, there are no words in the Greek language which could express that meaning. (62)

Such citations could be multiplied for pages. The telling citation is comprised of the very words of our Saviour when, as recorded in Matt. 25:40, He used the same word (*aionion*) to describe the duration of both heaven and hell--in a single sentence. Something inheres, eternally, in spiritual death which is unspeakably significant, and which must not be trivialized.

14. DOES NOT THE EXISTENCE OF HELL DENY GOD'S OMNIPOTENCE?

If we assume that God does not wish that any should suffer hell, and in fact, some will spend eternity there,

we are tempted to argue, as some have, to explain the facts by saying that either God is good or He is powerful, but that He cannot be both in the face of such a reality.

Let us assume, for the sake of analysis, that God is loving, and deal with the possibility that He is not sufficiently powerful to keep people out of hell. That is the argument of the “finite” God, but goes under other labels as well.

God’s omnipotence is defied if people go to hell only if we define omnipotence as raw power which does not take into account man’s freedom, the radical effect of his free choices, and the orderly structure of the universe. The boy who asked the question, when told that God could do anything, “Can God create a rock larger than He could pick up?” was nearer the central paradox of God’s power than he knew. To say that God’s omnipotence is violated by people going to hell is comparable to saying that God is “incapable” of making two plus two equal five, or causing cold to expand metal, or creating a rock larger than He could pick up. In any moral definition of omnipotence (which, obviously, is the sphere in which our discussion lies), the laws by which God has omnipotently chosen to govern His universe must be taken into account.

By the omnipotence of God we mean that He is able to do whatever He wills; but since His will is limited by His nature, this means that God can do everything that is in harmony with His perfections. There are some things which God cannot do: (1) Such as are contrary to His nature as God, as for example, look upon iniquity (Hab. 1:13), deny Himself (2 Tim. 2:13), lie (Heb. 6:18), or commit sin (Jas. 1:13), and (2) such as are absurd or self-contradictory, as, for example, making a material spirit, a sensitive stone, a square circle, etc. These are not objects of power and so denote no limitation on God’s omnipotence. (63)

This problem (raised by the absurd “impossibilities” just mentioned) has usually led theologians to conclude that omnipotence must mean, as Thomas Aquinas (c. 1225-74) has taught, that God can do “that which is genuinely possible.” By so modifying the idea, omnipotence comes to mean perfect power rather than unlimited power. (64)

C.S. Lewis has an interesting perspective on the issue which, though thought-provoking, is a perspective only and does not give final answers to the question.

Finally, it is objected that the ultimate loss of a single soul means the defeat of omnipotence. And so it does. In creating beings with free will, omnipotence from the outset submits to the possibility of such defeat. What you call defeat, I call miracle: for to make things which are not Itself, and thus to become, in a sense, capable of being resisted by Its own handiwork, is the most astonishing and unimaginable of all feats we attribute to Deity. (65)

15. HOW IS IT POSSIBLE THAT FINITE ACTS CAN CAUSE INFINITE PUNISHMENT?

Every day finite acts are engaged in which produce infinite results, either of pleasure or pain. People are murdered. Or they escape murder. Babies are born. Or they are disallowed birth. People are swindled out of all their possessions. Or they win the lottery (on the basis, obviously, of having made a finite choice to obtain a ticket.) Medical discoveries, in a particular time and place and circumstance, save lives and produce infinite joy. Or, discovered, they become---because of the choices of other human beings---unavailable to those who need them. Somebody decides to explode a nuclear device on a city, and that finite, in-time-and-space, measurable, discrete act affects, perhaps, millions of people and it affects them infinitely, no matter how “infinitely” is interpreted, etc., *ad infinitum*. When a person decides to do the will of God, to turn from his own sin and selfishness to allow God’s self to inhabit his own self, that finite act produces---according to the Bible---infinite results. And when he decides not to do so, again---according to the Bible---infinite results occur.

In fact, every human act is of infinite proportions. We experience, according to the conditions of our existence, the sights and sounds and smells and textures and tastes of existence, and the results are infinite. They have happened and because they have happened, they cannot “unhappen;” they are forever, they are infinite.

We cannot re-create the universe and reconstruct it along lines which allow some acts---those we choose, or do not choose, let us say---to produce infinite results and some to produce only finite results. Perhaps it is true: “Every step every man takes stirs chords which will vibrate for eternity.”

Bishop Butler once declared: “Things and actions are what they are, and the consequences of them will be what they will be: why then should we desire to be deceived?”

Josiah Royce, former professor of philosophy at Harvard University, once said that if he had betrayed a trust,

I can never undo that deed. If I ever say, “I have undone that deed,” I shall be both a fool and a liar. Counsel me, if you will, to forget that deed. Counsel me to do good deeds without number to set over against that treason. Counsel me to be cheerful, and to despise Puritanism.... Only do not counsel me ‘to get rid of’ just that sin. That, so far as the real facts are concerned, cannot be done. For I am, and to the end of endless time shall remain, the doer of that willfully traitorous deed. (66)

“But,” says the Christian, “the New Testament is full of promises that our repentance does precisely that; it removes our guilt and condemnation for that ‘traitorous deed,’ and we become as righteous before God as if we had never done it. The results of it are, therefore, finite.” The results, whatever they may be, are, nevertheless, based on a *finite* decision to accept God’s forgiveness, by an act of our will.

John Gerstner, delineating Jonathan Edwards theology at this point, and---precisely how a finite creature can, by his finite acts, bring upon himself infinite punishment---observes that Edwards held that since God is infinite in his awful majesty, sinful acts against Him have infinite consequences. If it be argued that a finite person, having no complete comprehension of the infinite excellence of God, and therefore is incapable of an infinite offense, it is replied that “eternal punishment is (yet) just in the same respects infinite as the crime, and in no other.” Edwards said that sin against God in God’s eye is infinite, no matter what man thinks about the issue, and therefore the punishment for that sin must be infinite. (67)

Others relate the culpability of the evil deed to the death of Christ, arguing that if sin be such an evil that it required the death of Christ for its expiation, one can more easily understand how and why it deserves everlasting punishment.

The operative assumption in this entire matter is that man is capable of properly assessing the gravity of his own sin against God, which might be compared to trusting prison inmates to mete out equitable punishment to themselves for their crimes. Only if a man agrees with God about the infinite heinousness of his sins can he properly judge the propriety of the penalty for it.

The argument regarding the infinity of punishment for sin can, obviously, be applied to the question of the infinity of joy which accompanies righteousness, i.e., how can the finite act of receiving God’s salvation in Christ produce infinite joy? The two arguments are, from a logical point of view, precisely the same, although that perspective rarely if ever, occupies the attention of universalists.

16. DOES EVERYBODY SUFFER THE SAME IN HELL?

The Bible states in Gen. 18:25 that the judge of all the earth will do right. A thorough biblical study of the righteousness of God, His holiness, that is, His moral perfection and incorruptibility, guarantees that He cannot do what is wrong, but will, indeed, do, always and in every circumstance, what is right. God, as the perfect personification of moral propriety cannot be conceived of as doing less. God is not said, specifically, to be love, love, love, or truth, truth, truth (all of which is true), but He is said to be holy, holy, holy.

Among other things, that fact establishes degrees of reward in heaven (as the Bible clearly states) and different degrees of punishment in hell. If there are gradations of joy in heaven, based on the extent to which men have served God, so there are gradations of sorrow in hell based on the extent to which men have rebelled against God.

The degree of light men possess; the degree of fidelity to that light; the use of the opportunities and powers with which they are blessed; the circumstances which condition their lives; in a word, every fact which has any bearing upon human guilt and responsibility will be considered. It follows from this that not all the wicked will suffer the same degree of punishment. The doctrine of degrees of punishments is one of the most clearly revealed doctrines of Scripture. (68)

Mullins cites four passages in the Bible which affirm the doctrine: Luke 12:47-48, Matt. 11:21-24, Rom. 4:15, and Rom. 2:5-15. When Paul says in Romans 2:6, that God "...will render to every man according to his deeds," he is referring to degrees of punishment in hell. Rev. 20:12-13 states the same truth, as does Matt. 23:14-15, in which Jesus states, in part, "...therefore you shall receive the greater condemnation," and "...you make him twofold more a child of hell than yourselves." The comparative words "greater" in v 14 and "twofold more the child of hell" in v 15, explicitly affirm gradations of punishment in hell. Much speculation has occurred as to precisely what that scale of punishment might be, but is, of course, fruitless. Which mortal could properly quantify either the sorrows of hell or the joys of heaven?

17. WHAT IF THE DEVIL AND HELL ARE NOTHING MORE THAN MENTAL STATES?

What if everything else is nothing but mental states as well? Maybe the entire universe is but a mental state, as all the immaterialist philosophers state (perhaps including their writings on the subject!) No problem of any kind is ultimately solved by positing only an ideational universe. If one asserts that God and heaven are "real" and the devil and hell are not, he opens up a yawning rational abyss, has rendered language (not to mention logic) meaningless, has done so arbitrarily, and has---by destroying all order---made individual human capriciousness the lord of the universe.

Engaging in arcane discussions regarding epistemological foundations does not serve the discussion. If we cannot know all things, we can at least attempt to be consistent about those things we do know.

18. WHY DOES THE DOCTRINE OF HELL MAKE PEOPLE SO ANGRY?

The response of modern man towards the doctrine of hell is ambivalent. On the one hand he does not want to discuss the matter seriously, and on the other he cannot completely put it all out of his mind. He feels at times that there ought to be such a place for persons who commit especially heinous crimes---natural law teaches him that. He does not, however, wish to prepare a final list of all who should or might experience hell. He glibly tosses the word "hell" about in familiar conversation as if it were a fantasy, and yes demonstrates an unsettling fear that the word might refer to some horrific reality.

Divine judgment may fall upon the sinner in innumerable temporal guises such as the gnawing unrest of a guilt-ridden conscience, the accelerated loss of health and life, and the punishment administered by human courts. Against these temporal aspects of divine retribution, most of us raise little or no opposition. Such expressions of punishment, we agree, are consistent with human convictions and experience.

But transfer the concept of punishment from temporal to eternal categories, refer to everlasting punishment in hell, and the climate of the discussion changes. The silence with which any serious treatment of the subject is greeted, the reticence even of evangelicals to preach on hell and everlasting punishment, the modern resurgence of universalism (the belief that all will ultimately be saved) in Protestant theology, and the frequent, glib use of the word "hell" in ordinary language, not only that of the street, but

that of government,
news media, and literature---these are the varied expressions that
the doctrine of eternal retribution evinces today. (69)

Anger is common among those “various reactions” to the doctrine of hell. That may be so because our deeds are evil and we are angry at ourselves because we may suspect at times we have angered an omnipresent God sufficiently to risk hell. Perhaps the anger stems from a feeling that God will not act justly in sending our friends or loved ones to hell, that he will act prejudicially in dealing with them. It is possible that the anger relates to some wrong-headed or wrong-hearted discussion, or sermon we once heard about the subject. Some of the anger surely derives from our inability to fathom the enigma of hell, of being unable (perhaps) to control hell by knowing everything about it, of forever having to stand before its labyrinthine mystery ignorant of the profundity of its mysteries. (One cannot miss the irony that such ignorance of heaven apparently troubles very few!) More probably, the anger arises from the fact that hell causes us to realize that we cannot make everything come out as we might wish in the end---that we cannot make everybody live happily ever after. Perhaps it is the same frustration, enlarged to cosmic proportions, that the growing child experiences when he discovers that he cannot make the world and its inhabitants do what he wishes, that he cannot reconstruct the universe according to his design. Hell reminds man that he is not in control of the universe, indeed, that---besides himself---he cannot prevent a single person in the world from making choices that are eternally fatal. Again, child-like, his anger is intensified when he realizes that he must himself decide about his own destiny---that he must choose between heaven and hell. He cannot throw off that burdensome responsibility. Even if he holds to some rigid theory of iron-clad predestination (or any other sort of determinism) he cannot escape co-operating with God (or the universe) about the matter. He cannot simply sit and do nothing about it all; he must decide, and then act on that decision. Inescapably integral to the human condition is to experience anger (by one definition or another) in the face of ineluctable and weighty responsibility; that is the anger hell evokes.

If we were *properly* angry about hell, however, we might well be driven to expend great energy in attempting, not only to escape it ourselves, but in facilitating the liberation of others from a future there. Nicholas Berdyaev wrote:

If people were morally more sensitive they would direct the whole of their moral will and spirit towards delivering from the torments of hell every being they had ever met in life. (70)

Berdyaev is reminiscent of the apostle Paul:

I say the truth in Christ, I lie not, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Spirit, that I have great heaviness and continual sorrow in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were accursed from Christ (the Greek suggests he is saying, “I was at the point of wishing myself accursed from Christ”) for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh (i.e., the Jews). (Rom. 9:1-2.)

It explains, as well, why he said to the Corinthian church, “Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men...” (II Cor. 5:11)

The proper response to anger of any kind which has a divine component (and all anger, to some degree, does) is to joyously submit to God, to treasure His revelation of Himself, to act in obedience to His commands, and to fully rest in Him until we have all the answers in eternity.

19. IS IT POSSIBLE THAT THE ONLY HELL ONE EVER EXPERIENCES IS ON EARTH?

Sin produces humiliation, guilt, isolation, fear, and many other negative psychological states, both in reference to God and others. Such experiences emit the faint odor of hell, but they are nowhere described in the Bible as hell. Horrendous things happen to people beyond psychological states, which, indeed, often produce such states: injustices, injuries, prejudicial treatment, and all the other “shocks that mortal flesh is heir to.” Although we speak of “hellish” experiences on earth, that is monstrous overstatement. That is not to make light of human anguish; it is to speak stark truth about hell.

One of the inescapable feelings which every human experiences, at some time and in some circumstance, is the feeling that things are not simply fair. For many, it is the prevailing psychological state of their entire lives. That sense is written into our spiritual DNA code, and every parent knows that even small children sense and say it (whether it is true or not, one might add). That reality, then, produces (or is produced by) a sense that somewhere, at some point, justice simply must prevail. The good suffer and the evil prosper. In a cemetery in Germany stands a headstone with one word on it: “Varum,” “why?” Indeed, why?

The conundrum is as old as human history and at least one book in the Bible, the book of Job, which some believe to be the most ancient book in the Bible, deals solely with that issue. It is the most challenging philosophical problem for Christians. It is helpful to remember several facts: (a) It is also the most profound philosophical problem for the non-Christian, as well. If our problem is why evil occurs, his is why good occurs. (b) Life is, indeed, a “tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury signifying nothing,” if there is no resolution of the injustices of our common existence. (c) No The expected righting of things will, according to the Bible, will, indeed occur. God will see to that. (c) When God rights it, no one need worry that He will not have all the facts, will be prejudiced in any way, swayed by political or financial conditions, will be stymied by fear of any sort, but will produce what all humans wish for and never obtain: perfect judgment.

If we cannot depend on God to unravel it all, to make sense of it all, to give all men their just due, to ultimately right all wrongs, then what? That does not mean God is under any obligation to solve any problem for us, or cause us to understand anything; it does mean that the nihilist is right if He does not do so: nothing has meaning or value or sanity. But God has judged, is judging, and will consummate human history with his righteous judgment. Given our total inability to obtain what we say we pursue with avidity---true justice---humans need God to produce just that. How shall we make otherwise make sense of a universe

in which a saintly Mother Teresa (as her posthumously-published diaries indicate) came to the end of her remarkable life wondering if her devotion to God had pleased Him and---at the other end of the scale---Adolph Hitler's long-time paramour (in the final hours of his life, his wife), Eva Braun, in a hand-written letter, in the last hours of her life in the infamous bunker, suffering Berlin's incessant bombing, penning this: "I can't understand how all this could happen. It's enough to make one lose one's faith in God." (71) If all the hell one will ever experience is comprised of the pain suffered in time, what sort of justice does that convey to, let us say, David, who wrote of the wicked:

They are not in trouble as other men; neither are they plagued like other men. Therefore pride compasseth them about as a chain; violence covers them like a garment. Their eyes stand out with fatness: they have more than heart could wish. They are corrupt, and speak wickedly concerning oppression: they speak loftily. They set their mouth against the heavens, and their tongue walketh through the earth.... Behold, these are the ungodly, who prosper in the world; they increase in riches.

It will not do to pass that off as poetic hyperbole. Even if that is what it is, no one would deny that such men, God-haters who experience nothing but the commonest ills of human existence, live in every culture. No man of good will desires them to "get their due," but the universe does not make sense if they get a free pass to heaven because of the "wideness of God's mercy," a mercy defined by mortal men and in denial of the explicit teaching of the entire Bible.

The book of Revelation, which is consummated by God's judgment of all men who have ever existed, or ever will exist, is replete with references to God's perfect judgment. In 15:3, he is *pantokrator* (the one and only all-powerful ruler of the cosmos) who is said to be "just and true" in His ways; in 16:7, again He is *pantokrator* whose judgments are "true and righteous;" in 19:2, He is "true and righteous" in His judgments, and in 19:11 Jesus is "faithful and true, and in righteousness he doth judge and make war." *After the "Great White Throne" judgment by God in Rev. 20, there are no more judgments to follow. Ever. By anybody. Precisely because none are necessary.*

Interestingly, whatever the number of people who believe that the only hell one experiences occurs on earth, it vastly out-numbers those who believe the only heaven one experiences is on earth. One argument is as logically compelling as the other, and the fair-minded are compelled by simple rationality to say: "If I think temporal suffering is all I will ever know of hell, temporal joy is all I may ever expect of heaven." Heaven is not yet, and hell is not yet; they are both to come.

20. WILL A PERSON WHO NEVER HEARD ABOUT JESUS GO TO HELL?

First: the God of the cosmos will do, in all things, what is right. (Gen. 18:25) If one reads the scriptures (or simply, let us say, the book of Psalms) and notes every reference to the utter righteousness of God, he will find that the subject is the central subject, the mantra, as it were, of the entire Bible. The one thing that mankind needs is an incorruptible being. That is not to say that our need creates God (ala Freud); God was

righteous before the universe existed and cannot be other than pure righteousness. God is never called “loving, loving, loving,” or “powerful, powerful, powerful,” but He is called “holy, holy, holy.” No one will stand before God in the judgment and justifiably accuse God of not having been fair. That fact is the foundational fact of a theistic universe.

Second: All humans will be judged by God.

Third: All humans will be judged according to the light they have had during their lifetime here on earth. (Matt. 11:20-24).

Fourth: Mankind has been exposed to sufficient light to know truth, but not a single human being has lived up to all the light he has had, and many have obstinately rejected his light, and have thus incurred God’s wrath. (Rom. 1:18-20,

2:12-16, Luke 12:48). The last cited reference finds Jesus saying, in regard to the judgment of the last day, “But he that knew not (his Lord’s will) and did things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes.

Fifth: Precisely how God will judge those who have never heard of Him, babies, the mental or emotionally incompetent, those who have been tortured into some level of insanity, those incapacitated by drugs, those not possessing “discretionary powers” of “the age of accountability,” or *anybody else*, is not totally clear. (Most hold that those in the last category, at least, will not be held accountable for not responding to light they either did not have, or to which they could not comprehend.)

Finally: We must revert to the Biblical materials which are stated in the first four paragraphs, and then, add this: God would not have, incessantly and persistently, told us (both by Scripture and by the current conviction of His Holy Spirit) to take the gospel to every creature on earth (which is, following our own conversion, our chief business in life) if he did not take the condition of men outside Christ as a fatal situation for them. Maybe the larger question is not, how shall those who have never heard be saved, but how shall we ourselves be saved, who have heard, and we do not take His command about evangelism seriously! As to the coming Messianic wedding feast which concludes human history, the Bible says: “The Spirit (the Holy Spirit) and the bride (the church) say, Come. *And let him that heareth say, Come!*” (Revelation 22:17)

21. IF A PERSON IS SINCERE IN HIS RELIGIOUS BELIEFS, WILL NOT THAT FACT PREVENT HIM FROM GOING TO HELL?

The word “sincere” derives from Latin words meaning “without wax,” and refers to the practice, throughout history, to hiding defects in furniture with wax. Sincerity is a virtue, but is a poor substitute for facts. A sincere person may take the wrong turn in the road, ingest lethal medicine, or fatally wound himself with a gun he thought was not loaded, but in every case he must suffer the consequences of living in a universe

which does not substitute sincerity for facts. To be sure, God in His providential power may choose to negate the effects of such acts, but if He does, His act represents a miraculous exception to the rule. The universe is orderly, not capricious (one remembers Einstein's famous line, "God did not play dice with the universe"), and, as such, demands that man construct his life on something more solid than sincerity. It is inconceivable that the Bible could state, "It matters but little what one believes just so long as he is sincere in his belief." Such a rule works well in Alice's Wonderland where one is encouraged to believe at least six impossible things before breakfast every day, but it works in no other realm in the known universe. Jesus said, simply but profoundly, "And you shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free." (John 8:32)

We say that "ignorance is bliss," but the poet actually said, "...*where* ignorance is bliss 'tis folly to be wise." Ignorance is blissful nowhere and so it is never folly to be wise. By discovering and following solid facts. (From Gray's "On a Distant Prospect of Eton College," emphasis added.)

POINTS TO BE PONDERED

1. On the subject of hell, as in all matters, we must say no more than God has said; we dare not say less.

2. After reading the explicit language of Jesus and the apostles in regard to hell, the liberal can only come to the following conclusion: either they ignorant or liars. If they did not know, they were ignorant, and if they did know they were liars. Perhaps they would suggest third position: Jesus and His apostles were both ignorant *and* liars.

Kirsopp Lake, in his day perhaps the best-known liberal theologian in the English-speaking world, said about “fundamentalists” i.e., Biblical conservatives:

It is a mistake often made by educated persons who happen to have but little knowledge of historical theology, to suppose that fundamentalism is a new and strange form of thought. It is nothing of the kind; it is the partial and uneducated survival of a theology which was once universally held by all Christians. How many were there, for instance, in Christian churches in the eighteenth century who doubted the infallible inspiration of all scripture? A few perhaps, but very few. No; the fundamentalist may be wrong; I think that he is. But it is we who have departed from the tradition, not he, and I am sorry for the fate of anyone who tries to argue with a fundamentalist on the basis of (historical) authority. The Bible and the corpus theologicum (the body of theological thought) is on the fundamentalist side. (72, emphasis added)

3. The most intriguing oddity in the serious literature on the subject of hell is this: the vast majority of liberal theologians believe that, ultimately, everybody is going to be in heaven, and should be, when the most demonstrable fact in the universe is that all us are admittedly sinners and have earned a place, not in heaven, but in hell. What is the basis of the obvious but unspoken *assumption*: that God owes us a place in heaven and not in hell? Who belongs in heaven is debatable; who belongs in hell is not.

4. The foundation of aberrant theologies, despite protestations to the contrary, are almost always based on non-Biblical sources---Greek philosophy, traditions of murky provenance, and/or sophomoric logic, accompanied with a smattering of obscure Biblical passages, or portions thereof, which have little or nothing to say to the issue.

5. Theological conversatism, the desire to sustain the basic values of the Biblical revelation, is always a way *into* the Christian faith; theological liberalism, a diminution or denial of Biblical revelation is, very often, a way *out* of the Christian faith.

6. Those who discard an orthodox doctrine rarely, if every, discard only one such doctrine. I have said that conventional wisdom suggests that 85% of writing theologians are universalists. One wonders what a poll of those theologians would show regarding the likelihood of Jesus being born of a virgin. That is not an accusation; it is a pertinent question. When the doctrine of hell is dismissed from “orthodoxy,” it always leaves in company.

7. Many of those who deny the orthodox position on eternal punishment do so, they often say, because the doctrine is so monstrously unjust, and they are concerned that the doctrine of hell “will simply go away” if it is not seriously modified in modern times. We will have no such doctrine left, some assure us. Perhaps, they suggest, the persistency in holding the orthodox view will, in time, threaten if not destroy christendom, or at least to weaken it beyond repair.

Perhaps it is the other way around. Perhaps the cause of the weakening of the church is due to so many, especially among the presumed “leaders” of christendom---the theologians and pastors, having given up Biblical teaching, which they have done, often, openly and proudly. The immense numerical losses of several American denominations in recent decades is provably based on the surrender of various doctrines of Biblical orthodoxy. It is possible that it is no accident that the trajectories of membership losses and the abandonment of orthodox theological positions coincide. That is not to surrender to pragmatism; it is to suggest that perhaps God is capable of managing His affairs.

Malcolm Muggeridge ---no orthodox thinker by any stretch---said, with trenchant sarcasm, in reference to empty churches across England: The tragedy is not that they are empty, but it would be for church leaders to water down their message in order to fill them. (See Dean Kelley’s book: Why Conservative Churches Are Growing, Harper and Row, 1972. on this subject.)

8. “Reason” or “logic” or “morality” is an oft-stated base for giving up the orthodox position on eternal punishment. On what reasonable or logical base, it might be asked, would one use to defend the doctrines, say, of the virgin birth or creation. As to morality, no one can say God is acting morally or not unless he is fully cognizant of all God’s moral challenges, and until he sees how God brings the human story to its end. We must all think about moral issues, but for finite humans to superimpose our “morality” on the Deity is a perilous enterprise. “The well is deep and thou hast nothing to draw with.”

The mind of man may be compared to a musical instrument with a certain range of notes, beyond which in both directions we have an infinitude of silence. (73)

9. Sometimes what the Bible says about the final judgment sounds very strict: “Enter ye in at the strait gate; for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in therat: because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it, “(Matt. 7:13-14), “...many are called but few are chosen,” (Matt. 20:16), etc., etc. On the other side is God’s love and mercy, which sounds more lenient. Only God Himself can---for all the obvious reasons--

-judge humankind justly, and no one of us ought to trouble ourselves about over whether He will come through or not. Nobody is running around Paradise or Hades today shouting that he did not get a square deal. When the Bible says, in reference to God's judging capacity, that "every mouth will be stopped" (Romans 3:19) that need suggest no coercive power beyond the knowledge of the unimpeachable rightness of His judgment.

10. A pastor recently gave up the doctrine of hell, he wrote, because he was now "free from the burden of evangelism." No one can read the New Testament and miss the connection between the two---the orthodox doctrine of hell and an impulse to tell others about God's salvation from hell and to heaven. We may argue passionately that the "fear factor" is no proper motive for evangelism. The simple fact is that if my child is facing an oncoming city bus and a bystander risks his own life to save hers, (a) he probably engaged in very little metaphysical speculation before his act, (b) she is very much alive, (c) he feels good about himself for having done the *right* (note the word) thing, and (d) I am, as her father, not only thrilled beyond speech, but find it impossible to care precisely what produced his action. Perhaps it was driven by the highest Christian motive, perhaps it was produced by his guilt for just having robbed a bank, perhaps he won a bet with a fellow mobster that he could, indeed, do a single noble thing in the coming decade. Whatever. Bonhoeffer once said that we should not be more religious than God is. Refusing to act to save a human life because one must be certain his motive is totally pure (a thing humanly impossible) at least approaches Bonhoeffer's meaning.

But, the larger issue is this: is the girl really in danger, and is her life really worth saving? If a theology pervades the culture, and infiltrates the church (as culture infallibly does), which dims the moral chasm between right and wrong, how can such a fact not have a deleterious effect on evangelism? A pass is given to all men saying, "Look, there probably isn't a hell, and on the huge odds that it does exist, you need not worry because what you have done with your life simply could not cause a God of love to throw His creation into endless torment. Further, even if it does exist, the pain could not possibly be as intense as you have told, and, in any case, one day all the inmates are going to be given a complete and permanent pardon." To put it simply: why would I, having discovered the cure for cancer, make any effort to tell the world about it if I didn't believe in cancer anyway?

To those who say that evangelism should be based on the highest motive, that of the honor of God, I say: "Most assuredly, but you cannot wait, you must not wait, to tell the good news until you reach that rarefied state. And you must know, further, that if you do reach that state today, given human frailty and the power of the enemy, it may well be gone by this time tomorrow."

It is illogical to tell men that they must do the will of God and accept His gospel of grace, if you also tell them that the obligation has no eternal significance, and that nothing ultimately depends on it. The curious modern heresy that everything is bound to come right in the end is so frivolous that I will not insult you by refuting it. "I remember," said Dr. Johnson on one occasion, "that my Maker has said that He will place the sheep on his right hand and the goats on his left." That is a solemn truth which only

the empty-headed and empty-hearted will neglect. It strikes at the very roots of life and destiny. (74, emphasis added)

Since I am being personal here, let me state it starkly and honestly: I have no true idea as to the motive of the person who introduced me to Christ; I hope--- for his sake and God's---it was noble, but I'm just as saved if it turns out that I was only another notch on his gospel gun-handle.

H. Richard Niebuhr predicted such a weakened theology, which does, indeed, permeate our culture and the modern church, and which caused Muggeridge to speak of the "decrepitude" of the church of our day. We will look back on it some day in the future and say that according to it:

A God without wrath brought men without sin into a Kingdom without judgment through the ministrations of a Christ without a Cross. (75)

He might have added, "...concluding with a hell without residents."

That theology, to be guilty of massive understatement, will never rouse anybody to our Lord's "Great Commission:"

GO YE THEREFORE, AND TEACH ALL NATIONS, BAPTIZING THEM IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER, AND OF THE SON AND OF THE HOLY SPIRIT, TEACHING THEM TO OBSERVE ALL THINGS WHATSOEVER I HAVE COMMANDED YOU: AND, LO, I AM WITH YOU ALWAYS, EVEN UNTO THE END OF THE WORLD. (Matthew 28:19-20)

CONCLUSION

How does one conclude a book on the subject of hell?

Perhaps it is best to recall Blaise Pascal and his famed “wager” regarding the likelihood of eternity happening. He apparently never quantified the odds, but let us assume that there is only one chance in a billion that eternity is a reality, and that it is going to “happen” to us. Even if so, at those astronomical odds, the gamble is simply too risky, he said, given the duration of eternity. (See his “*pensee*, i.e., “thought” number 233)

I say that, not in order to affirm a man-centered theology the quintessential facet of which is to procure an eternal fire-insurance policy, but because it is inconceivable that anything could be more important than to be prepared for the possibility, not to say---in the light of the Biblical record---the strong (I join those who say absolute) probability, that it will happen, and, for some, that means hell will happen.

About hell (strange that we do not ask often about the nature of heaven!), let us allow God to make sense of it all some day, or not to make sense of it all, if He chooses. Let us leave it to God to resolve the bristling ambiguities of our minds and hearts, as we attempt to assimilate the awful reality of eternal suffering. Let us admit that the subject, like so many others, is beyond our comprehension. But let us not bet our one sole possession of ultimate value, our very selves, that God has not spoken to us about hell, or that when He did speak to us about it, He either mumbled or lied outright. Neither of those options is open to any sober human.

We have monumental evidence that a bad eternity exists, and we must *act*---not solely *think*---on that evidence. We cannot accuse God of leaving us in the dark, even if the light is painful.

The pressing consideration, then, has nothing to do with *rationale*, but *response*. To put it simply: if there never was a time and place where you received Jesus as Saviour and began to follow Him as Lord, you may never have a more opportune one than this time and place. He once said:

Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup (i.e., have continual fellowship) with him, and he (will have continual fellowship) with me. (Rev. 3:20)

If you have never answered that knock, *and you accept any shred of the evidence in this book that hell may occur*, you have no larger business than to do so immediately.

That act will not have the effect of instantly giving any man ultimate answers about eternal punishment; it will have the effect of saving him from it. The event itself, alone, will clear up the mysteries.

For believers reading this: (a) Ponder Paul's word to the Corinthians: "Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves. Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates?" Then, (b) recall Bunyan's words as well: "Then I saw there was a way to hell even from the gates of heaven, as well as from the City of Destruction."

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